

# Local Cultural Values and Projects of Economic Development

An Interpretation in the Light of the Capability  
Approach

Symphorien Ntibagirirwa



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and Projects of Economic Development**  
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To my late Mother,  
George Enderle, Gedeon Josua Rossouw  
and Mr & Mrs Erwin.





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## **PREFACE**

The centre of this reflection is the link between local cultural values and projects of economic development in light of Sen's capability approach. I argue that what people believe and value facilitate the passage from the universal conception of economic development to the feasibility of development at the local level. This mediation could be made possible through participation which makes development socially open to inculturation as well as politically democratic.

Sen's capability approach is analysed to show how it helps to ground economic development in what people believe and value, thus enhancing participatory development. This is achieved by looking at three aspects of the capability approach, namely: the definition of capability as the freedom of people to lead the kind of lives they value and have reason to value; the fact that the capability approach makes people agents and not patients of their own development; and, finally, the definition of development as the expansion of people's freedoms (or people's capability).

A case study of 12 local projects of economic development in Costa Rica is used to illustrate how the theoretical framework applies in practice.

By concentrating on cultural values and participatory development, the aim is to try to overcome the top-down/bottom-up duality or any type of approach to development that is exclusive. The capability

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approach leads to the conclusion that inclusive development can be achieved if the process of development takes seriously what people believe and value (openness to inculturation) and is politically democratic, thanks to public reasoning.

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## INTRODUCTION

*When people are oppressed or reduced to the culture of silence, they do not participate in their own humanization. Conversely, when they participate, thereby becoming active subjects of knowledge and action, they begin to construct properly their human history and engage in processes of authentic development*

(Goulet 1989:165).

### **1.1 Assumption and Rationale**

This research project focuses on how local cultural values affect local projects of economic development. I concentrate on the issue of participation in order to see how economic development could be an expression of what people believe and value. Thus, the underlying assumption of this study is that the participation of the people in their own development makes them agents and not just beneficiaries of development (cf. Sen 1999:11, 19, 137). Much of the reflections on local development have referred to participation in terms of bottom-up in reaction to the top-down development. I argue that this duality, one which could exclude certain actors in development and disintegrate a developing society, has to be transcended for an inclusive development to be achieved. The history of economic development has shown that neither the state nor the markets in isolation can achieve development.

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Nor should one believe that the people alone will achieve what neither the state and nor the markets separately achieved. Mohan and Stokke (2000) rightly warn us against the danger of localism. Accordingly, the concept of participation I envisage presupposes synergies of different actors in development. Thus, I explore how the capability approach could lead us to consider economic development as a process of validation of what people believe and value.

The rationale behind this research is the question of the condition of development for a developing country. I am aware that the achievement of economic development requires multiple factors such as the kind of political organization, the availability of financial means, the administrative machinery, ethical values, etc. (cf. Cooper & Vargas 2004). My focus is on cultural values and how they affect economic development. But more profoundly, since cultural values are an expression of a people's ultimate identity, the issue ultimately is how to create a link between people's identity and the economic development.

The implication of this research is that, if development is an outcome of a people's particular identity, no model of development can be universally applied or replicated in cultures other than one which generated it, contrary to what certain scholars such as Erik Reinert (2008) and William Easterly (2013) are claiming. Yet, the universal principles of development could be locally applied to yield a local economic development.

### **1.2 This Research in the Context of Other Research of Local Economic Development**

Obviously, this research could be seen as part of the ongoing reflection on the "culture factor" in local economic development (Huntington 1992, Granato et.al 1996, Inglehart 1997, Landes 1998, Harrison & Huntington 2000, Herrera 2002, etc.). The issue of "culture

factor” in economic development is at the centre of the ongoing heated debate among economists, sociologists, anthropologists and historians of development. However, my objective is not to learn whether or not culture contributes to economic development. Rather, since I believe that economy is part of the cultural dynamics, my aim is to inquire about the best way to account for this reality in developing countries.

Since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—and most remarkably in the last decade—the issue of economic development in developing countries has taken a new turn. One salient characteristic of this turn is the attention given to local cultures. This can be perceived in the increasing interest in the issue of “indigenous knowledge” which has now moved from the formative phase of research to “the phase of integration into academic and development orthodoxy” (Ellen 2002:238). This is obvious in the abundant literature on indigenous knowledge (Bronkensha 1980, Schuurman 1994, Udoh 1996, Sefa et al. 2000, Sillitoe et al. 2002, Bicker et al. 2004, Blaser et al. 2004). The *raison d’être* of the interest in indigenous knowledge is how those voices which are not often heard can speak for themselves within the established institutional, scientific and economic structures, in the search of the best conditions of participatory and sustainable economic development.

However, the “indigenous knowledge” approach to economic development deals with the question of what a given people knows. This is just one aspect. I am much more interested in the issue of how people’s identity could affect their economic development. Economic development is already present in people’s culture since people produce and consume as part of life, but also they have to exchange what they produce to acquire what they do not produce as part of the relationship with others. Perhaps this ‘unconscious’ economy needs to be prompted to become “conscious” economy that is open and takes into consideration “the capability to enjoy products of other cultures and



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other lands” (Sen 1999:244). Thus, the aim of this research is to unearth the cultural values that underlie this “natural” dynamics and see how they affect not only the economy of subsistence that is local but also the creation of wealth that is global. At this level, the case study on a certain number of projects of economic development in Costa Rica will be enlightening.

Accordingly, this research will consist of six sections. The first section is the introduction in which I have presented my assumption and rationale as well as a discussion of the situation of the study in our researches on local development. The second section is an overview of the major perspectives of economic development proposed to face the challenge of development in developing countries since post-World War II. In the process, the aim is to shed light on how participation has been taken into consideration. The third section creates a link between the universality and particularity of economic development, in order to see how the global policy of economic development can effectively be translated into local action. I argue that participation makes economic development both politically democratic and socially open to inculturation. In the fourth section, I consider the capability approach and how it could help us to ground economic development in cultural values for participation to be meaningful. In the fifth section I illustrate my point with a case study on projects of development in Costa Rica. The last section is the conclusion which summarizes the macro-argument and suggests possible policy implications.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF PERSPECTIVES OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: DID PARTICIPATION COUNT?**

*The reasoning behind the propositions regarding people participation and decentralization is essentially that the combination of these two strategies is likely to release dormant forces and resources, which can be used in the overall development efforts. [...] increased influence for citizens on their livelihood conditions will stimulate, more than anything else, their willingness to take greater responsibility and make self-sacrifice - to the benefit of socially broad-based development*

(Martinussen 1997:337).

### **2.1 Perspectives of Development since Post-World War**

There are five major perspectives in the history of development economics that have tried to address the issue of development in developing countries. In the first perspective of development economics (1945/1950s), it was argued that the lack of development is caused by low savings and investment. The low savings was understood to be the result of the persistence of a backward sector which needed to be modernized; whereas the low investment was a consequence of the lack of capital. Accordingly, modernization and government intervention were perceived as adequate ways to address this lack of development.

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Modernization is the suggestion that for the developing countries to escape from the scourge of economic underdevelopment, they must disengage themselves from their traditional mentalities and embrace the beliefs and the values of modernity (I shall elaborate on this later). Modernization was given an economic expression by Walter Rostow (1960) with his idea of linear development. Rostow (1960:1...12) argued that the transition from underdevelopment to development is a linear process which consists of five stages: the traditional society, the preconditions of take-off, the take-off, the stage of maturity, and finally the stage of higher consumption. He argues that some developing countries are still in the traditional stage, others in the stage of preconditions. In order to achieve a self-sustained economic growth that leads to the stage of take-off, they must follow the historical trajectory of developed countries. As for the idea of government intervention, it seems to have been part of the prevailing Keynesian economy as a response to the challenge of the great depression of the 1930s.

The second perspective of economic development was that of economic structuralism (1960s). The point of this perspective was to secure and protect national economies. The basic argument of the structuralists was that structural aspects of the national and international economy threaten the economic growth of developing countries, suggesting that economic growth in developing countries can be achieved through an internal expansion of the local economy thanks to the state's promotion of import-substitution-industrialization (ISI). The structural problem, however, was that the terms of trade worked against the producers of primary products. Thus, whatever income they got from these primary goods was used to import consumer goods from industrialized countries. Since consumer goods are higher in value than primary goods, the income increased for the industrialized countries while it decreased in the non-industrialized countries. This resulted in

asymmetric trade relationships. Thus trade was no longer perceived as the engine of economic growth and development.

Of course, one may quickly mention that the problem was not trade in itself but rather Ricardo's principle of comparative advantage that underlies it. How can the producers of primary good (agricultural goods, raw materials which do not involve a lot of innovation) enjoy the same sustained growth as the producers of manufactured goods (see Reinert 2007)? Yet still the question is how a given country can be selective and specialize in activities that ensure its economic growth and development and at the same time be economically complementary to others. Economic structuralism drew on the work of Arthur Lewis (1955) and influenced the economic policy of the Economic Commission of Latin America under the leadership of Raul Prebisch. Economic structuralism was influential in the economic policies of the newly independent African countries such as Ghana and Libya.

The third perspective of development economics which flourished in 1970s/1980s consisted in critiques of the earlier approaches. Three main critiques emerged. The first critique was that of the dependency theorists such as Gunder Frank, Fernando Cardoso, Enzo Faletto, Dos Santos, Samir Amin and many others who decried the dependency of the South (poor, also called periphery) on the North (rich, also called centre). In Latin America where the dependency theory originated and flourished, the dependency proponents blamed the Economic Commission of Latin America (ECLA) for having been soft and too cold in pushing forward radical measures such as land reforms and other structural changes such as social transformation. In implementing structuralism in a "soft" way, the ECLA had assumed that various aspects of economic underdevelopment would automatically disappear in the process of industrialization. Thus, the dependency theory was perceived as a more radical economic perspective. Using the same economic assumptions as those of structuralism, its proponents suggested a national and collective

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economic self-reliance. The dependency theory inspired the first major strategy of development in Africa, namely the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) in 1980s.

The second critique was that of those who argued that economic growth, capital accumulation and industrialization should be challenged to emphasize human development and the satisfaction of human basic needs such as food, shelter, education, health, participation in political decision making, etc. This critique seems to have been formulated by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1970s. This critique is nowadays reconsidered seriously and theorized in the capability approach elaborated and developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum.

