

# PLAY AND THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

*O brincar e o desenvolvimento humano*

*El jugar y el desarrollo humano*

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**Abstract:** Play is an activity of expression of the singularity of the human being that at each stage of life assumes distinct characteristics and represents nuances of the Human Development. Play shows itself in different ways at different ages, yet it presents a basic form that characterizes it - it is motivated by spontaneity and it can be associated with a manifestation of the creative potential. In our 21st century we contemplate great changes such as the creation of the internet, that constituted a new social landscape and instituted new habits that have no precedent in the timeline of our human evolution. The possibilities of communication with different cultures and of social relationship without face-to-face, concrete but real contact, modified the way of living and thinking of it, in which the Play expanded by reinventing the daily life. Playing, each day more, is an action characterized as experience that features in the future. To play is to produce and protect the culture, to unlock the human potential and to contemplate the incessant expansion of human capabilities that derive from its creativity.

**Keywords:** Play; Human Development; Spontaneity; Creativity.

**Resumo:** O brincar é uma atividade de expressão da singularidade do ser humano que em cada fase da vida assume características distintas e representa nuances do Desenvolvimento Humano. O brincar mostra-se de diferentes formas em diferentes idades, mas apresenta uma forma básica que o caracteriza - é motivado pela espontaneidade e pode estar associado a uma manifestação do potencial criativo. Em nosso século XXI, contemplamos grandes mudanças, como a criação da internet, que constituiu um novo cenário social e instituiu novos hábitos que não têm precedentes na linha do tempo de nossa evolução humana. As possibilidades de comunicação com diferentes culturas e de relações sociais sem contato face a face, concreto mas real, modificaram o modo de viver e pensar, no qual o brincar se expandiu reinventando a vida cotidiana. Brincar, cada dia mais, é uma ação caracterizada como experiência que se apresenta no futuro. Brincar é produzir e proteger a cultura, liberar o potencial humano e contemplar a expansão incessante das capacidades humanas que derivam de sua criatividade.

**Palavras-chave:** Brincar; Desenvolvimento Humano; Espontaneidade; Criatividade.

**Resumen:** El juego es una actividad de expresión de la singularidad del ser humano que en cada fase de la vida asume características distintas y representa matices del Desarrollo Humano. El juego se muestra de diferentes formas en diferentes edades, pero presenta una forma básica que lo caracteriza, es motivado por la espontaneidad y puede estar asociado a una manifestación del potencial creativo. En nuestro siglo XXI, contemplamos grandes cambios, como la creación de internet, que constituyó un nuevo escenario social e instituyó nuevos hábitos que no tienen precedentes en la línea del tiempo de nuestra evolución humana. Las posibilidades de comunicación con diferentes culturas y de relaciones sociales sin contacto cara a cara, concreto pero real, modificaron el modo de vivir y pensar, en el que el jugar se expandió reinventando la vida cotidiana. Jugar, cada día más, es una acción caracterizada como experiencia que se presenta en el futuro. Jugar es producir y proteger la cultura, liberar el potencial humano y contemplar la expansión incesante de las capacidades humanas que derivan de su creatividad.

**Palabras claves:** Jugar; Desarrollo humano; la espontaneidad; La creatividad.

## Introduction

More and more in our current reality, communicating ideas and discussing points of view on subjects under study become more responsible. It is because the society in the digital network has enhanced the dissemination of information, or because the greater freedom of expression and propagation has made communication an extended practice that is not always careful. We are experiencing a moment

of great expansion of communication at international level, where it became possible to search for any information content immediately and without barriers through access to the internet, in its numerous data warehouses.

The internet has modified the basis of our conceptions and relations about living and coexisting. Society has transformed extraordinarily due to the global connectivity in real time and has been expanding its reality with new elements that emerge, such

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as: the culture of convergence, collective intelligence, co-creation as a tool for innovation, to name a few.

In this scenario where the human development is simultaneously a source of technological changes and its product, we invite you to think about the ludic human activities that present a density of interdisciplinary scientific analysis through new habits and customs of people, at different ages. The advances of technology have transformed daily life - the smartphone, today all over the world, is the product that surpasses in the consumption of the population, any appliance. Children from preschool age already have cell phones that are a means of communication and entertainment.

