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## Irreplaceable and uncatchable. The innovative power of the culture.

Policy advice Netherlands Commission for UNESCO, November 2023.

This is an English summary of the policy advice *On(ver)vangbaar. De innovatieve kracht van the culture*. In it, the Netherlands Commission for UNESCO (hereafter: 'the Commission') officially advises the Dutch Government to thoroughly revise cultural policies in the Netherlands to better reflect the diversity and rich cultural expressions that are present in the country. The advice focuses on the cultural ecosystem of migrant and diasporic urban cultures (also known as *the culture*), which include, for instance, street culture and hip hop culture.

In this summary, the elaborated good practices and personal contributions of various voices from *the culture* are not included. This is because many of these personal contributions have a literary component, paying extensive attention to language and word choice. We therefore appreciate your consideration and understanding that much nuance and valuable information is lost in this summary. The original, formatted text and pictorial section can be found [here](#). Would you like to get in touch? Then please send an email to [info@unesco.nl](mailto:info@unesco.nl).

## Background

The advice concludes that within Dutch society, *the culture* still does not receive sufficient recognition, appreciation, and support from current policies and relevant agencies. The report identifies several problems, including the marginalisation of cultural expressions, limited funding opportunities and a lack of representation within traditional cultural institutions. These issues lead to inequality, unwanted parallel systems and untapped potential and creativity for addressing the big social issues of our time.

The advice provides concrete recommendations, including substantial investment in this ecosystem, recognition of its power, and thorough research into its extent and impact. The report also emphasises the Netherlands' international obligations under UNESCO treaties and Mondiacult 2022, aimed at encouraging diversity in cultural expression and facilitating communities. In essence, the advice calls for a thorough review of current cultural policy to fully embrace and support the diversity and innovative power of *the culture*.

## Recommendations

Within *the culture*, there is a sense of urgency, resourcefulness, and ownership. Self-expression and self-development are central. It's about valuing where you come from but also about 'the new kid on the block' and 'the next new thing'. The Commission acknowledges that this presents challenges for policymaking and recognises that the needs within *the culture* are broad and diverse, demanding a lot from all involved.

Various stakeholders will need to take (joint) responsibility. The Commission sees a leading role for the State Secretary for Culture and Media, as well as opportunities for other departments such as Health, Welfare and Sport, and Foreign Affairs (International Cultural Unit). Additionally, municipalities and funds play a crucial role in valuing and facilitating cultural movements on an equal footing. The Commission also sees a role for itself, both as a continuing catalyst and in further developing and implementing the recommendations. Lastly, there is a role for *the culture* itself, with collaboration and mutual understanding forming the basis.

The Commission concludes in the advice that:

- *The culture* is unjustly marginalised in policies, while it forms the focal point of cultural life for young generations.
- Makers, thinkers, and communities within *the culture* can generate significant results and impact.
- The innovative power of *the culture* is indispensable in shaping the city of the future and addressing societal challenges.

Therefore, the Commission recommends creating substantial space for initiatives by, for, and with *the culture*. Recommendations include:

- Substantially and sustainably invest in *the culture* and facilitate the movement in ways that suit *the culture* and addresses its wishes.
- Acknowledge the strength and success of *the culture* while recognising its role in identifying and addressing societal challenges. Translate this into policy.
- Conduct thorough research into the size and impact of *the culture* in the Netherlands and compare the results with the resources currently allocated to *the culture* from the government's cultural budget.

The Commission considers facilitating *the culture* as an obligation that aligns with various UNESCO treaties ratified by the Netherlands. The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) and the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) call for stimulating, disseminating, and promoting cultural diversity and facilitating communities. By ratifying these treaties, the Netherlands has internationally committed to adhere to them. Additionally, *the culture* can significantly contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, stimulating and facilitating *the culture* aligns with the recommendations of UNESCO Mondiacult 2022.

Finally, efforts resulting from the above recommendations should focus on sustaining the type of initiatives mentioned in the advice, rather than strengthening the existing system. Truly engage with *the culture* and facilitate its communities, institutions, and rich forms of expression to perpetuate its uniqueness and existence. Invest in contemporary and future heritage roles in realising a harmonious and prosperous society.

## **Comprehensive summary**

### **Preface**

The preface by the chair of the Netherlands Commission for UNESCO, Kathleen Ferrier, emphasises the importance of cherishing diverse cultural expressions for maintaining individual identities, fostering understanding between cultures, and promoting economic growth in the cultural sector. It calls for greater recognition and utilisation of the rich cultural diversity in the Netherlands, including contemporary movements such as *the culture*, urging policymakers to acknowledge its significance. Grounded in UNESCO conventions and influenced by the Mondiacult 2022 conference, the recommendations aim to bridge different societal perspectives, addressing challenges encountered during the advisory process. The author, Kathleen Ferrier, expresses gratitude to all who contributed to the report, underscoring their vital role in its creation.