The third critique, which I will rather consider as the fourth phase of economic development (1980s), is often referred to as the neoclassical counter-revolution. This counter-revolution is of course very complex and, therefore, difficult to grasp. According to Lee Mudge (2008) the neoclassical counter-revolution, which is also known as neo-liberalism, is three-dimensional. The first is the intellectual dimension which presents the market as the source and arbiter of human freedoms. Among the representatives of this intellectual group I could mention von Hayek (1944, 1949), Milton Friedman (1962), the Chicago-trained economists, the intellectuals of the Mont Pelerin Society and the Institute of Economic Affairs in London. These neo-liberal intellectuals provided the political elites with explanations for the failures of Keynesians and development policies and made recommendations for economic recovery. The second dimension of neo-liberalism is bureaucratic and refers to the set of economic policies of which the aim is to expel “the state out of the business of ownership and getting the politicians out of the business of dirigiste-style management” (Mudge 2008: 704). This dimension is represented by John Williamson with his repertoire of ten neo-liberal macro-economic prescriptions that

constitute the Washington Consensus (Williamson 1990, 1993). Finally, there is the political dimension which seeks to redefine the responsibility of the state as well as the locus of its authority within the market-centric politics. Against this background should be understood the advice that, in the developing countries, the state should provide institutions of good governance and sound economic policies that accommodate the markets, should be understood against this background.

Accordingly, the proponents of neo-liberalism critiqued the excessive role of the state, the import-substitution industrialization, and the dependency theory. They dismissed the structuralists' appeal to state intervention and the dependency theory as unrealistic. They claimed that the dependency theorists had little knowledge of neoclassical economic theory, and that economic underdevelopment was rather a consequence of poor economic policies in conjunction with the excessive state intervention in the economy. Thus the solution to economic underdevelopment was thought to be an efficient market economy achieved by eliminating market restrictions and by limiting the state intervention.

The fifth phase is that of 1990s which is apparently led by new developments in technology especially in the means of communication. Manuel Castels (1996) talks of the era of information that creates a networked society. It is perhaps this technology- information that is pushing development economics in various directions. One of the directions is the call for a greater involvement of the state in the economic development of its people by providing sound economic policies and reliable institutions of governance able to face the challenge of poverty in its various aspects and take environmental sustainability as a major concern. Could one call this new perspective "neo-structuralism"?

## 2.2 The Question of People's Participation

The question in reference to these perspectives of economic development is to what extent participation of the people has been addressed. To what extent have people been involved both theoretically and practically in the elaboration and execution of the policies of economic development? The above overview shows us that the issue was not how people can be better agents of/in their own development but what can be done for them. Thus, paternalism seems to have been a characteristic of economic development both at national and international levels. The reason for this could have been the colonial experience, as well as the ideological conflicts which justified most of the interventions of superpowers. There is yet another reason for paternalism in development of developing countries. It is the lack of a democratic experience which is still wanting even today. According to Denis Goulet (1989:167), if top-down, growth oriented approaches to development are adopted, it is most likely that whatever participation does occur will be generated by people themselves.

Thus, the voice of participation was hardly heard in modernization, structuralism, dependency, and neo-liberalism.<sup>1</sup> And where the issue of participation was raised, it was marginal and expressed in terms of

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<sup>1</sup>Although the concept (and the practice) of participation has not attracted much attention in these perspectives of development, it is central in the social teachings of the Catholic Church. In fact, it was already much debated in late 1940s/early 1950s, under Pope Pius XII, in terms of what level of participation is appropriate to determine the policies, procedures, practices and directions in industries. In *Pacem in Terris* issued in 1963, Pope John XXIII referred to the common good as a social reality in which all people should share through their participation. In *Populorum Progressio* issued in 1967, Pope Paul VI uses the concept participation to reconcile the notion private property and the common good. He suggested that when the conflict between acquired private rights and primary community exigencies, the public authority, with the active participation of individuals and social groups, should provide a solution. Thus one might be right to ask why it was not replicated in the perspectives of development that followed at least 1960s.

“human capital,” that is, geared to “augmenting production possibilities”. In his *Participation: the view from above*, Marshall Wolfe (1983) argues that state promoted participation usually tend to focus at getting people to produce more and more efficiently. It is interested in the inputs from those who participate. This leaves the concept of participation surrounded with ambiguities (cf. Crocker 2007: 432-3). The human capital approach to participation does not give a full voice to people. As in all perspectives of economic development proposed from above, participation is just accidental and does not take into consideration what people believe and value.

Thus one is left with the issue of how people could participate essentially yet in a way that includes other actors of the society. This leads to suggest that the full voice consists in going beyond the perception of people in terms of “human capital” to “human capability” as people’s ability to lead the lives they value and have reason to value (Sen 1999:293). The capability approach builds economic development on what people believe and value.





## UNIVERSALITY AND PARTICULARITY OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

*Both the inculturation and democratisation of economic development are geared to translating what is universal in economic development to a local context. The need for development as a process of improving the quality of people's lives is universal.*

(Ntibagirirwa 2014:201).

### 3.1 The State of the Question

Currently, development theorizing and practice has produced an inflation of new concepts: local development, people-centred development, endogenous development, participation, indigenous knowledge, etc. This inflation of concepts in development is sometimes perceived as a sign of the crisis of post-World War II development by certain post-development theorists (Matthews 2004). In fact, these theorists go as far as proclaiming the bankruptcy of the theories and practices of development, and hence calling for alternatives with a subsequent development of methodologies most of which are practice oriented rather than theory oriented (Pieterse 1998). For them this bankruptcy is evident not only in environmental destruction, but also in the failure to deliver on promises such as poverty reduction, increased income equality, and increased standard of living (Matthews 2004: 377).

Certain development theorists suggest that development should therefore be reconceived and redefined. One option of this reconceptualization is to allow developing countries the possibility to define development themselves, rather than acceding to the definition established by the developed world. That is, for Peredo et al (2004:9), the interaction between a global economy and a particular people need not be that envisaged by renowned development perspectives; it can be something else entirely (cf. Pieterse 1998). However, although the suggestion of Peredo and his colleagues is powerful and challenging, I have an impression that there is confusion between the best route to development and the definition of development. Development should always be integral, that is, “the development of every person and the whole person”.<sup>2</sup> This means that in the process, everyone is empowered to free oneself from everything that is dehumanizing. The question is what way is suited to achieve this kind of development? How to achieve what is universally acknowledged in a local context?

I have already underlined the fact that the failure of the major perspectives proposed to deal with economic underdevelopment lies in not taking participation seriously. Taking participation seriously makes development both politically democratic and socially open to inculturation. I shall elaborate on this.

## **3.2 From the Universal Conception of Development to Local Context**

### **3.2.1 Inculturation of Economic Development**

The translation of the universality of development to a local context is mediated by local beliefs and values. By inculturation of economic

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<sup>2</sup> I am echoing here the Encyclical *Populorum Progress* in which Pope Paul VI defines development in Lebert's terms: the good of “every man and the whole man”

development, therefore, I mean the process by which economic development takes root in what people believe and value. At its universal conception, development is soul-less and is then “insouled” when it takes root in people’s beliefs and values. That is what Cooper and Vargas have referred to as the cultural feasibility of economic development. Quoting the Arab Human Development Report 2002, they said:

Culture and values are the soul of development. They provide its impetus, facilitate the means needed to further it, and substantially define people’s vision of its purposes and ends. Culture and values are instrumental in the sense that they help to shape people’s daily hopes, fears, ambitions, attitudes and actions. (...) values are not the servants of development; they are its wellspring (Cooper and Vargas (2004:343)

In the same vein, Throsby gives this advice:

(...) development projects in poor countries such as those financed by international agencies, NGOs, foreign aid programmes and so on, are likely to be effective in raising living standards in such countries only if they recognize that the culture of the target community is the fundamental expression of their being, and that this culture is placed within an economic context, that determines the scope and extent of material progress that is possible (Throsby 2001:11).

These ideas may appear to be mere wishful pleas to a neo-classical development economist who may be convinced that “getting prices right” and “responding rationally to market signals” and other utility maximizing models are necessary and sufficient conditions to get the machine of economic development moving in every society. These different aspects are certainly very important in the quantitative conception and assessment of economic development, but do not give the whole picture of economy (*oiko-nomia*) as the “laws that underlie the management of the house”. The house is always a context of life with a spirit, beliefs, values, attitudes, and norms of behaviour which

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inspire those who live in it. So is it for the development agents in society and its culture.

Paredo, et al. (2004) rightly attracts our attention to historical variations, national diversity, national and regional units that are constantly in state of flux as they adjust to the influence of the global economy. They introduce the regulatory theory which allows them to understand development in terms of the link between the modes of accumulation<sup>3</sup> and modes of social regulations. While accumulation determines the general possibilities for the economy, social regulation determines a complex of institutions, norms which secure the adjustment of individual agents and social groups to the overarching principle of the accumulation regime.

According to Hirst and Zeitalin (1992:85), the regime of accumulation informs us about the relationship between production and consumption defined at the level of the international economy as a whole. From the other hand, social regulations inform on how modes of development can and do emerge at every geographical scale.

Against this background, Dunning (2003:24) assesses capitalism in terms of moving out of the age of hierarchical capitalism into the age of alliance capitalism which presupposes a set of virtues such as trust, reciprocity and diligence that fosters a fruitful and a sustainable coalition and partnership. Sen (1999: 9) is right to point out that the role of social values and prevailing mores which people have reason to treasure must be acknowledged in connection with the effective reason as the engine of development.

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<sup>3</sup> I am uncomfortable with this concept of “accumulation”. It does not give the whole picture of wealth and its moral meaning, especially the distributive dimension it entails.

### **3.2.2 Democratization of Economic Development**

The question that appears to be a puzzle to scholars who study the link between economic development and cultural values is that of “how:” how to make sure that the process of economic development takes root in what people believe and value (what I called inculturation of development). It is here that the concept of participation needs careful elaboration, because it brings what is social and cultural in the political sphere. Fernando Henrique Cardoso suggested that participation should be linked to political activity in broader arenas to save from small-scale, problem solving efforts (in Goulet 1989:168). I argue that it is through public reflection and debate that what people believe and value are “insouled” in the process of economic development (See Sen 1999, 2005, 2009). I call this “democratization of economic development”.

