

CULTURAL INDUSTRIES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS – FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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Abstract. This article aims to analyse recent evolutions among some of the main constituent elements of cultural diplomacy in 2020. As an element of innovation, the article debates a new possible relevant concept, respectively “Industries/technologies with a cultural content” as an increasingly important element in creating a presence abroad into the minds of foreign audience.

The academic debate related to the usefulness of cultural diplomacy actions, the difference between *de facto* cultural diplomacy and that represented by actions organized by the governmental apparatus is considered. At the end, a series of possible evolution scenarios are proposed in the short-term future of the external cultural representation and its role in the contemporary international relations.

Keywords: *International Relations; Cultural Diplomacy; Cultural Industries; Conflict Prevention*

Speaking of *soft power* and persuasion capabilities in international relations, the *cultural industries* and especially the *industries/technologies with a cultural content* are at the core of a *de facto* external imagistic capital. They act discreetly and effectively on the minds of individuals and speak by themselves about the culture and civilization of a country, without being susceptible of propaganda. The propagandistic language is difficult to avoid and difficult to digest by the audience and is identifiable in most external cultural actions financed by governments. *De facto* cultural diplomacy through cultural industries can also avoid the question of “who is accredited or entitled” to define what is relevant or representative for a nation’s national character or culture. The capacity for cultural persuasion and branding of *industries/technologies with a cultural content* is stronger than the one of *cultural industries* as such being generated by a world where economic interests and the *language of money* prevail political ideologies.

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The Concepts

The concept *creative industries* emerged in 1998 in the UK and was widely popularized by John Howkins in his book *Creative Economy*¹. In his book Howkins explain the way *creative industries* expanded steadily over the past two decades to cover both the cultural industries primarily those involving intellectual property and copyright but also industries and technologies to which design offers a cultural content and involving constant innovation². The concept of *creative industries* or *creative economy* overlaps with a post-industrial reality in which *knowledge economy* has become the spearhead of economic growth in developed countries or in countries aspiring to this status. Some practitioners disapprove of the use of the term *cultural diplomacy*, which refers directly to the government sphere and the dependence on funding for it, given that most *de facto* actions and implicitly *de facto* changes come from outside the government sphere. The concept of *cultural diplomacy* itself is challenged, as I noticed other terminology is often preferred in governmental documents and academic literature: *international cultural relations*, *cultural exchanges*, *branding*, *cultural collaboration*, *knowledge diplomacy*.

The concept of *culture* as such has undergone significant changes with the inclusion of new material and immaterial values such as *gastronomy*, *fashion*, *technological culture* and especially *lifestyle*, increasingly overlapping the concept of *civilization*³.

Industries/technologies with cultural content would be those industries mainly in the technological field which at the level of concept and design are associated with a certain culture, an association usually intentional if produces comparative advantages. For example, in the automotive industry Jaguar, Rover or Rolls Royce cars are associated with the English culture, the interior and exterior design carefully reflects an English lifestyle and the purchase decision is largely associated with that particular design/style. Even when Rover and Jaguar were purchased by German or Malaysian companies, they were trying their best to keep the “Englishness” of those products. The same stands for Italian auto-moto industry (Alfa Romeo, Lancia, Ferrari, Motta Guzzi, Ducati etc.), the fashion industry for France, interior design products for the Scandinavians, stylish mechanic watches for the Swiss, etc. Conceptually, “Industries/technologies with cultural content” revolve around the concept of branding, a *de facto* branding, very effective. It demonstrates the attention governments should pay to this fertile source of “international prestige” even if this source of prestige is beyond government control. The efforts invested in technologies and industries with cultural content must go hand in hand with efforts invested in the Cultural industries as such. For example, the investments in international cultural events would be of little effect

¹ John Howkins, *The Creative Economy: How people make money from ideas*. London: Penguin, 2001.

² *Ibidem*.

³ UNESCO, “World Report Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue”, 2009, p. 269, available on line: https://www.un.org/en/events/culturaldiversityday/pdf/Investing_in_cultural_diversity.pdf, accessed 11/09/2020.

(if any) if the technological products or services *made in Romania* were perceived as poor in quality or dull. Customers nowadays have more expectations than ever about what their favourite brands (I-Style, Nike, Alfa Romeo etc.) represent in cultural terms. The role that brands play in society and implicitly in the international prestige they are associated with (if any) involves an increased focus on “storytelling”, context and cultural relevance. In a post-industrial society, IT hardware, car manufacturers, fashion industry must be as concerned with the cultural impact. Given the strategic importance for the nation’s branding governments may also step-in discreetly if, when and where needed, with some incentives and eventual support.