### **Introduction**

The introduction, written by the chair of the advisory committee, Martin van Engel, frames the policy advice as a crucial step in a continuous journey, emphasising the need for inclusive distribution of financial resources, a diverse cultural landscape, and

strategic networking to pave the way forward. It underscores the necessity for collaboration between cultural visionaries and policy experts to build a resilient and inclusive sector. The narrative advocates financial equality as a fundamental prerequisite for a just and flourishing cultural realm, highlighting its broader impact beyond economic prosperity to include individual opportunities. Recognising the shortcomings of the current funding structure, the text calls for innovative strategies and bold reforms. It clarifies how financial inequality perpetuates social barriers and impedes access to basic needs such as education and healthcare, underscoring the imperative of financial parity for fostering a healthy and inclusive sector. The discourse further explores the challenges faced by individuals from diverse backgrounds, particularly those with migration backgrounds, in accessing opportunities and finding investors within the cultural sector due to subjective criteria often influenced by biases and stereotypes. It stresses the importance of representation and diversity among evaluators and policymakers to ensure fair assessments. Lastly, the introduction aims to broaden the readers' perspectives and catalyse necessary change by introducing them to *the culture* and its significance within the discourse.

### **Rationale and research methods**

This section serves as a rationale for the advice, highlighting the significance of cultural diversity for local, national, and international peace and security, as outlined in the preamble of the UNESCO Convention on the Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expressions, ratified by the Netherlands in 2009. The advice notes the richness and diversity of cultural expressions in the Netherlands but acknowledges that not all receive equal recognition and support. The initiative for this advice stemmed partly from discussions held during the 50th anniversary celebrations of the World Heritage Convention in November 2022, where concerns about access to and documentation of heritage were raised.

Under the leadership of Martin van Engel, entrepreneurs such as Jefferson Osei (Daily Paper), dancer Randy Telg (Groove Kings), and (street)football player Mohamed Attaibi (KNVB) engaged in discussions on unlocking and documenting their heritage. Osei's statement about overcoming closed doors resonated, reflecting broader challenges in the sector regarding diversity and inclusion. Subsequent research and discussions highlighted various issues, including lack of recognition and support for certain cultural expressions, limited institutional involvement, untapped potential within marginalised communities, and frustrations among self-taught creators.

Building on these findings and guided by UNESCO's mission, the Commission conducted further research and engaged with experts and community members to explore the concept of *the culture*. Despite its lack of a singular definition, with its multifaceted nature *the culture* encompasses a diasporic realm influencing various creative domains rooted in postcolonial migration. It flourishes mainly in urban

environments and migrant neighbourhoods, defying categorisation under terms such as 'urban' or 'youth culture'. The report draws on the experiences of experts and insights from recent research to develop recommendations aimed at addressing these issues and harnessing the potential of *the culture* within cultural policy frameworks.

### **Definition and position**

This section explores the relationship between hip hop and *the culture*, emphasising their significance within contemporary cultural landscapes. Hip hop, originating in marginalised communities in The Bronx in the early 1970s, encompasses various elements such as rap music, DJing, breakdancing, and graffiti, serving as a reflection of social and political realities. *The culture* represents a lifestyle driven by shared values and experiences, transcending ethnic boundaries and embracing inclusivity. It embodies autonomy, innovation, and a counter-cultural spirit, influencing mainstream culture while remaining rooted in the daily struggles of marginalised communities.

### Characteristics of the culture

The experts included a number of characteristics to better define the culture. These characteristics collectively illustrate the multifaceted nature and enduring impact of *the culture*, underscoring its significance as a dynamic force shaping contemporary social and cultural landscapes.

- **Lifestyle and Community:** *The culture* transcends mere cultural expressions; it embodies a way of life rooted in shared values, experiences, and attitudes. It fosters a sense of belonging within inclusive communities, where diversity of ethnic backgrounds is celebrated. The term 'transcultural youthnicity' underscores the inclusive nature of this belonging, emphasising openness over ethnic exclusivity or age boundaries.
- **Innovative Creators and Thinkers:** *The culture* is propelled by pioneering creators and thinkers who redefine and reclaim existing norms and objects. A prime example is the transformation of Timberland boots from workwear to a globally recognised symbol of both lifestyle and hip hop culture. This process reflects a necessity to reconsider the meaning of space and objects in a society that often fails to adequately cater to individual needs and preferences.
- **Boundaryless Expression:** *The culture* knows no geographical bounds, fostering a strong sense of interconnectedness among creators and thinkers worldwide. Despite differences in social class and geographic location, shared experiences and cultural values unite individuals across borders.
- **Challenging Norms:** Central to *the culture* is its autonomous and rebellious nature, characterised by a willingness to challenge prevailing norms. Practices such as sampling and remixing in music exemplify this ethos, where reinterpretation and homage to the past are valued over strict adherence to copyright laws. This attitude extends beyond music to encompass various forms of artistic expression.