Considering this enlarged scenario of complexities in the appreciation of human life and the life cycle, we will try to discuss Play - its definitions, meanings and interface with Human Development, considering the peculiarity of the theme, the context of the networked society and the horizon of humanistic concerns that have been growing in the scientific and social fields. The preoccupation about the perspective of future of our species and the guarantee of sustainable life in the planetary sphere is a subject that pervades many research purposes on the development of the human being and the environment nowadays, it is also a focus of international interest that motivated the institution of the Agenda 2030 proposed by the United Nations Organizations.

Playing, as a genuine expression of human spontaneity not only in childhood, portrays the interaction between the individual and his environment and the exercise of creative ability. It is, from our point of view, a thought-provoking topic for reflecting about established patterns of entertainment and relationship in today's society.

The state of the art about Playing brings together scholars of excellence and leading authors in our history of building scientific knowledge, who have offered extraordinary contributions on what is Play. Among the authors who consider it a genuine expression of the child, or his way of acting and communicating, we find Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Melanie Klein (1882-1960), Arminda Aberastury (1910-1972), Françoise Dolto (1908-1987), to name a few; among those who define it as an activity indissociated from cognitive development and learning, we have Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lev Vigotsky (1896-1934); among the scholars of Play as synonymous with creativity and expression of potentials, we have Donald Winnicott (1896-1971), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1934- ), Jacob Moreno (1889-1974) and Johan Huizinga (1872-1945).

Huizinga (2001, p. 3) mentions that the "ludic" or play is "older than culture" and that because it involves

pleasure, it has become a necessity in the context of human existence. He adds that, although it involves a peculiar satisfaction related to its own achievement, it has a "disinterested" character because it is not linked to the demands of real life (Huizinga, 2001, p. 11). The author states: "it is an evasion of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own" (Huizinga, 2001, p.11). Freud (1969) also alludes to the nature of the ludic action and will refer to Play as the activity of the child in which he creates his own world, or a state of suspension of reality such as a creative writer, who is a "dreamer in the light of the day", also does it (Freud, 1969, p. 154). Freud (1969, p. 98) states that "an artist's joy in creating, in giving his fantasies body, or a scientist's in solving problems or discovering truths, has a special quality which we shall certainly one day be able to characterize in metapsychological terms." These adult experiences that correspond to the Play of the child in the Freudian view are directly related to the imaginative life and subjected to the processes of sublimation of the instincts, clearly present in the debate about the approach of human suffering and the search for relief, or regarding the roots of the civilizing process described in "Civilization and Its Discontents", a work of 1929 published in 1930.

We can affirm that Playing is an activity of expression of the singularity of the human being that at each stage of life assumes distinct characteristics and represents nuances of the Human Development. Play shows itself in different ways at different ages, yet it presents a basic form that characterizes it - it is motivated by spontaneity and follows the course of interactive exposition, it can be associated with a manifestation of the creative potential that is inherent in being alive and consists in the person's approach to the environment, according to Winnicott (1975).

In this we will discuss Play as a human activity that presents a basic structure of action or social interaction, manifested in different ways throughout life. Afterwards, we will share an initial attempt to organize the manifestations of Play at different ages and their psychosocial functions in the life cycle. Finally, we will present reflections on Play in the present and its implications in the construction of capabilities, that impact the future of humanity and its state of becoming.

The challenge of thinking about what is Play and the creativity associated with it, which can be translated as the ability to develop capabilities inherent to the human being, is a task that we hope to exercise in an introductory way in this opportunity, because we have in view that the act of inquiring about Play in the

contemporaneity is a thorough examination, given a society that includes a cultural industry serving the consumption of mass entertainment. Play in its essence gives way to the unexpected and genuine creative impulse that inaugurates new possibilities of being and creating the world, which by definition, persists in the opposite direction of what is reproductive and alienating.

## **Play as an activity of spontaneity**

Play may be analyzed from various angles. From the point of view of an external observer, it can be described as something easy to understand, given its direct perception. Its description may be confined to the modalities of the play performed (its categorizations, for instance: traditional, regional, pedagogical, corporal, intergenerational, etc.), we can highlight the motor skills involved, consider the social relations involved in it - cooperation, competition or both factors, etc. We can also compare performances between participants in the situations of Play or observe the individual dexterity of who is playing, whether a child or a person of a different age. There are innumerable perspectives of description, but Play remains as a peculiar activity that exposes the individual background and the cultural context - it expresses the singularity of who plays and the social practices and the cultural identity of a collectivity.