Further clarifications are needed when we define today the very concept of *cultural diplomacy*. Some forms of cultural representations are meant to emphasize, under the label of *national specificity*, the differences in *superior* versus *inferior*, *civilized* versus *primitive* attitude. It is a discourse not necessarily meant for the foreign audience but rather for the audience of expats living in that particular country and in the end a form of propaganda with some outputs but zero results as far as *cultural diplomacy* is concerned. A genuine *cultural diplomacy* involves the transmission of a cultural and artistic experience that stimulates a culture of understanding, empathy and respect for different ways of thinking, a culture of reconciliation with beneficial political and economic effects. Adapting to contemporary needs the concept of *cultural diplomacy* also involves the inclusion of *cultural identities* that transcend the nation in its Weberian sense of the term. And it is not just about local and regional identities in cross-border areas, but about cultural identities related to *generation*, *socio-economic*, *politic* or *religious* affiliation. Globalization and cross-border mobility are only deepening the phenomenon.

In 2020 the academic literature concerning *cultural diplomacy* and *cultural industries* remains *Eurocentric*, or *Western-centric*. The non-Western cultural models applied to the cultural dimension of international relations must be, if not adopted, at least taken into consideration and acknowledged. *Confucianism* does not conflict with the Western-centric models. It only proposes to achieve the ultimate goal of “eternal peace” using a different recipe. The East Asian inspired theory of international relations (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean etc.) still awaits to enter the mainstream of IR theory.

Some “Unwanted” Effects and Possible Solutions

Political valorisation and the commercialization of culture is not a new phenomenon. What is new is the scale of the phenomenon and its capacity to penetrate the daily life of individuals through an increased access to information and transnational mobility. The *kitsch* is the “price” paid for “democratizing” the access to culture and over-valuing the “marketing culture”. Any form of folklore taken out of the vernacular and the daily life of a community hardly avoids a more or less deplorable aesthetic degradation. The folk show organized on the stage of an exhibition stand is a form of degradation of the initial cultural act

with deep meanings at its origins and in its native environment. Probably the supreme form of cultural diplomacy and exposure of the national cultural heritage would be cultural tourism directed to those areas where folk culture and the self-image desired by a nation exist in a form as close as possible to the vernacular. There are nowadays few places where we can find something like this and the places where local communities live in the “la long durée d’histoire” are isolated, lacking infrastructure and the comfort expected by potential tourists. Rehabilitation, reinterpretation of the elements of identity to the conditions of modern life seems to be the solution but its implementation is difficult, requires additional funds (architect, landscaper, interior designer) and a level of aesthetic culture rarely found outside developed countries. The *heritage industry* with all the “perverse” effects mentioned is the solution of viable cultural diplomacy and economic revitalization of many areas; however, the state must step in providing clear regulations, expertise and incentives for authenticity, use of environmentally friendly traditional technologies, and design solutions which maintain and valorise the local character.

I also note the excessive noise and unpleasant ostentation characterizing many “theme parks”, national pavilions or “exhibitions”, which makes them (in my view) a less inspired form of external exposure and valorisation for a national culture. Those public funds may be redirected towards good quality translations of representative literature works, by incentives for the integration of traditional clothing (if compatible) in the fashion industry and industrial design, or by an unobtrusive but permanent direct exposure of the foreign public to a particular culture; one of the best case study through my knowledge being the “Book corner” in commercial libraries (often connected, in the big cities, with a cafeteria). The public funds used for some costly but inactive (or not active enough) cultural institutes abroad may be redirected towards other forms of “cultural presence” abroad, less bureaucratic but much more effective in terms of result (a real cultural presence abroad, a country and its culture better known and appreciated by the foreign audience).

The Constructivist Paradigm

The culture valued by cultural industries, industries with cultural content, branding and cultural diplomacy can contribute to a “lasting peace” in which the logic of “zero-sum game” is replaced by a logic of common interests. The already classic Franco-German example of peace and reconciliation can be useful but not generalized. It can be a useful source of inspiration not as “universal recipe”. In the Franco-German case *culture, educational exchanges, and reconciliatory discourses* were only to top of the “iceberg” an “iceberg” of economic measures and American money (the Marshall fund). The European integration also is not a magic formula applicable anywhere in the world, especially in areas where cleavages of socio-economic development have created significant cultural differences (Northern and Southern Mediterranean, Southeast Asia). Some practices are universal, others are again about imposing European or Western perceptions on a world that is unprepared or unwilling to accept them in the formula prescribed by the West.