According to Glyn Williams (2004:557) the idea of participation (in development) was present within the sphere of the NGO community. As noted earlier, participation of the people might also have been an issue in the milieu of government policymaking, but its top-down approach could not allow moving it from the mere accidental stage to an essential one where it matters. Rightly so, in the time when everything was state controlled, there appears to have too much worry that public participation would exceed the capacity of official institutions and threaten political stability. Where this worry was relativized, “strategies for increased participation were combined with efforts aimed at strengthening local government institutions” (Martinussen 1997:235). To seize this nuance between accidental participation and essential participation, let us consider the various levels of participation. David Crocker (2007:432-3) outlines seven types of participation:

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- *Nominal participation:* People participate in group decision-making only as a members of the group but, for instance, do not attend meetings, perhaps because of other responsibilities, lack of will, or feeling that they are harassed and unwelcome;
- *Passive participation:* one is a member of a group and attends decision-making meetings only to listen to reports about decisions already made. As Drydyk (2005) explains , passive participation is limited to being told what is going to happen;
- *Consultative participation:* f those who are not part of the decision-making body participate by simply giving information or opinions to the decision makers. However, those who are not part of the body of decision makers neither deliberate among themselves nor make decisions;
- *Petitionary participation:* Those who are not part of the decision-making body participate by making petitions to authorities to make certain decisions or do certain things as a remedy to their grievances;
- *Participatory implementation:* The decision makers determine the goals and the main means while others implement the goals and decide the tactics. Drydyk (2005) calls it functional participation.
- *Bargaining participation:* The non-elite individually or collectively bargain with the elite, but mostly as adversaries rather than partners, the motive of the bargaining being largely or exclusively self-interested;
- *Deliberative participation:* Both the non-elites deliberate together, engage in reasoning and scrutinize the proposals, and reflect in order to reach agreements on policies geared to the common good. According to David Crocker, this deliberative process includes scrutiny and formation of values as well as the importance of various processes and opportunities. Drydyk calls

this kind of participation interactive participation geared to a joint analysis and reflection in order to get solutions to issues.

The first five types of participation refer to what I call *accidental participation*. There is no public reflection and debate involved. According to Goulet, in this ‘pseudo-participation’ people are just mobilized and co-opted but not organized. The occurrence or non-occurrence of this kind of participation does not prevent “the course of things”, that is, what has been planned at the level of leadership and expertise, to take place. In this kind of participation, people’s participation is practically limited to approval and execution as is the case (has been the case) in most of the “top-down” development approaches. There is no movement from mobilization to organization in which people are truly empowered; in other words, people are “patients” of development rather than “agents” of development. Once policymakers and planners have finished the office work of designing a plan or a project of development, people are required to work with it without knowing its politics, its meaning, how it will shape their lives and where it will lead them.

Deliberative participation refers to what I call *essential participation*. In this kind of participation, people are agents and not merely patients of their own development. In other words, their participation is essential to the process of development; in fact, it is already development in process. Development starts within them and not without. And at the same time, development is essential to what they become. It transforms them as they give it a shape. To use Hodgett’s terms, by exercising their agency, people increase the political and social awareness that helps them to leapfrog in their development (Hodgett 2008).

Although bargaining participation is rather a sign of the tension between the decision-makers and those who are not part of the decision making body, one could see it as a step towards essential participation. In effect, once the balance of power is reached, the process of



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deliberative participation can be contemplated in the near future as each of the bargaining parts sees the need to move from self-interest to common interest, from mobilization to organization.

Later Crocker talks of transformative participation or effective participation (what Drydyk calls self-mobilisation) which consists in taking initiative independently of the external institutions. Although this is the highest level of essential development, I would find it hard to subscribe to it since participatory development, as I view it, should not be exclusive but inclusive. Institutions are always needed and must themselves be a fruit of the democratic process. In a contrary case, self-mobilization or transformative participation may end in situations whereby people evolve in the margins of the state. This would be a negation of an aspect of human nature as a political animal. Essential participation should not be conceived of as a revenge on the top-down approach by the bottom-up perspective. Instead, it must be seen in terms of a move from the thinner to the thicker as David Crocker puts it:

The further we go down the list, the thicker is the participatory mode in the sense of more fully expressing individual or collective agency. It requires more agency to attend a meeting than to be a stay-at-home member, and even more agency actively to comment or petition than merely to listen, accept others' decisions, or do what one is told. In both bargaining and deliberative participation, non-elite individuals and groups manifest even more robust agency because they are part of the decision-making process and not passive recipients of others' decisions.... Agency... is not just making (or influencing) a decision, even when the decision is the outcome of deliberation. It is also effectively running one's own individual or collective life and thereby making a difference in the world (Crocker 2008:344).

As is obvious, the move from the thinner to the thicker, the public reflection and debate increase. The public reflection and debate not only ensure that what people believe and value are accounted for in the

process of development. They also create a platform whereby responsibilities and roles are reflected and shared. It is against this background that Korten understands development as a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their aspirations (Korten 1993:67).

Democracy in development entails freedom in all its aspects. In fact, freedom is always a major characteristic of democracy. People need freedom to free development and they need development to free them. Freedom is both a means and an end of development. In his *Development as Freedom*, Sen argues that freedom is central to the process of development for two reasons. The first is the evaluative reason. This is concerned with the assessment of progress done in terms of whether the freedoms that people have are enhanced (Sen 1999:4). Secondly there is an effective reason which underlies the fact that the achievement of development is dependent on the free agency of people. For Sen (1999:44), the enhancement of freedom is both the main object and the primary means of development.

In developing countries, there is a tendency to isolate freedom to the sphere of political ordering when in fact it is equally important in all spheres of human life, in particular, in the field of development. Put differently, in most of the developing countries, democracy in development has not been given the same importance or the same emphasis it is given in political processes. According to Pellissery and Bergh (2007:284), democracy enables people to exercise their agency and shape their own well-being and destiny rather than having it determined by others or by impersonal forces. Freedom in development allows people to own their development process, and to make it a product of what they believe and value

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Henceforth, I will consider essential participation as a process through which people have an opportunity to make their cultural values the ground of the desired development. Such an opportunity consists in a public reflection and debate in which people increase their political and social awareness of development. In the following I will explore and substantiate how the capability approach could help to ground development in cultural values and makes it politically democratic, and is, thus, well suited to foster the essential participation.

## **CAPABILITY APPROACH AND THE GROUNDING OF DEVELOPMENT IN PEOPLE'S CULTURAL VALUES**

*(...) a comprehensive treatment of capabilities should go beyond the individual level to examine the social and structural conditions permitting people to act and participate in society*

(Jackson 2005:102).

### **4.1 Understanding the Capability Approach**

The capability approach was formulated by Amartya Sen and further developed by Martha Nussbaum. Both Nussbaum and Sen (1993) stress the capability approach back to Aristotle's conditions for human flourishing. For Aristotle, human beings really flourish when they lead a life of activity. According to Sen, the capability approach is related to Aristotle's analysis of the good of human beings, leading to an examination of the functions of a person as well as his exploration of life in terms of activity (Sen 2003:4, 1992:5). Sen also traces the capability approach back to Adam Smith and Karl Marx (Sen 2003:4). For Sen, both Adam Smith and Karl Marx discussed the importance of functionings and the capability to function as determinants of well-being. Marx's political economy conceived the success of human life in terms of fulfilling the needs of human activity (this links us back to

Aristotle). Sen shows us that the focus on freedom that capability reflects is featured by Marx’s claim that what we need is to replace the “domination of circumstances and chances over individuals by the domination of individuals over chance and circumstances”. Adam Smith discussed the functioning of appearing in community without shame, an achievement which, according to Sen, is valued in all societies.

While for Sen the determination of what capabilities should be considered is a matter of public debate, Nussbaum proposes a fixed set of capabilities that would be arrived at through an overlapping consensus<sup>4</sup> and argues that “any life that lacks any one of these capabilities, no matter what else it has, will fall short of being a good human life (Nussbaum and Glover 1995:185) (see comparative table.1):

*Table 1: Comparative table of Sen and Nussbaum on Capability*

	<b>Central human functional capabilities (Nussbaum) (Nussbaum &amp; Glover 1995: 76-79, 83-85)</b>	<b>Functionings (Sen)<sup>5</sup></b>
Life:	Not dying prematurely	Avoiding escapable morbidity and premature mortality Longevity

<sup>4</sup> The concept of overlapping consensus comes from John Rawls who used it in his essay to answer the question of the possibility of a stable and just society taking cognizance of conflicting and incommensurable religious, philosophical, and political doctrines (Rawls 1996:133ff). For Nussbaum, the ten functional capabilities she presents could be seen as the core of this overlapping consensus in so far as “any life that lacks any one of these capabilities, no matter what else it has, will fall short of being a good human life” (Nussbaum and Glove 1995: 85) .

<sup>5</sup> One could summarize all the following capabilities in terms of the five freedoms: Political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security. For Sen, each of these types of rights and opportunities helps to advance the general capability of a person (Sen 1999:10)

Bodily health:	Having good health, having opportunities of sexual satisfaction, being able to move from place to place.	Being adequately nourished, nourishment being in good health being free from malaria being well-sheltered
Bodily integrity:	Ability to avoid unnecessary pain and non-beneficial pain, to have pleasurable experience	Move about traveling
senses, imagination and thought:	Access to information, education, etc.	Being literate cultural and intellectual pursuits
Emotions:	Ability to have attachment to things and persons outside ourselves.	Being happy being close to people one would like to see
Practical reason:	Being able to form a conception of the good and engage in critical reflection, being able to seek employment and participation in political life.	Taking part in the life of the community
Affiliation:	Ability to live for and to others, concern for others, social interaction; capability for justice and friendship.	Ability to entertain and visit friends being close to people one would like to see having self-respect appear in public without shame

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Other species:	Concern for and in relation to animals, plants and world of nature.	
Play:	Being able to laugh, play, enjoy recreational activities.	Vacationing
Control over one's environment:	Ability to live one's life and nobody else's (personal choice), freedom of association, integrity of personal property, being able to live one's own life in one's own surroundings and context.	Ability to entertain and visit friends Vacationing Travelling Being employed Being decently clothed
Method:	Overlapping consensus	Method: Public debate and reflection

*(Adapted from Ortrud Lessmann 2008)*

My aim in this section is not to compare and eventually reconcile the two ways of looking at capabilities. In fact, I believe that the human being is a complex reality which needs more than one angle to understand it. However, in the following I will depend more on Sen's view of capability since its democratic character (public debate) harmonizes with the kind of participatory development I envisage.

