

Cultural content and the media



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In accordance with Article (6) of Organic Law no. 128-12 determining its organization and functioning, the CESE (Economic, Social and Environmental Council) decided to deliver an own-initiative report on "Cultural Content and the Media".

For this purpose, the Bureau tasked the Standing Committee on Knowledge and Information to prepare the Council's work on the subject.

The present own-initiative report and its ensuing opinion were approved by a majority decision at the General Assembly's 88th ordinary session (26 July 2018).

Foreword

Culture is the sum of all human heritage, both tangible and intangible, reflected in the complex whole of knowledge, arts, modes of expression and forms of behavior that are acquired by people in a community or society. On the other hand, culture has a dual nature, immaterial and material. The first aspect is about culture as a mediator of values and a source of meaning. But a society's cultural heritage is also an economic engine and, as such, translates into the creation of wealth and employment. With this twofold characteristic, culture serves as a driving force of development. This is particularly so when public policies establish structures where cultural practices, economic rules and means of communication converge into a unified core.

It would therefore be a fallacy to approach a nation's culture as a homogenous, unchanging monoculture. A nation's culture includes diverse and evolving components. These hail from the interactions between a society's naturally driven creativity and public action to protect cultural heritage and promote creativity.

Now, in this increasingly digital era of globalization, it is imperative for the State that it should have a cultural development plan with the following three main objectives:

- Foster freedom of artistic and cultural creation and enable access for all to cultural products.
- Make citizens more cultured and promote national cohesion.
- Grow Morocco's influence worldwide as a cultural powerhouse and create favorable conditions for Moroccan culture to have a prominent place in the global cultural landscape.

Thus, the obligation to support the promotion and development of culture does not mean State intervention in terms of cultural production or the defense of an “elitist” culture versus a “populist” culture. On the contrary, the State is to create an environment conducive to the diversified and balanced development of culture, preventing society from being dominated by a stereotyped, inflexible, unimaginative and uncreative culture that would send the country headfirst into cultural alienation and stifle national creativity and evolution.

If the Moroccan media landscape is characterized by diversity and balance of public and private sector components, how can we solve the equation of Moroccan culture being a public service that makes the wider Moroccan general public, with all its different expectations, more cultured and aware, without compromising its function in promoting the availability and accessibility of the broadest possible diversity of the Moroccan society’s cultural content through the media?

Coming to the role of the media, and whatever the medium involved, the media is recognized as an important tool in the construction and transmission of values to the public. As an agent of socialization, the media is playing today a significant role in changing our standard pattern behavior and social communication and interaction. The media tends to shape our opinions and perceptions, enhancing public imagination and gives access to knowledge. This is achieved through the content of articles, radio and television programs, films, advertisements and other such cultural productions and varieties of mass media, both positive and negative, that circulate information and values.

And there is no doubting that new media communication has arguably become a powerful instrument of cultural change. This is why it is wrong to see the media as mere communication tools. The rise of new media platforms has brought significant changes, influencing people’s perception of technology, of economy, of editorial independence and of national culture models. This presents a twofold challenge with a political undertone:

- To develop solid, diversified technical media systems.
- To support the development of cultural content that meets national challenges.

We need to embrace this twofold challenge to encourage a rich and varied cultural ecosystem. The purpose is to cultivate national cultural creation and look into ways to extend the reach of Morocco’s cultural wealth and enhance its influence and value.

Normative frameworks

Article (6) of the Constitution of the Kingdom, which provides as follows: “[...] The public powers work for the creation of the conditions permitting the effectiveness of liberty and of the equality of citizens [feminine] and citizens [masculine] to be made general, as well as their participation in political, economic, cultural and social life.”

Article (25) which reads as follows: “The freedoms of thought, of opinion and of expression under all their forms are guaranteed. The freedoms of creation, of publication and of presentation [exposition] in literary and artistic matters and of scientific and technical research are guaranteed.”

Article (26), which reads: “The public powers lend, by appropriate measures, their support to the development of cultural and artistic creation, and of scientific and technical research, and to

the promotion of sports. They favor the development and the organization of these sectors in an independent manner and on democratic and specific professional bases.”

Article (28): “The freedom of the press is guaranteed and may not be limited by any form of prior censure. All have the right to express and to disseminate freely and within the sole limits expressly provided by the law, information, ideas and opinions. The public powers encourage the organization of the sector of the press in an independent manner and on democratic bases, as well as the determination of the juridical and ethical rules concerning it. The law establishes the rules of organization and of control of the means of public communication. It guarantees access to these means respecting the linguistic, cultural and political pluralism of the Moroccan society.”