The *security communities* invoked by the constructivist paradigm as defined by Karl Deutsch⁴ and more recently by Emanuel Adler are based on a pragmatic economic dimension which never lacks the cultural dimension⁵. In this case, cultural industries represent the quintessence of this mixture between economic and cultural interests. At the level of 2020, the constructivist approach to international security issues is no longer an unconventional and unconsecrated approach in academia. Much has been written in the last two decades about the “culturalization” of the economy and the “economization” of culture, about the effects of cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, and finally everything that revolves around the concept of *Soft Power* theorized by Joseph Nye⁶. International security approached from a constructivist perspective face research methodology difficulty related to the nature of the research object. Barometers that record identity behaviours or the effects of actions with a cultural dimension are debatable due to the complexity and terminological ambiguity of everything related to culture and last but not least the “cause – effect” issue. Mindsets changes over generations and in fact any change is difficult to demonstrate that is the sole result of a particular action (in this case cultural diplomacy). A temporal dimension is needed as well as considering as many as possible disruptive external factors. For example, a Romanian citizen who committed a crime in Italy, widely reported on the front page of the peninsular press, will annihilate the positive effects of a whole complex and expensive arsenal of cultural diplomacy actions of the Romanian state in Italy.

Considerations Regarding CD's Contemporary Status and Future Predictions

It is expected that *cultural industries* as part of public or *cultural diplomacy* (institutionalized but especially un-institutionalized) will further facilitate regional integration through mutual knowledge and familiarization with the values of other cultures. They will also facilitate the creation of a sense of economic and security interests which do not necessarily imply significant changes in identity practices. At the same time, we will further witness a continuation of previous practices and policies characterized by the organization of cultural events, protectionist practices, endless meetings workshops and conferences with more or less sterile statements. This scenario leaves to the effects of globalization the uninterrupted access to information and mutual knowledge unfiltered by the ideologies of various political regimes. There are also limits to “mutual cultural awareness” as the “fascination” with a certain culture does not exclude the potential conflict by virtue of a mechanism that involves a lethal mixture of love and hate. The fascination for American and Western cultural products in general does not

⁴ Emmanuel Adler & Michael Barnett, “Security communities in theoretical perspective”, in E. Adler & M. Barnett (Eds.), *Security Communities* (Cambridge Studies in International Relations). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 3-28.

⁵ Emanuel Adler, “Imagined (Security) Communities”, *Millennium Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 26/2, 1997, pp. 249-277.

⁶ Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The means to success in world politics*. Public Affairs, 2004.

exclude the hate that a part of the society in the Arab states have towards the West, especially when this West is inaccessible through travel restrictions, etc. In this case, the line between love and hate is thin.

At the level of 2020 *cultural diplomacy* through *cultural industries* implies a trinomial mixture: politics/security (soft power), cultural identity (a social dimension) and finally the knowledge economy/creative economy (cultural industries, industries with a cultural content, cultural tourism, etc).

The state concern regarding cultural identity, cultural heritage just like the ecological aspects became a part of the daily political discourses and political strategies including those related to national security. The new “knowledge economy” speaks not only about the representational capacities of cultural heritage but also about the “accumulation of cultural capital” and its efficient production and distribution internationally⁷. We are also witnessing a certain phenomenon of hybridization of national cultures an opportunity and a threat to national identities. From a communication perspective, the exposition of not only traditional cultural values but also those relevant to today’s society in a certain country must be done with an intelligible and attractive language and manner otherwise it will remain in the “ivory tower” accessible only to a bunch of “initiates” (which are usually familiarized enough with each other culture). The “ordinary” citizens which are after all those who pay for the governmental cultural representation abroad must considers themselves culturally represented by a certain kind of interpretation of national cultural values. And here intervenes the issue of elitism. Sometimes decision makers chose highly sophisticated postmodern art forms considering that the average tax payer is not refined, “culturally literate” enough to be consulted. They may have a point here unless is about public funds.