Today, the capability approach has become a cornerstone in assessing economic development as well as the methods and policies that lead to it. Indeed, since 1990, the capability approach has inspired a new way in which the United Nations Development program (UNDP) assesses human development. The focus on Gross Domestic Product, Gross National Income, economic growth and the human capital fails to

appreciate the centrality of people in economic development (Gasper 2002:442).

Before moving any further, it is important to know what is meant by the concept of “capability”. Capability refers to the ability of people to lead the lives they value and have reason to value. The concept of capability is linked to two important notions: functioning and agency.

According to Sen, “a functioning is an achievement of a person: what he or she manages to do or to be. It reflects, as it were, a part of the ‘state’ of that person” (Sen 1987:7). Thus functioning consists in what a person succeeds in doing or being. According to Sen, functionings include such aspects of life as being well-nourished, avoiding escapable morbidity, premature mortality, having self-respect, being able to participate in the life of the community, etc. (Sen 1992:5).

In relation to functionings, capability represents the various combinations of beings and doings that a person can achieve (Sen 1992:40). Capabilities may include such abilities as reading and writing, being well-informed, having realistic chances of participating freely, freedom, in short, those aspects of life that allow one to fully function as a human being for one’s well-being (Sen 1999:233).

Also linked with the concept of capability is the notion of human agency, that is, a person’s capability to act. Sen (1999:137) talks of seeing people as agents rather than patients. He refers to an agent as “someone who acts and brings change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives” (Sen 1999:19). Sen defines agency by distinguishing between achievement of well-being, which is the capability of individuals to improve their well-being, and achievement of agency, which is the capability of individuals to undertake action as a result of commitment: “A person’s agency achievement refers to the realization of goals and values she has reasons to pursue, whether or not they are connected to her own well-being” (Sen 1992:56).



One may wonder why Sen is making this distinction. It is possible that Sen wants us to keep in mind the interaction between the individual and the social networks of which one is a part, or, more precisely, the link between individual freedom and social commitment. In fact, he wrestles with this issue in various parts of his writings. It is also possible that Sen has in mind the blame that is laid on Adam Smith's idea of self-interest in *The Wealth of the Nations*, although Smith emphasized also the interest of others as is the case in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Like Adam Smith, Sen would like to lead us to the fact that the individual can depart from his self-interest in view of the interest of others. The two possibilities are linked. Agency presupposes a universe in which one's action is undertaken. This has to do with the fact that the individual does not stand in isolation; thus, human agency has meaning when viewed from participatory perspective.

With this concept of agency, one may say that Sen's capability approach considers people in their individuality without, however, being individualistic. In effect, Sen has been accused of being individualistic in his approach insofar as he emphasizes individual capabilities and seemingly ignores the way collectivities affect individuals (Evans 2002, Stewart 2005). Thus, certain scholars such as Ibrahim (2006), Ballet, et al. (2007), Cleaver (2007) have responded to such a critique by developing a perspective of collective capabilities. However, the critique of Sen as being individualistic in his capability approach is not warranted.

There are two perspectives from which Sen addresses the individual and the communal dimensions of capability. The first perspective is that of culture to which he alludes abundantly (1999, 2005, 2006). The consideration of culture is dictated by the fact that neoclassical economics is done in a way that would make us believe that people live in a culture-free context. The second perspective is the liberal philosophy of which the extreme could deprive the individual of the

awareness that activities are undertaken in society. Hence Sen's major concern is how to address economic and social circumstances that affect the individual. This concern brings him to consider not individualism but agency (see Jackson 2005). Agency becomes an answer to the question of how individuals participate in the life of their society while at the same time preserving their individual autonomy.

Thus Sen concentrates on individual capabilities along with the fact that the individual is embedded in the society or the community. Sen makes it clear that individuals are socially embedded agents who interact with their societies and flourish fully only by participating in political and social affairs (Sen 1999: xi-xii, 2002:79-80). Nevertheless, Sen is aware of the tension that exists between the individual and the community as is obvious in his reflection on culture and human rights, social choice and individual behaviour, individual freedom and social commitment (Sen 1999), and recently his reflection on culture and development (2005) as well as violence and identity (2006).

But why the capability approach? What is its *raison d'être*? The capability approach arose as a response to approaches used to define and measure economic development such as the economic growth model, methods used to assess equality of opportunities as well as inequalities. But more fundamentally, Sen developed the capability approach to address the limits of utilitarianism as well as the limits of Rawls' theory of justice which gives priority to liberty and emphasizes the distribution of the primary goods (incomes, wealth, opportunities, etc.). For Sen these theoretical frameworks are not sufficiently comprehensive to account for all the potentialities and possibilities of the human being. Thus, Sen's suggestion is that development should be evaluated in terms of the expansion of the real freedoms that people enjoy (Sen 1999:3).

In the next section, I will analyse how the capability approach could help us to ground development in what people believe and value and enhance essential participatory development.

## **4.2 Capability Approach and Development as a Validation of People's Cultural Values**

There are three angles from which the capability approach could help us to ground economic development in what people believe and value:

1. The first angle is the very definition of capability as the freedom of people to lead the kind of lives they value and have reason to value;
2. The second angle is the fact that the capability approach makes people agents and not patients of their own development.
3. The third angle is Sen's definition of development as an expansion of people's capability or freedoms.

I shall elaborate on these by considering the whole structure of a culture of a given society.

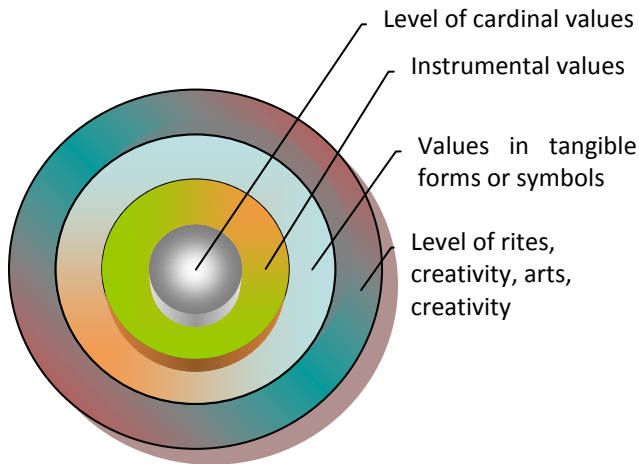
### **4.2.1 Development and Capability as the Freedom of People to Lead the Lives they Value**

The question to be answered here is how capability as "the freedom of people to lead the lives they value and have reason to value" helps to ground economic development in people's cultural values. First of all, the ability of people to lead the life they value starts by questions of self-definition which, in turn, leads to self-awareness, awareness of the context and the potentialities people have. Questions, such as Who are we as a people? How should we live given who we are, our circumstances and the circumstances of the world we live in?, are about people's identity and their unique way of living, of conception of the world around them, and the way of doing things. This unique way includes envisaging development on their own ground and the freedom to do so.

According to Kabeya Tshikuku (2001), the universe of human existence and actions in all its determinations and trappings is permeated with culture. He outlines three main functions assigned to culture in all places and at all times:

- Culture as the matrix that incorporates and encompasses all the realities perceived,
- Culture as the vector that orients and gives meaning to all existence and all practice,
- Culture as an order in which objects and choices, facts and events, the present and the future, assume, in relation to one another, their specific weights and particular heights, their explanations and justifications, etc.

One could say, therefore, that people's ability to perceive, to appreciate and to act is derived from the matrix of their culture. But one may object to this by saying that there is no such thing as a matrix of culture since culture is dynamic and keeps changing—it is not fixed. Culture changes through the meeting of other cultures, education, people's creativity, innovations, new knowledge, etc. Individuals keep changing, as they change their environment, their way of appreciating the world and doing things. The acquisition of new knowledge as well as cultural exchange seems to give the individual a new identity. However, that which becomes is that which is first. Becoming presupposes being. One cannot talk of becoming without essentially referring to being. Now the question is this: since one can locate where the becoming of culture lies, where can one locate the being of a people's culture? Tshikuku talks of the being of a culture by a way of a diagram of concentric circles (fig.1).



As can be seen from the above figure, there are four levels of culture that define people's identity: the nucleus level (that of cardinal values), the instrumental level (that of instrumental values), the level of symbols (that of values in tangible forms), and the level of actualization of values in rites, arts and creativity.

At the nucleus level, there are cardinal or characteristic values of a people. These values are said to have their own *raison d'être*. It is from these values that one derives meaning and direction in life. In this connection, I could refer to the American value of freedom as consisting in the right to be considered "just as good as others," or to have an equal chance or opportunity with others. This is different from the Latin American perception of individuals as valuable because of the unique inner quality of worth they have. In other words, the individual is valued precisely because one is not exactly "like" anyone else. Each is special and unique (Gillin 1955: 491). In the African society, we talk of the value of the individual as a member of the community because the individual shares in the humanity of the community.

Tshikuku argues that these values can lose their internal coherence and hierarchy when a given civilization falls. But one may ask oneself to what extent this is the case. In effect, people tend to refer to those values which have constituted their grandeur. One may refer to the idea of renaissance in Europe or the African renaissance in Africa. In the same way it is obvious that the Jews, the Chinese, and Indians can easily do away with the “founding myths” on which they have built most aspects of their lives. In the European Union there has been a debate on whether Christianity (along with other aspects such as philosophy or other religions) should be introduced in the Constitution of the Union as a peculiar characteristic that makes Europe unique. Such debate flows from a deeper question all people constantly ask themselves and which leads to their self-awareness upon which a course of action is based.

Sally Matthews argues that despite slavery, colonization, and the injunction of the modernization theory into Africa as well as Western influences, Africans still retain most of their values: they still converse in their own languages, and still have their African style homes and African food. Furthermore, Africans’ world views and value systems remain noticeably different from those of the West (Matthews 2004: 379). Thus one would say that when a society’s civilization falls, the cardinal values are shaken but remain in the collective (sub)-consciousness of that society. The cardinal values are to a people what the soul is to the body.

