

THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF THE SKY

GLORIA LÓPEZ MORALES

President, Conservatory of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mexico.

One thing that characterises today's generations is their enormous capacity to appreciate the profound relations that exist between the cultural framework that has ensured human survival and, at the same time, understand in accordance with the natural phenomena whose harmony allows the preservation of life in all its expressions.

The earth is one and it is governed by natural laws that propitiate the prodigious balances between species, the biosphere, the atmosphere and the infinite space that we share with the rest of the universe. The worlds that inhabit it, however, are varied and divers and their cultural practises enable them to propitiate negative changes that endanger the existence of the living creatures on the planet. But, we know that this same culture has the power to make us flourish through a sustainable use of the resources that brought them into being.

The predominant idea of development in these times is one of the leading factors that has led to a the deterioration of the quality of life of human communities. Each community, each region fights to survive and prosper without considering the consequences that their abusive and unsustainable practises have for everybody else that inhabits this planet.

One of these dreadful effects is born of the divorce from the firmament, consummated by us, and which has now made it impossible for us to contemplate the spectacle of the stars, as our forefathers have been able to since time immemorial. But it is not only the fact that we cannot see the stars, there is also a raft of scientific problems arising from the opacity of the atmosphere that disturb the harmony that favours the interaction between this planet and the space in which it is contained.

We have to look back in time to discover the precise moment in history in which the notion of human development was dissociated from scientific and cultural truth and the founts from which traditional wisdom sprang to enable mankind to survive and prosper.

Over the ages, observing the stars has always been one of the essential underpinnings of this wisdom. All the major civilisations and their fusion with the cosmos have to be studied to realise that none of them could do without this learning to forge their knowledge.





Hence, in order to understand the alarming ills that the planet suffers, we have to turn our eyes to the cultural root of the catastrophes that threaten the world, such as global warming, the ozone layer, the impossibility of maintaining the atmosphere clean so that we can see the celestial dome at night.

That is why, because these illnesses suffered by planet earth have been caused by the human race and its ways of life. Ecosystems are connected in complex and determinant ways that have led to creation, just as they can also put an end to life, to human settlements and to the biosphere that nourishes them.

In this sense, it is particularly essential to set our gaze, precisely and in detail, on the urban explosion that has prevailed for some decades and that is irremediably putting an end to millennia dominated by rural life.

The proliferation of metropolises with all their virtues, but with their grave disadvantages too, gives rise to tremendous disappointments for those that designed them in the tradition of the great utopians. Apart from not creating the conditions for harmony between communities, most of them go against the imperative needs of sustainability.

Many megalopolises devour energy to function efficiently. Obviously they consume energy for lighting too, the effects of which are largely responsible for the loss of visibility of the night sky. In this case, urban culture should lead the movement to create new patterns of harmony that propitiate quality of life and comfort and that, at the same time, pay close heed to the imperative needs set by a global ethic.

The method for modifying this slippery slope that is leading our planet, with its population, to an irremediable abyss, lies in the progress of science based on ethical principals, but also on a cultural approach to the phenomena of harmonious existence and human development that make it possible to preserve the environment in the best possible condition. Without meeting this requisite, star gazing will be impossible, let alone the survival of the human race to bear witness to the greatness of the universe.

