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Homogenisation is probably the process, in both its positive and negative effects, that is most often associated with globalisation in normal discussion about the topic. Seeing globalisation as a process of homogenisation assumes that its main thrust is to unite the world and make all its different points become alike, whether this be in the cultural, economical or political field. In a certain respect, this particular aspect of globalisation is inherent in its definition because, as Lechner and Boli argue:

*“If certain activities or institutions become more global, they must displace existing, locally variable activities and institutions. If there are more global linkages, global institutions, and global values, presumably this means that more people will have more in common” (Lechner and Boli, 2004:2).*

This homogenisation process operates in different ways:

- As we have seen in lesson “Globalisation Processes A”, the communications revolution is an important driving force of globalisation. It has homogenising effects in that, by bringing actors into more direct contact with each other, whether physically (thanks to faster and cheaper transport) or through the media (phone, internet), it allows for a greater circulation of ideas around the world.
- Global institutions such as the World Bank, the WTO, the IMF and the UN also play an important part in this process of homogenisation. By promulgating global rules for all nations to follow, they contribute to this homogenisation. For instance, the push by the UN for the protection of human rights – whether this is genuinely effective or not – has meant that this question cannot be ignored by national governments. The IMF, by imposing similar demands for structural adjustments to countries’ public finances during the 1990s also had homogenising effects, as does the liberalisation of markets promoted by the WTO.
- The world economic and financial systems are also strong factors of homogenisation. Just about all national economies are integrated into the world market (with a few exceptions such as North Korea) and financial markets are the epitome of a homogenised market, functioning 24 hours a day and allowing operations all over the globe to be linked through new modes of communication. With the rise of free trade, it is now possible to find similar goods in every country and this is leading to a homogenisation of people’s behaviour as consumers.
- Homogenisation processes also affect culture. The most obvious examples are the diffusion of Hollywood movies that can be seen all over the world or of the global brands that people all around the world aspire to possess. The brands often not only represent the products but also a certain lifestyle. Some of these brands, such as McDonalds, have even become synonyms for homogenisation (i.e. has lent its name to the expression ‘McWorld’).

An important factor of homogenisation is standardisation. It occurs in many fields and helps to reduce complexity. Standards in the IT realm make it possible to set up, view and edit

homepages from millions of workstations. Production standards allow for the use of the same motor block in different types (and even makes) of cars and standardised places such as airports, train and bus stations ease travels around the world. McDonalds mastered this standardisation within its production chain a long time ago:

- Efficiency: people order speedily due to a limited amount of items on the menu. Drive thrus save space for tables and chairs and the absence of plates and cutlery make the washing of dishes obsolete. Due to the assembly line principle every move and step is prescribed and can be learned quickly by almost anybody.
- Measurability: Every step in the production line can be timed and measured, even the content of fat in the hamburgers is monitored regularly.
- Control: Not only employees are being controlled and admonished when they work too slow or not according the book, but also the guests, who are advised to clear their tables themselves.
- Predictability is a consequence of standardisation and assures that customers know what to expect in a McDonalds once they have visited one.

There are those who praise this homogenisation process as they expect it to result in a pacified world where all societies share the same values (i.e. human rights, democracy). They expect that democratic values can be diffused like Levi's Jeans or Coca-Cola drinks.

The opponents of the homogenising function of globalisation criticise it for various reasons. On the one hand, they generally criticise this process because it is erasing local particularities, which are unable to resist the overwhelming forces of globalisation. On the other hand, many people argue that homogenisation does not really mark the emergence of a global culture, but rather an imposition of the Western model on other cultures (see: [Sen, 2003](#)).

The United States are now the dominant power in most spheres of globalisation (see lesson "Globalisation Processes A" text "The four dimensions of globalisation according to Anthony Giddens"), and this manifests itself through military hegemony, a preponderance of US firms among the most famous global brands and the worldwide diffusion of Hollywood movies and TV shows such as Dallas ([Tomlinson, 2003](#)), as well as the use of English as the main international language.

This process of homogenisation within globalisation has been labelled a new kind of **imperialism** or **Americanisation**.

#### **References:**

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