CALL FOR PAPERS

Feature 2021

Public action and "cultural diversity" International perspectives

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The general context of this feature is one in which the capacity and legitimacy of public action to promote and regulate "cultural diversity" in all its forms is being called into question. The issue at hand is to examine the multiple meanings of this concept and take stock afresh of the questions it has raised since Unesco first coined the phrase "diversity of cultural expressions" in 2005.

The byword for the 1980s was deregulation, driven by the dominant players of the time and demanded mainly for the telecommunications sector. It resulted in a number of negative effects, in particular financial imbalances between private players and difficulties for public authorities to protect the "common good". A general movement to set up public regulatory bodies – with their promises and limitations – began at the same time, particularly in African countries and in Eastern European countries that began democratising following the fall of the Communist regimes. When the third millennium dawned, regulation issues began being redefined in a different way. Regulation of the Internet is still a subject for debate, between advocates of this being market-based, or concerted, or binding and imposed by law. Public regulation of the audiovisual sector seems to have become accepted from the moment when, in French-speaking Africa in particular, the promises made by private television channels fell short of expectations. The regulation of written information is perceived in a variety of sometimes contradicting ways. For some people it constitutes a commitment to address the ethical concerns arising with the spread of "fake news" and other risks of information abuse that jeopardise democratic expression. For others, such regulation poses a threat of the incumbent powers taking back control of information and stepping up their surveillance of the media.

Today, it is once again becoming legitimate to question large-scale State involvement in the creation, development and promotion of local cultural and creative industries.

Against this background, this feature aims to identify the nature of the mechanisms used by public authorities to manage and regulate "cultural diversity", by correlating some of the following dimensions:

- industrial sector (cross-sector or sector-specific);
- territorial dimension (local, national, regional, continental, intercontinental);
- means of intervention (budget, jurisdiction, authoritarian or concerted nature, enforceability of decisions);
- legal level (constitutional, legislative, regulatory, agreement-based, *etc.*);

The objective of the feature is to recognise the bodies concerned and the objects taken into consideration in the concept of "cultural diversity", which has already been deconstructed at length in information and communication sciences, in order, when appropriate, to establish types of public action along with their justifications, challenges, scopes and limitations. Public action is not the only type of action to be considered and it must not be addressed in isolation. An analysis of public action must hence factor in all the different interactions between players – including private and international ones.

The proposed contributions must fall within one of the following four areas:

Area 1: State and cultural diversity: between instrumentalisation and regulation of identity-based demands

With the rise of populism and the accession to power of nationalist leaders and governments with "sovereignist" approaches to today's increasingly globalised world, the nation state seems to be regaining a degree of appeal in contending with the regional groupings that have formed in recent history. This tendency to refocus on the nation comes hand-in-hand with the classic characteristics of populist demands. In Poland, for instance, the media landscape is being redefined with the creation of "national media" intended to replace the public media, and the country's history and narrative are being rewritten with the focus placed on an assumed national identity, which is even reaching into school curricula. In Russia, in the name of innovation, modernisation and managerial efficiency, the State is participating in new culture nationalisation processes, some of which are resulting in forms of "neo-isolationism". At the same time, the "social and cultural reconfiguration" processes taking place in African and Arab countries making the so-called "transition to democracy" are particularly interesting from the perspective of how roles are being redistributed to different players. Since the "Arab revolutions", for example, issues relating to public action in the field of cultural diversity are being raised in various ways. These include calling into question an enduring colonial model of centralised public administration, or tensions between a central power undergoing what can be a laborious reconfiguration and factional movements representing intersecting and complex cross-border issues and strategies for gaining supranational influence. Lastly, trends in migration call for public action in order to manage increasing cultural diversity in social, professional, religious, "ethnic", linguistic or other terms. The Canadian province of Quebec is often held up as an example for having set up two interesting types of mechanism to address these issues: a particularly open legislation, complemented by a "reasonable accommodation" system to address the needs of native populations (first nations).

Is public action in all these areas not merely following – or even submitting to – the pressure exerted by the players that shape the nation, especially the most structured and organised ones? Are "new" players partaking of new means of monopolising formal and informal public spaces (such as the "grins", "agoras" and other such "assemblies" found in Ivory Coast)? What are the characteristics of these players and other "influencers"? Does public action have the capacity to instigate its own original actions?

Area 2: Public action, a framework for promoting culture industry sectors?

Public authorities in some countries are overtly involved in promoting cultural industries, while those in other countries hesitate to do so in the belief that these sectors do not offer profitable opportunities for economic development.

In the areas studied, the work will focus on examining how certain sectors configure cultural diversity through the involvement of major supranational players on one hand, and of local artists and artisans on the other hand. The ground in this area has already been prepared by research on the cultural industry theory which, in the music sector, for instance, has revealed close links between small-scale producers, which have the benefit of advanced artistic knowledge and craftsmanship, and major producers, which pose as intermediaries to limit the uncertainty inherent to producing cultural goods and prefer to focus on dissemination, between production and final distribution.

