



Session Outcome Document

Summary of Session: Cultural and Linguistic Diversity, and Local Content Promotion UNESCO

16 March 2023 (9:15-10:15)

[Session 193— WSIS Action Line C8: Cultural diversity | WSIS Forum 2023 \(itu.int\)](#)

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

The definition of cultural diversity differs from one person to the other. As a result, there was a large variety in the themes that were addressed on (i) what actions had been undertaken under line C8, (ii) what the current issues are for cultural diversity in the information society, and (iii) what issues should be prioritized by the participants from government, civil society, and academia.

While there was a plethora of actions undertaken and priorities discussed in furthering the Action Line C8, all 20+ physical participants to this session agreed with the following:

- Linguistic and cultural diversity is essential for humankind. The digital environment currently does not exploit all opportunities to reach more linguistic and cultural diversity.
- On this above point, reference was made to the mono-linguistic and centralized *status quo* of the internet at present, as the governance of internet is concentrated and sits with a small number of tech companies.
- Access to culture in the digital environment is fundamental in the participation in cultural life and can in turn result in more cultural diversity.

Towards WSIS+20 and WSIS beyond 2025, please share your views on the emerging trends, challenges, achievements, and opportunities in the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines to date (5-8 bullets)

Over the course of the discussion the importance of *access* to cultural expressions in the digital environment was underlined. The following challenges were identified:

- Lack of infrastructure which impedes populations to the access cultural expressions in the digital environment.
- Monolingual set up of the internet, implying a certain level of English and/or another language in the Latin alphabet to access the digital environment. An example that was given, were the efforts to mainstream the use of internationalized domain names.
- Lack of digital skills for people to access culture, and for creatives to access and generate digital content. This challenge is especially pertinent for under-represented populations, such as indigenous populations.
- Within the digital environment, the governance is concentrated and sits with a small number of tech companies. An example are the digital platforms that offer audio-visual content in their libraries, following their criteria.

The following achievements and opportunities were identified:

- The ongoing efforts in the digitization of collections, making these more accessible to a larger public.
- Open access to culture through the revision of the current copyrights system was addressed. While recognizing that not all cultural expressions should be accessed easily (without remuneration), there are opportunities in the heritage sector to digitize collections. Openness could, in those contexts lead to more cultural diversity.
- Additionally, the importance of digital capacity building and specifically on relevant digital platforms was emphasized. In line with this point, the contextualization of digital platforms to the local reality was also seen as a possible entry point to increase access to culture.

Tangible outcomes (such as key achievements, announcements, launches, agreements, and commitments (3-5 bullet points))

Initiatives shared by civil society:

- The pandemic demonstrated great innovativeness in giving digital access to cultural collections. Moreover, there have been initiatives to promote and **develop skills for digitization and digital preservation**, such as by the Digital Preservation Coalition and the International Internet Preservation Consortium.
- The establishment of a working group on **Ethics of Open Sharing** by Creative Commons.

Initiatives shared by national governments:

- Facing major regulators of video on-demand services, South Africa created a draft **White Paper on Audio and Audiovisual Content Services Policy Framework**.
- Tanzania set up a **local content fund** that aims at contributing to cultural diversity in the digital environment.

Initiatives shared by international organizations:

- The adoption of the **MONDIACULT Ministerial Declaration** has given new momentum to underline the essential role of cultural diversity to humankind. The adoption provided an impetus to declare culture “a global public good”. Hence, culture is a good that is non-rivalrous and non-exclusive. It also means that all stakeholders should take steps in order to make culture as inclusive as possible, as culture’s benefits are global, and concern all people in the present and in the future.
- UNESCO is leading the **International Decade of Indigenous Languages**. The Decade aims to raise awareness about the critical situation of Indigenous languages around the world and mobilize stakeholders for immediate safeguarding actions. In December 2022, a high-level celebration initiated the decade, during which a panel discussion on access to information and culture in the digital environment was organized.

Actionable plan (2-5 points)

- Sharing experiences on actions related to capacity building efforts to make culture more accessible should receive attention, while recognizing the differences in linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Hence, contextualization of platforms and subsequent capacity building efforts, to the local context might be necessary.
- In line with the MONDIACULT declaration, culture should be streamlined in other policies/SDGs. The SDGs framework recognizes the interlinks among the goals. This could also be applied to WSIS action lines, with a view to achieving WSIS’ common vision, desire and commitment to build a people-centric, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and cultural content.

Suggestions for thematic aspects that might be included in the WSIS Forum 2024 (WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event) (one paragraph)

The largest thematic aspect that was discussed was access to cultural expression in the digital environment, notably (i) access to the digital environment to generate content as a creator, and (ii) access to the digital environment to consume culture. On the first point, fair remuneration of the artists was underlined as a thematic aspect. On the second point, capacity building efforts on accessing digital platforms as well as decentralizing the governance of internet were put forward as themes worth discussing.