

Interculturality

⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:6-9

Each culture has its own characteristics, values and customs. Some are perceived as strong and others perceived as weak. Some are more aggressive and some are considered passive and shy. When the word culture is used in this context, it refers to ethnic culture - values, beliefs, arts, food, customs, clothing, family and social organizations, and government of a particular person in a given period.

It is useful to analyze culture in two parts: external and internal.

Fig. 1

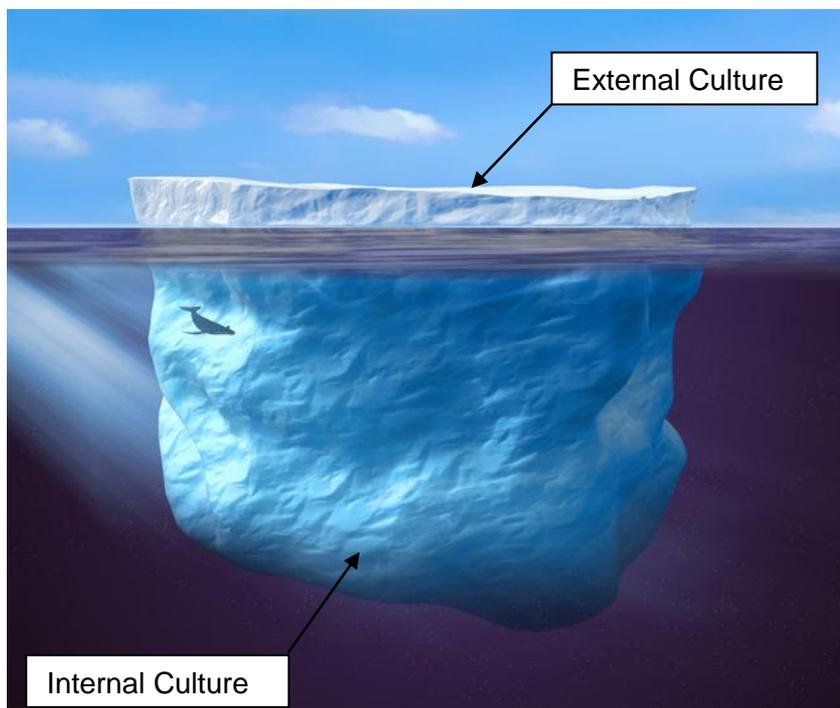
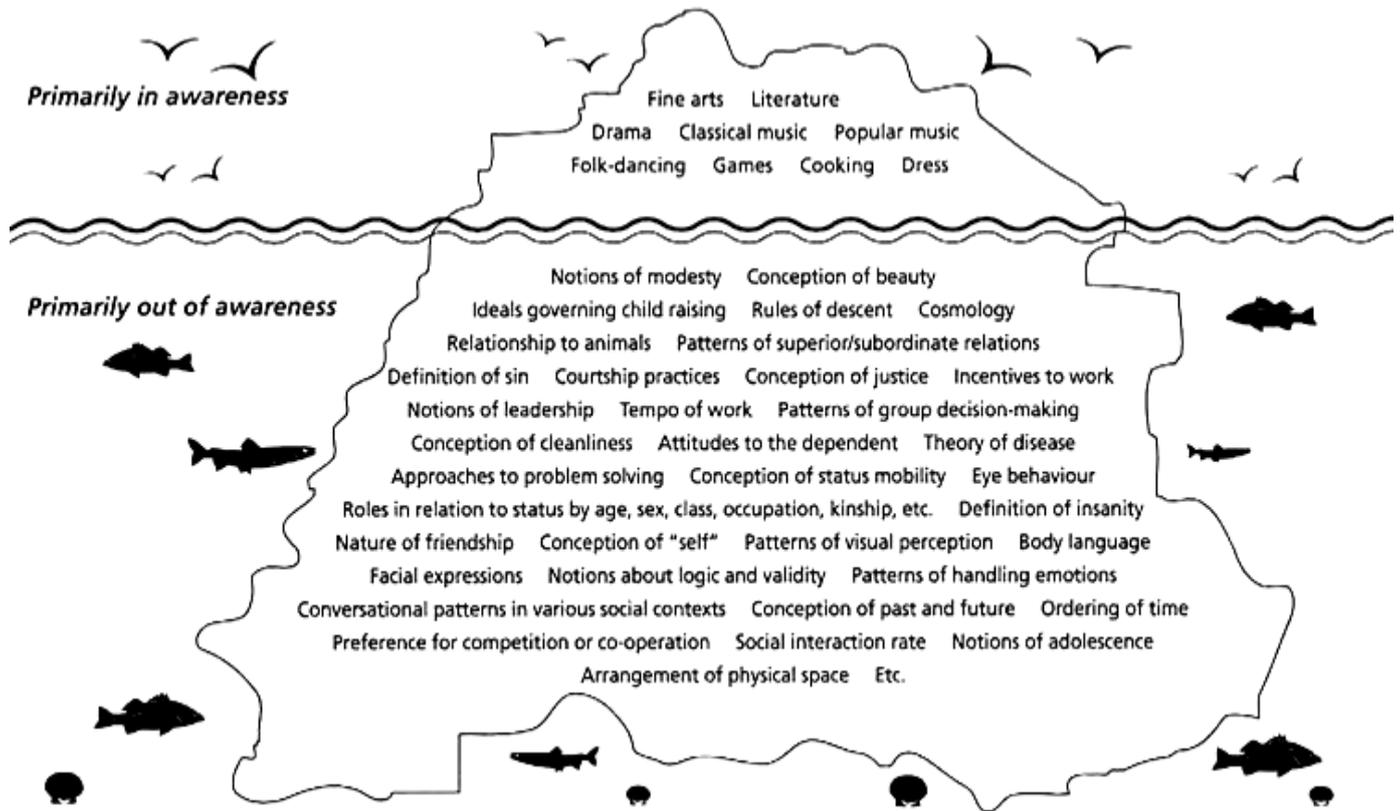