From the angle of an internal process, the comprehension of Play imposes a difficulty - the indirect study on the objects investigated, since it is the universe of subjectivity. The Play is an experience of great amplitude that brings together several psychological dimensions. Play may have its primary roots in affective motivations, may include cognitive processes, involve perceptual functions, relate brain centers and psychological processes related to memory, speech, and motor actions.

Playing is an interactive activity from the point of view of the relation of the individual with the environment, which synchronizes the body and its characteristics with psychic factors and behavioral manifestations that express individual, social and cultural meanings.

In Winnicott (1975) we find a comprehensive and original conceptualization in which the aspects previously presented - the view of an external observer or the prism of a phenomenology of activity are deconstructed and replaced by a definition in which action flows the creative potential and simultaneously brings together the internal and external dimensions of reality, which overlap. In explaining what is Play, or the creative

experience, the author proposes a new theoretical concept, that of the "third area of human experience" that he called Potential Space or Transitional Space.

Winnicott (1975, p. 145) states that this "place" must be understood "in the abstract sense" and is that "where we remain most of the time while we experience life." In it, according to the author, we can locate the creative experience that can be exemplified in Play at any age, in art, in religious experience, in science, and in all imaginative living. Winnicott (1975, p. 76) refers to the Space in which creative potential happens:

This area of playing is not inner psychic reality. It is outside the individual, but it is not the external world. Into this play area the child gathers objects or phenomena from external reality and uses these in the service of some sample derived from inner or personal reality. Without hallucinating the child puts out a sample of dream potential and lives with this sample in a chosen setting of fragments from external reality. In playing, the child manipulates external phenomena in the service of the dream and invests chosen external phenomena with dream meaning and feeling.

The author also states that "playing is doing" (Winnicott, 1975, p. 63), and "the playing of children also applies to adults [...] in the choice of words, in the inflections of voice, and in the sense of humor" (Winnicott, 1975, p.61), because Playing is the same as the creative human activity which includes an "unintentional" quality of activity (Winnicott, 1975, p. 82).

However, this "doing" for Winnicott (1975), which is a possibility of communication of the Self, or an encounter with personal reality, paradoxically is linked to the pursuit of fulfillment of his creative potential, but should not be subject to this goal. The objective of the creative experience must be to live the experience, and it is this authentic and spontaneous way of doing and being that reveals the Self and characterizes the Play or creative activity.

Csikszentmihalyi (1998, p.103) refers to this characteristic of experience which he calls "autotelic" or "which is an end in itself", the factor that will define his concept of creativity or "optimal experience" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998, p. 139). The "optimal experience" is that endowed with a "state of flux" that differentiates it from other actions because "it directs our attention, matching the maximum of our abilities with challenging activities" (Ogata, 2012, p. 14). "Games, artistic performances, and religious rites are good examples of such 'fluid activities'." (Csikszentmihalyi,

2008, p.14). However, the author adds that "any activity can produce the optimal flow experience" insofar as it "has concrete objectives and manageable rules", "makes it possible to adjust the possibilities of acting with our abilities", "provides clear information on how we are doing" and "eliminate distractions and make concentration possible" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008, p. 13-14). The author concludes: "The second group of conditions that allow flow is internal, of each person. Some people rely on the odd ability of combining their capabilities with the opportunities that surround them." (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008, p. 14).

In this horizon of understanding, Playing is the action that, by its genuine peculiarity of expressing individuality, constitutes in a unique and singular way the Self in its subjective dimension as a manifestation of capacities, depending however on a central element - spontaneity. The action of Playing, which starts from the spontaneous initiative of ludic activity, is not reduced, however, only to free Playing - an action that is the greatest example of spontaneity; nor is it synonymous of impulsiveness.

