

EXPLORING DEAF CULTURE IN LEGAL TEXTS: A JOURNEY FROM DEAFOLOGY TO CULTURAL RIGHTS

Filipe Venade de Sousa

Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Faculdade de Direito;
Instituto Politécnico do Porto, Escola Superior de Educação, Portugal
ORCID ID 0000-0003-4059-3034
filipesousa@ese.ipp.pt

ABSTRACT:

This study investigates the incorporation of Deaf Culture into legal texts, aiming to clarify its significance and extent within the chosen corpus of texts. Through an in-depth analysis of approaches within the legal framework of different countries, this research reveals variations in including cultural aspects in the legal texts. Deafological perspectives, rooted in the experiences of Deaf people, contribute to understanding the treatment of issues related to the protection and promotion of Deaf Culture within legal contexts. This study highlights the importance of considering Cultural Rights and emphasizes the limited scholarly attention given to the legal status of Deaf Culture. It calls for further exploration to promote inclusivity, respect for Deaf identity, and the protection of cultural rights within the legal systems. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the legal considerations surrounding Deaf Culture and its implications in broader legal frameworks.

KEYWORDS: Deaf Culture; Deafology; Deaf Studies; Cultural Rights, Law; Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

1. Introduction

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the cultural rights associated with Deaf Culture, it is essential to examine the legal landscape surrounding the use and access of sign language and its implications for the concept of Deaf Culture itself. This article takes a systematic and comparative approach to analyze current national legislation and practices concerning cultural rights, particularly concerning “Deaf Culture.”¹

Defining Deaf Culture is an ongoing and intricate endeavor within the field of Deaf Studies. The discourse surrounding possible cultural definitions remains fluid and evolving, extending beyond Deaf Studies to various domains, such as Law. Although the process of delineating Deaf Culture has been unfolding over centuries, the formal establishment of Deaf Studies as a field began just over four decades ago.

Deaf Culture, as understood in Deaf Studies’ literature (e.g., Holcomb 2013, 2016; Ladd 2003), encompasses the forms and ways of being intrinsic to their own language and the shared linguistic, social, and cultural experiences of Deaf people. Exploring its legal implications requires a multidisciplinary approach, including legal considerations and broader sociocultural contexts. However, a clear legal understanding is essential to ensure the recognition and protection of Deaf Culture within the legal framework.

The presence of the term Deaf Culture in national and international legislation, as well as in academic discourse, raises significant questions. What is the legal meaning of Deaf Culture as shared by Deaf Studies? How do legal and cultural perspectives intersect in the legal and jurisprudential understanding of Deaf Culture? Who has the right to claim and express Deaf Culture within the legally recognized framework and the inherent freedom of expression it entails?

¹ In the context of this article, the differentiation between “D” or “d” when referring to deaf people is not essential, as the significance extends beyond mere capitalization. While within the realm of Deaf Studies (Kusters, De Meulder, and O’Brien 2017) there are ongoing debates concerning capitalization, with some favoring it from a sociocultural perspective and within the broader associative movement. From a legal standpoint, the definition of a “deaf person” remains variable. Many legislations across different countries employ the term “deaf person” generically, alongside the term “person with hearing impairment,” without providing a specific conceptual framework. Consequently, these legal contexts do not distinguish between “Deaf” and “deaf” in terms of sociocultural or audiological perspectives. Therefore, the legal relevance does not hinge on terminological disparities based on capitalization but rather on the fundamental essence of the “deaf person” concept, whether broadly or narrowly defined. Moreover, the term “Deaf Culture” remains applicable irrespective of capitalization, as its core conceptual principles significantly influence legal semantics. We will explain throughout the text.

By delving into these questions, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding Deaf Culture and its legal dimensions. My investigations aim to foster greater recognition and appreciation of the cultural rights associated with Deaf Culture within legal contexts.

Deaf Culture, with its rich linguistic heritage, plays a vital role in the existence of the Deaf community. As scholars and researchers delve deeper into the multifaceted aspects of Deaf experiences, there is a growing recognition of the need for encompassing various branches of knowledge. Within this context, the term *Deafology* (Sousa 2022b) emerges as a transformative approach that reshapes our understanding and conceptualization of Deaf Culture.

Throughout this article, I will delve deeper into the concept of Deafology, examining its theoretical underpinnings, methodologies, and practical applications. This comprehensive approach not only recognizes the value of Deaf Culture but also empowers Deaf people and amplifies their voices within academic and societal discourse. By examining the intersections and synergies between various fields, including Deaf Studies and Law, we can uncover new insights and foster a more inclusive and equitable society that respects and values the cultural diversity and linguistic rights of the Deaf communities.

This article employs an analytical and comparative legal approach to explore the definition and extent of Deaf Culture. Analyzing the present legislation from different global jurisdictions will identify explicit or implicit references to Deaf Culture. The research includes a comprehensive review of national and international laws regarding Deaf people, linguistic rights, and Deaf Culture. It also incorporates relevant normative documents from international and national organizations addressing Deaf Culture. In addition, sources in various languages were translated and examined to capture the meanings and interpretations of Deaf Culture within their legal context. While not exclusively jurisprudential, this approach forms a solid basis for understanding Deaf Culture's legal aspects, contributing to its broader societal recognition.

2. The meaning and scope of Deaf Culture

2.1. Deafology: exploring the meaning and scope

The concept of Deafology, as articulated by Sousa (2022b), represents a transformative approach that reshapes our understanding and conceptualization of Deaf Culture. Within the extensive and integrated landscape of interdisciplinary knowledge, the neologism Deafology emerges as a dynamic synthesis of the term “Deaf” and the suffix “-ology.” This amalgamation denotes an intricate and multifaceted field of study that serves as a comprehensive repository for the collective and individual experiences of the Deaf community.



Figure 1: signing “DEAFOLOGY”
Source by the author

Deafology, as a multifaceted and multidimensional construct, encapsulates not only the body of knowledge generated by Deaf communities considering their distinctive existence but also the myriad of facets of Deaf experiences across diverse social contexts. It encompasses both communal and individual dimensions that emanate from the lived experiences of Deaf people. Furthermore, Deafology extends its scope to encompass the active agency and socio-political engagement inherent in these experiences within the broader societal framework. Deafology represents the confluence of scholarly inquiry, cultural exploration, and socio-political activism, all aimed at shedding light on the intricate tapestry of Deaf lives.

