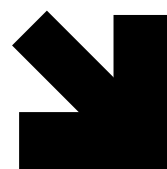


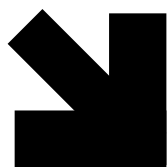
The Role of Culture in Tobacco Policymaking



Humans are social animals and as such we are profoundly influenced by the social world we inhabit. The term 'culture' has been used to characterise aspects of this social world. This example, drawing largely from the United Kingdom, looks at the interplay between culture and government policies aimed at curbing cigarette smoking.

It shows that achieving sustained reductions in smoking prevalence hinged on addressing the culture of smoking and that as culture evolves, more progressive policies were enacted. In turn, the interplay between culture and policy is also worth considering in other society-wide change efforts namely, in shifting societal preferences towards nutritious and sustainable foods.

What do we understand by



Culture?

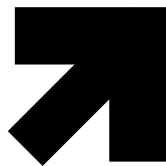
Culture is defined by the Cambridge English Dictionary as “the attitudes, behaviours, opinions, etc. of a particular group of people within society”¹

Culture involves identity; implicit and explicit social rules; likes and dislikes; perceptions of what is deemed to be normal; and crucially, judgements about what is deemed acceptable. It sets the boundaries within which we live, think, feel and behave. It is a feature of every size and type of social group from family and friendship networks to organisations, geographical regions and even whole populations. Culture is acquired by humans through processes of enculturation and socialisation as witnessed in the diversity of expressions across societies.² Culture is not static³; sometimes evolving slowly and sometimes suddenly switching from one dominant mode to another.

Arguably, culture comprises a profound social force influencing our behaviour. As is evident in tobacco use, there exists a complex public and political co-dependency between Culture and Policy. As such, considering culture is critical when designing a systemic response to food consumption patterns.

Culture and government policies on smoking

Looking globally at policies to curb cigarette smoking, those that have considered the pivotal role of culture and sought to address culture, have been more successful than those that haven't recognised the constraints of pre-existing culture.



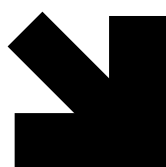
Increasing the price of cigarettes through taxation is lauded as one of the most effective means at the disposal of governments to reduce smoking prevalence.⁴ However, when, in the 1990s, the UK Government opted for a regulatory measure, by increasing the price of cigarettes year on year, smoking prevalence stopped declining.^{5 6} It was only when, in 1998 a new government introduced a comprehensive tobacco control policy, which proactively shaped the culture of smoking as well as provided support for smokers to quit, that prevalence started to decline again.⁶ The comprehensive policies represented a strategy that signalled the unacceptability of smoking. The strategy involved a substantial investment in shaping the culture of smoking, through social marketing campaigns, ramping up controls on tobacco marketing, some increase in restrictions on where people could smoke, and increasing tobacco taxes.

In turn, this precipitated further changes in smoking culture that enabled stricter controls on tobacco marketing, a ban on smoking in public places as well as stronger and more graphic health warnings on cigarette packets. There is evidence that many smokers extended the 'ban' to their own homes^{7,8} and that support for the policy increased further once it had been enacted. In contrast, in countries where developing a strong 'anti-smoking culture' did not happen first, such as the Netherlands, there was lower adherence to the ban on smoking in public places.⁹

A further example is the recent divergence between Australia and New Zealand in smoking prevalence. In 2015, smoking prevalence was similar in the two countries at around 16%.¹⁰ Today, New Zealand has a smoking prevalence of around 10% while Australia's prevalence appears to have changed very little. The striking difference between the two countries is New Zealand's national effort to address the culture of smoking in its population, particularly among the indigenous communities. Subsequently, the government has felt able to enact legislation to increase the legal age of the sale of tobacco by one year every year until eventually there will be no new smokers.¹¹ This policy appears to be accepted by the population and has cross-party support in parliament.



