
ZDRAVKO MLINAR

CREATIVITY AND SMALL NATIONS*

Spiritual Creativity in Conflict with National Frameworks — Restricted Means, Restricted Usability, Several Communications

The smallness of a nation very directly determines the frameworks and stimulæ of its spiritual production. If, on the one hand, we have the problem of securing the material means needed, for instance, for scientific-research work, we can conclude at the same time that the results of scientific work within a small nation cannot find corresponding means of expression and an adequate public which would guarantee their *raison d'être*.

It should first of all be noted that we are witnesses of a *permanent crisis* which appears here only from the aspect of the possibility of *publishing the results of scientific work*. We reach the contradictory, and, we could say, absurd situation in which, under conditions when it is possible only with supreme efforts to secure the financial means for the implementation of certain scientific research or studies, the same studies, when completed, in most cases *remain unpublished*, which means that they are *not available* to potential users either in the Slovenian language region or in the other republics and abroad. Such a *severing of communications*, naturally makes it *a priori* impossible to achieve basic goals and reasons for the support and development of scientific work in general. *In such a situation scientific work becomes an end in itself, the financial burden for the support of this activity, instead of relying on potential users and true usefulness, (whether completely practically, or purely generally-theoretically viewed) falls on the burden of mere high awareness and general slogans on the (great) importance of scientific work.*¹

* Part of *Spiritual Creativity in Conflict with the Frameworks of the Small Nation*, a study by Dr. Zdravko Mlinar.

¹) It is the generally prevalent conviction that the constant problem of how to secure sufficient means reflects the fact that we have still not attained a high

This crisis, too, is not fully independent of the true size of the national community on the one hand, and of the prevailing concept of what the overall communications system within and outside the boundaries of this community should be on the other. We can illustrate both with concrete examples. On the one hand, it is evident that, let us say, the publication of the results of scientific work — particularly in highly specialized fields — represents no problem whatsoever in countries with large language regions, such as, for instance, the United States and the Soviet Union. In this connection I should note that the phase of publication in the United States, for instance, does not — naturally, with the assumption of the presence of a certain standard quality — represent an additional obstacle in the overall cycle which should be traversed by intellectual creativity and development in a given field. The precise opposite, in fact, holds true. Publishing houses establish direct contacts with thousands upon thousands of scientific and cultural creators, follow their work, and evince interest in possible results even before the research processes have entered their final phase.

Such a system, therefore, alleviates and stimulates to the fullest degree everything that is creative, new, and that represents a certain value, a certain contribution.

As can be seen, the entire complex of questions is mutually inter-dependent. On the one hand, small social systems restrict the possibilities for the material support of scientific work — which, by its character is predominantly relevant to a considerably wide circle determined by the frontiers of the national community; this unavoidably causes a *discrepancy* between available *material possibilities* a *small nation* can extend for the publication of the results of intellectual work, and the considerably *higher potential usability, the wider scope* (or even universal character of results), in which the results achieved are usable, i.e. relevant.

On the other hand, we nowadays have, as we have already noted, the big countries, which represent relatively integrated social systems in enormous areas, and which can far more easily stimulate and assert the results of work. In the contemporary world a characteristic course of communications appears, which reflects precisely the division into large and small so-

level of economic development. It is forgotten that hence the participation — for the present still unsuccessful — of spiritual production in world frameworks, in which alone it can seek its true justification and need, is all the more important.

ciopolitical systems. In all fields of social life, and particularly in scientific work, communications are not evenly distributed among nations, nor are they proportionate to the number of the population belonging to various nationalities. The orientation and channelling of scientific communications of numerically small nations and countries towards selected regions of the entire world, such as, for instance, the USA, the Soviet Union, and perhaps some others, is being increasingly asserted as a general tendency. A situation, therefore, emerges, in which the members of small nations enter into increasingly direct contacts with scientists or scientific institutions of one or two of the largest countries, which have already achieved a high level of development. At the same time, however, direct contacts between scientific workers in various smaller nations are either completely laid aside, or relatively lose in significance. It occurs with increasing frequency that even the scientists of neighbouring countries are not informed of the activities of one or the other on the basis of direct mutual contacts, but instead on the basis of the literature and publications they receive from other direct contacts — for instance with scientific workers in the USA, etc.

One of the main reasons for such a situation, once again — is language. It is, naturally, far *more rational* for each scientific worker to communicate in one, or at least in *as few languages as possible*. This has given rise to the general tendency towards nationalization — in the sense that *those works which have been published in the languages through which it is possible to communicate with the largest number of people automatically attain a greater role*.

Scientific achievements published in Slovenian, Hungarian, or a similar language will probably remain completely unknown, even in Italy and Austria. If, however, they are published in English, they have a clear path to practically all major scientific institutions throughout the world. It is evident that in the latter case a whole series of other *stimulative consequences* emerges at the same time, essentially opening up and expanding opportunities for the assertion and *propagation of everything creative and scientifically valid*.