According to Moreno (2012, p. 163), "the term 'spontaneous' is often used to describe individuals whose control over their actions is diminished", but this definition is inadequate. According to the etymology, the word "spontaneity" comes from the Latin "sponte", which means "of free will" (Moreno, 2012, p. 163), which means the opposite of the idea presented. This definition allows the establishment of a "relationship between states of spontaneity and creative functions" while impulsivity can be understood as an activity of the "pathology of spontaneity's field" (Moreno, 2012, p. 45 apud Silva, 2010, p. 2).

It is interesting to note that

Spontaneity is often mistakenly considered to be something more related to emotion and action than to thought and rest [...] Spontaneity can be present in a person both when thinking and when feeling, when at rest as much as when dedicating himself to a certain action." (Moreno, 2012, p. 163).

For Moreno (1993), spontaneity and creativity are intimately linked to the extent to which "spontaneity is the catalyst" of creativity (Moreno, 1993, p. 11 apud Silva, 2010, p. 8). "Defining spontaneity", however, is "a challenge", because it is necessary to apprehend it "from certain manifestations of each individual in terms of behaviors, expression of feelings and oral expression"; often the "state of readiness" for the action that constitutes it, is replaced by

the result that it generates (Kipper & Hundal, 2005, p. 120 apud Silva, 2010, p. 10).

Spontaneity is a subjective or "free will" state which, according to Kipper (1967, 1986 apud Silva, 2010, p. 10) has both "no premeditation" and an "element of directionality". This "directionality" inherent in spontaneity, from our point of view, can be identified through its potential of originality or proposition of the new, present in the creative quality of action. In the words of Sakamoto and Antunes (2017, p. 202): "Spontaneous actions are those that have the creative possibility of re-inaugurating human doing. [...] they bring the unexpected creative impulse that allows them to introduce unusual elements and build new and original scenarios". Studying the element of spontaneity, as a structuring factor of Playing in its manifestations, can contribute to the advancement of knowledge on the basis of ludic or creative activities and the extraordinary potential of transformation of the human being and his ability to build the world.

## **Play at different ages and its functions in the life cycle**

It seems an overly ambitious idea, to elaborate an exposition, although introductory, on the Play at different ages, presenting parameters, examples of activities and their functionalities. Nevertheless, if the proposal is shared as an invitation to reflections rather than conclusive statements, it may prove valid and attract the interest of those who agree to seek improvement of the theme.

In order to better visualize a possible disposition of the life cycle and Play at different ages, we will be supported in the stages presented in the Complete Life Cycle Theory, proposed by Erik Erikson (1998). In this Theory we find social dilemmas at each stage, possibilities of development of virtues or basic forces and characteristics that stimulate to think about ludic activities that are compatible with each period. The organization sketch for a Theory of Playing in the Life Cycle is summarized in Table 1, at the end of the article. Table 1 was based on Figure 1 proposed by Erik Erikson (1998, p. 32-33) in its Complete Life Cycle Theory, in which he presents eight factors related to the eight evolutionary stages from birth to old age; of the factors selected by the author, we reproduced the first four of Figure 1, where "conflicts" and "virtues" or resolutions are two distinct but linked elements related to each stage, which are presented together in Table 1.

**Table 1 – Life cycle aspects and Play based on Erik Erikson**

<b>Development stage</b>	<b>Psychosocial characterization</b>	<b>Conflict / RESOLUTION</b>	<b>Self – World relations (positive aspects)</b>	<b>Play and Spontaneity-expressions</b>	<b>Focus of Being &amp; Doing / Functions of Play</b>
I. First year	Oral - sensory	Basic trust vs. mistrust <b>HOPE</b>	Maximum dependence on care of the other, beginning of construction of the Self	Exploration of self and immediate world, continuous curiosity	Interest in objects in general, sensations of movement and expansion in space
II. Early childhood	Anal - control	Autonomy vs. shame <b>WILL</b>	Initial emancipations about the self and in relation to each other.	Limits test (of self and others) is the central factor of interactions	Interest in the body, immediate reality and consequences of actions
III. Play age	Genital (discovery)	Initiative vs. guilt <b>PURPOSE</b>	Family is the center of attention, Self-Other vision widens. Comparation.	Interactivity and diversity, perception of the different in front of the other. Initiative action.	Attraction by affective situations, comparative perception, admiration. Self-experimentation
IV. School age	Latency	Industry vs. inferiority <b>COMPETENCE</b>	Friends come into play, reason takes place	Games with rules depict doing and adjusting	Interest by logical argument; competition and cooperation
V. Adolescence	Puberty followed by adolescence	Identity vs. confusion <b>FIDELITY</b>	Leadership and Relevance in the groups, search for autonomy, authenticity	Motivation no.1: Who am I? The class has weight, but there is egocentricity	Taste for arts, sports, games, etc.; focus on groups and Self. Self-knowledge
VI. Early adulthood	Genitality	Intimacy vs. isolation <b>LOVE</b>	Significant friendships, love life, choices related to life project	Being with each other, deepening experiences of change, couple matters	Attraction by specific situations, individual and small groups, pair search
VII. Adulthood	Creativity	Generativity vs. stagnation <b>CARE</b>	Varied areas of living - family, work, leisure, etc. Productivity	Freedom and ability for innovation, improvement is the goal	Attention to life in groups, interest in helping others. Collective thinking
VIII. Old age	Consolidated identity	Integrity vs. despair <b>WISDOM</b>	No restrictive and enriched relations with the world and time	Self-giving, testimony about knowing, developed expertise	Importance of affection, of neighbor; loneliness can prevail. Leave a legacy.