The second level is that of instrumental values which falls under the authority of the nucleus. Contrary to cardinal values, the instrumental values do not have their own justification. They are justified on the ground that they are useful in maintaining and consolidating the cardinal values. A good example of this is seen in science and technology. Their use consists in facing the challenges of life which an individual or a society as a whole faces. While the cardinal values cannot be transferred to another culture insofar as they are the nexus of a people’s identity, the

instrumental values can be transferred to another culture. Science, technology, language can be used by people of other cultures to consolidate or maintain the cardinal values of that culture.

The third level is that of symbols, rites and attitudes. These are the cardinal and instrumental values in concrete form. Monuments, certain social functions, sacred objects or animals as well as rites and attitudes which may be performed around them can be situated at this level. One may refer, for instance, to the horse and what it symbolizes in the imaginary of a Western, or a dragon to the East Orientals, or again a cross to Christians, or certain kinds of dances or masks and what they represent in the imagination of certain African groups.

The fourth or last level is that of creation, projections and artistic expressions. These are the results of how people live and feel in and outside their own cultures. They are expressions of human freedom within and outside one's own culture. Tshikuku tells us that freedom is a fact of culture and is as much a part of culture as a shadow which sticks to its objects.

In the process of development, capability as "the freedom of people to lead the lives they value- and have reason to value" allows people first to bring to their awareness those values that are the deep source of their inspiration. I call this the recovery of the *independence of human spirit* as a ground for creative pride. At this juncture, I would like to recall how Morishima (1982) explains the development success of Japan. He argues that the secret of the Japanese economic success lies in the Japanese spirit and ethos.

The independence of the human spirit is in itself a source of empowerment for whatever course of action, a fortiori development. It would be difficult to image that a person who is confused about herself can lead an action which is meaningful for her.

This idea of the independence of the human spirit could help us to understand why, despite the good will, modernization as a wellspring of

achieving development in the developing countries failed. The modernists argued that, for underdeveloped countries to develop, they have to embrace the beliefs and values of modernity. The assumption was that economic development is premised on a set of beliefs and values that are universally valid. I have already referred to Walter Rostow (1960) who argued that economic development is a linear process that runs from the traditional stage to the stage of high consumption.

The argument of the modernists relied on the sociology developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Emil Durkheim and Max Weber as well as the positivism of which August Comte is the founding father. What is common to sociology and positivism is the distinction between traditional and modern societies. The traditional societies were said to be backward looking with a kind of authority premised on a metaphysical cosmology. This was presumably the cause of underdevelopment of these societies. On the contrary, modern societies emerged from the traditional formation to engage in the process of development thanks to the rise of reason and scientific explanations of the world. Let us admit that, indeed, reason and scientific explanation are central to economic development, especially as they are one of the grounds of innovations. However, they do not necessarily require that one gives up one's beliefs and values which lay beneath one's identity. In other words, they do not require people to give up their "independence of the spirit" from which they draw their "élan vital" and their creative pride

Thus, one has to be careful about the trap of the fallacy of universalism. In effect, that the beliefs and values which an individual incarnates in society A yield its economic development does not mean that if they are transferred to society B they will necessarily produce the same economic outcome as in society A. According to Arthur Lewis (1955:13), we cannot assume deductively that things associated in a



society we know must necessarily also be associated in all other societies. It is possible that the individual in society B might have different beliefs and values that could produce the same economic outcome as in A. Gusfield (1967) felt uncomfortable with the classification of certain societies into the category of traditional. He argues for a greater concern and appreciation of the complexity, richness and individuality of societies, which, while maintaining traditional traits, might still “modernize”.

The point that has been made so far is that “capability as the freedom of people to lead the lives they value” is important in the process of development at two major aspects. The first aspect is that of the awareness of one’s identity and the values that differentiate it from the identities of other people. The second aspect is that of the independence of the human spirit of people as a ground of their *élan vital* and their creative pride. It is certainly all this wealth that the individual brings to the public debate and reflection on given project of development. I shall now turn to agency.

#### **4.2.2 Development and Agency**

As in the definition of capability, the question is how agency helps to ground development in people’s cultural values. I shall consider this question by looking at the definition of agency and its aspect of autonomy. Agency entails two things which are interlinked, namely, the ability to act and autonomy.

First of all, by definition agency means the ability to act. In other words, agency means that people are seen as being actively involved in shaping their destiny, and not just as passive recipients of the fruits of cunning development programs (Alkire 2003:15). A lack of agency means not acting, being passive, patient or recipient, and eventually

allowing others to act on one's behalf. A lack of agency may arise because one is not given the opportunity to act.

In normal conditions (when people do not suffer from mental or physical deficiency), it is hard to say people can be "in a natural disposition" of passivity. In effect, the human being is created with the ability of incessantly going beyond oneself. The human being is characterized by self-transcendence. However, external circumstances such as poverty, powerlessness, exploitation, and a lack of those things, such as education, health, food, which could increase our spiritual and material capacity can deprive people of such ability. Focusing on the deprivations which poverty can cause, Alan Gewirth (2007) argues that people do lose their capacity to act as moral agents because their freedom and well-being are undermined by their lack of the means of subsistence. At the international level, for instance, most developing countries have been deprived of their opportunity to exercise their agency by imposing on them certain types of development or conditionalities that prevent them from defining policies of development as they understand it or as their reality dictates it (cf. Reinert 2007, Chang 2008). One could also evoke the reality of the global economy.

According to Mark Fleurbaey (2007), the way the global economy operates undermines the integrity of poverty-stricken people who see themselves forced to act against their will to the extent that they can make decisions they would not make if their basic socio-economic needs were met. At another level, in Africa most of the (macro) strategies of development often have been devised by the leaders and their expert advisors without involving the majority of the people and other actors in development (see Adebayo 2002). The role of the latter is limited to executing the projects and policies handed down from above, even if these are not understood and/or are of little interest. This leads us to a category which is important in the definition of agency: autonomy.

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Agency presupposes that people who act are aware of their autonomy. According to Gasper (1997:298), autonomy can be understood from two points of view, namely, the critical and the substantive points of view. The critical perspective of autonomy has to do with the “ability to form, not just adopt, one’s own conception of the good”. Here autonomy has to do with the individual decision-making of various matters of one’s society.

Since the ultimate matrix from which development is conceived is culture, one may wonder whether autonomy could not undermine this matrix. This is certainly a serious concern. In effect, certain individuals could, indeed, make decisions that have a disruptive impact on their own cultural matrix. An example that strikes me most is that of Etounga-Manguelle and his view on the conditions of economic development in Africa. In his work, *L’Afrique a-t-elle besoin d’un programme d’ajustement culturel* (Does Africa need a program of cultural adjustment), Manguellé argues that Africa needs a program of cultural adjustment that would transform its mentality to one which is consistent with values in the rest of the world (1990). Such condemnation of a people’s way of life in *toto* is hardly understandable. Although there may be certain aspects of the African culture that may need some caution, the issue is not the incompatibility between African mentalities and development; rather, the issue is whether the beliefs and values that are at the core of African identity can be validated in terms of policies of economic development.

However, in relation to culture, the autonomy that is characteristic of agency should not be perceived from the perspective of a man standing on a limb which, as he cuts, will fall with him on it. Instead, autonomy should be seen in terms of dialectical interaction between the individuals and their community in search of better horizons, in particular, the horizons of development. Sen seems to support this sense of dialectical interaction as the following shows it:

There can be little doubt that the community or culture to which a person belongs can have a major influence on the way he or she sees a situation or views a decision. In any explanatory exercise, note has to be taken of local knowledge, regional norms, particular perceptions and values that are common in a specific community. (...) Even though certain basic cultural attitudes and beliefs may influence the nature of our reasoning, they cannot invariably determine it fully (Sen 2006: 32).

Earlier in the diagram, it was clear that there is room for creativity and innovation in every culture. Furthermore, in Gasper's words, culture is more than something one has, or has been given. It is the medium through which one acts, and part of what one is (Gasper 1997:299).

Secondly, autonomy is understood as a substantive one. The substantive autonomy refers to the content of agency. According to Black and Mooney (2002:198), "substantive autonomy emphasizes the processes of formation of an agent's desires, beliefs and emotional attitudes, including attitudes and beliefs about herself". Substantive autonomy is certainly an important issue particularly for women and their eventual stand on such issues as marriage, childbearing, sexual expression, employment and speech which may be linked to culture (Nussbaum 1995:85). There are at least two issues here. The first one is how to differentiate the agent's informed desires from mere preferences. Informed desires means that the agents reason on the implications of their desires not only on themselves but also on others. As far as preferences are concerned, agents tend to supply reasons for choosing this option and not that other. Given this tendency, the question is how to make sure that, effectively, people do not fall into mere preferences of which the implications do not involve other people. This leads us to the second issue.

The second issue which is in continuity with the first is how to deal with the desires, beliefs and preferences that foster the agent's life but which could endanger the public good in the long run. Thomas Scanlon

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(1993:187) recalls what Harsanyi referred to as the “principle of preference autonomy”, that is, ‘the principle that, in deciding what is good and what is bad for a given individual, the ultimate criterion can only be his wants and his own preferences’. Such wants and preferences could be mistaken if they advance the cause of the person only. But the concept of preference is more complex than it appears in first sight.

For Sen (1982, part.1, see also 2002: chap.9 *inter alia*), autonomy, preference and commitment should be linked. In this respect, he distinguishes three aspects of preferences:

- Subjective preferences which reflect the personal welfare of agents.
- Objective preferences which represent agents’ choices when their welfare is not affected by their decisions
- Meta-rankings which refer to the fact that agents choose what they judge to be most appropriate.

In this distinction, Sen would like to lead us to interpret preference not in terms of satisfaction of selfish choices and desires, “but in terms of values that individuals may generally accept in the context of some social exercise” (Sen 2002:309).

Both critical and substantive autonomy are important aspects of agency. The critical aspect of agency helps individuals to make sure that nothing is imposed on them based on their understanding of the state of affairs presented to them, but also to make sure that they have a say based on the values they hold. Substantive autonomy helps individuals to be aware of how they are affected by the realities of their own cultural framework and how to go about it. This awareness may even bring them to adjust their realities to new contexts or to transform them in order to be able to confront the future.

Thus agency as ability to act and autonomy is a ground upon which to build participatory development. As in the definition of capability,

agency leads people to the awareness of themselves and the values they hold in esteem. This makes them an autonomous source of the goals they would like to achieve. Thus the development that takes seriously people's agency is a development which, in the end, people see as leading to a concrete formation of their own identities.