The guiding principle of Deafology is conveyed by the motto “nothing about us, without us”. This principle serves as a vital and dynamic organism in all its dimensions, both within the Deaf community and in society at large. The essence of Deafology lies in the ability to integrate and include all these branches, forming the basis of the Deaf perspective. This integration encompasses a diversity of actions and verbs: to be, to do, to experience, to advocate, to mobilize, and to dream, all of which encapsulate the Deaf idiosyncrasy in all its complex dimensions.

Deafhood (Ladd 2003) focuses on the diverse ways of experiencing and being within the Deaf community. It places significant emphasis on the cultural conception of Deaf people, highlighting the importance of Deaf Culture and sign language. Deafhood centers on the subjective and collective journey of self-discovery, self-acceptance, and empowerment among Deaf people. Conversely, Deafology transcends the boundaries of Deafhood and Deaf Culture. While

Deafhood primarily explores the subjective experiences and perspectives of Deaf people, Deafology is a multidimensional holistic approach that integrates academic inquiry, sociopolitical engagement, and the intersection of Deaf experiences with various academic disciplines.

Deafology and Deaf Studies are closely intertwined fields that complement each other. Deaf Studies (e.g., Bauman and Murray 2016; Ladd 2003; Lane et al. 1996; Padden and Humphries 2005; Gertz and Boudreault 2016) provide the foundational academic and theoretical basis for the study of Deaf Culture, focusing on its linguistic, historical, and sociocultural dimensions. Deafology, on the other hand, offers a transformative perspective that emphasizes the active participation and agency of Deaf people in defining their cultural identity, advocating for their rights, and shaping their daily experiences. While Deaf Studies lays the groundwork for understanding the Deaf community's rich heritage, Deafology adds a sociopolitical dimension by actively engaging with Deaf people and communities in shaping policies and fostering sociocultural change. These approaches and Deafhood contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the Deaf experience, ultimately promoting a more equitable and supportive society for Deaf people.

Critical Legal Studies (e.g., Unger 1983) and Critical Disability Theory (e.g., Siebers 2008) offer valuable perspectives for analyzing the influence of power dynamics, social structures, and legal norms on the rights and recognition of the Deaf community. These fields focus on examining underlying assumptions and biases within legal systems. Deafology utilizes these lenses to challenge and reform legal frameworks, advocating for Deaf rights. This includes recognizing sign languages within legal contexts and promoting awareness of Deaf cultural and linguistic uniqueness. Deafology aims to dismantle inequalities by critically evaluating societal norms and legal structures, fostering a more inclusive legal environment for the Deaf community.

Deaf Legal Theory (e.g., Bryan and Emery 2014; Wilks 2022) specializes in the legal aspects of Deaf rights, synergizing with a comprehensive deafological approach. It critically examines legal challenges faced by the Deaf community, ensuring a deep understanding and advocacy for its legal rights. Deaf Legal Theory acknowledges Deaf cultural and linguistic identity and evaluates how legal systems impact the preservation of Deaf cultural practices. Its goal is to reshape legal

frameworks to empower and protect Deaf Culture by fostering an inclusive legal landscape.

Deafology centers on sign language as a pivotal element of communication and cultural expression within Deaf Culture. It recognizes sign language as the medium for sharing stories and traditions as well as unifying the Deaf community. Deafology celebrates linguistic and cultural diversity among Deaf people and stresses inclusive environments for various sign languages. Moreover, it highlights the legal and sociopolitical dimensions crucial for Deaf empowerment. Through critically examining legal frameworks, Deafology strives to overcome challenges and preserve Deaf cultural heritage, challenging misconceptions and promoting equity and awareness for the Deaf community.

2.2. A multifaceted definition of Deaf Culture: reflections and contributions

The concept of Deaf Culture has its origins within the Deaf community, distinct from societal perceptions and projections. It encompasses its own narratives and intrinsic meanings to the Deaf community. Deaf people's identification with Deaf Culture is considered a fundamental aspect of its formation and cultivation, contributing to a shared and essential cultural understanding among Deaf people. Moreover, it is a means to present and contrast cultural perspectives with those of other societies, encompassing diverse representations integral to the Deaf community.

Within the field of Deaf Studies, several authors provide their interpretations of Deaf Culture. In his book *Understanding Deaf Culture* (2003), Paddy Ladd acknowledges the complexities in defining Deaf Culture and explores its meaning extensively from various perspectives, including its linguistic, social, and cultural dimensions.

Bahan and Parish (2006, 349-350) define it as encompassing the way of life, behaviors, and modes of interaction, belief systems, and systems of knowledge within the Deaf community. They emphasize the linguistic aspect, describing it as a "visual way of being" that prioritizes visibility over hearing and is embodied in sign language as a distinct cultural reality separate from spoken languages. Additionally, they highlight the notion of "a way of life", which extends beyond the visual existence of Deaf people in sign language. It encompasses their cultural experiences, values, awareness, social spaces, and literature.

Holcomb (2016) also recognizes the significance of Deaf Culture in the diverse experiences of Deaf people, noting that it is commonly used to describe these experiences. He emphasizes the critical role of Deaf Culture in the development of Deaf children, mainly referring to the absence of easily accessible Deaf role models for these children. Without early exposure to the Deaf community, Deaf children lack the strategies necessary to navigate a world populated by individuals who are different from themselves. By addressing this concern, he highlights the importance of culture in providing solutions for effective living, such as access to communication, information sharing, healthy identity formation, and self-determination.

In the realm of Deafology, the terms Culture and Deaf are deeply intertwined. They form a common ground where the synergy between Deaf culture and Deaf people – including the Deaf community as a whole – can thrive and contribute to sociocultural transformation. This is particularly relevant to the Deaf community, as Deaf culture is seen as vital to its existence. The essence of Deafology lies in the understanding that all Deaf people, irrespective of such distinctions, can be recognized as members of the Deaf community if they embrace, with equal dignity and cultural integrity, the values that unite them (e.g., Kusters et al. 2017).

Understanding Deaf Culture entails the need to perceive the Deaf people as both a cultural subject or/and, simultaneously, as a person with disability. This complexity is intricately connected to historical contexts that encompass the conceptual evolution of Deaf people from the medical model to the social model of disability. These matters have been extensively debated within academic domains, such as Deaf Studies (e.g., Ladd, 2003), as well as Disability Studies (e.g., Burch, and Kafer, 2010), and Law (e.g., Bantekas et al., 2018; Johnson, 2020; Sousa, 2020).

