



Democratising Cultural Learning through a Shift from Inclusion to Infusion

ABOUT THE STUDY

This is the second in a series of policy briefs published by the Cultural Heritage and Identities of Europe's Future (CHIEF), a research project funded by the European Commission and led by Aston University (UK). This policy brief summarises the main findings and related policy recommendations, with the aim to understand how young people develop and learn about issues related to culture and culture belonging and how they develop cultural literacy – that is, an understanding of cultural references, enabling active cultural participation in society.

The findings emerged from research carried out at formal (i.e. schools) and non-formal education settings and heritage sites across nine countries (Croatia, Georgia, Germany, India, Latvia, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey and the UK).

With nationalism on the rise, previous approaches to addressing culture and diversity are becoming increasingly ineffective and have reached their limits. In educational and cultural heritage settings, young people have felt a sense of inclusion but not belonging that has been exacerbated by ethnonational perceptions of cultural diversity (e.g. us versus them). Young people's understanding of culture and cultural heritage is limited and often seen as external to everyday life. The lack of financial and logistical support for cultural literacy as well as the exclusion of young people from the decision-making processes have hindered their engagement in cultural learning.

Based on our research in schools, non-formal education environments and cultural heritage sites, we have identified a need to shift the narrative from inclusion to infusion – to fluid models and practices of culture that allow young people to develop their own heritage and explore cultural literacy in safe spaces. Their involvement, and representation, in decision-making processes is foundational to democracy and equips them with the social skills and knowledge to contribute to society.

The overarching recommendation from our research is that schools and arts and heritage organisations, in partnership with local organisations and NGOs, should engage and empower young people through more accessible and diverse forms of cultural learning, with a view to linking cultural learning to everyday, individual experiences. Such forms of cultural learning may include, for example:

- diversifying the curriculum to reflect the histories, heritage and demographics of local communities and young people;
- recognising multilingualism as a strength that should be encouraged and enhanced to build up learning experiences;
- recognising musical traditions that diverse young people may be familiar with and encouraging this knowledge to be shared in school to further develop and enrich all pupils' learning.

FINDINGS

Limited understandings of culture and cultural heritage

We identified that young people did not see culture or cultural heritage as a part of everyday life but rather outside of lived experiences and reproductive of dominant hierarchies of cultural value. There is a need for expanding the scope of cultural learning and linking that to everyday, individual experiences.

Limitations of inclusion

A shared sentiment towards valuing cultural difference and accepting diversity was broadly evident. This was supported by a focus on inclusion, while the limitations of this approach were also identifiable. For young people, this was described as feeling 'included but not fully belonging', and indicates the need to shift and expand the general approach to diversity management.

Disconnection from European identity

In most countries where research was carried out, young people did not identify with Europe or European culture. To some, Europe signified something distant or 'bigger', while others considered it as 'totalitarian'. This disconnection with European culture and identity suggests that there is a need to develop the idea of Europe as a cultural identity that upholds liberal values.

Lack of resources

Young people are eager to use digital channels (e.g. social media, online learning platforms, etc.) and resources for cultural learning. However, limited financial and human resources, accessibility problems and ambivalence by schools have restricted the development of effective collaborations and cultural literacy provision. This points to a need for greater financial and logistical support so that young people have access to safe spaces and more opportunities for cultural learning.

Other barriers of cultural literacy

Opportunities for young people from different socio-economic backgrounds to participate in decision-making processes were limited. There is a need for improving the representation of youth interests and identities to ensure young people are engaged and emotionally invested in cultural learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Expand the scope of cultural learning

Based on our findings and analysis, **schools and arts and heritage organisations** should:

- present culture in different ways by incorporating multiple, localised, informal and everyday forms of culture, alongside more formal and institutionalised forms, into the learning process;
- connect culture to everyday experiences (e.g. spending time with friends, playing music), with the idea – *We are all 'cultural', we all 'do' culture.*

Move beyond inclusion to infusion

Schools and arts and heritage organisations should:

- encourage a wider shift from pedagogy of *inclusion* to one of *infusion* that recognises and incorporates

multiple, diverse cultural references and forms across all the aspects of school lives;

- allow expressions of cultural diversity in school space and time beyond designated areas, fixed days or events (e.g. multicultural day or praying spaces);
- encourage initiatives to decolonise knowledge and diversify curricula.

Develop meaningful, relatable concepts of European belonging

Schools and arts and heritage organisations should:

- build upon existing perceptions of Europe as a champion of liberal values;
- deepen knowledge around these values with a focus on how these values can be translated into/reflected on professional practice
- expose, raise awareness and critically engage with historical or contemporary socio-political events that have hindered the cultivation of these values;
- identify cultural references beyond Europe that exhibit and support the formation of liberal values and give prominence to silenced groups, marginalised actors and events worldwide (e.g. black histories).

Improve infrastructure and diversify sources of support

Schools and arts and heritage organisations should:

- encourage the diversity of NGOs working with young people to enhance participation and allow different interests and needs to flourish;
- increase institutional support to and recognition of learning in non-formal organisations to enrich and create more resources for young people's cultural learning;
- strengthen collaboration between non-formal and formal education settings.

Address the barriers to cultural literacy through civil society

Schools and arts and heritage organisations should:

- promote easy access to different forms of culture to limit class-related cultural participation and polarisation, e.g. by expanding the offering of leisure activities in deprived areas/social groups or by subsidising young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to attend existing performance art, music, art classes;
- strengthen collaboration between mainstream and alternative cultural heritage sites to enhance flexible forms of interaction with young people and minority groups, e.g. using technology to make information more interactive;
- empower disadvantaged young people through more accessible forms of cultural education (i.e.

non-formal, active and emotional learning);

- create more formal and informal learning spaces to reach young people with different socio-economic backgrounds;
- include young people in the decision-making process (e.g. advisory group boards) for cultural heritage agenda and programmes to identify and incorporate youth perspectives and improve youth engagement;
- develop partnerships with local organisations to create more financial and logistical resources.

PROJECT IDENTITY

Project Name Cultural Heritage and Identities of Europe's Future (CHIEF)

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ABOUT CHIEF

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CHIEF:

- examines the processes and environments that influence young people's cultural literacy and cultural identity through an inter-disciplinary and methodologically varied approach;
- advocates an inclusive interpretation of Europe's cultural heritage as a foundation for cultural literacy and cultural identity;
- challenges ethno-nationalist, xenophobic or otherwise exclusionary understandings of European cultural identity that may lead to intolerance and marginalisation; threatening the future of the European project;
- recommends effective strategies for enhancing cultural literacy among young people in ways that reflect both the heterogeneity of modern Europeans' cultural backgrounds and heritage, and diversity as a historic feature of Europeanness.

Further Reading

Mapping Reports of Cultural Heritage
<http://chiefprojecteu.com/deliverables/mapping-reports-of-cultural-heritage/>

National Cultural/Educational Policy Review
<http://chiefprojecteu.com/deliverables/national-cultural-educational-policy-review/>

National Curriculum Review Reports
<http://chiefprojecteu.com/deliverables/national-curriculum-review-reports/>

Policy Briefing 1
<http://chiefprojecteu.com/wp-content/uploads/CHIEF-Policy-Brief-1.pdf>