

Appendix 1: The Iceberg of Culture

One of the most well-known models of culture is the iceberg. Its main focus is on the elements that make up culture, and on the fact, that some of these elements are very visible, whereas others are hard to discover.

The idea behind this model is that culture can be pictured as an iceberg: only a very small portion of the iceberg can be seen above the water line. This top of the iceberg is supported by the much larger part of the iceberg, underneath the water line and therefore invisible. Nonetheless, this lower part of the iceberg is the powerful foundation. Also in culture, there are some visible parts: architecture, art, cooking, music, language, just to name a few. But the powerful foundations of culture are more difficult to spot: the history of the group of people that hold the culture, their norms, values, basic assumptions about space, nature, time, etc. The iceberg model implies that the visible parts of culture are just expressions of its invisible parts. It also points out, how difficult it is at times to understand people with different cultural backgrounds – because we may spot the visible parts of “their iceberg”, but we cannot immediately see what are the foundations that these parts rest upon.