Source: Aspects of Figure 1 - Life Cycle according to Erik Erikson (1998, p. 32-33) - Stages and their Psychosocial Characterization, Conflicts and Resolutions.

We added to Erikson's (1998) factors three new elements that broaden the perspective of debate about the activities and focuses involved in the expression of Play in the different stages of life.

The human development throughout the life cycle presents an orderly sequence of acquisitions that blend specific capabilities, which are individual achievements versus the expected accomplishments

for each age group. These evolutionary advances show in our view how creativity engenders the expansions of the continuous construction of the Self. In childhood, we contemplate, for example, that

The child, when he starts talking, plays with his voice, [...] until he develops the language and emotional tone of oral communication. In acquiring the pace, he plays with his body [...] challenging the maintenance of physical balance [...] until he becomes capable of [...] agility and motor skill. The child who exercises the game of social relationship experiences the act of taking the initiative of the invitation to affective involvement and risks the rejection of interpersonal contact, investing in the subjective identifications of the diversified relationships established with others [...] he plays with imitation of social roles. The child who develops the most diverse abilities, including writing and reading [...] tests hypotheses about his understanding of the world, doubts the truth of the facts, and at the same time constructs beliefs about himself, beliefs about the people with whom he lives [...] (Sakamoto, 2008, p. 272).

Throughout life we can contemplate innumerable relations between expressions of capabilities and diverse experiments related to the quotidian, whose psychosocial nuclei Erikson (1998) based its Theory of the Development.

As an illustration of what we are trying to shape, we could exemplify the stage of adolescence or Erikson's stage V (1998) in which the center of development lies in the consolidation of identity, in contrast to the crisis of identity and confusion of roles. At this stage, the self itself occupies the greatest interest of adolescents; however, as self-definition solidifies in social relations, the group acquires relevance, which explains the establishment and maintenance of numerous classes in which the young people participate. In the affective and intellectual exchanges within these small groups or in the affiliation to larger groups (fans of musical bands, for example), the adolescents test approvals and disapprovals about ideas, decisions and behaviors, assigning the group the role of legitimating positions. What is Play at this stage of life? - we can question. It is to launch into the experiences of relationship in the small groups that come together to practice sports; to cultivate learning and development in the arts (music, painting, etc.); to integrate into groups that enjoy games and play with people from all over the world through the internet. It is to seek new forms of association and choice of affective relationships, and also to define emotional detachment from specific individuals and groups.

Play in youth allows young people in different contexts to have personal experiences regarding their limits and possibilities and to perceive a great diversity of ways of being and relating, that serve as substratum for comparisons and choices. To play in adolescence is to give rise to egocentric interests in a collective space of coexistence that allows an expression of the Self and an observation of other Selves in the same situation of search and condition of social exposure. The time of adolescence is the period when the initial experiences of leadership and loyalty germinate that tend to be genuine and that, in the future, may unleash core purposes of life projects, when personal choices include the basic forces of love and care, directed, for example, to social causes.

