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pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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联合国教育、
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Item 4.10 of the provisional agenda

39 C/49
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THE IMPORTANCE OF SOUND IN TODAY'S WORLD: PROMOTING BEST PRACTICES

OUTLINE

Background: By 201 EX/Decision 32, the Executive Board requested the Director-General to include an item on the importance of sound in today's world in the agenda of the General Conference, and recommended 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.

Purpose: This document has been prepared by the Secretariat, and reflects the spirit of the Executive Board discussion and recommendation on this item.

Decision required: paragraph 10.



doc. 2017/01903

INTRODUCTION

1. At the request of Argentina, France, Japan and Lebanon, an item on “The importance of the sound in today’s world” was included on the Agenda of the 201st session of the Executive Board, and an Explanatory Note, including a proposed decision (document 201 EX/32), was submitted to the attention of the Board.

Key points of the Explanatory Note and decision by the Executive Board

2. Highlighting that 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 Explanatory Note emphasizes the following points:

- (a) The sound environment 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.
- (b) 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.
- (c) UNESCO, in light of its different fields of competence, namely education, science, the social and human sciences, culture, communication and information, is the organization best placed to take account of sound-related issues by making the public at large more aware and promoting best practices among the youngest, alongside highlighting, preserving even the least significant sounds.
- (d) 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. 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.

3. By its 201 EX/Decision 32, the Executive Board encouraged Member States to foster the mobilization of extrabudgetary contributions to enable UNESCO, in association with the National Commissions and the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet), to promote best practices relating to sound in all areas of life from earliest childhood. The Board also expressed its satisfaction at seeing the Director General promote initiatives inspired in particular by the Week of Sound and requested her to include this item in the agenda of the 39th session of the General Conference. The Board further recommended 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.

Comments by the Director-General on Member States’ proposal

4. In her comments (document [201 EX/DG.INF](#)), the Director-General welcomed the item proposed by Argentina, France, Japan and Lebanon, which highlighted the importance of sound in today’s world.

5. The Director-General also acknowledged the important work of The Week of Sound (La Semaine du Son) in raising awareness on issues related to sound, acoustics, auditory health, and musical expression, and further recognized that sound influenced the equilibrium of human beings and had “economic, environmental, societal, medical, industrial and cultural dimensions”, which relate to the work and mandates of a number of United Nations organizations.

6. While the Director-General recognized the importance of sound, its educational and cultural dimensions and its impact related to noise pollution in urban environment, she also highlighted (i) the request by Member States to focus the work of the Organization, (ii) the funding implications of possible work in this field and (iii) the need to mobilize voluntary contributions in order for the Secretariat to engage in related activities. This included also proposed activities within the framework of the Associated Schools Project Network, to promote best practices in sound in all areas of life from early childhood.

7. The Director-General appreciated the efforts undertaken to raise the visibility of such an important matter and acknowledged the significance of introducing the public to a better understanding of issues related to sound and the quality of sound environments. She reminded, however, Member States that they had called for a prioritization and enhanced focus in order for UNESCO to concentrate on areas where it has a strong comparative advantage.

8. The Director-General further emphasized that should Member States decide UNESCO's involvement in this area, Member States would have to provide the necessary extrabudgetary funding and some technical guidance in this respect.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

9. Issues relevant to the importance of sound in today's world were discussed at the World Humanities Conference (6-12 August 2017, Liège, Belgium), co-organized by UNESCO, the International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences (CIPSH), the "World Humanities Conference – Liège 2017 Foundation" and LiègeTogether, with particular reference to the ways in which debates in musicology about notation and its relation to the nature of sound shed light on understanding of soundscapes, aural literacy and the relation between performance, recording and the written traces of music. These discussions will be followed up on as part of the ongoing effort to enhance the role of the humanities in making sense of contemporary social transformations.

PROPOSED RESOLUTION

10. The General Conference may wish to adopt the following resolution:

The General Conference,

Recalling 201 EX/Decision 32,

Convinced that the sound environment is so important that it shapes our personal and collective behaviour,

Noting that human beings and other living organisms are both dependent on and agents of a sound environment that makes increasing use of sound and audiovisual equipment at increasingly high and continuous harmful noise levels, and that this matter has already been addressed by international institutions such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), as well as under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD),

Also noting that throughout the world, the densification of communities and the intensification of urbanization, which lead to an increase in the noise level, make the soundscape a matter of concern for professionals and citizens,

Expressing the hope that UNESCO might work towards an understanding of sound-related issues at the international level,

Having examined document 39 C/49,

1. *Expresses* its satisfaction for the Director-General efforts in promoting initiatives inspired in particular by the Week of Sound;
2. *Encourages* Member States to foster the mobilization of extrabudgetary contributions to enable UNESCO, in association with the National Commissions and the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet), to promote best practices relating to sound in all areas of life from early childhood.