#### **4.2.3. Development as the Expansion of Capability**

The basic idea of Sen's book, *Development as Freedom*, is that development has to be assessed in terms of the expansion of capability or real freedoms, that is, in terms of how development enhances the freedom of people to lead the lives they value and have reason to value. The issue to be dealt with is whether Sen's definition of development accommodates participation in development as a process of validation of what people believe and value. I shall consider this issue by looking at the different ways in which Sen's definition could be interpreted.

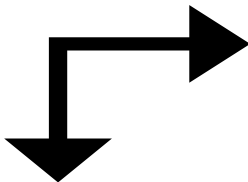
The definition of development as the expansion of capability can be interpreted from three perspectives. The first perspective is to see the expansion of capabilities as an actual achievement of a given policy of development. In Sen's terms, it would be the issue of whether such a policy of development enhances people's substantive freedoms, that is, elementary capabilities (being nourished, avoiding morbidity and premature mortality, being literate or numerate), political participation, freedom of speech, and so on. If Sen's definition were to be understood only from this perspective, and the planning of development done accordingly, the expansion of capability would only be a determined objective which does not necessarily involve the people. The implication would be the fact that people would remain in a state where they are patients rather than agents of their development, as in any top-down approach to development. For instance, people could be given food without participating in food production, or they could be educated yet

not be allowed to use the knowledge and the skills acquired; or in the global economy they could be consumers instead being both consumers and producers. A concrete example of this scenario is the issue of aid. Certain developing countries are given aid presumably to promote development without involving the beneficiaries in the process (ideology- motivated aid, aid given on the simple purpose to satisfy the duty/obligation to the other or simply to feel good). In the end, the development aimed at is not achieved.

In this perspective, one cannot think of participation whereby people would validate what they believe and value. Obviously that is not the kind of expansion of capability Sen is referring to insofar as he conceives development “the removal of major sources of un-freedom: poverty, tyranny, poor economic opportunities, social deprivation, as well as the over-activity of oppressive states” (Sen 1999: 3).

The second perspective is seeing a given policy of development as taking the expansion of capability to be a means to achieve the targeted development. In other words, such a policy includes the empowerment of people so that they can participate in the process of the development being targeted. This is the whole issue of the interaction of agency and structural institutions and how they feed each other (see tableau 2). Although the participation of people is guaranteed, the problem is the risk of making people a means of development. This could be the case of participatory implementation whereby the decision makers determine the goals (the goal of development, for instance) and the means (the people) to achieve them, while the people implement the goals and decide the tactics. I have referred to this by Crocker’s concept of participatory implementation. In this kind of participation, even though people can decide tactics, they cannot validate what they believe and value since they do not own the whole process in the first place.

Table 2: Interaction between capabilities and the structural institutions



		Structural institutions	
		Strong	Weak
individual/collective capabilities	increased	A People are involved in development (mutual reinforcement between the structural institutions and the people)	B People individually have the basics, but structural institutions do not canalize their capacities, and even block them, if not blocked they can be manipulated.
	Decreased	D The basic needs are provided but people are patients of their development (provider state). Functional participation as people could be used for the sake of development	C Both the structural institutions of the society and the people are absorbed by a sentiment of powerlessness

The third perspective is the combination of the first and the second perspectives. Here the capability expansion is both the end and the means of development. The part A in table 2 gives the ideal type of this capability expansion: development planning, policing and execution are the business of both the structural institutions and the people; as the people participate in development, they get involved in the structural institutions of their society; and as the structural institutions involve the people they work better. We are already in the social and political meaning of development which should be acknowledged (Williams



2004). In this way, the duality between top-down/bottom-up, leadership-people duality is avoided.

Now let us see whether such a perspective accommodates participation as a process of the validation of what people believe and value in terms of development. In his definition of development as capability expansion, Sen does not neglect the importance of cultural values since he recognizes the importance of potentialities of cultural traditions. However, Sen (1999: 32) warns that preferences and values should not be questioned (to save autonomy). His underlying point is that matters of culture and cultural values should be subjected to debate.

Sen's apparent relativization of culture and values is worrisome. To what extent can cultural values be a matter to choice? Can this be done without the risk of being culturally uprooted or losing one's identity? The colonial experience, for instance, shows that certain Africans who cherished western values to the detriment of African values ended with cultural confusion. This cultural confusion is thought to have caused confusion in Africa's development. More precisely, certain Africans espoused the Western life-style without appropriating to themselves the fundamental values that achieved that life-style. The end result was that most people achieved satisfaction with acquiring what the Westerners have without questioning the spirit that produced them.

Thus, I do concede with Sen that there should be a debate and choice. This debate and choice is particularly necessary in the distinction between cultural values that enhance development and those that do not enhance development but which might serve other purposes in human flourishing. However, care should be taken not to erode the spirit that these cultural values produce when they are taken together. It is this spirit that one would expect people to bring into the issue of how to proceed in development and which, in the process, is validated along with other values (their instrumental values as well as borrowed ones) in terms of policies of economic development. Once again I would like to

recall Morishima's interpretation of the Japanese economic success. After their meeting with the West, the Japanese envisaged their future in terms of the "Japanese spirit with western capacity". It is possibly this spirit that gave birth to the Japanese corporate capitalism which reflects Japanese cultural values.

Thus capability as both a means and an end of development must start from people's awareness of their present potentialities, what they believe and value as the source of their future. One may recall Sen's reference to Marx's claim about the need of 'replacing the domination of circumstances and chance over individuals by the domination of individuals over chance and circumstances' (in Sen 2003:5).

In conclusion, I have tried to make the case of the link between cultural values and local projects economic development using the tools of Sen's capability approach. I have argued that what people believe and value mediates between the universal conception of economic development and its feasibility of development at the local level. This mediation is possible thanks to people's participation which makes development both politically democratic and socially open to inculturation.

In the next section, I will consider a case study on 12 projects of development in Costa Rica. I will show how these 12 projects evolve thanks to a spirit incarnated by a certain number of cultural values of Costa Rica. These values are at the heart of the participation and the flourishing of the members of the association that lead the project.



## **A CASE STUDY: 12 PROJECTS OF DEVELOPMENT IN COSTA RICA**

*(...) active citizenship and effective states are compatible, as well as desirable. The challenge is to combine them as early as possible in a country's development. (...) Private sector as a third pillar in this scheme, alongside state and citizens, interacting with the others.*

(Green 2009: 13.14)

### **5.1 Costa Rica at a Glance**

As can be seen from the map, Costa Rica, also known as the Switzerland of Latin America, is geographically located in Central America, bordered by Nicaragua in the north, Panama in the southeast, the Pacific Ocean in the west and the Caribbean Sea in the east. Demographically Costa Rica has a population of about 4.5 million people unevenly spread over its 51, 100 square kilometres. Its capital, San José, alone accounts for 2 million people, almost the half of the country's population. The ethnic composition is approximately as follows: Europeans (mostly Spanish) and Mestisos (94%), Afro-Americans (3%), Amerindians (1%), others (2%).

Map 1: Costa Rica and its Major Cities



Historically, Costa Rica obtained its independence from Spain in 1821. Since then, it has known a democratic system of government and is the only country on the American continent which has not had an army since 1949. Certainly, the budget that would be allocated to military expenditure now contributes to various aspects of development. The policy of free and compulsory education introduced since the time of independence has achieved literacy and numeracy rates of 96% (both male and female adult of 15 years old and above), 2% above Latin America average. The life expectancy at birth is as high as 79 years (the average in America is 72). The infant mortality is 10 per a thousand against 22 in the whole of Latin America. According to the *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, Costa Rica enjoys a per capita GDP (PPP) of 10 180 US dollar, and only 2.4% of people whose income is below US\$ 1.25 (Report of MDG 2000-2006), with an unemployment rate of 5% of the labour force compared with an average of 9% in the whole of Latin America. With these rates, Costa Rica is known for its

high level of human development among Latin American countries and in particular in Central America.

The Costa Rican economy is built on three major sectors. The first sector is tourism. With more than 1 million tourists per year since 2000, tourism is developing to become a major industry in Costa Rica. The second sector is agriculture with coffee and bananas as the major export crops. Since the 1990s, a third sector has emerged in Costa Rica, namely the electronic industry, particularly with the manufacturing of computer chips.

## **5.2 Cultural Values and Projects of Development in Costa Rica.**

The survey was carried out in three major cities, namely San José, Heredia, and Alajuela. Methodologically, twelve projects of economic development with an experience of at least three years were randomly sampled and subjected to a survey questionnaire consisting of structured and unstructured questions (see appendix). The following table gives the types of projects that participated in the survey as well as their identification:

*Table 3: Identification of the projects surveyed*

Identification of the project	Categories	No of participants
	Tourism	2
	Commerce	2
	Catering	2
	Stationary store	1
	Technology and equipment	1
	Manufacturing	1

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	Entertainment	3
Social Background	Family project	3
	Individuals/ associations	9
	Public	0
	Semi private/semi-public	0
	Other	0
Economic background	Rural	1
	Urban	9
	Semi-urban/semi-rural	2
Sources of funds for the project	Members' contributions	8
	Government	0
	National NGOs	0
	International NGOs	0
	Private donor	0
	Bank loan	3
	Other	1
Market target for the products of the project	Consumption by members	0
	Local market	5
	National market	6
	Export	2
No of people involved in the project	10 and less	10
	10 and above	2
	Village/City	0
	Region	0
	Other	0
Membership	Voluntary	4
	Obligation	0
	Merit/Privilege	1
	Election (individuals choose one another)	8

	Other	1
Racial or ethnic background	American-Indians	0
	Hispanics	12
	Africans	0
	Asians	0
	Mixed blood	
	Other	0
Gender representation	Male	1
	Female	6
	Male/female	5

To make sure that the issue of cultural values in relation to economic development is worth investigating in Costa Rica, preliminary questions were asked concerning the nature of the Costa Rican society, how culture is perceived, whether the issue of culture is discussed as well as the question of the *raison d'être* of economic development (Tableau 4).