Also, underpinning the present opinion are the recommendations of the CESE in its report entitled “Towards a New Social Pact: Standards and Objectives”, particularly in its section that reads: “The right to culture [and] the promotion of participation in cultural life, the right to cultural creation in all its guises, and the right to cultural dissemination and accessibility. Follow-up indicators cover the total number of titles published annually, the number of publications by region, the annual number of Moroccan films, the number of new plays produced each year, and the number of books read per Moroccan citizen per year. This set of standards and objectives stresses the need to promote access to cultural goods, cultural services and cultural facilities.”

Normative literature on this issue also features Articles (3), (4) and (7) and (9) of the UNESCO World Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), respectively titled “Cultural diversity as a factor in development”, “Human rights as guarantors of cultural diversity”, “Cultural heritage and the wellspring of creativity”, and “Cultural policies as catalysts of creativity”.

There are also the recommendations of the 2017 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report on the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which calls for “cultural policy reform” and recognizes commitment to “place culture and creativity at the heart of development”, as a tool to “support sustainable cultural governance systems” and thereby achieve the “Sustainable Development Goals”. In the same vein, UNESCO 2005 Convention Global Report 2015 (Reshaping cultural policies) has as a key message: “Public service media can be crucial enablers and drivers of the diversity of cultural expressions – as producers, commissioners, distributors and mediators of a vibrant array of high-quality cultural content whatever the means and technologies used.”

The purpose of this study-based report, from which this opinion originated, was to examine how much the Moroccan media can produce cultural content and programs that can help promote cultural awareness, through a participatory engagement of all stakeholders – including public and private TV and radio platforms, along with electronic and print media journalists and relevant researchers.

Chief among the obstacles to shaping productive “cultural content” are:

- The atmosphere where cultural creativity can thrive is fragile, which adversely impacts on cultural practices.
- There is a sense of ambiguity and confusion about the “cultural content” of the media with a few exceptions.

➤ The weakness of the “cultural industries” in Morocco.

The cultural field in Morocco carries with it the inherent problem of ensuring the production of attractive, captivating cultural content that fuels the quest for knowledge, inspires good taste, style and refinement, and grows cultural awareness.

- The Moroccan cultural media's problems have their origin in:
- The major cultural choices made by political and media decision-makers.
- The lack of creative human resources.
- The various skill gaps in cultural industries and hence in various media.
- The experience and expertise required to implement new modes of production for all forms of cultural expression.
- The inability to engage in appropriate interaction with different public audiences.

The development of the media sector in Morocco requires the combined efforts of the State government and private contributions. A strategic approach to national “cultural content in the media” is needed which involves balancing political, economic, social and educational aspects. TV and radio station managers should identify and prioritize cultural objectives that align with the needs and aspirations of Moroccan citizens, while taking care of cultural heritage, cultural activities and new cultural heritage practices. The necessity is also to raise skills in the sector, develop cultural innovation tools and harness the tremendous potential of digital technologies to foster culture and cultural heritage.

In the absence of cultural economy infrastructure, the following three conditions should be fulfilled:

- An environment that doesn't compromise the ability – including of young people and women – to exercise their right to freedom of expression; one that opens doors to opportunities that match skills and aspirations, allowing people to propose creative projects and initiatives, carry them out and showcase them; an environment that appreciates talent and abilities and stimulates initiative and production.
- The questions and areas of concern to artists and other cultural practitioners – and their works –, as well as the educational, intellectual, social and moral values that should be integrated into the cultural programs and content produced.
- There is need to provide opportunities for public/private sector complementarity.

It is clear that “culture in the media” or “cultural media” (the two being clearly distinct issues) evolve alongside technological advancements and require knowledge of the State of the two main levers of culture: language and technology. Researchers concur, as surveys show, that the Arabic and Amazigh languages are facing major challenges, the effects of which are being felt on how culture is produced by and depicted on the media, on the one hand, and on how culture shapes people's beliefs, values and behavior, on the other hand

Recommendations:

Culture and information are a significant part of our lives and play an important role in structuring society. Cultural action should therefore be taken care of by the public authorities through the cultural economies of media forms. The sought objective is to value cultural capital, in its tangible and

intangible dimension, by exploring the changes induced by digital technologies, particularly their transformational impact on how cultural activities and information are produced and disseminated, and by leveraging digital technologies for social inclusion. And based on the key elements of assessment and diagnosis of cultural content and the media in Morocco, and exploring the best practices in this field, the CESE puts forward the following set of recommendations:

First: Launch a wide-ranging debate to establish a large-scale National Contract guided by a cross-cutting public policy that has a bearing on the sectors of culture, education, information, the youth, tourism and digital economy. The aim is to place culture at the heart of national efforts to best deliver, through genuine political will, on the “UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

Second: Broaden the scope of freedom of expression and opinion, to democratize cultural action and citizen participation, and consolidate diversity in the media and national cultural production.

