

Dr Khiari Rim

TC, M2 Larbi Ben Mhidi OEB

What culture is NOT: A Comparative Perspective

In our exploration of culture, it is important to understand what culture is not in order to understand what culture is. Culture often intersects with various fields, such as religion, civilization, literature, sociology, history, and geography, but it remains distinct. Psychologist Geert Hofstede defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one group or category of people from another."

1. Religion: Religion is a system of beliefs, practices, and values that often encompass a divine or supernatural dimension. It offers explanations for existence, moral guidance, and rituals, example (Islam). While culture may include religious practices and beliefs, it extends beyond religion. Not all cultural aspects are tied to religion. Hence, "Culture is not a mere overlay on religion but something more like the earth from which religion grows." - Wilfred Cantwell Smith

2. Civilization: Civilization refers to a complex society with organized institutions, advanced technology, and often a defined political structure. Culture is a part of civilization. It encompasses the shared customs, values, and practices that define a civilization, but it is not synonymous with it. In other words, "civilization is a stream with banks. The stream is sometimes filled with blood from people killing, stealing, shouting, and doing things historians usually record, while on the banks, unnoticed, people build homes, raise children, sing songs, write poetry." - Ryszard Kapuściński

3. Literature: Literature is a body of written or spoken works, often artistic, that reflect the cultural values, narratives, and expressions of a society. Literature is a part of culture. It reflects and conveys cultural aspects, but it is not the entirety of culture. Thus, "literature adds to reality; it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become." - C. S. Lewis

4. Sociology: Sociology is the study of society and human social behavior, focusing on understanding social interactions, institutions, and structures. Sociology analyzes culture, but it is not synonymous with culture itself. Culture is a subject of sociological study. "The human being is in the most literal sense a political animal, not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society." - Karl Marx

5. History: History is the study of past events, actions, and experiences, often recorded in written form, to understand human development over time. Culture is an essential component of history, but history focuses on the events and developments in human societies, while culture encompasses various aspects of these societies. "The farther backward you can look, the farther forward you can see." - Winston Churchill

6. Geography: Geography involves the study of the Earth's physical features, climate, resources, and the spatial relationships of human societies. Geography influences culture as it determines the environment in which cultures develop. Culture, however, is a complex and multifaceted concept that goes beyond geographical factors. "Geography is the key, the crucial accident of birth. A piece of protein could be a snail, a sea lion, or a systems analyst, but it had to start right to end up a systems analyst." - Clifford Stoll

In conclusion, culture is a multifaceted concept that intersects with various domains such as religion, civilization, literature, sociology, history, and geography. These fields are closely related to culture, and they often influence and are influenced by it. However, it's essential to recognize that culture is a broader and more encompassing concept that encompasses but is not limited to these domains. Understanding these distinctions deepens our appreciation of the rich tapestry of human societies.

Dr Khiari Rim

TC, M2 Larbi Ben Mhidi OEB

A Multidimensional Exploration of Culture: A Multifaceted Definition

Culture, a concept fundamental to the understanding of human societies and their diverse attributes, defies a singular, universally accepted definition. From a multidisciplinary perspective, culture can be defined through various lenses, each shedding light on distinct aspects of this complex and dynamic concept. This paper presents a comprehensive examination of culture from multiple angles, drawing insights from anthropology, sociology, psychology, and other disciplines. By weaving together these perspectives, we arrive at a more holistic understanding of culture as a multifaceted construct.

The term "culture" carries inherent complexity, eluding a singular, universally accepted definition. In this paper, we embark on a multidisciplinary exploration of culture, bringing forth its intricate dimensions through the lenses of anthropology, sociology, psychology, and other relevant fields. By examining culture from these diverse perspectives, we strive to formulate a comprehensive definition that encompasses its various facets.

Anthropological Perspective: From an anthropological standpoint, culture is understood as the sum total of shared beliefs, values, practices, and behaviors of a particular group or society. It encompasses rituals, customs, language, art, and social structures, serving as the collective identity and framework within which individuals in a given society operate. According to E.B. Tylor, one of the founding figures in anthropology, culture can be defined as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [humans] as a member of society."

Sociological Perspective: In sociology, culture is analyzed through the lens of patterns of behavior, norms, and institutions that shape and govern human interactions within a society. It comprises social systems, roles, statuses, and symbols that influence the way people relate to one another and construct their identities. Max Weber, a prominent sociologist, described culture as "a set of shared and learned behavior patterns that serve as the norms and values of a particular society."

Psychological Perspective: Psychology explores culture as the psychological programming and conditioning that individuals acquire as members of a society. This perspective delves into the cognitive processes, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors shaped by cultural environments and influences. Psychologist Geert Hofstede defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one group or category of people from another."

Historical Perspective: The historical viewpoint situates culture within the context of temporal evolution. It acknowledges that culture is not static but continuously shaped by historical events, migrations, and the interplay of societies over time. Historian Arnold J. Toynbee suggests that culture is "a dynamic response to specific challenges and opportunities that societies encounter in their historical development."

Communication Perspective: From a communication standpoint, culture is seen as a system of symbols and meanings, impacting the way individuals encode and decode messages. It encompasses verbal and non-verbal communication, facilitating or impeding cross-cultural exchanges. Edward T. Hall, a pioneer in the study of intercultural communication, views culture as "a pattern of shared meanings and behavior that are learned and passed on from one generation to the next."

Economic Perspective: Economists examine culture in relation to economic behavior and development. It explores how cultural values and practices influence economic systems, trade, entrepreneurship, and consumer behavior. Economist Douglas North describes culture as "the shared mental models that people in a society use to interpret their environment and guide their economic decisions."

Political Perspective: In politics, culture is considered in terms of how it influences political ideologies, governance structures, and power dynamics within societies, shaping the political landscape. Political scientist Samuel P. Huntington contends that culture is "the set of common assumptions and values that define a people and distinguish them from their neighbors."

Conclusion:

Culture, as revealed through these multiple perspectives, emerges as a multifaceted, ever-evolving construct that transcends a one-dimensional definition. It encompasses shared beliefs, behaviors, institutions, and symbols, impacting nearly every facet of human existence. This multidisciplinary exploration underscores the intricate interplay of culture with various fields of study, exemplifying its profound influence on the human experience. Understanding culture in its entirety requires appreciating its dynamism, the historical context, and the diverse dimensions through which it is perceived. In embracing a multidimensional definition, we gain a richer comprehension of this complex, integral aspect of human societies.