From a legal perspective, defining a “Deaf people” is variable and challenging to establish uniformly. Currently, the dominant literature posits that being Deaf is a sociocultural construct stemming from a cultural approach. However, this does not automatically imply that the legal definition of a Deaf people is exclusively cultural. Legally speaking, the concept of being Deaf is an intersectional category encompassing both cultural and disability conceptions with appropriate

adaptations. This is objectively demonstrated in numerous legal references that define a Deaf and, consequently, Deaf Culture.²

The interplay of Deaf Culture and legal recognition is pivotal, demanding consideration of sociohistorical, sociolinguistic, and sociopolitical contexts. Deaf Culture's symbolic importance lies in affirming the identity of the Deaf community and fostering a distinct way of being and relating. Legal acknowledgment, achieved through legislative and political means, is essential, yet its timing is contingent upon societal circumstances. The transmission of multidisciplinary knowledge about Deaf Culture and its connection to sign language is equally integral, ensuring a deep-rooted cultural legacy. Deaf Culture's transformative influence within the Deaf community underscores its significance in societal interactions and self-identity.

3. Is there a legal definition of Deaf Culture?

3.1. At the international level

From a jurisdictional perspective, culture is broadly defined by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2009) as a dynamic and inclusive concept encompassing all aspects of human existence, reflecting the diversity and individuality of societies. Consequently, legal interpretations of culture must consider its context and the societal norms it embodies.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006) plays a pivotal role in defining and safeguarding Deaf Culture, particularly through Articles 24(b) and 30(4), emphasizing inclusive education and the right of Deaf people to engage fully in their cultural and linguistic communities. Article 30 underscores Deaf people's rights to participate in, access, and contribute

² For example, in Latin America, many legal references describe the concept of a “deaf person” without specifying capitalization. Chilean legislation in 2021 defines a “deaf person” in two key aspects: firstly, as someone with reduced or absent auditory functionality from birth or acquired later in life, relying primarily on visual communication. They have the right to access sign language, embrace Deaf culture, and identify as part of a linguistic and cultural minority. Secondly, it defines the “deaf community” as a linguistic and cultural minority, primarily consisting of deaf individuals and organizations. People with hearing impairments and those who share the language and culture of deaf individuals can also be part of this community. In the European context, Hungary (2009), Romania (2020), and Spain (2022) provide definitions of a “deaf person” without specifying capitalization. Malta, on the other hand, uses capitalization and defines the “Deaf community” as people with hearing impairments who use Maltese Sign Language as their first or preferred language. In Africa, Kenya (2023) defines the deaf community without specifying capitalization as a socio-linguistic cultural group using Kenyan Sign Language. In Asia, South Korea (2016) defines “the deaf” as persons with hearing disabilities who use Korean sign language as their primary language. New Zealand (2006) uses capitalization and defines the “Deaf community” as people who are deaf and use New Zealand Sign Language as their primary language.

to cultural life, including expressing themselves in their preferred language, accessing cultural knowledge, and engaging in cultural activities and policymaking.

In line with the study published by Bantekas, among others (2018), Deaf Culture signifies belonging to a community that self-identifies based on the expressions inherent in its members' way of life and interactions. Within the legal context, culture is expansive and adaptive, evolving alongside broader sociopolitical and sociocultural factors, reflecting changing meanings and content.

The CRPD recognizes *Deaf Culture* and *cultural and linguistic identity* as integral to Deaf people's lives. Deaf Culture is a dynamic concept primarily expressed through language, lifestyle, and forms of expression rather than a rigid construct. It enjoys legal recognition and protection both nationally and under the CRPD, with definitions varying by national legal frameworks. Deaf Culture encompasses sociohistorical, sociocultural, and sociolinguistic elements, imbuing it with symbolic significance that reflects Deaf people's cultural and linguistic identity. Embracing this comprehensive view of Deaf Culture is vital for upholding the rights of the global Deaf community.

3.2. At the African level

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa (African Protocol)³, which was adopted in 2018⁴, is the first international legal instrument in Africa to provide a specific definition of Deaf Culture in its Article 1 (Definitions). According to the African Protocol, Deaf Culture refers to the way in which deaf people interact. It encompasses a set of social beliefs, behaviors, art, literary traditions, history, values, and shared institutions of communities that are influenced by deafness and use sign languages as the main means of communication.

The African Protocol aligns with the corresponding articles of the CRPD, emphasizing the recognition and promotion of sign language and Deaf Culture in Article 24(2)(c) (access to information) and the recognition and support of the cultural and linguistic identities of persons with disabilities, including deaf-blind people and Deaf Culture, in Article 25(2)(j) (Right to participate in cultural life).

³Source:<https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-rights-persons-disabilities-africa>

⁴ To this day, only eight African states have ratified the African Protocol, namely: Angola, Burundi, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, and South Africa.

This definition has important implications for the enjoyment and exercise of cultural rights. Therefore, while there may not be a universally accepted legal definition of Deaf Culture, the African Protocol provides a concrete definition that acknowledges the diverse characteristics and significance of Deaf Culture, sign languages, and the cultural and linguistic identities of Deaf people.

In the Kenyan context (2023)⁵, the country has a legal framework that recognizes and protects the rights related to using and accessing sign language. This legal framework also includes a specific definition and content related to Deaf Culture, which has been incorporated into the African Protocol (Article 2).⁶

Additionally, the Kenyan law sets forth objectives that aim to promote and recognize Deaf Culture within the country. Specifically, one of the objectives of the law is to “promote and recognize deaf culture in Kenya” (Article 3(i)). This demonstrates the commitment of the Kenyan government to supporting and upholding the rights and cultural identity of the Deaf community in the country. By incorporating the definition of Deaf Culture and emphasizing its promotion and recognition, the legal framework in Kenya acknowledges the importance of preserving and celebrating the diverse aspects of Deaf Culture within the country’s context.