A model of culturally-informed policymaking



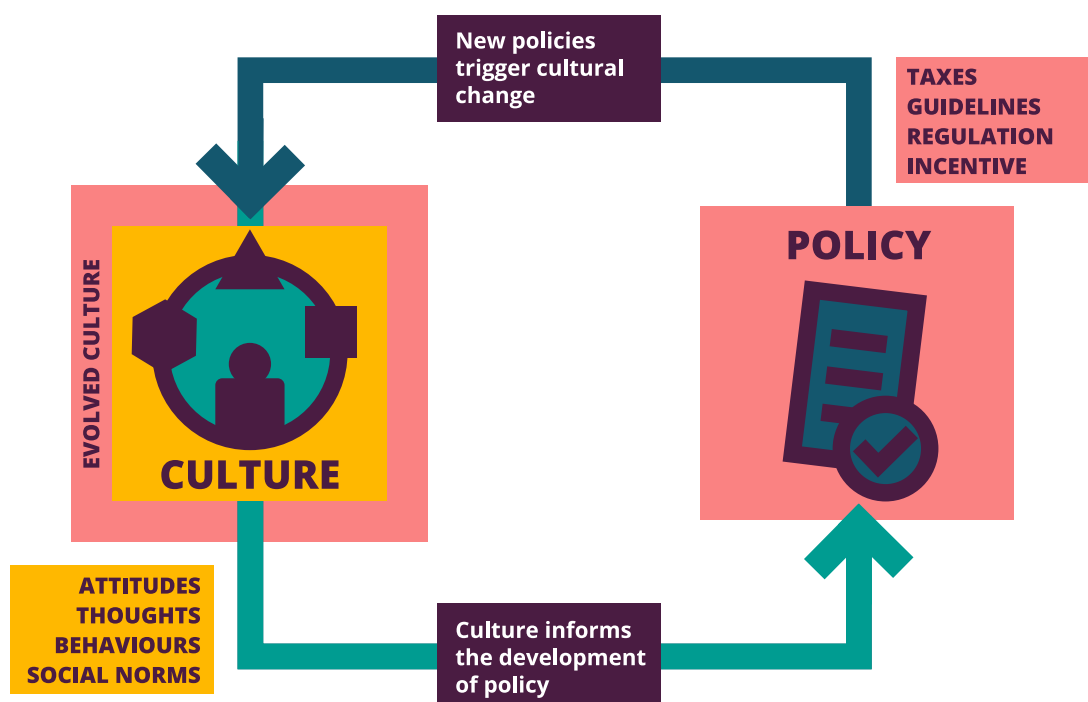
There is growing recognition that culture needs to be considered when making public policy.¹² Trends in cigarette smoking and the effectiveness of policies to combat smoking suggest the beginnings of a model of effective culturally-informed policymaking.

Such policymaking aims to create a virtuous cycle between the critical role of culture and policy implementation by embodying three features.

Cultural congruence: Policy that fits with the existing culture of the target population.

Cultural impact: Shaping the culture of the target population through policy choices.

Cultural synergy: Creating a favourable cultural environment for acceptance of further policies.



This model provides a pathway for how one might examine culture and policy synergistically. If you are interested in having a conversation on culture and policy making, especially related to food culture and food policy, please reach out to:

Eva Monterrosa, Food Culture Alliance- emoterrosa@gainhealth.org.

References

1. Culture. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/culture> (2023).
2. Culture. Wikipedia (2023).
3. Whiten, A., Hinde, R. A., Laland, K. N. & Stringer, C. B. Culture evolves. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 366, 938–948 (2011).
4. Tobacco statistics. Cancer Research UK <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/risk/tobacco> (2015).
5. Chaloupka, F. J., Yurekli, A. & Fong, G. T. Tobacco taxes as a tobacco control strategy
6. *Tobacco Control* 21, 172–180 (2012).
7. Beard, E. V., West, R., Jarvis, M., Michie, S. & Brown, J. 'S'-shaped curve: modelling trends in smoking prevalence, uptake and cessation in Great Britain from 1973 to 2016. *Thorax* 74, 875–881 (2019).
8. Tattan-Birch, H. & Jarvis, M. J. Children's exposure to second-hand smoke 10 years on from smoke-free legislation in England: Cotinine data from the Health Survey for England 1998-2018. *Lancet Reg Health Eur* 15, 100315 (2022).
9. Jarvis, M. J., Mindell, J., Gilmore, A., Feyerabend, C. & West, R. Smoke-free homes in England: prevalence, trends and validation by cotinine in children. *Tobacco control* 18, 491–495 (2009).
10. Ge, N. et al. Comparative impact of smoke-free legislation on smoking cessation in three European countries. *European journal of public health* 22 Suppl 1, (2012).
11. Australia, T. in. *Tobacco in Australia*. https://www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au/homepage_module/homepagec_content/homepagec_main_content/home_content.html (2023).
12. New Zealand's new cigarette law is fighting the wrong war. *Quartz* <https://qz.com/new-zealands-new-cigarette-law-is-fighting-the-wrong-wa-1849893616> (2022).