Third: Develop participatory rules and mechanisms whereby public and private sector stakeholders are brought together to ensure high-quality standards for cultural information and produce content that values positively cultural capital. These rules and mechanisms are meant to promote social cohesion and bring together different social and generational groups.

Fourth: Bring culture and the media to bear as a lever for advanced regionalization, engaging relevant associations and experts in the production of cultural content, while highlighting the cultural diversity and multicultural nature of Morocco, toward strengthening social cohesion and national inclusion.

Fifth: Elevate the country's cultural standing regionally across Africa and on the world stage, using audiovisual media to publicize Morocco's cultural capital, religious heritage and distinctive lifestyles and ways of living, while leveraging the language spectrum in the country, on the one hand, and fostering exchange and collaboration with the Moroccan diaspora, on the other hand.

Sixth: Put in place a strategy to develop national digital cultural content on major broadcasting platforms (written, audio and video), specifically on the internet, to build outreach capacity and community presence among the youth in particular, train children right from school age to distinguish between different types of content as a means of protecting them from confusing and misleading information.

Seventh: Encourage the development and delivery of alternative culture and media initiatives and projects that are gender-responsive and inclusive of the interests of all young and new generation Moroccans.

Further recommendations include:

1. Promoting cultural creation in all its forms, most importantly by encouraging books and reading and supporting civil society organizations that are active in this field, while arranging spaces dedicated to reading and other forms of expression, such as the Moroccan reading network and the network of cultural *cafés*.
2. Setting quantified targets concerning the availability and accessibility of Moroccan cultural content online; while developing monitoring tools thereof and reviewing media support policy, especially those media that give pride of place to national culture and

creativity, by adopting criteria that measure the real impact on users and the public; prioritizing in the meantime the most effective publishing and information channels, including the use of new mediums of information dissemination.

3. Ensure the product of audiovisual communication companies meets cultural content and national production specifications.
4. Encourage private radio stations to include cultural products and activities into their offering, with focus on sensitizing listeners to the importance and the role of knowledge and culture in the national development process.
5. Establish an audience ratings system to measure viewership patterns of Moroccan cultural and other types of content through electronic media.
6. Invest institutionally in the training and development of human resources in media houses operating in cultural contexts and ensure continued training in these areas of specialty.
7. Provide training to managers with expertise in activity planning, programming and organization in various cultural contexts, with the use of audiovisual and digital media.
8. Develop partnerships between cultural players and public and private media institutions and strengthen national production in all modes of expression (literature, audiovisual and electronic arts), while striking the right balance between local and regional content on the one hand and national and international content on the other.
9. Launch local and regional community radio and TV stations and encourage cultural associations to contribute to their creation as part of specific conditions, to reach out to inhabitants with cultural services. This is even more so as with the switchover from analogue to digital terrestrial broadcasting technology, more frequencies could be available to potential new radio operators.
10. Encourage youth-led cultural initiatives by providing material and institutional support for their cultural projects, including digital ones, and establishing special prizes to reward successful cultural programs.
11. Invite public sector operators to support young people's digital production companies and entrust them with the production of local and national cultural programs that respond to the youth's new cultural practices.
12. Ensure the preservation of Moroccan cultural archives in all formats, enhancing their value through the production of new cultural content.
13. Include cultural programs in the training curricula for journalists and media professionals, to offer them basic knowledge on cultural action, design and production of cultural content, both traditional and digital.
14. Make optimal use of the work of Moroccan digital cultural content creators.
15. Initiate policies for quality cultural offerings, in both the public and private sectors, that can respond to constantly changing expectations, especially those of young people, and compete with multiple media offerings and the wide array of communication networks driven by digital connectivity.
16. Encourage telecommunications (internet, mobile phones, etc.) operators to include Moroccan cultural content (songs, films, series, documentaries, etc.) in their offerings.