

The 2011 International Conference on Cultural Diplomacy in the EU
"Crisis, Conflict, and Culture: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in the European Project"
(Brussels, International Conference, December 6th - 9th, 2011)

Bringing Cultures Together Through the Arts
to Facilitate Cultural Diplomacy in the Context of the European Project

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Culture is central to international relations. As the carrier of culture, the arts have an important role to play in this regard, and they must be given their proper due as part of the diplomatic process.

In times when Europe's economy is under pressure, cultural diplomacy takes on increased importance for inter-European as well as worldwide understanding and cooperation. History has shown over centuries that the arts can be instrumentalized as an effective tool of "soft" power. U.S. Secretary of States Hillary Rodham Clinton has referred to this as "smart power."⁴

The arts wield a strong influence. They can inspire or degrade cultures, enable interaction among communities, tear people apart or bring them together. They are a strong asset for opening a difficult dialogue. Through the arts, people can approach sensitive topics in an open and respectful way and breach difficult subjects as well as address political agendas on sensitive topics, for which it is sometimes difficult to find the right words.

The Arts have never been intended to solve political problems, but they can be a beautiful facilitator of cultural diplomacy. The fact is that art can not only be a manifestation of beauty and humanity but also a representation of politics and culture. The Arts have sensitized human perception in so many positive and profound ways from expressions of beauty to representations of love! Art is the outward manifestation of our humanity

In Egypt and Rome, artists served pharaohs and emperors and made gods of their rulers via their portraits. In the middle ages, the arts became a medium for representing religion. They helped people visualize the presence of a supreme being. The arts have thematized combat, social and political movements, and economic prosperity to name just a few subjects.

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³ The IDEA Society is a non-profit cultural organization based in Vienna, Austria. The Society represents the creation of a global cultural platform for bringing together artists from across the world. Through partnerships with other cultural institutions worldwide and by offering an internet-based cultural portal to the public, the IDEA Society aims the enhancement of international and cultural exchange. The major goal is to promote better understanding among different cultures in order to create tolerant and harmonious coexistence. This cultural platform offers a basis for joint initiatives for participants from all over the world. Our projects and events are addressing established and young artists, as also creative children. Through the initiation of global art campaigns it is in our effort to raise awareness for social engagements and to support charity organization. Website: www.idea-society.org

⁴ For details of Clinton's stance, please see Paul Lewis, "Hillary Clinton backs 'smart power' to assert US influence around world: Diplomacy will be key to foreign policy Obama's choice for secretary of state tells Senate confirmation hearing," *The Guardian*, January 13, 2009, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jan/13/hillary-clinton-confirmation-hearing-senate> and Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Leading Through Civilian Power: Redefining American Diplomacy and Development," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2010.

So where is Contemporary Art taking us today and how can this influence the European Project?

In the course of the past century, the devastating developments of the two world wars showed the failure of humanity, which was also reflected in the arts. At present, artists are experimenting with a variety of new media and materials, for example art installations using video and digital media. Form and method in art are continually changing and adapting to new technical possibilities. Art topics and content are widening in a variety of different ways over a diverse spectrum. The modern mass production of art not only calls into question what art will sustain over time but also what message it will have.

Art offers an enormous repository of artefacts that preserve our cultural heritage and reflect not only our past but also the present and our vision of the future. Europeans and other peoples of the world are in the process of rethinking their everyday lives, their values, their cultures, and their actions. Economic turmoil, natural disasters, and resource issues have resulted in social and political conflicts that need expression! As Jeremy Berlin has noted notes in *National Geographic* magazine, "... nowhere is a lingua franca more vital than in places of conflict..."⁵ Art offers the means for expressing and visualizing inner thanks in extreme times. The hope is to solve problems that have arisen without making new ones based on miscommunication and cultural misunderstanding. Shared values should be reflected through peace education, and the arts are surely one means of communicating these values.

The Arts can and should be empowered to promote a better dialogue between cultures. In fact, an educational initiative for cross-cultural learning and better understanding ought to be a priority within our swiftly globalizing society. The Arts are a prominent and accessible means of communication that can unite humanity.

In this context, for example, The IDEA Society launched the PANGAEA Global Art Initiative in 2008 to support the children's program of UNICEF. Pangaea offers an inter-cultural dialogue between countries across the globe with the aim of stimulating an appreciation of other societies and traditions with an aim towards better intercultural understanding.

A saying goes: "We are most afraid of what we do not understand."

