

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

For discussion

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Item 2b of the Provisional
Agenda

COMMENTS ON RAPPORTEUR REPORT FOR CULTURAL STATISTICS

Comments by Brazil, Germany and the UNECE secretariat

BRAZIL

1. The analyses of the economic aspect of culture have grown in importance in recent times. There has been increasing interest of countries and international organizations in the production of knowledge about the specificities and potentialities of activities related to culture, in terms of value added, employment and income.
2. In Brazil, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics – IBGE and the Ministry of Culture – MinC – established, in 2004, a partnership in order to organize and systematize information related to the cultural sector and previously investigated by the surveys currently conducted by the Institute.
3. In the absence of a precise definition of the term cultural sector, due to the non-existence of updated international recommendations and national references, the partners have chosen to include in the work a wide range of activities disaggregated in a way that allows the users of information to adopt their own definitions of this group. The starting point of this work for the construction of an ad hoc approach to culture was the National Classification of Economic Activities – CNAE.¹
4. From the analysis of each of the 581 existing classifications (the most detailed level), the cultural sector was delimited based on the economic activities which were, to some extent, related to culture. This demarcation encompassed the economic activities directly related to culture, including theater arts, cultural presentations, libraries and museums, the publishing of books, radio and television activities, as well as others indirectly related to the main topic.
5. This second group of activities was included because of the necessity to treat the different stages of production chains of the cultural sector for the sake of public policies. This need is based on the premise that, in the production of cultural goods and services, there is a transformation from intangibility to tangibility and this leads to the consumption of cultural products. Therefore, the activities approached do not include only the production of goods which give tangibility to cultural production, for example, the reproduction and the commercialization of recorded material as in the activity “wholesale trade of office and stationery material; books, newspapers and other publications”.

¹ The reference used by the CNAE is the United Nations *International Standard Industrial Classification* – ISIC, Review 3.

6. Once this ad hoc approach was defined, information available in the economic surveys conducted by IBGE on the segments of industry, trade and services were organized, in order to allow the dissemination of information concerning employment, salaries, revenues and costs of activities directly or indirectly related to culture.

7. This information was made available for a period of three years so that researchers of this topic could reflect about the boundaries of cultural activities in the country. It is worth pointing out that this process may result in a Brazilian definition of the scope of culture, and that the absence of updated international recommendations will be reflected in the impossibility of comparing national data with those from other countries.

8. In this respect, the recommendations must be created considering a comprehensive view of culture, which will force the careful consideration of matters related to popular culture and to current aspects of technology.

9. When considering the definition of the scope of culture², activities representing popular customs such as festivities, rhythms and songs, dances, legends and myths, handcraft, gastronomy and all else which represents popular culture should be included, and accompanied by indicators about possible forms of economic valuing.

10. One of the singular aspects of Brazilian culture is miscegenation. All over the national territory, there are several instances of cultural expressions which reflect the combination of cultures of several peoples, such as Indians, Europeans, African, Arabs, Asians, and so on. Some of these manifestations attract a large number of tourists, including foreigners, as is the case of the Carnival in Rio de Janeiro and in other regions of the country. Although they do not always receive much international visibility, these elements of culture, such as folklore and regional dances³, mobilize resources and generate employment and income.

11. These activities are characterized by informality and, consequently, are not easily measured, although they are signs of the diversity of symbolic expressions associated with distinct social, geographic and historical realities. It is not only plurality which makes it difficult to understand these activities – which are characterized by the immateriality of knowledge and practices - but also their own nature. Such expressions are full of spontaneity and, in some cases, even seen as irregular⁴, and their study often requires survey and analysis procedures which go beyond traditional methodologies.

12. Once cultural expression is marked by spontaneity, diversity and subjectivity, to explain a popular festivity through statistics constitutes a challenge in itself. Given the high cost of statistics and the demands for technical rigor and temporal continuity, it can be said that diversity, especially of geographic nature, affects the access to information on the cultural reality, especially in big countries like Brazil.

² Regulated by UNESCO, according to the recommendation on Protection of Traditional and Popular Culture of 1989.

³ Some examples are: Batuque, Carimbo, Ciranda, Coco, Fandango, Frevo, Jongo, Lundu, Maculelê, Pastorinhas, Pau de Fita, Quadrilha, Reisado, Samba, Tambor da Crioula, Xote.

⁴ Capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian dance which incorporates self-defense movements, was illegal in Brazil for a long time.

