



Purpose of the Committee:

In the Action Committee, delegates will embody the representative of a company, an organisation or a real person and debate on societal issues. *Participants of the Action Committee can thus refer to each other the pronouns you/I and by the name of the party or person they represent.*

The questions chosen this year are centred around culture. This committee will last the entire day, the people selecting this committee will therefore not participate in the General Assembly (taking place in the afternoon).

Issue: **How is universal access to culture a way to reach equality?**

Committee: Action Assembly

Chairs: Lou, Eloïse

Introduction:

Though culture is often deemed secondary, unsubstantial, and of different meanings according to different perspectives, the UN has considered culture a matter of international discussion over the last few years. As culture is a primary variable of one's belonging in society, access to culture represents a common stake for all nations of the world as the article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states.

However, numerous challenges of different natures prevent individuals and populations from enjoying accessibility to culture. As the Cultural Rights of many populations are not effective, this unequal access is an indicator of many inequalities and depends heavily on the social background and conditions of individuals. We can therefore list free self-expression, political freedom, unequal opportunities, low quality of life, and rights as some of these inequalities. In order to address all of these inequalities, we can thus ask: How is universal access to culture a way to reach equality?

Key terms:

Universal access: An access existing everywhere and for all.

Culture: The customs and beliefs, art, way of life, and social organization of a particular country or group.

Equality: A situation in which men and women of different races, and religions are all treated fairly and have the same opportunities.

Highbrow culture: Sophisticated and intellectual artistic and cultural activities typically appreciated by educated and elite individuals.

Digital divide: the gap between individuals, households, businesses, and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access information and communication technologies and to their use of the internet for a wide variety of activities.

Globalization : The process in which the development of the economic, cultural, and political relations among the States of the world becomes increasingly interconnected and similar due to an increase in trade and cultural exchanges.

Erasure : The act of removing or destroying all signs of something.

Enculturation : the process by which an individual learns the traditional content of a culture and assimilates its practices and values.

Acculturation : the process of sharing and learning the cultural traits or social patterns of another group and the result of this process.

Multiculturalism : the belief that different cultures within a society should all be given importance.

Monoculturalism : cultural singularism in which one main ethnicity leads the culture, customs, and beliefs of the state.

General overview:

Importance of culture: Social inclusion and fighting poverty

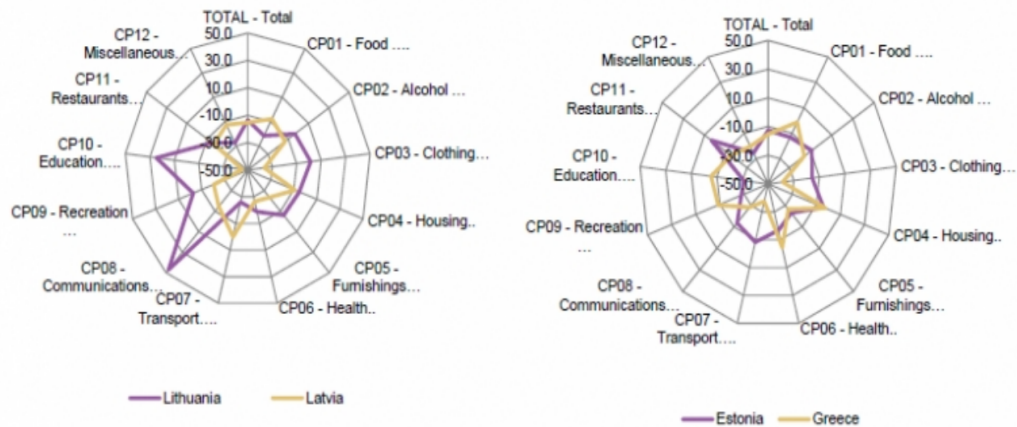
Regrouping a wide cultural diversity, the European Union studied and debated the impacts of access to culture on the scope of fighting poverty. It concluded that culture should be considered as a skill to be acquired. Culture would be a set of skills of cultural awareness and expression. The cultural aspect of education would develop skills of self-expression, personal fulfilment, and critical consciousness. The development of these skills would allow the acquirement of creative potential and skills that give one opportunity in the labour market, and in social and civic life.

On the broader scope of culture as a whole, such skills would be key to social cohesion. Indeed, with the increasing intensity of conflict between populations of different cultures, the necessity to resolve this issue may find a solution in spreading/allowing broader access to culture. Universal access to every culture would provide common cultural grounds, and develop equality, tolerance, and respect for the diversity of cultures. By favouring intercultural dialogues, access to culture would improve the ability of populations to have respect towards differences as well as prevent and resolve intercultural challenges. It would then prevent social exclusion.