Public action in relation to cultural industry promotion can take a variety of forms that need to be examined:

- To what extent does such action address Unesco's requirements in terms of safeguarding cultural elements that have been listed as the tangible or intangible cultural heritage of humanity?
- What public policies promote (or hinder) the spread of cultural industries beyond national borders? How might they factor in local cultural specificities, and do they encourage the local integration strategies of Western media conglomerates?
- What do States themselves mean by cultural diversity?
- In what conditions do new powers emerge in the field of cultural and creative industries?

Area 3: Public action faced with the digital giants and other supranational entities

Efforts to regulate the audiovisual sector and the Internet come up against, on one hand, the advocates of cultural diversity who deem that private enterprise and the market are the best vectors for promoting this diversity and, on the other hand, the advocates of a "cultural exception", who view diversity in expression as being synonymous with pluralism.

France presents itself as a model in several cultural industry sectors (*e.g.* publishing, media and cinema), precisely because it has developed public action including various types of legal mechanism that introduce a form of regulation aiming to safeguard cultural diversity. Elsewhere, a number of powerful players that produce nothing themselves live on content produced by other players (*e.g.* Facebook) or avail themselves, for instance, of copyright on "common goods" (*e.g.* Amazon), as a result of which regulatory methods are being questioned once again. Lastly, grouped together in supranational organisations such as the OECD, nation states are currently seeking to impose a "Gafa" tax on the digital giants – which are experts in tax optimisation – by 2020. This type of public action sometimes meets resistance from certain states (such as – in Europe – Sweden, Ireland, Switzerland and Finland) that reject any form of joint action.

There are numerous questions to be addressed in this area:

- Does public action go beyond the scope of purely legal approaches, to which states sometimes tend to limit themselves?
- Does such action address the increasing public demands in areas such as greater protection for people and data?
- Are we not witnessing new forms of public action that no longer seek to impose, but that negotiate, pursue compromise, and consider – sometimes under pressure – the "grassroots players" (associations, NGOs, collectives campaigning to democratise the internet, *etc.*)?

Area 4: Public action: what are the ethical issues in producing and disseminating information?

Public action to promote the diversity of expressions has taken the form of various administrative and legal mechanisms and policies aiming to improve ethical standards among media information producers and encourage them to be more inclusive in their considerations of different players. At grass-roots level, key requirements include improving journalists' training by providing specific courses that are variously discussed on account of their normative and exogenous nature or hoped for on account of the participative methods used to build and dispense them, taking the conditions in which they are practised into consideration. This issue is also raised in regard to teaching groups such as children about the "new media". At the same time, acknowledging in particular the development of live streaming, a host of new ethical codes have emerged with a view to improving standards in journalism while encouraging and safeguarding the diversity of expressions. Such demands have intensified in recent years, particularly in regard to standards for collecting and processing so-called "sensitive" data, such as that relating to certain potentially "contentious" periods (*e.g.* election campaigns, wars, or revelations of data protection scandals or cyber-terrorist acts) or to certain types of content (*e.g.* conspiracy theories, targeted harassment of public figures or institutions, irresponsible sharing of discriminatory practices, or anonymous stigmatisation of sensitive minorities and population groups). Such rules, sometimes instigated by public authorities, place the State back in its "natural" role as guarantor of rights and freedoms, in particular the right to information, which in some countries is constitutionally guaranteed. The evolution of this right to access information, via digital technologies, calls for public action to be "modernised" in order to enhance transparency (the "open government data" philosophy) while keeping private data confidential. However, these ethical and "civic" demands may also be viewed as means of stepping up social control that are likely to impede freedom of information, put journalists in danger and give public players even greater impunity.

The trade-offs between demands for higher ethical standards and measures that curtail freedoms in the content and application of frameworks for public action in the field of information are hence still to be examined. Here again, the questions are fundamental:

- Can – indeed should – the State's scopes of action be demarcated with respect to those of civil society players, in order to promote genuine social public spaces alongside the political public space?

- Are there specific factors to consider depending on the territories, continents, interactions between players and periods concerned, in order to move beyond normative representations?

- How much autonomy do media regulation authorities have with respect to public powers, and what features characterise the relationships between media regulation bodies, professional organisations and the State, which can at times be tumultuous?

Submission Procedures

Proposals (4000 signs excluding spaces and an indicative bibliography, three to six key words) presenting an issue and methodology and an indication as to the expected outcomes and conclusions must be sent by 28 October 2019 to this address: dossier2021lesenjeux@gmail.com in French, English or Spanish.

Following selection by the reading committee, the first complete versions of the papers (25,000 signs excluding spaces and written in accordance with the journal's editorial standards, which can be consulted at this website : https://lesenjeux.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/pageshtml/soumettre.html) must be submitted for double-blind peer review by 1st June 2020.

Following this phase, the final versions of the papers, taking any comments and feedback from reviewers into account and including any corrections requested, must be submitted to the editorial board, which takes the final decision regarding publication. This is currently scheduled for May 2021.

Schedule

- **July 2019:** call for papers;
- **28 October 2019:** closing date for submission of proposals;
- **December 2019:** notification of acceptance or refusal;
- **1st June 2020:** closing date for sending complete articles;
- **Mid-September 2020:** authors notified of review results;
- **14th December 2020:** authors submit revised papers;
- **2nd quarter of 2021:** feature published in Les Enjeux.