13. On the other hand, new forms of cultural expression appear every day and, together with the creation of new infrastructures and technologies for means of communication (which are more segmented and diverse), reflect the processes (phenomena) of convergence between the different media (digital goods and services) and the introduction of new social habits generating new demands. This global phenomenon deserves a theoretical and conceptual treatment so that it is also reflected in the statistics of several countries. This is especially true for activities related to information and communication technologies, which have become extremely important, leading to new and varied uses and to production of content.

14. Today, in Brazil, there are over 100 million mobile telephones, an invention which completely changed the profile of interpersonal communication and allowed access to a wider variety of cultural expressions. From the point of view of culture, there are two questions in relation to technology. The first one is whether the telephone, after all its evolution, can really be considered an effective means of communication in terms of the transmission of artistic and cultural content. The answer seems to be easier today, considering the multiple functions of new appliances and the tendency to digital convergence involving the television, the personal computer, and the mobile telephone itself. It is more than justifiable; therefore, these media should be the object of studies and surveys of indicators in which culture is the main focus of attention.

15. However, another equally important subject combines telecommunications, technology and culture. If culture is present in the technological field, it is necessary to delimitate its scope of action, because, even in telecommunications, some segments are evidently cultural (television, radio transmission, internet, telephony). It is clear that not all forms of communication are cultural, for example, a fixed telephone appliance which allows the conversation between two persons. The products which present information are not necessarily tangible and, differing from traditional products, are not associated to a specific format. The value of these products lies in the content and not in the type of vehicle by which they are distributed.

16. Undoubtedly, we know that there is a need for specification of the relationship among new technologies of information and cultural activities considered in a limited sense, such as the production of artistic and creative goods and vice versa. Principally, the relationship tries to identify the effect of new technologies in creative industry and how creative industry encourages the appearance of new technologies. Besides traditional difficulties of delimitation of the concept of culture, there is another challenge of measurement which is not contemplated by current statistical classifications. The solution has been the articulation of existing databases which touch the problem, and the formulation of lines for new surveys, both from the point of view of supply and from the point of view of demand.

GERMANY

17. The assessment of cultural statistics brought forward in the document is correct from our point of view.

18. At present cultural statistics are living a "revitalisation" on international level. Experiences on a national level are similar to this (establishment of cultural statistics on Federal level, activities for assessment of "cultural economy").

19. Cooperation of all stakeholders is urgent to work out internationally accepted standards (definitions, classifications etc.). Only by doing so can Member States orientate their work on a national level.

20. We approve the international coordinating meeting recommended in the document but it should not be convened without submitting concrete proposals for the future shaping of coordination. These proposals could serve as a basis for the discussions.

UNECE

21. The comments presented below are a summary of the points raised at a discussion organised within the UNECE Statistical Division.

- The purpose of collecting and disseminating culture statistics needs to be better explained. This can be one of the reasons for the lack of support and funding of culture statistics. It is easier to find the resources when there is a clear client need. On the other hand, culture can be viewed from many different aspects and not all of these can or should be measured by official statistics.
- The interest in culture statistics can be expected to increase in the near future because of
 - emerging policy needs (protection of cultural diversity, integration of minority groups, cultural liberty, etc.);
 - increasing interest in “soft” values like human welfare, happiness, etc.;
 - in relation to sustainable development (SD is about sustaining human welfare but there can be no human welfare without culture);
 - recognizing the economic importance of culture.
- The content of culture statistics needs to be specified before developing a framework. For example, do sports or leisure activities fall under culture?
- The traditional culture statistics, such as statistics on newspapers, cinema and libraries, have lost a lot of their relevance. The changing ways of communication have a profound influence on where and how cultural content is created and disseminated. This makes it also more difficult to draw the line between cultural and non-cultural content (e.g. are online publications, music, blogs, self-made videos part of culture?).
- When developing a framework of culture statistics, the statistical offices should be consulted. Countries can provide valuable input concerning what data are available, what data can be collected in a sustained manner, quality requirements, etc..
- In developing a framework for culture statistics, some parallels can be drawn with the capital approach to measuring sustainable development. Culture is related to the produced capital (buildings, historical monuments, etc.), environmental capital (natural parks, natural tourist attractions etc.), human capital (creative and artistic abilities of people), and social capital (cultural associations and clubs, cultural heritage, national traditions, etc.).
- There should be a closer link between cultural and information society statistics. The current statistics on information society are too technologically oriented and do not take into account the content that is disseminated and exchanged. Counting the number of internet connections and computers does not allow to analyse the impact of the information society. Linking these two topics could be beneficial for both areas.
- Time use surveys are an important source for culture statistics.