Barriers to access to culture

a) Economic and stereotype barriers

The high price as well as the secondary aspect of culture in day-to-day life contribute to the economic barrier to be among the three main obstacles of universal access to culture. In times of crisis, households of poorer income privilege the consumption of substantial means to their quality of life such as housing or food over recreation and education. This economic barrier correlates to the second one, the lack of time, as lower classes have to work more to make money. Thus, lower classes' access to culture being dependent on economic factors higher classes are not impacted by, create an important exclusion from culture.



Source: [Eurostat](#), January 2013.

This difference in consumption between lower and higher classes leads to each class having their own culture: ‘lowbrow’ culture for the lower class, and ‘highbrow’ culture for the higher class. In this case, the economic barrier translates to the barrier of stereotypes. Indeed, the characteristics of the two cultures being specific to socio-economic backgrounds and willingly directed at these backgrounds, build a psychological barrier. In the example of highbrow culture, the degree of sophistication, tradition, and linguistic codes seem intimidating for newcomers to the culture. The opposite is true, as lowbrow also has sets of social codes that are unknown to non-encultured people. Depending on the example, these barriers are deliberate and contribute to the preservation of one’s identity to the culture and cultural expression being closed to outsiders.

b) Physical barriers, digital divide, and disabilities

Access to culture is often restricted due to structural and geographical constraints. In areas excluded from cultural centres – like theatres, museums, or libraries – the main reason for not consuming culture proves to be distance. This leads to low access to culture in isolated areas, rural areas, or areas with no cultural centres. Initiatives of ambulant museums have proven to be an effective way to bring culture to people even if these initiatives were only temporary. Though access to culture through the Internet can be a sustainable solution, a digital divide would prevent countries and regions from having access to culture.

The distance between people and culture also depends on the condition of specific individuals. Whether in detention or hospitalized, access to culture is either difficult or restricted in jails, hospitals, and day-care centres for the elderly. This difficulty can evolve into an inequality depending on the time of detention or hospitalization, notably if the individual is away from culture for an important part of their life, if not the entirety of it. In the last case, individuals with disabilities face incapacity to consume culture. Recent resolutions of the UN's Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) recognized cultural life and leisure as a right. A survey from the EBU (European Broadcasting Union) revealed people with visual disabilities had poor access to culture. In addition to the structural constraints of physically going to cultural centres, the difficulty of access to culture for disabled people resides in the transmission of information despite their disability. In the hopes of working in favour of disabled people, the UK and France implemented some changes in physical accessibility and information accessibility in theatres and museums. More ramps and audio description equipment are available and benefit disabled people.

Different politics on access to culture

a) Censorship, a global constant

Censorship of culture and subculture is globally increasing as the values of the populations come to clash with the values of their government or of another part of the people. Censorship then becomes a means to control the influence of culture on the population.

One major argument for censorship is to protect the beliefs and values of the population against ideologies. For instance, in the USA, the list of banned books is growing each year. Most of the banned books approach subjects of sexual education, LGBTQ stories, and fiction on historical realities such as the Shoah. These books were withdrawn from the school library bookshelves because they contained content that 'children should not read'. In this case, it is under state ruling and pressure from the parents that books are censored. The topic of the censorship of books opposes both politicians and the population. In Iran, the drift happens

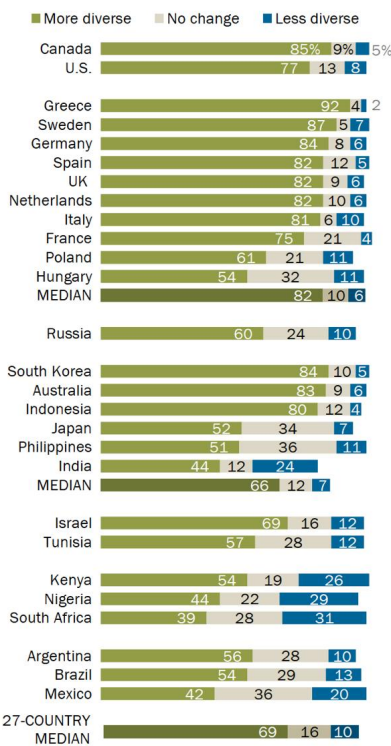
between the government and women. The condition of women in Iran is critical as the oppression of the government against them goes beyond human rights by cause of direct violence. In this context, the censorship of women's visibility in the media demonstrates a threat to the representation of women in Iran's culture and in the subculture associated with their gender. Under such a regime, women's culture faces danger of erasure if it wasn't for the recurrent protests from the Iranian population.

Thus, censorship of culture is said to protect individuals from its influence, but censorship of culture also creates a lack of representation as well as a danger to the rights of individuals of a culture.

b) Monoculturalism and multiculturalism

Most believe their country has become more diverse in the past two decades

% who say over the past 20 years, the ethnic, religious, and racial makeup of our country has become ...



