



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

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Two hundred and first session

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Item 32 of the provisional agenda

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOUND IN TODAY'S WORLD: PROMOTING BEST PRACTICES

SUMMARY

This item has been included in the provisional agenda of the 201st session of the Executive Board at the request of Argentina, France, Japan and Lebanon.

An explanatory note, together with a draft decision, is attached hereto.

Action expected of the Executive Board: proposed decision in paragraph 7.



EXPLANATORY NOTE

INTRODUCTION

The sound environment is a key component in the equilibrium of all human beings in their relationship with others and with the world, in its economic, environmental, societal, medical, industrial and cultural dimensions. The sound environment is a mirror and a gateway to the world; it reflects and shapes our individual and collective behaviour, and our productivity and capacity to live in harmony together. Giving more importance to sound-related issues in our increasingly noisy world has thus become a vital matter.

Five sectors are mainly concerned: the sound environment, health, sound recording and broadcast and conservation technology, the relation between image and sound, and musical and sound expression. UNESCO, in light of its different fields of competence, namely education, science, the social and human sciences, culture and communication, is the organization best placed to take account of sound-related issues. Making the public at large more aware and promoting best practices among the youngest are the project's two main objectives, alongside highlighting, preserving even the least significant sounds and promoting activities carried out in this field by UNESCO.

1. Sound environment

The sound environment is a key component in our equilibrium as it shapes our individual and collective behaviour. Limiting noise pollution, designing atmospheres that are conducive to good listening, controlling the acoustics of spaces, and respecting the diversity of actors involved in designing the sound environment, are today conditions for better living together. Throughout the world, the densification of communities and the intensification of urbanization make the soundscape a matter of considerable concern for professionals and citizens who are actively transforming the setting of their lives.

2. Health

The limits of auditory perception cannot be extended, given human hearing capacity. As the ear cannot filter sounds, human beings are subject to a sound environment that makes increasing use of sound, close audiovisual and listening equipment at increasingly high and often continuous noise levels. According to recent work undertaken by the World Health Organization (WHO), the risk of hearing loss caused by the threat of recreational exposure to noise concerns 1.1 billion people¹ and might have potentially devastating consequences on physical and mental health, education and employment.

3. Sound recording, broadcasting and conservation technology

Technology to record, broadcast and conserve sound has been introduced into our lives and seems familiar to us even though we do not understand how it basically works. Ways of recording and reproducing sound mean that an individual's privacy can be penetrated anytime, anywhere. What is known as "sonic dynamics" compression has accustomed us to hearing voices and music without nuance. This situation may eventually lead to a distortion or even a mutation of the hearing system at the level of populations increasingly exposed to compressed recordings.²

¹ <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2015/ear-care/en/>;
<http://www.who.int/pbd/deafness/activities/MLS/en/#>

² The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and European Broadcasting Union (EBU), in the context of their research into sound levels, warn about exposure to continuous and dangerous sound levels in broadcasting (radio, television, Internet, podcasts, and so on) and sound systems.

4. Relation between image and sound

In a context of widespread audiovisual and multimedia access, sound is an aspect that determines final visual perception. Sound creation is part and parcel of audiovisual works and live performances.

5. Musical and sound expression

Musical expression, by voice and by musical instrument, is a factor of both individual and collective equilibrium through listening to one's self and to others. Scientific research has demonstrated the extent to which the practice of music helps to develop and maintain cognitive performance at all ages of life. It boosts learning and memorization capacity, and contributes to the acquisition of other skills, particularly in children. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that human expression is as complex as musical expression. The voice, like silence, is a key component of our expression and our equilibrium. Likewise, verbal communication in its various expressions and intonations is a vector of peace.

6. Sound and UNESCO

The question of sound, owing to its universality and the cross-cutting nature of its components, is a prime example of an interdisciplinary field, in which UNESCO has natural legitimacy to play an important role with a view to raising global awareness. UNESCO provided support in 2016 and 2017 to the initiatives of Week of Sound worldwide, and the Sound Charter.³ The challenges of taking it into account and promoting best practices have a legitimate place in UNESCO's mandate through its sectors of activity relating to science, the social and human sciences, education, culture and communication.