Table 4: Perception of culture in and nature of the society of Costa Rica

Rating	Very important	Quite important	Not at all import	Not at all	Frequently	Some times	Never	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Non Response	Total
Perception of culture	11	1											
Discussion of the issue of culture in economic development					9	3							12
The group comes before the individual								2	2	7	1		12
Family business grow faster than individual business								2	2	6	1	1	12
Business of associations make money faster than family business								8	2	2			12

As the table shows, eleven respondents out of 12 see culture as very important and none sees it as unimportant. Nine say that the issue of culture in economic development is frequently discussed. Eight strongly agree that the business of associations flourishes more than that of families. There may be various reasons for this. According to Jennifer Spencer (2009), the Costa Rican government has initiated programs geared to promoting domestic entrepreneurship, with a focus on small business enterprises. It is also observed that the small and medium

enterprises (SME) account for as much as 90% of the employment in Costa Rica. In fact, in the survey, certain participants have expressed the fact that the local government has helped them to improve their business through an organized course or by exposing them national and international opportunities. The preference of associations in business will help us to understand why most of the major cultural values given in the survey and which are linked with the projects surveyed are not directly belonging to family.

On the question of whether culture is related to the projects surveyed, the responses are as follows:

*Table 5: Projects surveyed in relation to culture*

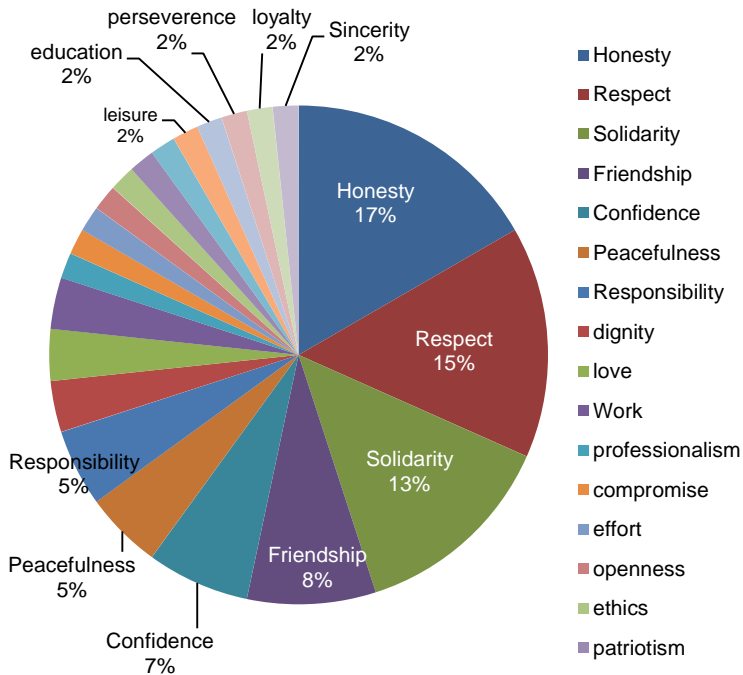
<b>Whether the project survey is related to culture</b>	<b>No. of respondents</b>
Very much	8
Quite much	3
Not much	1
Not at all	0
Total	12

Now let us come to the central issue of the research: the central cultural values of Costa Rica and how they affect economic development surveyed. This investigation will follow three major steps, namely: the identification of the values identified as “very important” in Costa Rican culture, how these values help in the projects identified, and whether these values are also recovered as the keys motivating participation in the project.

### 5.3 Important Values in the Costa Rican Culture

Each participant was asked to give five values of his/her culture and to rate them as very important, quite important, not important. However, the interest of the researcher was more on those which are underlined as very important and how they affect a project of economic development (figure 2).

Figure 1: Important values in the Costa Rican culture

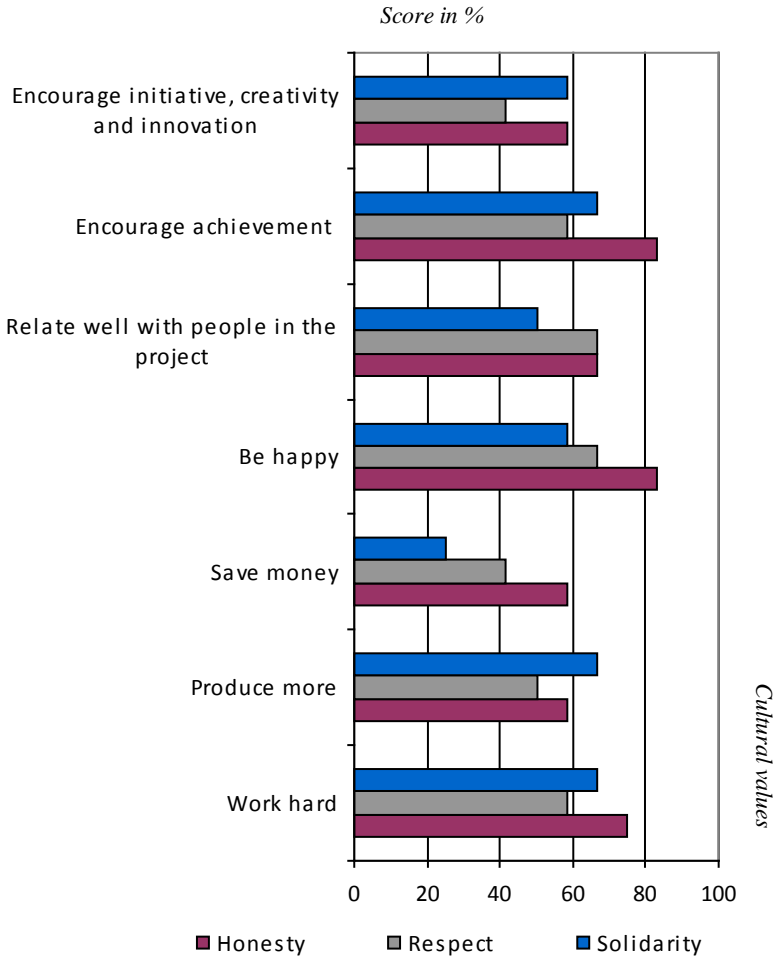


As can be observed, the values that gather a larger consensus are three: honesty, respect, and solidarity. This may be explained by the fact that the respondents are *culturally* inclined to associations in business and projects of development. In his reflection on *Teaching Materials*, Araya Araya (2007: 6) tells us that the three values are central to the

national syllabus and are promulgated through different target contents. Thus one may understand that honesty, respect and solidarity are important values of the Costa Rican culture. In his *Organizational Empowerment*, Miguel Sobrano (2002) mentions solidarity, cooperation (involving honesty) and self-esteem ( involving respect) as values that lay at the heart of the organizational empowerment (cf. Sobrano and Carmen 2006).

I shall now investigate in which ways these three values influence the projects of development surveyed (see fig.3).

Figure 2: *The three values in relation to aspects of economic development of the projects surveyed*

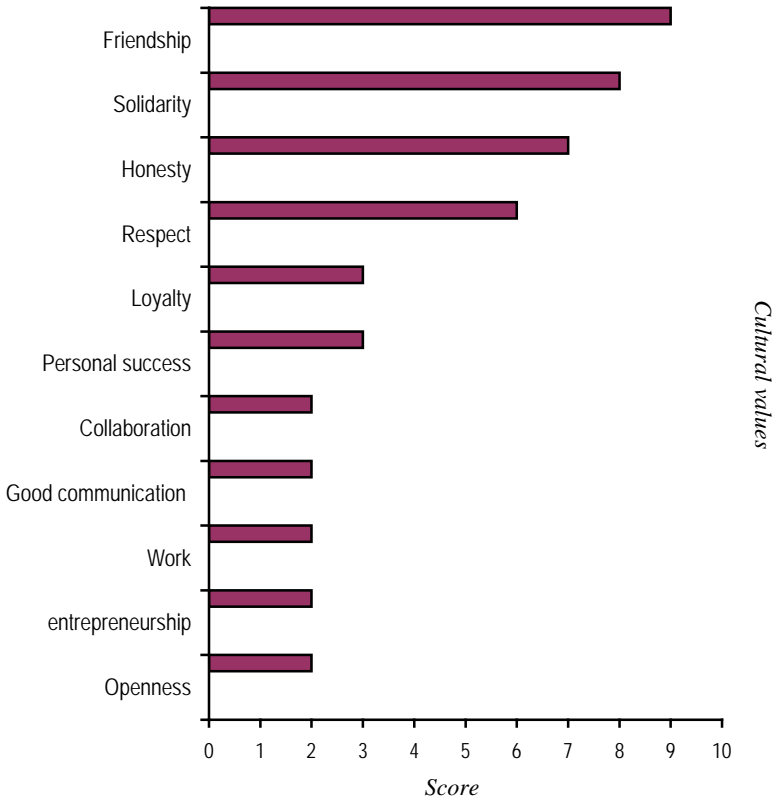


It is not clear how honesty is related to hard work, savings, or happiness or how it encourages achievement. While it could be

explained how the value of solidarity enhances happiness and the dynamics of relations in a given project, it is not clear how it is related to hard work, savings, or encouraging achievement creativity, innovation, and initiative. Nor can it be understood how respect is related to hard work and achievement.

However, the three values should not be assessed in terms of the objective of production in the first place, but rather in terms of how they create a context where individuals can flourish. As it has already been, in Sen's capability approach, participation in the life of the society is very important. Nussbaum talks of the capability of "Being able to live for and to others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interactions..." (Nussbaum 1995: 84). Solidarity, respect and honesty are values that foster these capabilities. The three values are qualitative and not quantitative values. When people feel respected, counted (solidarity), or trusted (honesty), they use all their potentialities in production. Flourishing in their activities becomes the realization of themselves and how they feel. They participate fully in production as they participate in the community. This can be seen from the fact that these same values are ranked high in motivating participation (fig. 4).

Figure 3: *Values that motivate participation in surveyed development projects*



As can be seen from the above figure, in relation to participation, the three values occupy the driver’s seat again. However in this case, the participants rank higher not only solidarity, honesty and respect, but in the first place friendship. How can this be understood? Members of associations are not only partners in projects of development. Their relationships grow to become more than what each can do for others. As they journey together in the projects, they grow to relate in terms of what each one can be for others. This quality of relations eventually

adds to the future of the project in terms of productivity. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle largely reflected on friendship and extended the reflection to show its implications in his *Politics*. The meaning of this is that the way people live socially has implications on their political and economic ordering. For Aristotle, the real friendship is that of equals. This is the case in associations. Equality is a major characteristic of democracy. At the ideal level, when friendship is combined with equality, democracy and participation become not only a matter of principle but a matter of life in a given project of development.