Another example found is the case of Zimbabwe (2015)⁷. The Deaf Zimbabwe Trust also presents its bill defining Deaf Culture.⁸

Recently, in South Africa, the South African Constitution (2023) incorporated the official status of sign language alongside other languages. The South African National Deaf Association⁹ is fighting for and advocating for constitutional recognition. The definition of Deaf Culture was also found in a preparatory document that explains the concept. Among other reasons, they also justified that

Accordingly, when we proudly proclaim that all people shall have equal right to use their own languages, and to develop their own folk culture and customs, we

⁵Source: <http://www.parliament.go.ke/sites/default/files/2022-03/The%20Kenya%20Sign%20Language%20Bill%202021.pdf>

⁶ In this Act — “deaf community” means a socio-linguistical cultural group who use Kenyan Sign Language in their everyday communications and as a native or mother tongue, first or preferred language; “deaf culture” means the way deaf people interact and includes a set of social beliefs, behaviours, art, literary traditions, history, values and shared institutions of communities that are influenced by deafness; (...)

⁷ Source: <http://deafzimbabwetrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Zimbabwe-Sign-Language-Bill.pdf>

⁸ The objects of this Bill are to –

(i) promote and recognize deaf culture in Kenya. (...)

⁹ South African National Deaf Association. 2016. Report “Submission to the constitutional review Committee in terms of section 45(1)(c) of the Constitution of The republic of south africa, (ACT 108, 1996) – recommended review of section 6(1)”. Consultant. <http://www.sanda.org.za/assets/files/constitution.pdf>

include Deaf persons, South African Sign Language and Deaf culture. (...) South African Sign Language should be recognised as an expression of cultural wealth. It constitutes an important element of South African linguistic and cultural heritage. (2016, 19, 22)

3.3. At the Asian and Pacific level

In Asia and the Pacific, the concept of Deaf Culture has been explored and explained by various organizations and entities. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP 2022) highlights that culture refers to the common behavioral patterns and values shared by a group of people. In the context of Deaf Culture, it specifically refers to a group of Deaf people who are visually-oriented and form Deaf communities. Regular interactions within these communities give rise to shared patterns of behavior, values, and visually-based communication traits, which collectively form the basis of Deaf Culture.

The concept of Deaf Culture emerged in response to the historical perception of Deaf people as having a hearing disability that can be overcome through hearing technology and speech training. The development of community pride and the assertion of collective cultural identity among Deaf people are closely tied to the recognition and validation of sign languages through research, teaching, sign language arts, and critical language awareness (United Nations 2022).¹⁰

¹⁰ This report (United Nations 2022) understands Deaf Culture implies that “ (...) Language: Deaf persons acquire sign language in Deaf families and at schools or gatherings of Deaf persons, have conversations in sign language, and pass it on to others and the next generation. In addition, poems and narratives in sign language may be recorded on film or video and valued as literary works to be shared mainly but not only within the Deaf community. For example, Malaysian Deaf poet, Anthony Chong, 237 participates in mainstream literary events and has mobilized resources for the training and empowerment of Deaf women through feminist poetry using Malaysian Sign Language or Bahasa Isyarat Malaysia (BIM).” (United Nations 2022, 78)

“Values and beliefs: Deaf persons also have distinct values and beliefs, a key one being that being “Deaf” is a high-value identity rather than a deficit that requires a remedy. This is linked to attitudes towards cochlear implant surgery, perceptions of one’s hearing loss, and a common feeling that hearing persons hold greater power and have higher status in society than Deaf people. Belief in the importance of sign language, especially one’s own sign language, and shared experience of discrimination create a strong sense of collective solidarity within Deaf communities.” (United Nations 2022, 78)

“Behavioral patterns: One of the well-known behaviors of Deaf persons is to raise and flutter the hands as “visual” applause. To gain another person’s attention to communicate, a Deaf person might tap the shoulder of that person, wave a hand, or blink a light in the room to attract the person’s eye-gaze, before signing. Speaking loudly in someone’s ear, throwing objects or touching the head or hands are generally considered impolite ways to establish eye contact. Face-to-face communication with eye contact is a hallmark of Deaf culture and communication.

Tradition: In many Deaf communities, Deaf schools play a central role in historical intergenerational links and in narratives about Deaf identity. Local Deaf clubs and national organizations have a long history of convening community events in many countries. International organizations, such as the World Federation of the Deaf and the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (ICSD), host traditional events at international and regional levels.” (United Nations 2022, 79)

Lifestyle: The lifestyle of Deaf individuals has changed greatly over time, especially with the development of technology. For example, in the days before technology became part of daily life, Deaf persons used various methods to wake up in the morning, such as leaving the curtains open for daylight to stream in, or drinking extra

Entities representing the Deaf communities in Asia and the Pacific also express their understanding of Deaf Culture (Manning 2022). They highlight the intertwined nature of language and culture, emphasizing that Deaf Culture involves shared values, traditions, communication behaviors, beliefs, history, art, and humor. Deaf communities often come together to celebrate their language and culture through festivals, expos, sporting events, celebrations, and conferences (Manning 2022, 7)

In South Korea (2016)¹¹, the law that officially recognizes Korean Sign Language underlines the need to assist Deaf people in establishing their Deaf identity, succeeding, and developing Korean Sign Language, and fostering Deaf Culture (Article 2(2)). The law defines Deaf Culture as the lifestyles based on Deaf identity and a value system as a Deaf, while Deaf identity refers to self-identity as a Deaf (Article 3(4) and Article 3(5)). The Korean authorities are responsible for establishing and implementing policies to promote Deaf identity and foster Deaf Culture (Article 4(2) and Article 6(2)(8))

Currently, the Japanese Federation of the Deaf advocates for the legal recognition of their sign language.¹² They present a bill (2018) that establishes some definitions but does not directly specify the concept of Deaf Culture. However, it is implicitly understood.¹³

In the Philippines (2018)¹⁴, the legislation grants and promotes the use of sign languages that embody the specific cultural and linguistic identity of Filipino Deaf people (Section 2, policy statement). This acknowledges the importance of sign

water before going to bed to be woken by a full bladder. Nowadays, vibrating alarm clocks are widely used. Deaf persons also tend to prefer a visually calm environment with good sightlines, such as an open-plan layout between the living room and the kitchen in a home. The employment options of Deaf persons have widened. In the past, the traditional focus was on manual occupations. Today, there is more access to higher education, with training and interpreting within workplaces becoming better supported in many countries.” (United Nations 2022, 79)

¹¹ Source: https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_mobile/viewer.do?hseq=43932&type=part&key=38

¹² Source: <https://www.jfd.or.jp/en/sla>

¹³ Draft of Sign Language Act in Japan 2018 (Definition) Article 2 The term “sign language” as used in this act shall refer to the language used by people, including persons in Japan who are deaf or deaf-blind in order to lead their own lives, which has a distinctive language system and is the cultural product of linguistic activities that lead to the cultivation of rich humanity and an intellectual and fulfilling life. 2. The term “deaf” shall refer to persons who cannot hear (including person who are hard of hearing) and who use sign language in their daily and social lives. 3. The term “deaf children” shall refer children (including infants and young children) who cannot hear or are hard of hearing. 4. The “deaf community” shall refer to a community that is mainly comprised of deaf persons who use sign language in their daily and social lives.

