
TOMO MARTELANC

THE CULTURE OF A SMALL NATION*

It is already sufficiently clear what culture means to every society, and it is even clearer to us that in a socialist social system it is inseparably linked to development on the whole. This claim also applies to the small nation. But with this difference: that it applies even more to the small nation than to the large one, for it is noticeably linked to its national, cultural and spiritual survival, and the price paid for it by the small nation is far greater.

The struggle for the self-defence of national rights, for the self-preservation of the vital survival of the Slovenian nation is truly already behind us. However, are foreign influences today really no longer dangerous to our original, independent cultural and national development?

Both yes and no.

They present no danger to us in the sense that they could, or perhaps would like, physically, nationally, and in the sense of statehood, to subjugate us, break us, annihilate us... But they can be dangerous in the sense of causing us spiritually, culturally, to become lost, to become distorted, or merely to become lazy; to lose our self-confidence and our trust in our own creativeness, to begin to crawl on our knees before foreign models, to underestimate our own creative forces, to become parasites, hangers-on, of the more developed, richer, greater and more powerful.

Such a danger is constantly present. Today more than yesterday, for we are living in a world which is growing smaller, which is increasingly enveloped in a network of up-to-date communications. We have become an open social community, with wide open frontier crossings, a state of international tourism, a state which is enthusiastically taking part in the international division of labour, in the world community...

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However, though we are aware of this danger, it does not mean that we will close our frontiers, that we will put an administrative ban on imports of foreign films, books, newspapers and periodicals, or on the visits of foreign lecturers, it does not mean that we will cancel the lively cooperation between our cultural institutions and foreign ones... This would be absurd, even opposed to our conception of the development of socialism and international cooperation in accordance with the principles of peaceful coexistence. This would uproot and dry out the living tree of our culture. Our road can and must be solely the strengthening of our cultural creativity, our own artistic range, the confirmation of our original thought and inspiration, and at the same time the fructification and enrichment of our own cultural heritage with the experiences and achievements of other states and nations.

In doing so, we must take a critical stand towards our own creativity and simultaneously be proud of achievements which embody true quality.

The problems of the "small nation" and its culture are nevertheless being re-opened in our Republic. If it wants to preserve its national, cultural identity, every nation, whether large or small, must have definite national cultural institutions and activities.

Naturally, the small nation must pay a higher price for such a right and duty...

I should like to illustrate what some call the "morbus slovenicus" with two or three examples: *Sales Price*.

An original Slovenian prose work — averaging at about 15 proof-sheets — costs 6,180 old dinars (3,50 \$), if its circulation is, let us say, 1500 copies. As we usually subsidize the work of a domestic author with an average of two million old dinars, the book is sold at 3,500 old dinars per copy. This means that society provides more than half the price. However, if we could raise the circulation, at least by 4,000 copies, there would no longer be any need for subsidies. The book would then be paid for only by those who buy and read it.

How could we increase circulation? There are several ways of doing this: first, if public libraries, for instance, were to buy at least half of the circulation — i.e. 2000 copies. Second, if the purchasing power and cultural awareness of the population were at a higher level. And, third — and now we draw closer to our theme — if there were more inhabitants

in Slovenia, which, even with the present level of cultural awareness, would mean a proportionately greater number of purchasers for books.

In fact, we can boast in Slovenia of a proportionately high circulation of published books, a circulation which is attained by some far larger and more numerous nations. However, the size of the population sets a certain limit, all the more so as the stratum of educated people, who are the most frequent consumers of the most expensive cultural goods, is thus restricted in number. This restriction, which is objectively imposed by the numerical size of the nation, is particularly manifested in relation to the distribution of periodicals dealing with cultural, social and political matters.

One of the proofs of national autonomy is individual production of films. In highly developed, large countries, it is profitable, while this need not be the case in smaller ones. Film production in Slovenia is working at a considerable loss: producers cover only one fourth of the expenditures for the production of a domestic feature film (the average cost is about 123 million old dinars) from sales in the country and abroad, while three fourths are subsidized by the film fund. Such subsidies would not be needed if Slovenian films had better sales in Yugoslavia itself, or abroad. It is true that we have examples of small nations who can sometimes compete successfully with larger nations owing to the quality of their films. Therefore, the size of the population is not always an automatic standard for opportunities of attaining good quality. But if we believe in the principle according to which quantity also creates conditions for better quality, it must be clear to us that an annual production of two, three, or four feature films at the most, cannot — except in the most exceptional, unique and completely accidental cases — lead us to expect supreme quality.

Perhaps we should also cite an example from the field of music. The five largest symphony orchestras in the United States (the Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, New York and Philadelphia symphony orchestras) spent 1,873,000 dollars for their work in 1963, or 374,600 dollars each on the average. That same year, the Slovenian Philharmonic spent 295,000 dollars. As the concert halls in the United States are far larger than here, the audiences at concerts are also much larger; the five above-mentioned orchestras have an average of 70,000 visitors each

year. This is twice the number of the audience at concerts of the Slovenian Philharmonic. (This year its audience numbered a little under 35,000).

The price of tickets for concerts of the American orchestras was then about four times the price for concerts of the Slovenian Philharmonic, but the situation is such that the overhead of our Philharmonic per ticket sold is much higher than in the United States (8.54 dollars for the Slovenian Philharmonic, and an average of 5.33 dollars for each of the five US orchestras per ticket).