Also, considering how the act of playing in the adult stage is presented is another particular challenge, because in addition to the greater diversity of personal choices of this stage to reunite a great amount of options in numerous fields of experience, it is necessary to observe the changes of habits and customs, common in societies that also evolve. Today, Play for adults has invaded the environment of cyberspace and cyberspace and has been expanded in comparison to the last century. For instance, we can think of a craftsman who can daily express his creative potential on the Pinterest platform and prove to be an exemplary influencer of artistic trends in his area. This professional is able to influence thousands of persons he will never meet personally.

Addressing the multiple forms of Play during the stage of adult life is a purpose that should occupy a new and unique article, which may be given in due course.

## **Playing at the present time - final reflections**

Human history stimulates precious observations regarding the meanings that emerge from the ways of living and the relationship that the human being establishes with his peers and the social context.

Huizinga (2001) draws attention to the losses and gains of ludic aspects in the changes that have occurred over time in our history. The author points out that there has been a "transition from occasional amusement to the system of organized clubs and matches [...] this systematization and increasing regulation [...] implies the loss of some of the purest playfulness." (Huizinga, 2001, p. 219). The author adds that professionalization eliminates the "playful spirit, because it lacks spontaneity, carelessness"

(Huizinga, 2001, p. 219). On the other hand, “economic life” gains “a certain sporting element” because it introduces a competitiveness that aims at success and profit, and then “the trend reverses: the game becomes a business” (Huizinga, 2001, p. 222).

In our 21st century we contemplate great changes such as the creation of the internet, that constituted a new social landscape and instituted new habits that have no precedent in the timeline of our human evolution. The possibilities of communication with different cultures and of social relationship without face-to-face, concrete but real contact, modified the way of living and thinking of it, in which the Play expanded by reinventing the daily life.

The human relationship gained a global expansion and resignified the paradigm of time and space, whose parameters have always guided human experience and existence. The nature of cyberspace and the territory of cyberspace have removed the geographical boundaries and have characterized the environment of the internet as a creative place par excellence, nowadays.

Authors such as Maslow (1982), Winnicott (1975) and Csikszentmihalyi (2008) refer to the loss of consciousness of space-time coordinates in creative experience and mention this characteristic as a peculiar element of creativity. This factor, so present in virtual reality, can explain even the fascination that the environment of the internet causes in its users. Being connected to the cyberspace and having access to global reality through technological possibilities is an inherent part of the everyday life of productive people all over the planet these days. Being connected to the Internet is to “lose” the concrete guiding references of space-time and to acquire new parameters like the “glocal”, that

[...] is the place where we are when we are not located either locally or globally. When, for example, we visit a virtual museum, we are not literally in the city, in the location of this museum; but we are also not in the city where our physical body is, since we are not experiencing the environment of this locality, but rather

the *glocal* environment of the location of the museum that receives us through the virtual, the one that presents itself by virtual means, that has been teleported by the technology. (Antunes & Sakamoto, 2015, p. 384)

Playing today, therefore, presupposes being aware of an experience whose creative nature can be perceived in a virtual dimension that is not concrete reality but is one of its dimensions and is not purely potential, since it allows concrete manipulation. We are facing a new world constitution whose characteristics make possible exponential increases in human capacities, which today even operate “out of the cranial box”, aided by numerous equipment and technological resources (SANTAELLA, 2004, p. 221); nowadays, to give an example, our usual memory has an expanded storage of information that can be found on mobile devices, notebooks, tablets, etc. In this scenario, Play represents to bring together spontaneity and originality up to creative possibilities beyond hybridity, that is to say, constituted from a multiple mixture of factors of diverse orders. The internet is an important protagonist in this situation since it allows to be clarified as a modeling area in the present society, which can illustrate the concept of Potential Space proposed by Winnicott (1975), that is, an area in which individual and environment, although clearly distinct, are linked in an extreme creative interdependence. Considering that evolution is a continuous process in human existence that goes through distinct periods of progression influenced by striking facts (for instance: the industrial revolution, electronic revolution, digital revolution, etc.), we can contemplate evolutionary leaps arising from inventions and changes in the structures of thought which explain the emergence of new motivations and capabilities.

Playing, each day more, is an action characterized as experience that features in the future. To play is to produce and protect the culture, to unlock the human potential and to contemplate the incessant expansion of human capabilities that derive from its creativity.

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