Globalization in the field of culture does not only mean “Americanization” but to a significant extent “Hybridization” and probably an instrument of access to the world stage for marginalized cultures (see “K Pop” for the Korean *cultural diplomacy*). The reluctance of intellectuals to this process reappears when it comes to forms of unnatural cultural hybridization. They are usually manufactured by corporations with little concern (if any) to aspects of cultural identity unless is profitable and meets the customer expectation in the target market⁸. Government actions such as an exhibition or a folklore show do little to know a country in the absence of real interaction between individuals (through expat communities or the influx of tourists outside tourist enclaves). Cultural events themselves can be organized starting from a strategy designed to promote interaction, inter-activity and dialogue. However, the interaction between individuals does not always produce positive cultural dividends. EU educational programs such as Erasmus were highly successful in this regard. Equally, what is applicable to the cultural diplomacy strategies of cultures from the dominant Anglo-Saxon cultural area is not necessarily valid for other cultures. “Panda diplomacy” practiced by the PR

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, “The forms of capital”, in J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York, Greenwood, 1986, pp. 241-258.

⁸ Koichi Iwabuchi, “Marketing ‘Japan’: Japanese cultural presence under a global gaze” in *The Design Culture Reader*, editor Ben Highmore, Routledge, Abingdon Oxon UK, 2009, pp. 213-232.

China or gastronomic diplomacy for Turkey, culture diplomacy or state-of-the-art technological products explicitly associated with a particular country (like Samsung for Korea or Skype for Estonia) are among the best known and quoted examples for “non-main-stream” cultures.

Interesting, interpretations of the CD are in the light of a potential hierarchy of international prestige, more or less correlated with Simon Anholt’s National Brand Index⁹. Regardless the democratized access to information, and facile trans-continental travel having a remarkable cultural heritage (material and immaterial) will remain the necessary but not the sufficient condition for a successful CD (in the Soft Power dimension and the economic dimension). Many small countries need an “amplifier” (usually a large culture) to reach the global stage and the potential capital to invest in cultural and creative industries. The Internet has simplified this paradigm, but the success of branding companies (usually located in London) that small country governments (like Lithuania, Estonia, Mongolia) compete to hire with generous contracts demonstrates the reality of the phenomenon. Hosting a major sport event or a highly successful film may “catapult” a certain destination and its culture to the attention of the world wide public and implicitly potential investors. New Zealand has seen a massive influx of capital and investment in cultural tourism since the success of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy filmed in this country, and Tibet has once again come to the attention of the world after the success of the film *7 Years in Tibet*. Even the negative cultural advertising that curls the aesthetics of the ugly in the “Baudlerian” sense of the term expressed by the film “Borat”¹⁰ had a positive impact on the influx of tourists to Kazakhstan more impressed by the potential to see a Central Asian country as an exotic culture than the modern capital of steel, concrete and glass built in the last 20 years.

The recent Covid 2019 Pandemic and its tool on international travel and tourism involves an increased adaptability to the needs of digital age. For governments it mainly involves finding new and inspired ways of “engagement” with the external audience, co-opting influencers in social media networks, facilitating the blogosphere while trying as much as possible to maintain the distance (or rather to leave the impression that a government is not behind a certain social media campaign).

As an ending remark I noticed as an issue on the academic debate the excess of theorizing at the expense of concrete examples of good practice, teamwork and investments in the *economics of culture*. A proper recognition of the role that the privately funded cultural industries, cultural and creative businesses play in shaping the external image of a country, its culture and civilization is needed. The causal relationship between CD action and effect remains one of the most

⁹ Simon Anholt, “Simon Anholt on Competitive Identity, the Good Country Equation, and Place Branding 2.0”, TPBO – Place Brand Observer interview from 2 April 2020, published on line <https://placebrandobserver.com/simon-anholt-interview/>, accessed 2.10.2020.

¹⁰ Richard Weitz, “Kazakhstan and the New International Politics of Eurasia”, *Silk Road Paper*, July 2008, p. 100, available on line: https://isdpeu.org/content/uploads/publications/2008_weitz_kazakhstan-and-the-new-international-politics.pdf accessed 3.10.2020.

important issues related to the financing of relevant projects. Usually the “output” indicators are considered, the simple numbers and less the result indicators. The number of participants in a symposium conference or the number of entrances to a museum or show is not irrelevant but says little about increasing the “image capital” of a country, city, region, institutions. Periodically organized qualitative analyses can be either partially the solution to this problem. Equally, each country must consider at the level of government policies for economic if not ideological aspects the aspects of cultural deficit, namely how much it imports from other cultures and how much it exports from its own culture. Again, this kind of analysis suffers from superficiality because it uses rule restrictive definitions of the cultural phenomenon.

Finally, it is incorrect and unproductive to ask for miracle solutions from CD. Simply exposing the values of a national culture for the pleasure of exposing them may have a better persuasive effect than an explicit CD action.

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