The IDEA Society has launched its global project PANGAEA to diminish fear, enhance cultural exchange and promote mutual understanding by assembling a collection of paintings from a variety of artists from around the world. The collected artistic works will be the ambassadors for the various cultures. They will strive to enhance appreciation of different traditions and highlight the diversity and richness of our global cultural heritage. Art - the sole universal language - is the ideal vehicle in bringing cultures closer together and revealing developments in a particular society. Therefore, the theme chosen for all paintings of the PANGAEA project was "Our society of Today and Tomorrow."

The "PANGAEA Art Collection for World Peace" premiered at the Sigmund Freud Museum in Vienna, on November 18, 2011, and it has now gone around the globe as a travelling exhibition and a time capsule of our society today. The universality of the art speaks volumes without saying a word. It is a message that a tumultuous world needs. It can soothe and heal. It can reduce tension and bind. It can represent and promote human values.

Pablo Picasso is reported to have said: "You expect me to tell you what art is? If I knew it, I would keep it for myself!"⁶

Art has so many different definitions and expressions. The diversity of opinion is immense, but our strong personal belief is that the arts are a human phenomenon that should serve the good of humanity. The PANGAEA initiative wants to share art with the world. As a result, The PANGAEA Initiative can be seen not only as a philanthropic approach and but also as a romantic attempt to reprocess and better understand humanism, which may give birth to a new Art direction, which can be described as: "Philanthropism," the face of philanthropy in our time.

Art in its various forms of expression can be seen as a beautiful medium for peace education. Everyone understands art in his or her own personal way. People tend to oppose things they do not understand, and they often resist change or interaction with other cultures as a consequence. Cultural clashes are frequent in our interconnected society, and it is, therefore, a matter of crucial importance for us to find ways to broaden our horizons through education and thus stimulate inter-cultural exchange and ensure peaceful coexistence.

⁵ *National Geographic*, August 2011.

⁶ Ingo F. Walther, *Picasso* (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen Verlag GmbH, 1999).

Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Exchange

All culture is in essence diplomacy. Understanding the other is and always has been a challenge to be mastered, and an understanding of culture can be the key to both successful interpersonal and international relations.

Before there was language to communicate thoughts and ideas, there was art, and art remains a means for simply conveying complicated messages. Art unites and binds by providing a channel for making visualizations and trading representations of people, objects, ideas, colors, and tones.

A starting definition is offered by the American political scientist and author, Milton C. Cummings, in his description of cultural diplomacy as: “the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding.”⁷

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, “In its rich diversity, culture has intrinsic value for development as well as social cohesion and peace.”⁸ The capacity of art to capture imaginations has no limits and can smooth the way for broader cultural understanding and dialogue.

Today, divergent societies from around the world are increasingly interacting in a variety of ways. Their interwovenness is nothing less than amazing. These societies generate common interest, and through modern technology and communication barriers are being omitted. Once the process has started, it progresses very quickly, and in order to improve it, many things have been simplified. Simplification helps in many ways to speed things up, but it also leaves good qualities on the track behind. A good example for this is the development in agriculture, where today to keep up with the growing amount of people (seven billion this year), farmers decide for monoculture for fast growing and temperature resistant seeds for almost every kind of fruit or vegetable. According to Charles Siebert, who initiated the Food Ark project, which has created a repository of fruit and vegetable seeds, we must take steps to preserve the diversity of regional food varieties, even if they do not fulfil our momentary criteria for hardiness and longevity, otherwise many domestic varieties of seeds will become extinct. Knowledge we do not believe we need today, we may need tomorrow! The same also corresponds to Cultural Diversity. If we find the right way to value and preserve our cultural heritage, which has been built on practice over many centuries that would probably enrich our modern society with experience and wisdom, on which it can rely, if and when needed.

Making Art Sustainable through Cultural Diplomacy in the European Project

Art moves us, but food sustains us, and this, of course, must be taken into account in any discussion of the value and role of culture in the modern world. In the last thirty years, visualization has gained the upper hand over content in the Arts. The real difficulty in cultural diplomacy today is that one must make art sustainable, and art can only be sustainable if it has content.

The European Project is facing the challenge for establishing a common European identity and value system, by preserving the cultural diversity of its member states. The unification of national standards of the European Community can be taken as a threat to local communities, if their voices are not being heard and taken into consideration in the process of forming European Cultural Policy, and therefore Cultural Diplomacy should be embedded in the process from the very beginning. This would ensure the commitment of all parties involved, and also would assure that change will not mislead the community and divide it.