(Culture and Sports) Article 16 The national and local governments shall implement measures to promote the development of cultural, artistic and sports activities in sign language.

Chapter 6. Miscellaneous Provisions (Sign Language Day) Article 20 Sign Language Day shall be held to encourage citizens to increase their interest in and understanding of sign language and sign language culture.

¹⁴ Source: <https://www.ncda.gov.ph/disability-laws/republic-acts/ra-11106/>

language as a key component of the cultural and linguistic identity of the Deaf community in the country.

In Fiji (2018, Article 48(3))¹⁵, Malaysia (2014, Article 28(b), 31(4)) and Nepal (2017, Article 14(3))¹⁶, their respective legislations, which align with the essence of the CRPD, affirm the right of Deaf people to recognition and support for their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including sign language and Deaf Culture. However, they do not provide a legal definition of Deaf Culture.

In New Zealand (2006)¹⁷, while the legislation does not define Deaf Culture¹⁸, Deaf Culture is described as encompassing the shared language and experiences of Deaf people, including their beliefs, attitudes, history, norms, values, literary traditions, and art. It is fundamentally about valuing and celebrating Deafhood, and members of the Deaf community have a strong connection based on participation, resource-sharing, and mutual support. (Report *Giving effect to the New Zealand Sign Language Act*, 2019, 3)¹⁹

3.4. At the North and Latin-American level

In the North American context, it is challenging to find legal references regarding Deaf Culture. However, the Deaf community in Quebec, which also advocates for the legal recognition of their language, provides a definition of Deaf Culture (2001 and 2013).²⁰

¹⁵Source:<https://www.fiji.gov.fj/getattachment/99fa9072-67f7-4532-9c32-f5a2f20c4f72/Act-4---Rights-of-Persons-with-Disabilities.aspx>

¹⁶Source:<https://dredf.org/legal-advocacy/international-disability-rights/international-laws/nepal-the-act-relating-to-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2074-2017/>

¹⁷ Source: <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2006/0018/latest/whole.html>

¹⁸ However, there are legal definitions regarding the “Deaf community” that serve as an implicit notion of Deaf Culture: “4. Interpretation In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires, — Deaf community means— (a) the distinct linguistic and cultural group of people who are deaf and who use New Zealand Sign Language as their first or preferred language; and (b) people who are deaf and who identify with the group of people referred to in paragraph (a)”

¹⁹ Source: <https://www.odi.govt.nz/nzsl/nzsl-strategy-2018-2023/>

²⁰ Source: https://www.bibliotheque.assnat.qc.ca/DepotNumerique_v2/AffichageFichier.aspx?id=83817

The definition of Deaf Culture is understood in the French language. Our translation is as follows: “A group is considered to have a distinct culture when the values, norms, behaviors, and institutions that make up the group collectively exhibit a sufficiently significant difference from another cultural group. Based on this criterion, it can be demonstrated that the characteristics, practices, values, norms, and symbols found within the Deaf community constitute a complex cultural entity distinct from that of hearing individuals. Among some of these distinctive traits are, of course, sign language, which allows for the expression of Deaf identity and the maintenance of group cohesion. Specific rules governing social interactions, the presence of symbolic affiliations facilitating the transmission of these traits and practices, and various art forms such as sign language poetry, theater, and humor inspired, among other things, by these differences in ways of doing, thinking, and being between Deaf and hearing individuals.”

In the Latin-American context, several countries recognize and affirm the cultural and linguistic rights of the Deaf community.

Colombia (2020)²¹, although it does not provide a specific definition of Deaf Culture, offers several definitions concerning the “deaf community” and “deaf people”, categorizing them in various ways.

Costa Rica (2020)²² defines sign language as the “cultural and linguistic heritage of the deaf community, and it is incorporated into the Costa Rican multilingual system”²³ (Article 2). Consequently, it defines Deaf Culture as the “set of customs, values, and forms of communication shared by deaf individuals”²⁴ (Article 3(u)). Furthermore, it not only provides a definition but also attributes rights related to Deaf Culture (Articles 4(b) and 19).

El Salvador (2014)²⁵ includes sign language in the Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage.

Mexico, in its legislation from 2011 (Articles 2(XVII) and 26(V))²⁶, acknowledges sign language as part of the linguistic heritage of the Deaf community. The authorities in Mexico promote the recognition and support of the specific cultural and linguistic identity of Deaf people, including sign language and Deaf Culture.

Chile, in its legislation from 2021 (paragraph h) and Article 26)²⁷, recognizes the right of Deaf people to access and use their language and identifies them as members of a minority linguistic and cultural community. The legislation explicitly states that sign language is the intangible heritage of Deaf people and constitutes an essential element of their individual and collective culture and identity.

Paraguay, in its 2020 legislation (Article 3)²⁸, mandates that public authorities assume responsibility for promoting the identity, culture, and linguistic rights of Deaf people.

²¹ Source: <https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=17283>

²² Source:

https://www.tse.go.cr/pdf/normativa/Ley9822_Reconocimiento_y_promocion_de_la_lengua_LESCO.pdf

²³ Translation by the author.

²⁴ Translation by the author.

²⁵ Source: <https://www.asamblea.gob.sv/sites/default/files/documents/decretos/7301994B-2F15-4D3D-97CF-B1D3F20A971A.pdf>

²⁶ Source: https://dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5191516&fecha=30/05/2011#gsc.tab=0

²⁷ Source: <https://www.bcn.cl/leychile/navegar?idNorma=1154963>

²⁸ Source: <https://www.bacn.gov.py/leyes-paraguayas/9206/ley-n-6530-otorga-reconocimiento-oficial-a-la-lengua-de-senas-paraguayas-lspy>

In Brazil, the Brazilian Deaf community applied in 2019 to include Brazilian sign language as cultural heritage and linguistic diversity. The National Inventory of Linguistic Diversity in Brazil (IPHAN 2016) recognizes sign language as one of the categories of languages that can be included as a “Brazilian cultural reference”²⁹ (Quadros et al. 2019). This recognition highlights the importance of language as a symbol of identity and belonging for social groups.