Proposed decision

7. The Executive Board may wish to consider adopting a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Convinced that the sound environment is a key component of our equilibrium insofar as it shapes our personal and collective behaviour,
2. Noting that human beings are both dependent on and agents of a sound environment that makes increasing use of sound and audiovisual equipment at increasingly high and often continuous noise levels, and that this matter has already been raised at the international level by organizations such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and World Health Organization (WHO),
3. Also noting that in every part of the world, the densification of communities and the intensification of urbanization in relation to the increase in the noise level, make the soundscape a matter of concern for professionals and citizens who are actively transforming their environment,
4. Further noting that the phenomenon of "sonic dynamics" compression has accustomed us to hearing voices and music without nuance,
5. Aware that in a context of widespread audiovisual and multimedia access, sound is an aspect that determines visual perception and perceived final quality,

³ <http://www.lasemaineduson.org/?lang=en>

6. Considering that musical expression, by voice and by musical instrument, is a factor of both individual and collective equilibrium through listening to one's self and to others that helps develop and maintain cognitive performance at all ages of life,
7. Considering that noise pollution of human origin generates stress with negative consequences on the ecosystem and on the immune system of humans and animals,
8. Noting that the sound environment, health, sound recording, broadcast and conservation technology, the relation between image and sound, and musical and sound expression are the five main sectors of activity affected by sound-related issues,
9. Also recalling the Director-General's support for the Week of Sound Charter, promulgated in her presence at the opening event of the thirteenth Week of Sound in 2016,
10. Also noting that the different sectors of UNESCO, education, science, social and human sciences, culture and communication, are concerned by sound-related issues,
11. Expresses the hope, for these reasons, that UNESCO might work towards an understanding of sound-related issues at the international level;
12. Expresses its satisfaction at seeing the Director-General promote initiatives inspired in particular by the Week of Sound;
13. Encourages Member States to foster the mobilization of extrabudgetary contributions to UNESCO, to enable it, in association with the National Commissions and the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network, to promote best practices in sound in all areas of life from earliest childhood;
14. Requests the Director-General to include this item in the agenda of the 39th session of the UNESCO General Conference;
15. Recommends that the General Conference adopt, at its 39th session, a resolution on the importance of sound in today's world, so as to promote best practices, in the spirit of the present decision.



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CORRIGENDUM

Paragraph 2 on page 1 should read as follows:

Five sectors are mainly concerned: the sound environment, health, sound recording, **reproduction**, and conservation technology, the relation between image and sound, and musical and sound expression. UNESCO, in light of its different fields of competence, namely education, science, the social and human sciences, culture and communication, is the organization best placed to take account of sound-related issues. Making the public at large more aware and promoting best practices among the youngest are the project's two main objectives, alongside highlighting, preserving even the least significant sounds and promoting activities carried out in this field by UNESCO.

Heading 3 on page 1 should read as follows:

3. Sound recording, **reproduction** and conservation technology

Technology to record, broadcast and conserve sound has been introduced into our lives and seems familiar to us even though we do not understand how it basically works. Ways of recording and reproducing sound mean that an individual's privacy can be penetrated anytime, anywhere. What is known as "**dynamic range compression**" has accustomed us to hearing voices and music without nuance. This situation may eventually lead to a distortion or even a mutation of the hearing system at the level of populations increasingly exposed to compressed recordings.¹

In the proposed decision, paragraph 4 on page 2 should read as follows:

4. Further noting that the phenomenon of "**dynamic range compression**" has accustomed us to hearing voices and music without nuance,

In the proposed decision, paragraph 8 on page 3 should read as follows:

8. Noting that the sound environment, health, sound recording, **reproduction** and conservation technology, the relation between image and sound, and musical and sound expression are the five main sectors of activity affected by sound-related issues,

¹ The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and European Broadcasting Union (EBU), in the context of their research into sound levels, warn about exposure to continuous and dangerous sound levels in broadcasting (radio, television, Internet, podcasts, and so on) and sound systems.