- **Self-empowerment and Identity Formation:** Self-determination, personal growth, and identity formation are fundamental drivers within *the culture*. It provides a platform for individuals to assert their agency and shape their identities authentically.
- **Integration of Technology and Internet Culture:** Technology and internet culture are integral to *the culture*, facilitating the creation and dissemination of artistic expressions on a global scale. Platforms such as samplers, synthesizers, meme culture, and online blogs empower individuals to bypass traditional gatekeepers, democratising cultural production and consumption.
- **Rooted in Social Realities:** Grounded in everyday realities, *the culture* reflects the experiences of individuals grappling with societal issues such as poverty, racism, discrimination, and inequality. It serves as a medium for voicing dissent, advocating social justice, and fostering solidarity among marginalised communities.
- **Self-organisation and DIY Mentality:** *The culture* thrives on self-organisation and a 'Do It Yourself' ethos, exemplifying resilience and resourcefulness. It empowers individuals to create something meaningful out of limited resources, embodying a spirit of grassroots activism and creativity.
- **Diasporic and Urban Foundations:** The cultural ecosystem of the movement is deeply rooted in diasporic and urban environments, particularly evident in vibrant urban centres and migrant communities. While its origins lie in urban settings characterised by cultural diversity, the influence of the culture extends far beyond city limits, facilitated by digital connectivity and online platforms.

The impact of *the culture* and hip hop extends across multiple domains, from art galleries to fashion runways, and from education to language. Internationally, hip hop has become a dominant force, shaping social and cultural narratives and offering a platform for marginalised voices. In the Netherlands, initiatives such as Daily Paper and Hiphophuis Rotterdam exemplify the growing success and influence of the culture within the country's creative landscape. Despite increasing recognition, challenges persist in integrating the culture into mainstream cultural policies, with insiders facing bureaucratic hurdles and a lack of genuine collaboration.

Moreover, this section discusses the international context, highlighting the relevance of UNESCO cultural conventions such as the Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. These conventions emphasise the importance of cultural diversity, freedom of expression, and the protection of living heritage, aligning with the ethos of the culture and hip hop. Additionally, the Mondiacult 2022 conference underscores the transformative power of culture and creativity in sustainable development, calling for greater integration of cultural perspectives in global agendas.

Overall, this section provides a comprehensive overview of the cultural significance, influence, and challenges faced by *the culture* and hip hop within both national and international contexts.

### **Best Practices**

The best practices aim to give readers a better understanding of what *the culture* is and the areas it engages in. To provide insight into how *the culture* also contributes to addressing societal problems, the examples are linked to the SDGs – set as an agenda for a better world by 2030. Many people within *the culture* have grown up on the fringes of our society. They have experienced poverty, educational inequality, and discrimination from an early age. Therefore, within *the culture*, there is a sense of urgency and a need for progress. Recognising the potential of *the culture* and considering it as a powerful engine for positive change is an opportunity to make our society and the cultural sector fair, inclusive, and future-proof. *The culture* is an environment where innovation and creativity flourish.

UNESCO is the coordinating organisation for SDG 4 within the UN system: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In this advice, we highlight the fact that *the culture* involves many self-taught individuals. The best practices demonstrate various forms of non-formal education: education not provided in a formal context and therefore not focused on obtaining a diploma. Non-formal education contributes to lifelong learning and thus to SDG 4. It is an example of how *the culture* can also contribute to addressing societal issues.

The text also includes a warning regarding the instrumentalisation of culture. Instrumentalising culture for political, economic, or social purposes can have a negative impact on cultural integrity, inclusivity, and respect for diversity. In some cases, it can lead to cultural appropriation, where elements of a culture are used without understanding or appreciation of their meaning. Respect for the origin and meaning of cultural elements must take precedence to promote an inclusive and respectful society.

### **Authors**

The experiences and knowledge of experts from *the culture* itself form the basis of the policy advice. Without their input and cooperation, publishing the report would not have been possible. Experts involved included: Glenn Abrokwa (rapper Nnelg/SMIB WORLDWIDE), Amal Alhaag (curator and researcher/co-founder Metro54), Larry Appiah (producer/SMIB WORLDWIDE), Mohamed Attaibi (street football player/KNVB), Cleo Boland (PR specialist and copywriter/Moai agency), Miriam Geerdes-Gazzah (researcher), Cissy Gressmann (spoken word artist and more), Dennis de Groot (artist and tour management/Okay, Sounds Great), Jamal Jama (creative strategist/JAMA MEDIA), Munganyende (author, political scientist, professor of Beyoncéology), Jefferson Osei (culture and artistic director/co-founder Daily Paper), Amira al Rawi (dancer, creative producer), Gerard Rooijackers (ethnologist),

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The Advisory Council was chaired by Martin van Engel, member of the National Commission. Other members of the advisory board were: Jonathan Donken and Claudia Marinelli (cultural education specialists at the National Knowledge Institute for Cultural Education and Amateur Arts), Halima el Ghamarti (director of BOKS Youth Culture House), Malique Mohamud (founder and director of Concrete Blossom: urban culture consultancy and design agency) and Zineb Seghrouchni (founder of DAR cultural agency).

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