THE ELEMENTS OF THE OCCLUSION OF A NATION: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES

It is evident from what has so far been stated that the members of small nations are in a considerably less favourable position, that they have less opportunity either for development

or for the assertion of scientific work. One should, however, go a step further and ask oneself what the possibilities are for reducing unwanted consequences; one should seek possibilities of *doing away with interruptions in the courses of communication* which appear on national frontiers, i.e., on the frontiers of a given language region.

In this respect one should not expect that we can expand and intensify communications over national boundaries without a thorough re-orientation to the *increased use of world languages in all forms of communication*.

It is however, neither our goal, nor do we have the possibilities of entering here into an analysis of the knowledge of foreign languages. However, it does seem necessary to illustrate a little more concretely the lagging behind which is noticeable in this field.

The lagging behind in the active participation of our science and culture in world frameworks is not only a consequence of the difficulties which appear in connection with the numerical smallness of the nation, but also of — at least — two other circumstances. On the one hand we have the consequences which stem from the basic economic and political orientation of the first period (10 to 15 years) following World War II. The prevailing *conception of a closed market system* and moving away from market-commodity relations, parallel to the intensification of political and ideological differences in inter-state relations, all found expression in the relatively acute occlusion of Yugoslavia and Slovenia from the wider regions of Europe. The exchange of ideas, goods and services over state frontiers did not increase in that period as could have been expected with regard to general laws compared to the pre-war state. That was the time of the strongest statism, and it is no accident that precisely at that time the Yugoslav society represented the proportionately most tightly closed social system. It is exactly the *closed system*, namely, which offers the best conditions of acquiring the *monopolization of authority*. The opposite holds true at the same time, of course, i.e. the freer and more developed the courses of communications (both) through state and national frontiers, the more favourable the conditions for the democratization of society.

On the other hand, however, we should draw attention to the fact that certain *structural changes in the world*, certain shifts in the cultural, scientific and political role of individual European and non-European countries, indirectly influence the degree of openness of

Slovenia and Yugoslavia towards the outside world. One should reckon with the fact that "relationship of forces" among the larger countries (nations, states) constantly shifts in favour of (or against) one or the other, whether in reference to economic power, political influence, or cultural and scientific creativity.

The question arises in this connection of whether Slovenia and Yugoslavia adequately follow these changes, or link themselves, perhaps by inertia, to certain regions in the world — which undoubtedly played a significant part in the past, but which at present no longer represent the leaders in the processes of the socio-economic development of the world? One of the *changes in the world constellation of "forces"*, for instance, relates to the relative reduction of the significance of the role of dissected, unintegrated Europe and its central, proportionately small countries (as opposed to the Soviet Union and the United States). The claim that this change was faster than the corresponding *process of adaptation, i.e. re-channelling* and expansion of our traditional *courses of communication* to new (language) areas is probably well-founded. At least in the field of scientific work, there is an obvious lagging behind of the European countries which have not yet succeeded in organizing on a higher level which would surpass narrow national frameworks.

In reference to the role of language, we have noted that we are practically dealing with two aspects: first, the question of the scope of *general knowledge of foreign languages* which makes possible the surmounting of national frontiers and the elimination of occlusion of nations; no less significant, however, is the second, more specific issue, that of how much the *expanded knowledge of individual languages* corresponds to the true, functional needs existing in individual fields, i.e., branches of activity.

WHAT IS CONTAINED IN THE PARTICIPATION OF SCIENTIFIC AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION IN THE INTERNATIONAL SPHERE

Several circumstances warn us that there are increasingly evident contradictions between ethno-centric tendencies which are reflected in certain phenomena of occlusion and self-sufficiency on the one hand, and the functional demands relevant to the work and development of science, that is, education, which demands universal standards, an unrestricted flow of ideas, free mobility in space in international standards, etc., on the other — particularly in relation to scientific-research and instru-

ction work at universities and higher schools. Numerous phenomena indicate that practice hitherto has neither fulfilled certain conditions of a more active participation of institutions of higher education and individuals in world events in this field, nor has a clear awareness emerged of the fact that we are generally dealing with phenomena which considerably hinder the further development of science and culture. The common denominator of these phenomena is, to a great extent — once more the use of the Slovenian language.

Whether we are dealing with literature, i.e. textbooks prescribed for students of Ljubljana University and other higher schools, with cooperation between scientific workers in other countries in educational and research work and our scientists, or with the inclusion of foreign students in various education programmes, whether in reference to the employment of our graduates abroad, etc. etc. — it is once more revealed to us that in the long run, we are (also) dealing with the problem of language.

We do not solely encounter this problem, however, when we are studying the brakes on the development of science and its greater role in a wider social scope, but also when we are primarily setting out from the motives of national self-preservation and asserting them — in one way or another — in a given field of endeavour. In this sense, namely, we comprehend the measure of the Constitutional Court of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, which decided to check up on the use of non-Slovenian textbooks in university teaching — evidently not because foreign literature is insufficiently used, but far more from a concern for the limited use of the Slovenian language, and because of the presence of works in foreign languages on the list of obligatory students' literature.³⁾

We are obviously dealing here with a divergent tendency and with different interpretations of objectively the same phenomena and processes. Consequently, only detailed analyses can help us to reach a conclusion on how to settle the contradictions between opposite values, and how consciously to channel the further development of that field. Let us glance at some concrete aspects of this complex set of problems.