Note: "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown.
Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey, Q7.

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Monoculturalism, often associated with authoritarian regimes, is a cultural homogenization that can result in the reduction of cultural diversity but can also help the popularization and diffusion of a main culture. The homogenization of one state can assist in breaking down cultural barriers and therefore can create and/or strengthen a sense of national identity as well as of pride in the nation and its culture.

Still, in order for monoculturalism to keep and preserve one culture, Nations considered monocultural frequently leave aside different cultures and their influences. Immigrants entering the country as well as their future generations, may have a hard time fitting in or adapting to the culture of the state. This can lead to marginalization and when confronted with indigenous minorities and cultures,

monoculturalism can also signify the complete extinction of their culture.

Multiculturalism, mostly associated with the Western world, is the cultural plurality of a state. Political debates about multiculturalism aim to answer the demands based on cultural diversity whether they are based on ethnicities or

religious differences. Multiculturalism can also help in maintaining a distinctive identity, language, and beliefs/values, and enable minorities to preserve or even save their cultures.

Overall, countries dealing with multiculturalism have a culture shared by the entire nation but which can also raise awareness towards cultural diversity and minorities.

However, the accommodation of multiculturalism of other cultures is sometimes criticized as challenging one's right of freedom of association as well as preserving a 'pure' version of a culture altering its basis: evolution.

Major actors:

1- Cultural minorities

Ethnic minorities – Due to being outnumbered or discriminated, ethnic minorities have less representation than dominant ethnicities. Their culture is mostly known by those who were born in it, making it harder to preserve as ethnic minorities tend to forget their culture if not passed on. To only make matter worse, some ethnic minorities are decreasing in number, thus putting their language and history on the verge of extinction. Ethnic minorities are mostly immigrants, from immigrant descent, or small isolated populations.

Other subcultural minorities – The specificity of belonging in subcultural minorities is that these subcultures are common to countries with more differences. Indeed, to belong in these minorities one doesn't have to be born from with characteristics that would make them a minority in the country. Gender, religion, sexual orientation, and language are characteristics that either come from the choice of the individual or from birth without restriction based on the ancestry. These minorities face repression of dominant majorities because of their non conformity to values shared by these majorities. It is in places where freedom and human rights are guaranteed that these subcultural minorities are the safest. Their culture can be borderless as they don't depend on the countries they are in but rather on the possibility to share their experience and access their culture. Thus, their strongest chance to resist erasure are medias and freedom of expression.

2- The role and ownership of the medias

From the local to global scales, **media** play a role of distributor of culture through the publications of artistic craft or documentation of history. Medias are necessary means of connection between the people and culture. Without it, the access and transmission of one's culture would be difficult and the existence and acceptance of that culture would then be at stake. However, the role of media in the context of globalisation and culture erasure is more complex.

The simple existence of medias isn't enough for culture to be preserved, for the content the medias share are means of enculturation and acculturation. If misinformation happens to be shown through the media, this misinformation would become the image one has about one's culture; this phenomenon can be seen in the transmission and perpetuating of stereotypes. On the contrary, the publication of accurate cultural content improves the representation of one's culture on the scale the media operates. Thus, one's cultural identity would be preserved. Nonetheless, the cultural content available for access can vary depending on the control exercised on the media. For example, mainstream medias tend to be Part of a conglomerate owned by wealthy individuals or governments and can be subject of censorship to correspond either to the law or the beliefs of the individuals. Such restrictions would not be applied to independent media. However, the mainstream media have a broader influence on the global scene.

Being either motivated by money or dependent on approval from the state, these mainstream media when broadcasting adjust their content (see Netflix and Disney). This choice contributes to a cultural normativity excluding the representation of other cultures, effectively erasing these cultures from media.

Questions to consider/reflect on:

Should highbrow culture and lowbrow culture be exclusive to social classes?

What are the advantages of highbrow culture?

Between multiculturalism and monoculturalism which system guarantees equality?

Preservation and perpetuation of culture? Freedom of expression?

Is multiculturalism to culture a preservation? a transformation? an erasure?

Should access to culture be universal or a privilege?

How can more access to culture be given?

Should there be legislation considering which culture should be forbidden of access or saved?

Should culture be under censorship?

Appendix : to help further research

Digitalisation of culture

[Cutting Edge | Protecting and preserving cultural diversity in the digital era](#)

66% of the world uses the internet regularly in 2022. However, 36% of the people living in the LDCs (Least Developed Countries) do not use these technologies regularly. This represents a major problem as digital technologies enable to safeguard cultural heritage and therefore allow the preservation of people's cultures.

Poverty and social exclusion in Europe

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Barriers to universal access to culture

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