

Preserving Bali's Cultural Memory – I Love Bali – Bali Daily

At the World Culture Forum held at Nusa Dua, Bali late November, renowned cultural expert and multi lingual writer, Jean Couteau represented Indonesia in the symposium “Holistic Approaches to Culture in Sustainable Development”. In an impassionate speech he delved into a subject dear to many people, making direct reference to the theme of the Forum in relation to Bali.

The four day event, presented by the Ministry of Education + Culture of the Republic of Indonesia in conjunction with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), dubbed "the Power of Culture in Sustainable Development", featured discussions between hundreds of foreign dignitaries along with some of the finest cultural observers on the planet. It aimed to examine ideas to include culture in the goals for the post-2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda.

Highlighted was the need for new approaches to the development of the planet focused on sustainability and equality.

In the symposium, it was stated that indigenous cultures can be a great hindrance to economic progress. If so, then should we not consider changing the economic model championed by the world's corporate governments?

Yet, insisted Couteau, the bulldozer of the contemporary capitalist economies turns everything into commodities. As land and labor are turned into commodities and the peasantry is urbanized, the traditional agrarian economies are being destroyed, and the cultural traditions associated with them are not any more productive and let to wither away.

As the control of the world's resources passes into the hands of the elite, local and international, the grinding capitalist machine standardizes everything and the people's original cultural memory is being lost.

The only elements of local memory that are preserved are those that become iconic of national or ethnic identity and can thus be turned into commodities - which means eventually into folklore. This engineered tradition is celebrated in seminars and conferences in the name of the nation and globalized in the media in the name of an exotic identity but the cultural leftovers of the original traditions are neglected and thus inevitably seem bound to disappear.

Yet no society can flourish without culture for it is essential to building bridges between people and institutions – for culture is who we are. In the “new world” culture will be the key enricher of economic development, but it will be so only if we preserve the world cultural diversity and confront the standardizing machine of today's globalized modernity.

For an economic model to be sustainable it must be people-orientated and morally responsible, reflecting people's core values, while unlocking their potential at generating a new contemporary modernity that is as much based as possible on the original traditions.

The alternative is to have Disney Land masqueraded as Indonesian through a touch of Wayang Kulit (the Indonesian shadow puppet performances) and Balinese dance. Is that culture, asks Couteau.

What remains of the memory of old should be systematically recorded, documented and translated, and it is here where he emphasized our beloved Bali.

To do this, Couteau says, we have between 20-40 years left, or the remaining life expectancy of people whose memory was shaped by their local culture before the introduction of television and other modern media –which are quickly altering the transmission of knowledge.

This is a plea to bring the issue of the preservation of the cultural memory of Bali into your hearts and minds, and to sway the collective consciousness for the better. Here begins the mechanisms of change.

In an era of rapid transformation and “cheap modern thrills” let us all think earnestly about what it is we are willing to sacrifice, and what is the legacy we wish to leave behind?