³⁾ The true state in reference to the use of non-Slovenian textbooks during studies at the University indicates wide differences among faculties: some faculties, that is, departments and courses of study, require a larger number of books in more foreign languages, while others do not provide for the use of any foreign textbooks whatsoever for their students. (A statement from the report prepared by the Chancellors' office at the request of the Constitutional Court.)

We can take as our point of departure the general trend of the expansion of integration processes which is being asserted as "a differentiation of the homogeneous and the assimilation of the heterogeneous in the course of social development. One of the aspects of these processes deals with the increasing mobility of people in terms of space, and with the increasing interchange of ideas, goods and services.

The tendency towards the exclusive use of the Slovenian language — whether intentionally or not — comes into conflict with such a general trend, and thus indirectly leads to stagnation and straggling. As precisely scientific and teaching work at university level — by its very character — depends most on the overall creativity in world standards, all restrictions in this field are, naturally, manifested most quickly and in their most negative aspects.

Practice hitherto had retained many characteristics in the work of — even the highest — scientific and educational institutions which pre-suppose the concept of a nation as a closed social system. Scientific workers at the University are almost exclusively taken from the ranks of their own graduated students, while students only exceptionally come from other countries.

Even post-graduate studies and studies in preparation for a doctorate in science do not, as a rule, include the most capable specialist-scientists from other countries.

If we observe the *inclusion of the most capable people* — either students or professors — as an opportunity for building up a creative scientific and cultural centre, which can "dynamize" the entire society and represent the intellectual potential of its development, — if we thus view the inclusion of students and professors (that is, not only as a sort of financial burden which inertly appears in various estimates from year to year), then, of course (a mere) *language difference cannot be sufficient reason* not to include capable cadres from other countries, and — of course — from other republics, in the scientific-research and educational work of the University.

The further development of science will unavoidably intensify the need for studies at the highest level (for Masters' degrees doctorates, and post doctorates). It is precisely in the connection that the problem of the use of the Slovenian language will appear first and most clearly. If at lower levels of education (elementary school, secondary school, studies up

to graduation at higher and high schools — i. e. faculties) it is proportionately easier to operate upon the assumption of a nation as a closed social system, this becomes far more difficult, and today already practically impossible, when dealing with the highest, that is, the *supreme level* of scientific-research and educational work. At this level a proportionately high level of specialization inordinately appears, which means at the same time that only a smaller number of individuals, or perhaps only one individual, is dealing with the subject-matter of a given specialized field, i. e. scientific discipline, within the framework of the entire University and the Republic of Slovenia. At the same time, there is a growing number of fields of specialization for which even the entire University (nation) — for instance in Ljubljana — has no trained cadres or required means.

All this indicates the imperative need, in future, for even Ljubljana University to open up increasingly towards external factors, and link up with similar institutions and individuals in those parts of the world where individual scientific branches are most highly developed.

In this connection the question arises of whether the educational and scientific workers of Ljubljana University will — only unilaterally — go abroad, either for specialization or as recognized experts and scientists who will extend assistance to others and participate in the work of corresponding institutions in foreign countries, or whether the opposite process will occur, i. e. the participation of foreign scientists and experts in the work of our University?

It is hard to conceive that we could restrict ourselves to only one of these two processes. If this is the case, then we are once more faced with the practical question of how to have foreign scientists participate in educational and research work here. Here we are dealing with a question which may, superficially, seem unessential, but which is basically capable of preventing the active participation of Ljubljana University in the world processes of scientific development. The question is, namely, whether we will include in scientific and educational work at the Slovenian university only those individuals who will be prepared to sacrifice enough time to learn the Slovenian language, and only thus to be able to communicate in our "sphere"?

Were we living in times when the transfer from one university to another represented a vital decision, it would, naturally, be justified

to expect that those who intend to work, for instance, at Ljubljana University will, when moving from another language region, take upon themselves the burden required in connection with the mastering of the Slovenian language (for instance — the inclusion of an emigrant from Russia after World War I). In contemporary industrially developed countries, however, *a mobility in space is an accompanying feature of the high dynamism of overall social life and development.* The transfer from one university throughout the entire life of an individual appear as a singular situation in the life of the individual scientific worker, but is a more or less constantly present possibility, i.e. requirement, particularly for supreme scientific workers. In a certain sense mobility is a synonym for a dynamic personality, just as *remaining in one place* (being tied to one university throughout the entire life of an individual) is being taken with increasing frequency as a sign of *stagnation, lagging behind, or incompetence.*

On the basis of all that has been said, we can conclude that it is not possible to expect that the university of a small nation, such as Slovenia, could play an active part in the front ranks of the vehicles of scientific development in the world, if mere differences in language were to prevent the possibility of scientists from other countries working within the frameworks of its research and educational work.

(Translated from the Serbo-Croat by
MAJA SAMOLOV)



NADEŽDA VITOROVIĆ