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# CULTURAL EXCHANGE

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The phenomenon known today as cultural exchange no doubt has its origins in the distant days when the first human communities were in the process of formation. One imagines primeval tribes, as yet unacquainted with one another, descending to the coast in search of salt, and exchanging not only raw materials and artefacts, but also, incidentally and unwittingly, songs, dances, rituals, customs and beliefs, in other words, reflections and ideas. The entire history of human civilization, of culture, art and human thought is studded with traces of and monuments to this intermingling of influences. Much of this has already been explained; more awaits investigation. We know a good deal, for example, about the interaction between East and West: the role of the Greeks in spreading Hellenic culture throughout the Roman Empire after the decline of Greek statehood is familiar ground. And we recall the conscious, if embryonic, cultural policy of Louis XIV, who sent teachers of the French language to various countries (Poland among them) at his own expense. Thus the thing that we now call cultural exchange existed, developed, and exerted considerable influence well before any national or international bodies were created to organize and further this ancient sphere of human activity.

Given these ancient traditions, it may seem strange to say that cultural exchange nevertheless contains new elements that remain as yet inchoate and unformulated. But this is undoubtedly true and worth underlining, as will be seen if we turn to the question which for present purposes interests us most: when did cultural exchange with other countries become a deliberate instrument of foreign policy, since when, in other words, has it grown into a means of consciously exerting an influence on the international situation?

Certainly very recently. One might even venture the assertion that cultural exchange was made part of the political armoury of states in their

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dealings with the outside world only after the First World War. As early as the seventeenth century, the great Bohemian educator, Comenius, envisaged a future state of international harmony in the fields of education and culture, but it was not until after the formation of the League of Nations that the first attempts were made to put intellectual cooperation on an organized basis, a mantle that has now been taken up on an incomparably greater scale by UNESCO. It was only in the 1920s, too, that the post of cultural attaché began to appear on the strength of embassies. This was a clear sign of the need that was felt to knit cultural exchange into foreign policy. It was then also that the first bi- and multilateral agreements were concluded and so ushered in the planning of cultural exchange. But it may be confidently asserted that it was not until after the Second World War that cultural exchange and cooperation became finally and indissolubly linked with foreign policy, and that their importance in international relations began to grow steadily.

In this most recent period, the span of cultural exchange has been considerably extended, both geographically and in respect to content. In particular, large areas of scientific and technological cooperation have been opened up, which intermesh with the vast ramifications of world trade and industry.

It should be pointed out here that the purpose served by cultural relations within a state's foreign policy is an unambiguous one; to further knowledge and rapprochement and, hence, to promote coexistence, ease tensions, and strengthen peace. For just as close and friendly political and economic relations usually go together with extensive cultural cooperation, so too, it frequently happens that the establishment or strengthening of cultural relations is often the first step on the path towards political détente.

Unfortunately, the converse has also been observed. To some extent this follows from the very nature of things. Since the function of foreign cultural policy is inherently détente, and the effect of cultural exchange is always to promote mutual understanding, and hence, peaceful coexistence, any curtailment or severing of these exchanges is bound to assume a cold-war flavour. In fact, attempts to return to the methods of cold war have usually begun with actions directed against cultural exchange, and aimed in effect at giving it a negative value instead of the positive one it should have. It was with such events in mind that in 1966 the UNESCO General Conference passed unanimously a Dec-

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laration on the Principles of Cultural Cooperation, which among other things, warns against the exploitation of cultural exchange for aims that are in conflict with its basic assumptions.

If, as we have said, cultural relations now form an important and growing component of foreign policy, it is also true that they feed on the whole complex of structures, activities, assumptions, aims and techniques, summed up in the term cultural policy. This consists of a web of organized and planned procedures by the state and its political and socio-cultural institutions aimed at giving the arts a particular ideological and educational slant and at making society conscious of its cultural heritage. A state's cultural policy is predicated on exercising a positive influence on the area of participation by society in cultural life, fostering the development of cultural centres and carrying out research into culture. It is defined by its ideological and educational postulates and executed by a network of cultural institutions representing both material resources and trained personnel.