Fig. 2



Most of the time, when we use the word culture, we mean the kind of things we see and hear - music, dance, food and art, etc. These are only external cultural traits that are articulated and therefore observable.

External culture is only a small part of our cultural iceberg. The major part is the hidden inner culture that governs the way we think, perceive and behave unconsciously. This is the "instinct" of our cultures.

To be interculturally sensitive, we need to examine the inner instinctive part of our own culture. The more we learn about our inner culture, the more we are aware of how our cultural values and thought patterns differ from others. Knowing this difference will help us justify self-adjustments to live peacefully with people of other cultures.

Our initiation through baptism is a symbol of our death to the old self and participation in the new life through Jesus Christ. Therefore, it takes courage, going against our instinct, discovering our own cultural waters and living in the natural, unexplored intercultural waters of the Peaceable Realm.

We live in a more and more connected world, in which people are increasingly in contact with one another. New people, ethnicities, races, peoples and nations begin to create a more diversified contemporary society.

With this phenomenon we can say that we are initiating a process that can be called "crossing cultures", which implies a mutual and multidirectional movement between cultures, giving rise to new concepts such as "acculturation", "inculturation", "transculturation", "interculturalization" as well as "multicultural".

Intercultural experience has never been strange, both for the Church and for Religious Life.

The Church, being a missionary by nature, and Religious Life, motivated by her charism, have elaborated intercultural coexistence since ancient times. This intercultural experience promoted new reflections and attitudes due to the displacement of missionaries from all continents. Religious communities, with members belonging to different states, cultures and nations, present an intercultural experience adequate to elaborate the mission.

True intercultural communities must be consciously created, intentionally promoted, carefully nurtured. Intercultural living requires some conscious personal attitudes, certain flexible community structures, and a particular spirituality. Both parties - the host and the guest - must interact in such a way that the whole community is enriched by the presence of the other. Both parties must recognize that diversity is divine, the other is necessary for mature community relations.

Inspiration comes from the One and Triune God who is always in a mutual and dialogical relationship with one another, and invites the members of the community to develop mutual and dialogical relationships (1) in the intercultural experience. The clues that could help such a dialogue would be some concrete and conscious aspects:

1. Know how to take the shoe out of your own culture that could jeopardize living in the cultural environment of the other. Therefore, it is necessary that there is a need to put on a new shoe with the learning of inculturation.
2. The religious members need to be aware that in their missionary journeys humility and respect for one another are necessary and thus to realize that they are only the guests, not the owners.

References:

The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, Eric H. F. Law

Intercultural Experience in Religious Life, Father Joachim Andrade, svd

(1) "Dialogical Relationship": Learning that takes place through dialogue.

Questions for reflection and conversation:

- 1.** “The host and guest must interact in such a way that the whole community is enriched by the presence of the other”. Have you had experiences of this? What were the circumstances? What were the learnings from this experience?
- 2.** In our “missionary journeys” or life in community “humility and respect for one another are necessary”. When have you had to have humility and respect in a culture or community situation that was new or uncomfortable? How do communities build respect among the members?
- 3.** Looking at figure 2, give concrete examples of aspects of your cultural reality that would fall into the category of “primarily outside of awareness”.