The maintenance of a symphony orchestra in Slovenia must therefore be more expensive than in America.

If we turn these calculations into a ratio to the national income, then the "problem of the small nation" and its culture will appear to us in even more drastic comparison.

The expenditures for all five orchestras in the US, are 0.0003% of the national income, while the expenditures of the Slovenian Philharmonic, on a ratio to the national income of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, are 0.04%, or 133 times higher.

All these comparisons apply not only to classical cultural institutions, but also to modern communication media. For instance, the Radio and Television:

In neighbouring Italy, RAI has about 50 times more subscribers and 30 times higher earnings than the Ljubljana Radio and TV, while one broadcasting hour is only 12 times the cost of ours.

How long and how far can the culture of a nation which is restricted in its possibilities not only in number, but in the material sense, develop successfully? We have already said that quality depends on quantity. It is also true that the small nation can produce a genius, but that the general level of civilization and culture remains within the material frameworks of the possibilities of society.

Our Slovenian example shows that in terms of numbers we hardly reach to the knees of other nations, but that in terms of cultural creativity we can boldly look even more developed nations in the eye. The Drama of the Slovenian National Theatre has made successful guest

appearances in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Paris, Milan, Zurich. — The Opera has had guest appearances in the Soviet Union, the Netherlands, and Italy. The Philharmonic has asserted itself through concert tours of Hungary and Italy. We have opened a gallery of our pictorial arts in New York. We hold a graphics biennial in Ljubljana which is of world repute. Even the small town of Slovengradec was the scene of an international exhibition. The works of more and more of our writers are being translated into foreign languages.

Our musicians — such as Igor Ozim or Dubravka Tomšič — have already made names for themselves abroad. The publishing business is being successfully asserted through coproductions on the international book market. We have lately had such internationally important manifestations in Slovenia as the Pen-Congress, and the Congress of Musicologists.

If we return to the determination of a national programme, we come up against another question: is it possible, in a structure of social relations such as that of our self-management society, to elaborate a national programme such as many still imagine it: as a firm, thoroughly established plan.

Whenever, hitherto, we approached major plans for the future, we wished to be visionaries in the noblest sense of the word. For it seemed to us that since we were already attempting to push aside the veil covering the future, it would be good to depict that future in the most wonderful and attractive colours and dimensions. Otherwise, what purpose would be served by pushing aside the veil, were it not truly attractive as a goal and purpose. Thus we repeatedly encountered the same dilemma: should we inscribe those desires into our tangible plans of development and thus preserve the dimensions and colours of the future — although we are aware in advance that we will not be able to realize them — or should we paint in grey, less attractive goals for which we could find the means, but whose small dimensions and modest aspirations would, from the onset, guarantee that we would not be disappointed. Faced with this choice we sought the best solution which would usually, under pressure from sincerely devoted and directly interested parties, lean towards the first alternative. Thus we have had many programmes and plans which we later had to delay, put off, or simply shelve because of goals which were set too high.

Wherever it may stand and act, culture should prove a capacity for life in accordance with natural, and not administrative, selection. Na-

tional policy in culture should be such as to boost and revive those cultural seeds which already organically live and thrive. In a small nation, every seedling of successful and qualitatively valuable cultural activity is extremely precious, but it is often fragile and sensitive. It should not, therefore, be developed by force, but should be aided in strengthening and branching out. Identical formulae in such cases often fail if we try, on the basis of one successful example, to generalize them for all similar activities or other areas. The road which, in one region or in one province of culture, has brought major success can fail completely in another field of cultural endeavour, or in a neighbouring municipality.

All of our cultural activities and institutions are potentially national. This depends on their activity, quality and specific gravity. The selection of what is nationally important for the development of culture cannot be mathematically calculated and absolutely precise. In most cases the true scope, quality and attainments of an individual institution or activity will decide the truly wide national significance, while often a social consensus will be required on this. Anything which promotes the entire culture of the nation, or which represents the nation and its culture, will be of national significance to the Slovenian culture. This is what we must cultivate and develop.

Whether it is easier or more difficult to achieve this in a small nation than in a large one is an extremely debatable issue, too complicated for me to presume to give a simple answer to it.

The scope of social means indubitably influences the content and character of the work of cultural institutions, that is, they often represent their only opportunity of channelling and coordinating cultural activities and their development.

We Slovenians are extremely proud of our own cultural achievements, of our tradition, national cultural institutions, of our reputation in international culture. At the same time, we are aware that this also means a sizeable burden for our economic base.

Our proportionately wide front of institutions and organizations in the field of culture admittedly shows that we have considerably widespread cultural activities, but that they are often broken down into small units which consequently lack achievement and quality. This is why we constantly encounter the task of attaining firmer social consensus on the na-

tional cultural programme. (Naturally, with all the above-mentioned restrictions in terms of the frameworks and possible scope of such a programme.) It is particularly necessary that we agree on what is nationally significant in our culture, and what we will particularly and consciously promote in future. This, of course, must not mean any privileges for any institution whatsoever, but indicates that each of them must justify or prove its national significance primarily, or solely, through its own activities.

(Translated from the Serbo-Croat by
MAJA SAMOLOV)



MIHAILO ĐURIC-TIKALO