At the Conference of Ministers of Culture held in Venice in 1970, a good deal was said about the state's responsibilities in the sphere of culture, in particular about the urgent necessity that the state should provide patronage for the arts to replace the rapidly disappearing private sources of financial assistance. There were different views on this matter; but everyone was agreed on one thing: since access to culture and participation in cultural life are the sacred right of every citizen, it is the equally sacred obligation of the state to see that this is ensured. For what we call culture consists not only of the treasures that have been created by artists, but also the degree to which they are made available to the whole community. And also the extent to which we succeed in eliminating the demarcation line between passive consumption of culture and active participation in the creation of cultural values.

Thus foreign cultural policy, being an important element of foreign policy tout court, will draw its strength from the state's internal cultural policy, but may, at the same time, reflect its weaknesses. Turning cultural cooperation and exchange to account as a factor tending towards rapprochement, understanding and peace in international affairs depends on the state taking increasing responsibility for the development of culture, just as was the case earlier in relation to education. The universality of education must be matched by a universalization of culture, and the network of schools by a network of cultural institutions.

Cultural policy has become all the more important now that in recent decades an immense transformation has come about in the media of communication, which makes possible the mass circulation of all kinds of information, and thus too, of cultural phenomena and events. Radio and television penetrate everywhere, or at least can do so. This is a veritable revolution, which is capable of erasing the borderlines between great cultural centres and what were once provincial backwaters or even deserts. The first landing on the moon was not such a startling event if one bears in mind the factor of anticipation. Writers and scholars had foreseen this event, and had even more or less accurately described the manner in which it would be achieved. Wells, Verne and our own Jerzy Żuławski all managed to imagine, and thus to predict, this event. Not one of them foresaw, however, that the moment when the first arrival from Earth placed his foot on the moon's surface would be seen by several hundred million viewers. I am convinced that this is a fact of decisive importance for the philosophy of communications. And, after all, what is culture and art, if not messages addressed to all who are willing and able to receive them.

Obviously the sheer technical ease and speed of mass communications can act as an invitation to communicate everything — or anything. A well-conceived and properly executed cultural policy should accordingly concentrate on ensuring a maximum of genuinely culture-forming content in the mass media. If this is not done, the mass media might well have the effect of isolating people from culture rather than bringing them closer to it. We have all seen numerous examples of commercialized television stripped of any educational, humanist, or cultural value invading the territory once occupied by books, theatre, cinema, concerts and exhibitions and turning it into a barren wasteland.

In less drastic cases, misuse of the media tends to produce an ersatz culture which impoverishes not only the individual but also the ethical and aesthetic forms of social life.

A great deal is heard these days about the pollution of man's natural environment by the by-products of his own civilization. It is high time that more began to be said about the pollution of his environment by the wastes of the pseudo-culture of the so-called entertainment industry operating through the mass media.

The bases of our foreign cultural policy are firstly: the state of our national cultural and artistic heritage; secondly: our links through cultural

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exchange with the rest of the world; and thirdly: the degree of efficiency of our institutions and agencies that are engaged in the work of realizing these exchanges.

The last war ravaged the treasury of our ancient, rich and great national culture. During the war years, all our cultural institutions were closed and outlawed by the occupation authorities. As much as 43 per cent of our physical assets in the field of culture were destroyed. These losses were estimated after the war at being equivalent to one thousand million pre-war dollars. During the occupation, to participate in any form of cultural activity was to risk one's life. In those days we knew that the price of our culture was the price of death.

But we knew too what we owed to our national culture. For almost a century and a half, Poland had been divided between three imperialist powers, forced onto the sidelines of social and economic change, and stripped of any possibility of modern evolution as a state. It was only the greatness of the national culture which preserved the spiritual unity of our people.

We rebuilt that national culture, restoring life to our museums, libraries, book-shops, theatres, concert halls, art galleries and cultural centres. The world-wide interest in Polish culture and literature both old and new is proof of the success of our efforts.

A commitment to national, social and humanist ideals was always characteristic of our art and literature. Based firmly on national traditions, the work of our writers and artists ventured resolutely forth into new and experimental domains, often anticipating developments elsewhere in the world.

Our cultural ties now embrace over eighty countries in all five continents of the world. From the formal, organizational point of view, these can be divided into three groups: the first comprises the 41 countries with which we have bilateral conventions (39) or agreements (2) on cultural exchange and cooperation. These conventions specify the main areas of exchange and its dimensions, and outline the proposed course of the principle development for the future. The second group is made up of countries with which various forms of exchange and cooperation are conducted, but where there is no inter-government agreement, everything being arranged by individual cultural and artistic organizations — art galleries museums, libraries, theatres, publishers, artists' unions, agencies, impresarios and so on.

