

Overview:

One aspect of cultural difference is the use of land/space, which is often dictated by both formal laws and informal practices. This activity uses regional variation in what are called fence laws ("fence in" or "fence out") to get participants talking about how their own and other cultures think about and use land/space. The facilitator will first introduce the concept of fence in/fence out and provide examples from both ends of the spectrum. Then, participants will identify where their own culture falls on the spectrum and reflect on how historical and cultural norms/values determine the use of land/space.

Background and Information:

This activity was created by Dr. Kris Acheson-Clair, CILMAR.

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Articulate cultural self-awareness of local laws, customs, and the history that has shaped them.
2. Identify cultural differences in peoples' relationships to land.
3. Discuss conflicts that could arise when newcomers to a community do not share local values and norms when it comes to land use.

Time:

45 minutes

Group Size:

Entire group

Materials:

Computer/tablet, projector, and Fence In or Fence Out PowerPoint (in [Downloads](#)).

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Denial
- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:**Cultural Self-Awareness:**

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

Knowledge of Cultural Worldview Frameworks:

- To demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs & practices.

Activity Instructions:

1. Use the slides in the Fence In or Fence Out PowerPoint to introduce a spectrum along which cultures can be located according to their formal laws and/or informal practices in terms of the use of space. Slides 1-3 introduce the fence in/fence out spectrum and provide descriptions/examples of land use in both fence in and fence out cultures.
2. Use slide 5 to help participants determine where their own communities lie on the fence in/fence out spectrum. It is recommended that the facilitator steer participants away from national culture for this exercise because regional variations often exist. Ask participants the following questions to get them thinking:
 - Let's say you are walking your dog... Do you have to keep them on a leash, or is it other people's responsibility to protect areas they don't want animals to come in?
 - Let's say you are hiking across country... Does property have to be posted for trespassing, or are you automatically trespassing if you are not on a road or public trail?
3. Divide participants into small groups and ask them to discuss the following prompts (also on slide 6):
 - Share your communities' locations on the spectrum with your group and illustrate your reasons for that placement with specific, concrete examples of laws, norms for behavior, or a story from your past experience.
 - Note commonalities and variation within your group. How similar or different are your cultural groups and communities?
 - Think analytically about causes: Discuss the historical, geographical, religious, and any other factors that you think may have played a role in your communities' relationships to land.
4. Debrief with the entire group using the following questions (also on slide 7):
 - How do newcomers to your communities learn about these expectations for land use? Is there always an assumption of assimilation (adapt or else)?
 - How strictly are the norms followed? What are the consequences when expectations are violated? Does motive matter?
 - How are conflicts over land use resolved in your communities?
 - *Optional question:* What happens when two different communities claim the same space for different purposes (most often border disputes, but sometimes over "holy" ground) and want to apply different rules for land use or access? How do these disputes generally get solved? Are there other potential solutions?

Related Tools:

Similar tools:

- [Draw a House](#)
- [For Whom the Cowbell Tolls](#)
- [Mental Mapping](#)