3.5. At the European level

At the European level, Deaf Culture encompasses diverse perspectives and definitions that shed light on its significance and implications.

In Belgium (Flanders), although it does not directly specify the legal concept of Deaf culture, the Advisory Committee of Flemish Sign Language stated in its memorandum (2013)³⁰ that it implies, in its view, the content of the right to culture in general. In other words, it is recommended that public authorities recognize and support Deaf arts in VGT (Flemish Sign Language). Additionally, in 2008, Flemish Sign Language was included in the Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Flanders.³¹

In France (2021), a report presented by a political party in the French Parliament highlights the two main elements that characterize the Deaf community. Deaf Culture is defined as a collection of representations, knowledge, practices, social rules, behaviors, and values specific to the social group comprising Deaf people and their relatives who communicate using sign language. Sign language serves as the core of Deaf Culture, being in use across various domains such as literature, politics, daily life, poetry, visual music, and culture. On the other hand, the concept of Deafhood (neologism was created by Paddy Ladd) is a factor contributing to the development of Deaf Culture. These two elements constitute the cultural and linguistic foundations of Sign Language in every country around the world, meeting the criteria of a full-fledged language (Rapport *Langue des Signes Française dans la Constitution de la République*, 2021).³²

In Switzerland (2022), the representative entity of the Deaf community asserts that legislation should acknowledge the right to cultural identity in

²⁹ Translation by the author.

³⁰ Source: <https://www.vlaanderen.be/cjm/nl/recht-op-cultuur>

³¹ Source: <https://immaterieelerfgoed.be/nl/erfgoederen/vlaamse-gebarentaal-vgt>

³² Source: <https://www.yanous.com/wp-content/uploads/Rapport-LSF-dans-la-Constitution-de-la-Republique.pdf>

accordance with Article 30 of the CRPD (Pärli 2022). It suggests that Swiss authorities have the potential to implement measures supporting this purpose. Conversely, a government report presents a different understanding than the representative entity's (Regula et al. 2019). The Swiss Federation of the Deaf advocates for the support and promotion of cultural activities by public authorities through appropriate legislation (Pärli 2022). They propose a revised formulation of specific norms related to Deaf Culture, incorporating recognition and support for Deaf Culture (Article 14) and funding of cultural activities by Swiss authorities (Article 15). However, the report does not explicitly define the term *Deaf Culture*, leaving room for further interpretation (Pärli 2022).

Recently, in Switzerland (2023), it was announced that the sign languages of their respective communities (French, German, and Italian) were recognized as part of UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage, joining Switzerland's inventory of living traditions.³³ The same happened in Germany (2023).³⁴

In the United Kingdom (2014), the British Association of the Deaf highlights the significance of Deaf Culture in the context of their work on sign language recognition legislation. The association states that Deaf Culture and spaces play a vital role in enabling positive self-actualization and collective identity. Deaf Culture encompasses the visual lives of Deaf people and includes shared histories, beliefs, and social practices. It offers a sense of wholeness and allows Deaf people to view themselves as cultural and linguistic beings within a collective community. Deaf Culture provides an alternative perspective to the hearing world's perception of Deaf people as disabled due to their lack of hearing. It celebrates the language and culture of the Deaf community, fostering pride and a sense of identity.

In Hungary, the constitutional law recognizes Hungarian Sign Language as "part of Hungarian culture"³⁵ (Article H(3)). This law acknowledges the power of cultural and community constructions through the sign language used by the Deaf community, ensuring their right to use, develop, and preserve sign language, as well as to promote and transmit Deaf Culture (2009, Act CXXV, preamble, Section 3(2)).³⁶

³³ Source: <https://www.sgb-fss.ch/fr/aktuell/les-langues-des-signes-reconnues-comme-patrimoine-culturel-de-lunesco/>

³⁴ Source: <https://www.unesco.de/kultur-und-natur/immaterielles-kulturerbe/immaterielles-kulturerbe-deutschland/gebaerdensprache>

³⁵ Translation by the author.

³⁶ Source: <https://sinosz.hu/sinosz-materials-in-english/sign-language/>

In Norway, the law concerning the use of Norwegian languages (2022, (section 7))³⁷ equates Norwegian Sign Language with the Norwegian language itself, recognizing it as an expression of language and culture. This equality in value focuses on the importance of Norwegian Sign Language as a cultural and linguistic component. The legal term *linguistic and cultural expression equivalent to Norway*³⁸ was explained in a recent report presented by a group of experts to the Norwegian government. The meaning and content of Deaf Culture are explained in that report in section 3.4.4. (Deaf Culture and Deaf Community).³⁹

Finland establishes the constitutional recognition of its sign language within the scope of Section 17 (Right to one's language and culture). The rights of persons using sign language and of persons in need of interpretation or translation aid owing to disability shall be guaranteed by an Act. By constitutional mandate, in 2015, sign language acquired its own legal framework (Sign Language Act 359/2015).⁴⁰ Although it does not directly concretize the notion of Deaf Culture, the law aims "to promote the linguistic rights of sign language users", that is, "Sign language user means a person whose own language is sign language." However, the explanatory reports (2011, 2014)⁴¹ provide an interested understanding of this meaning and scope of linguistic rights of sign language users. These reports clearly understand that linguistic rights are related to cultural rights because, on the one hand, language is an essential component of culture as a prerequisite for its maintenance and preservation. On the other hand, teaching one's language is also seen as a matter of learning and cultural knowledge.

In Iceland, the legislation regarding Icelandic Sign Language (2011, Article 5)⁴² promotes the development, study, teaching, and spread of this language. It also supports culture, schooling, and education for Deaf, hearing-impaired, and Deafblind people. This recognition highlights the importance of language policies and cultural support for the Deaf community.

In the case of Romanian legislation (2020)⁴³, the recognition of the Deaf community as a linguistic and cultural minority affirms their right to use, preserve,

³⁷ Source: <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/2021-05-21-42>

³⁸ Translation by the author.