This extremely lively and effective form of cultural exchange enables us to maintain broad cultural contacts with countries with whom we have not signed formal conventions. The third category consists of various types of multilateral exchange, stemming from our participation in UNESCO and the 67 non-government international organizations affiliated to it which deal with cultural and artistic matters. Membership in these organizations permits regular confrontations in all branches of art, exchange of experience in matters of cultural policy and active participation in consultations, discussions and research programs at a world level.

Within the framework of all three categories of exchange, we ourselves organize some 300 exhibitions abroad every year, and have 200 from different countries of the world on display in Poland. In addition we send 200 to 250 musical, drama and variety groups and 100 soloists abroad, and are hosts to 100 ensembles and 500 soloists in this country. Young Polish musicians take part in 20 international competitions annually, our theatres participate in ten drama and opera festivals, our films in 80 film festivals, and our painters, sculptors, etc. in 50 international exhibitions.

Moreover, Poland itself has become well known as the venue of a number of international artistic events: the Chopin and Wieniawski Competitions in Warsaw and Poznań, the 'Warsaw Autumn' Festival of Contemporary Music, the Graphics Biennale in Cracow, the Poster Art Biennale of Warsaw and the International Book Fair.

All these statistics would not add up to very much, were it not that these numerically very respectable cultural exports contain a great many items whose high quality has been generally acknowledged. To mention only a few of the most famous examples: the Mazowsze and Slask Song and Dance Ensembles; the National Philharmonic Orchestra of Poland; the music of Lutoski, Baird, Bacewicz and Penderecki; the Narodowy (National) and Powszechny (Everyman's) Theatres, Grotowski's Theatre Laboratory and Tomaszewski's Company; the celebrated films of the 'Polish School' directed by Wajda, Munk and Kawalerowicz; the Polish Art Treasures exhibitions in Chicago, Paris and London and the displays of artistic weaving.

Whereas before the war, Polish literature abroad was represented principally by one man, Henryk Sienkiewicz, it is no exaggeration to say that today a new translation of some Polish book appears virtually every day.

The rôle of general co-ordinator and executor of official exchange programs arising from international agreements or our participation in international organizations is shared between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Culture and Art. Here an important rôle is played by diplomatic and consular missions and Culture and Information Centres, as well as visiting fellowships in Polish language and literature, the Polish Cultural Institute in London and the Polish Academy of Sciences centres in Paris and Rome.

The business of arranging the exchange of soloists and ensembles and works of art on a commercial basis, together with the representation of the interests of Polish authors abroad is carried on by a number of specialized agencies and enterprises under the general supervision of the Ministry of Culture and Art:

The PAGART Polish Arts Agency, which organizes tours and performances in the fields of music, drama and variety;

The ARS POLONA Foreign Trade Enterprise, which handles the import and export of books, records, sheet music and scores and tape recordings;

The FILM POLSKI Film Export and Import Enterprise;

The DESA Foreign Trade Office, which handles the export and import of works of art;

The Authors' Agency, which deals with options and authorizations in the field of translations, and serves as a centre of information for Polish literature and music abroad.

I do not know whether this organizational structure and this pattern of activity are the best that could possibly be devised — for as Mr Packwick observed, nothing is perfect in this world except hot water with rum and sugar — and we ourselves complain often enough about these institutions of ours. But if we do so, it is only from a concern that what is being done should be done better still. The very fact that these institutions and enterprises exist is an indication of the importance which our government attaches to having an adequate basis in organization, funds and personnel for the conduct of our cultural policy abroad.

But the bodies listed above do not exhaust the list of Polish cultural assets. There are at least two others about which I would like to say something.

The first is the existence outside Poland of a large dynamic Polish community deeply attached to the old country. This and its voluntary associations form a factor of cardinal importance in the furthering of Polish culture abroad, in attesting to its presence, its vitality, its powers of radiation. Without their participation, many worthwhile things we do at present would be impossible, and many others impossible to do quite as well.

The other asset is the many friends we have beyond our borders. Though they are not of Polish extraction and may not even have spent any longer period of time here, they feel for Poland, her affairs, her culture, literature and art, her past and present, a warm affection, perhaps even love. These are the friends we value above all else.



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