

# Cultural astronomy perspectives on “development”

Alejandro Martín López

CONICET, Sección de Etnología, ICA, UBA, Bs. As., Argentina

Email: [astroamlopez@hotmail.com](mailto:astroamlopez@hotmail.com)

**Keywords.** Development, interdisciplinarity, social sciences, cultural astronomy

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## 1. Introduction

“Astronomy for development” has been a priority for the IAU in recent years, as is shown by the strategic plans 2010–2020 and 2020–2030. These plans insist on the interdisciplinary nature of this goal. But, the asymmetric relations among academic disciplines is an obstacle to this effort. It implies strong preconceptions about the social sciences among astronomers that are even reflected in the mentioned strategic plans. For this reason, it is crucial to include the perspective of cultural astronomy. This is an interdisciplinary area that deals with understanding the systems of knowledge and practices about the sky of different cultures. Many members of the IAU have devoted themselves to this field. They have important experience and knowledge about interdisciplinary work, especially with the social sciences.

As a brief example of the possible cultural astronomy contributions, we can mention the necessity of analyzing the very idea of “development”, a matter of strong debate in social sciences. We see the implications for the three areas recurrently mentioned in the debates on astronomy for development: education, heritage and economics.

Regarding education, cultural astronomy has very important contributions to do, because a true scientific education in the contemporary World must be an intercultural education. An education for a World with a great cultural diversity in a context of inequality. Cultural astronomy also plays a crucial role in the joint initiatives of the IAU and UNESCO on astronomical heritage. Here we need to break a static vision of heritage and also take into account that heritage has become a language for a great variety of conflicts (López 2016). Finally, in reference to economy, we must be especially attentive to the impact on local populations of the great international astronomical facilities. Many recent cases (Swanner 2013) show that we are following the ways of the large extractive industries instead of setting agenda to them. In a world in which imposition and authoritarianism are often the easiest way out, the astronomical community has the opportunity to show that reason, dialogue and listening to the other are the right path.

## Supplementary Materials

\*Fig 1: Example of misconceptions about social sciences.

\*Table 1: Terminology and preconceptions about social sciences among astronomers.

\*Extended References.

**References**

- López A. M. 2016, *Astronomical Heritage and Aboriginal People: Conflicts and Possibilities*. In: Benvenuti, P. (Ed.), 2016. *Astronomy in Focus. As presented at the IAU XXIX General Assembly 2015*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 142-145.
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