³⁹ Source: <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/nou-2023-20/id2984187/?ch=1>

⁴⁰ Source: <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2015/en20150359.pdf>

⁴¹ Source: <https://oikeusministerio.fi/hanke?tunnus=OM011:00/2011> & <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/76550>

⁴² Source: <https://www.deaf.is/english/status-of-icelandic-sign-language/>

⁴³ Source: <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/224473>

and maintain their culture, particularly through the improvement and inheritance of their mother tongue. This acknowledgment highlights the importance of cultural preservation and the promotion of linguistic rights within the Deaf community.

Similarly, Maltese legislation (2016, Articles 2, 3(1) and 8(d)(h))⁴⁴ explicitly identifies sign language as the language of a distinct linguistic and cultural Deaf community. The establishment of the Sign Language Council further demonstrates a commitment to the dynamic development of Maltese Sign Language and the advancement of cultural activities related to it.

In Slovakia (1995, Article 1)⁴⁵, the legislation respects and supports the linguistic and cultural identity of the Deaf community, stressing the significance of preserving their cultural and linguistic heritage.

In Lithuania (2022), the Lithuanian Association of the Deaf presents the relevant report to justify the need for legal status for their language and, therefore, also recommends to the government the regulation of one of the various aspects, which is the recognition of the right to deaf culture and cultural and linguistic identity. Currently, it is not legally protected adequately.⁴⁶

Bulgarian legislation (2021, Articles 2(2), 5(3) and 6(3))⁴⁷ also includes provisions that address Deaf culture. It highlights the specificity of sign language and the importance of respecting and preserving the culture and identity of the Deaf community. The recognition of the cultural and linguistic identity of the Deaf community reaffirms their unique heritage and underscores the value of cultural diversity and inclusivity.

In Spain, the legislation that recognizes the use of Spanish Sign Language and Catalan Sign Language (referring to Law 27/2007 and Law 17/2010) does not specifically address aspects of Deaf Culture. Very recently, in 2023, Spain approved two important legal instruments that define the concepts of “cultural expressions linked to deaf culture and Spanish sign language” and “linguistic identity of Spanish sign languages”⁴⁸ (Resolution of May 11, 2023, and Royal Decree 674/2023, dated July 18, 2023).⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Source: <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/556/eng/pdf>

⁴⁵ Source: <https://www.zakonypreludi.sk/zz/1995-149>

⁴⁶ Source: <http://www.lkd.lt/parengta-gestu-kalbos-statuso-europos-salyse-analize>

⁴⁷ Source: <https://asp.government.bg/uploaded/files/5951-ZAKONzabylgarskiqjestovezik.pdf>

⁴⁸ Translation by the author.

⁴⁹ Source: https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2023-16650 & https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2023-12646

However, in 2019, Spain declared Sign Language as a “representative manifestation of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.”⁵⁰ This declaration is a significant step towards safeguarding Deaf Culture as a whole. The grounds for safeguarding Sign Language as intangible cultural heritage were presented to highlight its importance. It is claimed that sign language reflects a diverse worldview inherent in Deaf Culture and represents the social and cultural history of the community that uses it. Language is seen as a reflection of people’s thinking, and sign languages have the potential to encompass the entirety of human experience within their signs. The distinctive characteristics of Deaf Culture are considered an integral part of cultural richness, human creativity, and shared heritage. Understanding these characteristics is essential for the broader population to have a more comprehensive understanding of the world (Spain 2019).⁵¹

Finally, regarding the national case, Portugal’s constitutional law considers Portuguese Sign Language as a “cultural expression”⁵² (Article 74(2)(h)). This recognition implies that Portuguese Sign Language represents a sociocultural characteristic inherent to the Deaf community, transmitting and sharing the specific linguistic identity and cultural values of that community. It emphasizes the symbolic sense of belonging and the particular way of transmitting the cultural idiosyncrasy of the linguistic community (Sousa 2022a).

Examining legal frameworks globally reveals a variance in defining Deaf Culture. Most notably, cultural rights, distinct from linguistic rights, are rarely explicitly designated in legal documents, despite they acknowledge the importance of Deaf Culture implicitly. While the term *Deaf Culture* may not be explicitly stated, these laws implicitly validate a Deaf Culture with its customs and modes of transmission. By recognizing sign languages as cultural expressions, a more comprehensive view of Deaf Culture emerges, encompassing shared values, traditions, and a distinct identity within the Deaf community. This recognition of sign languages as cultural expressions goes beyond protecting linguistic rights; it also contributes to the preservation and promotion of Deaf Culture. It underscores the cultural significance of Deaf Culture and establishes a normative framework for its acknowledgment and support.

⁵⁰ Translation by the author.

⁵¹ Source: https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2019-3386

⁵² Translation by the author.

4. Contributions to the legal understanding of Deaf Culture

In his presentation, “Sign Language Peoples and the Significance of Recognition of Deaf Cultures”⁵³, Ladd (2013) subjects the current state of Deaf Culture recognition and language rights to critical scrutiny. Ladd compellingly underscores that while considerable strides have been taken towards acknowledging language rights, the conceptualization of Deaf Culture remains remarkably limited in scope. This limitation pertains to its understanding, both within the communities making use of Sign Language and across broader mainstream societies.

Taking all of these considerations into account, the term *linguistic right* enjoys widespread recognition in the global legal landscape concerning the official recognition of sign languages. In contrast, *cultural right* remains a conspicuously understudied facet, despite its rightful claim to normative parity with linguistic rights.

Within the context of Deaf Culture, the term *cultural rights* still languishes in the absence of a precise demarcation, mirroring the challenges inherent in precisely defining *Deaf Culture* itself. This definitional ambiguity poses a challenge to grasping the substance and expansive purview of cultural rights within this context.

Within this framework, the articulation of cultural rights necessitates a systematic and comprehensive approach. This encompasses the identification of the legal scaffolding enacted by states recognizing sign language, and, potentially, the existence of a comprehensive suite of cultural rights. These rights could find explicit delineation within normative provisions or remain implicit, coalescing with linguistic rights. Such an approach serves as an instrumental conduit for fostering a holistic comprehension of Deaf Culture within the legal milieu.