To conclude, this case study leads to three certainties. The first is that most projects surveyed are sensible to Costa Rican cultural values. Secondly, the same values that constitute the bedrock of these projects also motivate participation. Thirdly, the relationships of the members of these associations tend to grow not only in terms of what each member gains from the association but also what one can be for others.





## GENERAL CONCLUSION

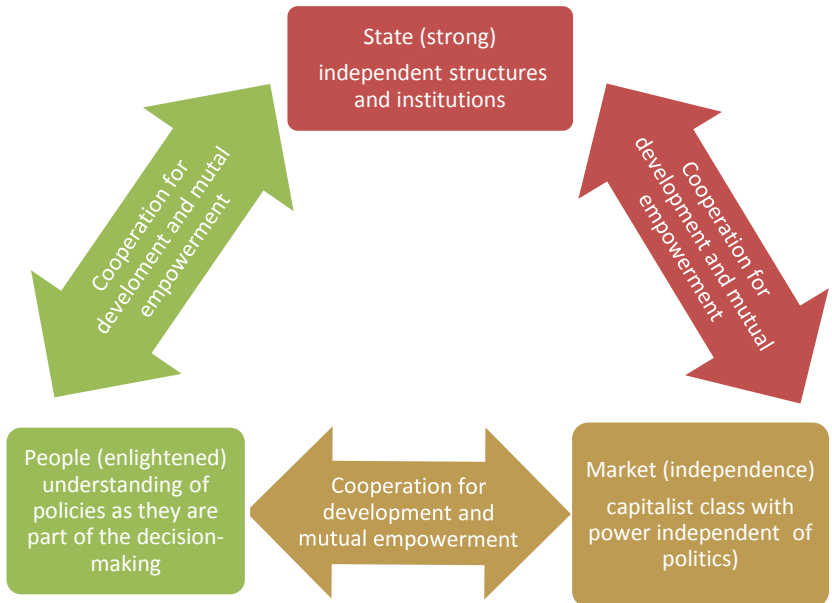
The aim of this research project was to investigate how cultural values affect local projects of economic development by using the tools of Sen's capability approach. First of all I outlined the major perspectives of development since the post-World War II and suggested that people's participation has not been taken seriously all along. This led to the suggestion that what people believe and value facilitate the passage from the universal conception of economic development to the feasibility of development at the local level. I argued that this mediation could be made possible through participation which makes development socially open to inculturation and politically democratic. I further analysed the capability approach and argued that this approach could help us to ground economic development in what people believe and value and thus enhance participatory development. In the argument, three aspects were considered, namely, the definition of capability as the freedom of people to lead the kind of lives they value and have reason to value; the fact that the capability approach makes people agents and not patients of their own development; and finally, the definition of development as the expansion of people's freedoms (or people's capability).

I tried to see how this theoretical framework applies in practice by considering a case study of 12 local projects of economic development in Costa Rica which are sensible to cultural values in economic

development. The conclusion reached is that the same values that constitute the bedrock of these projects happen to be the key values of the Costa Rican culture and also motivate people's participation. This recalled the capability of being able to participate in the life of the community and to engage in various forms of social interactions. This experience of the link between cultural values and economic development in Costa Rica is at the micro-level. The issue is how it can be translated in a policy at the macro-level (of the national planning of development).

If the concentration has been on cultural values and participatory development, the concern that lies in the background is how to overcome the top-down/bottom-up duality or any type of approach to development that is exclusive rather than inclusive in development. The capability approach leads to the suggestion that inclusive development can be achieved if the process of development takes seriously what people believe and value (openness to inculturation) and is politically democratic. How this can be done is a matter of public policy. I did not enter in the policy aspect as this could be another research. Yet I believe that the decision makers must be open to a two-way policing whereby each actor (state, people and market) in development enhances the public policy and is enriched by the public policy as the following (fig.5) shows:

Figure 4: Cooperative participation for development and mutual empowerment



(adapted from Ntubagirirwa 2014:309)



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**APPENDIX**

**Survey Questionnaire**

*Identification of the project Name and Address:* .....

*Country* .....

*District/Region* .....

*When did the project begin?*

199...

200...

*What is the focus of the project?*

Farming

Fishing

Commerce

Tourism

Mining

Other (specify) .....

*Social background*

Family project

Private (I. or G.)

Public

Semi private/Semi-public

Other (specify) .....

*Economic Background*

- Rural
- Urban
- Semi-urban/Semi-rural

*Who finances the project?*

- Members' contribution
- Government
- National NGOs
- International NGOs
- Private Donor
- Bank Loan
- Other

*What is the market target for the product?*

- Consumption by members
- Village market
- National market
- Export

*How many people are involved in this project*

- Less than 10
- More than 10
- Village/Town
- Region
- Other (specify) .....

*How do Members join?*

- Voluntary
- Obligation
- Merit/Privilege
- Election
- Other (specify) .....

*Racial/ethnic background*

- Am-Indian

- Hispanic
- White
- African
- Asian
- Mixed Race
- Other

*Gender representation*

- Male
- Female
- Male/Female

1. Culture and economic development					
Question/Rating	1	2	3	4	5
a. How do you see your culture?	Very important	Quite important	Not important	Not at all important	
b. Do people discuss the issue of economic development	Frequently	Sometimes	Never		
c. Indicate whether you	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
c1. In your culture the group comes first before the individual					
c2. In your culture family business grows faster than individual business					



c3. Businesses of associations make money faster than family businesses					
d. In your culture, what would you consider to have the first place	Religion	Wealth	Politics	Leisure	
e. How are people doing business perceived in your culture	Very respected	Quite Respected	Not respected	Not at all respected	
f. What would you consider to be the first object of economic development	Happiness	Creation of wealth	Power	Honor	Other (specify)
g. Is culture related to your project	Very much	Quite much	Not much	Not at all	

<b>2. Cultural values in relation to economic development</b>				
Question/rating	1	2	3	4
a. Give 5 important values of your culture and rate them as	very important	quite important	not important	Comment made
V.1:				
V.2:				
V.3:				
V.4:				
V.5:				
b. In which way do cultural values rated as “very important” help you in your project? Answer by rating	Very much	Quite much	Not much	Not at all
V.1:				
To work hard				
To produce more				
To save money				
To be happy				
To relate well with people in the project				
Encourage achievement				
Encourage initiative, creativity and innovation				
Other (say what)				
Question/rating	1	2	3	4
V.2:	Very much	Quite much	Not much	Not at all
To work hard				
To produce more				
To save money				
To be happy				

To relate well with other people				
Encourage achievement				
Encourage initiative, creativity and innovation				
Other (say what)				
V.3:	Very much	Quite much	Not much	Not at all
To work hard				
To produce more				
To save money				
To be happy				
To relate well with people in the project				
Encourage achievement				
Encourage initiative, creativity and innovation				
Other (say what)				
Question/rating	1	2	3	4
V.4:	Very much	Quite much	Not much	Not at all
To work hard				
To produce more				
To save money				
To be happy				
To relate well with people in the project				
Encourage achievement				
Encourage initiative, creativity and innovation				

Other (say what)				
V.5:	Very much	Quite much	Not much	Not at all
To work hard				
To produce more				
To save money				
To be happy				
To relate well with people in the project				
Encourage achievement				
Encourage initiative, creativity and innovation				
Other (say what)				

Question/rating	1	2	3	4
c. Name 5 values of your culture you would see as obstacles to the progress of your project and rate them as	Very harmful	Har mful		
V 1:				
V 2:				
V3:				
V4:				
V5:				
d. In which way the values considered to be “very harmful” affect the progress of your project:	Very much	Quit e much	Not much	Not at all
V.1				

Encourage laziness				
Allows corruption				
Give a negative view of wealth -money				
Encourage dishonesty				
Encourage consumption				
Undermine the future				
Encourage fatalism				
Discourage achievement				
Does not foster creativity, innovation and initiative				
Other (say what)				
Question/rating	1	2	3	4
e. In which way the values considered to be “very harmful” affect the progress of your project (ctd)	Very much	Quite much	Not much	Not at all
V.2				
Encourage laziness				
Allows corruption				
Give a negative view of wealth –money				
Encourage dishonesty				
Encourage consumption				
Undermine the future				
Encourage fatalism				
Discourage achievement				
Does not foster creativity, innovation and initiative				
Other (say what)				
Question/rating	1	2	3	4

f. In which way the values considered to be “very harmful” affect the progress of your project (ctd)	Very much	Quite much	Not much	Not at all
V.3:				
Encourage laziness				
Allows corruption				
Give a negative view of wealth -money				
Encourage dishonesty				
Encourage consumption				
Undermine the future				
Encourage fatalism				
Discourage achievement				
Does not foster creativity, innovation and initiative				
Other (say what)				
Question/rating	1	2	3	4
g. In which way the values considered to be “very harmful” affect the progress of your project (ctd)	Very much	Quite much	Not much	Not at all
V.4:				
Encourage laziness				
Allows corruption				
Give a negative view of wealth –money				
Encourage dishonesty				
Encourage consumption				
Undermine the future				
Encourage fatalism				

Discourage achievement				
Does not foster creativity, innovation and initiative				
Other (say what)				
Question/rating	1	2	3	4
<b>h.</b> In which way the values considered to be “very harmful” affect the progress of your project (ctd)	Very much	Quit e much	Not much	Not at all
V.2				
Encourage laziness				
Allows corruption				
Give a negative view of wealth –money				
Encourage dishonesty				
Encourage consumption				
Undermine the future				
Encourage fatalism				
Discourage achievement				
Does not foster creativity, innovation and initiative				
Other (say what)				
Question/rating	1	2	3	4
<b>i.</b> How do people (members,workers) participate in the progress in this project	Very much	Muc h	Not much	Not at all
By membership				
Meetings				
Decision-making				









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# Local Cultural Values and Projects of Economic Development

## An Interpretation in the Light of the Capability Approach

The author focuses the reflection on the link between local cultural values and projects of economic development in light of Sen's capability approach. He argues what people believe and value facilitate the passage from the universal conception of economic development to feasibility of development at the local level. Through 12 case studies, the book illustrates how the theoretical framework of Sen's capability approach, namely the definition of freedom to self-determination and the definition of development as the expansion of people's freedoms, applies in practice.

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