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) has played a crucial role in shaping the understanding of Deaf Culture within political and legal contexts. Their active participation in the development of the CRPD highlights the significance of Deaf Culture as the foundation of the Deaf community, encompassing its diverse history, traditions, and values. The CRPD incorporates Deaf Culture and sign language issues in Articles 24 and 30, recognizing the specific needs and rights of Deaf people (Kauppinen; Jokinen 2013).

⁵³ Source: <https://royalsociety.org/~media/events/2013/2013-02-28-Paddy-Ladd-presentation.pdf>

In their publication titled *Complementary or diametrically opposed: Situating Deaf Communities within 'disability' vs 'cultural and linguistic minority' constructs* (2019)⁵⁴, the WFD affirms the existence of Deaf Culture as an inherent aspect of the Deaf community. Since then, the understanding of Deaf Culture has spread globally, with Deaf communities asserting their linguistic and cultural identities. Deaf Culture encompasses shared experiences, beliefs, attitudes, history, norms, values, traditions, and art that are unique to Deaf people within a specific community. This understanding is fundamental to the WFD advocacy for the right to Deaf Culture and their celebration of the diversity that Deaf Culture brings to our world (WFD, 2019).

Recently, the WFD introduced the *Guidelines for Achieving Sign Language Rights* (2023)⁵⁵, continuing to assert that Deaf people are, conceptually, a “cultural and linguistic minority who use sign language as their primary language” (2023, 9). Furthermore, it identifies Deaf Culture as one that “Deaf culture is the culture deaf communities develop and share within the members of the community: it is formed around the use of a particular sign language and the perspective and life of deaf people in a particular context” (2023, 9).

The WFD provides examples of actions to support Deaf Culture: provisions that endorse Deaf Culture and the linguistic identity of the Deaf community should involve tangible measures and initiatives. States can also take proactive steps to promote cultural expressions within the Deaf community by acknowledging and valuing its sign languages. Furthermore, national governing bodies dedicated to the promotion of linguistic and cultural identities should explicitly include national sign languages within their mandates, acknowledging their significance and contributions. Additionally, provisions should be implemented to ensure that minority groups, including the Deaf community, are not deprived of their fundamental right to enjoy and celebrate their cultures and languages.

The incorporation of the term *Deaf Culture* into a precise legal definition represents a significant challenge. In this regard, the fundamental concept of Deaf Culture is implicitly outlined in legal documents. The normative enumeration of the constituent elements of Deaf Culture, on the other hand, primarily assumes an

⁵⁴ Source: <https://wfdeaf.org/news/wfd-position-paper-on-the-complementary-or-diametrically-opposed-situating-deaf-communities-within-disability-vs-cultural-and-linguistic-minority-constructs/>

⁵⁵ Source: <https://wfdeaf.org/guidelinesaslr/>

indicative character, refraining from being exhaustive. In other words, Deaf Culture represents a transformation of distinctive elements, characterized by their idiosyncratic and symbolic nature, which define the Deaf community. This composition predominantly encompasses sign language and the ways of being and experiencing, coexisting with other culturally relevant components.

In an effort to reasonably comprehend the legal substance of Deaf Culture, the following fundamental assumptions (e.g. Sousa (2020)), are presented:

(i) Deaf Culture materializes as an intrinsic outgrowth of Deaf historicity, manifesting itself through historical memories and narratives spanning various historical periods. Illustratively, the Milan Congress (1880) stands out as a symbolic event of resistance to oppression, configuring itself as an emblematic expression of Deaf community history.

(ii) Deaf Culture transcends the mere aggregation of cultural traits, encompassing a dimension that pertains to a way of being and experiencing Deafhood. Deaf people are considered cultural agents endowed with the capacity to externalize and express their identity uniqueness. This group intricately identifies with the identity elements inherent to the Deaf community, establishing an intrinsic connection with its singular culture.

(iii) Deaf Culture constitutes a reaffirmation of the distinctive socio-political representation of the Deaf community. Through its representative entities, the Deaf community actively advocates for the protection and preservation of sign language and its constituent elements, which bear emblematic significance in representing Deaf identity. This sociopolitical assertion plays a crucial role in the promotion and defense of the rights of the Deaf community.

Deaf Culture is a complex and multifaceted entity that, within the realm of cultural rights, encompasses a diverse spectrum of elements that characterize the Deaf community. It is crucial to understand that Deaf Culture transcends the mere adoption of cultural practices and, instead, encompasses the way of being and experiencing the world by Deaf people. Within the context of cultural rights, Deaf Culture can be conceptualized as follows: Deaf Culture comprises the sum of traditions, beliefs, artistic expressions, shared histories, sign language, and ways of life within the Deaf community. It originates from the Deaf historical experience, incorporating historical memories and narratives that span various historical periods and symbolic events, such as the Milan Congress (1880), which symbolize

resistance against the oppressions faced by the Deaf community. Additionally, Deaf Culture manifests itself in the way in which Deaf people perceive their own identity and identify with cultural elements intrinsic to the Deaf community.

5. Conclusions

Deaf Culture is a vibrant and evolving entity that deserves more comprehensive recognition and appreciation within legal systems worldwide. The legal landscape regarding Deaf Culture is marked by significant variations across countries. While many countries are aware of the importance of sign languages, there is often a noticeable gap when it comes to comprehensive development of Deaf cultural rights within legal frameworks. This prevalent focus on linguistic rights, while important, sometimes minimizes the tapestry of Deaf Culture.

The analysis of various legal contexts highlights the dynamic interpretation of the term *Deaf Culture* within legal documents. It serves as a versatile concept that encapsulates not only sign languages but also the collective identity, values, traditions, and shared experiences of Deaf people. In essence, Deaf Culture is a multidimensional entity where linguistic rights seamlessly intertwine with cultural rights. It's imperative to underscore that sign language, in addition to being a linguistic right, holds cultural significance. This duality underscores the importance of a holistic approach in recognizing and safeguarding Deaf Culture.

Despite substantial progress in acknowledging sign languages and linguistic rights, a gap remains in the legal protection and promotion of Deaf Culture. To address this gap, proactive initiatives are needed. Cultural policies should be designed with explicit support for Deaf cultural activities, encompassing not only sign language but also the broader spectrum of Deaf cultural elements. Inclusivity and collaboration with Deaf people and their representative organizations are pivotal to ensuring that cultural rights are not just acknowledged but also integrated into the fabric of society. This approach will contribute to a more equitable and inclusive world where the richness of Deaf Culture is celebrated and safeguarded as an integral part of human diversity.

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