The Arts reflect Society, and Society is reflected in the Arts. This correlation carries high responsibility. The European project can and should communicate values through the arts. Artistic creativity goes in the direction of exploration, and Art trends are presently evolving in the direction of cognitive value communication. The soft power effect of the Arts can accelerate the visual communication of European values and bring Cultural Diplomacy into line with a multi-cultural environment. The enhancement of a socio-cultural understanding, would be of value and support the European Project.

Cultural diplomacy is usually considered part of the larger field of public diplomacy, but cultural diplomacy is much more than public diplomacy. When Joseph S. Nye refers to “soft power,” he defines it as “the ability to get

⁷ Milton C. Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey* (Center for Arts and Culture: Washington, DC, 2003), 1.

⁸ UNESCO website, available at <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/cultural-diversity>

what you want by attracting and persuading others to adopt your goals.”⁹ Of course, cultural identity remains key to how we understand art. Our reference points all hinge on our cultural framework, our upbringing, and our understanding of what art is and should be.

If design provides the answers to questions about “How?,” art asks questions about “Why?” The interplay between public and cultural diplomacy is much the same as that of design and art. Public diplomacy focuses on how to improve the image of a country while cultural diplomacy is focused on the arts themselves for the sake of showing the progress of the culture of a nation. Entertaining questions rather than suppressing them lies at the core of cultural diplomacy. A commitment to “smart power” must be present for cultural diplomacy to work. If, this commitment is not present, public diplomacy is merely a shell without content. The arts provide the content for cultural diplomacy, which, in turn, makes up the core of public diplomacy. Diplomacy works in layers, the outermost being public diplomacy, but without the support of the other layers, this diplomacy cannot function. As Richard T. Arndt notes, “A decent cultural diplomacy costs amazingly little, a shadow of one wing of fighter aircraft.”

What is needed is an infrastructure in which cultural diplomacy can flourish and where it is not eclipsed by public diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy provides a counterweight to the evils of the world, hatred and misunderstanding, violence and greed, egocentrism. Cultural diplomacy works slowly over a long period of time without deadlines and not subject to political and policy agendas. Cultural diplomacy should be “above the fray,” although this is often not the case. Cultural diplomacy must be consistent to be successful. It cannot allow itself to be abused or misused for political purposes. For culture to speak, it must have freedom to speak of its own accord.

The arts are a mirror for people to see themselves and others. The arts are the perfect medium for bringing people together with no force or coercion required as is the case in standard power diplomacy. Milton Cummings notes correctly that “a certain degree of faith is involved in cultural diplomacy”¹⁰ Diplomats must trust artists to make art that speaks to people without a political subtext. The arts cannot be quantified in a mathematical formula. They must be appreciated for their inherent value. Still, it is possible to transcend political differences if people can relate to one another on the cultural level, and this should be the goal of cultural diplomacy. People can be reached through the arts and culture. The arts appeal to emotions, and these are not measurable in the standard sense. As Juliet Antunes Sablosky notes cultural diplomacy, like the “value of the arts,” is difficult to measure.¹¹ Cultural diplomacy necessitates long-term thinking. As one analyst notes, “Our cultural contacts have long memories. They remember the good things we do for them. Our political contacts don’t remember for very long.”¹²

The decline of cultural diplomacy in favour of the much broader public diplomacy has been a disaster for both the arts and diplomacy. The new focus by both the United States and the U.K. on true cultural diplomacy speaks to the need for a functioning cultural diplomacy. The E.U., however, has yet to come up with a broad cultural diplomacy; it relies on the cultural diplomacy of its individual member states. This will have to change for the E.U. to take on a larger role in international/world politics. Partnerships, both within the arts and between the arts and diplomacy, can provide the means for doing this, and The IDEA Society is poised to step into this void with its work. Cultural diplomacy reflects the soul of a nation, and in the case of the E.U., the soul of a union that is economic and monetary, but has yet to realize its full potential in the arts and foreign policy. The question is “How do you present Europe?,” and that will be a question to be answered in the coming years.

The argument has been made here that cultural diplomacy, especially as it regards the arts, should be separate and distinct from public diplomacy. In recent years, cultural diplomacy has become so intertwined with public diplomacy that there is practically no distinction between the two anymore.

Despite the power of the Arts to unite, the Arts have been commandeered on many occasions to achieve base political ends. This politicization has undermined not only the sustainability of the arts but their ability to build strong and lasting bridges between cultures.

⁹ Joseph S. Nye, Jr. „Propaganda Isn’t the Way: Soft Power,” *The International Herald Tribune*, January 10, 2003.

¹⁰ Cummings, 2.

¹¹ Juliet Antunes Sablosky, *Recent Trends in Department of State Support for Cultural Diplomacy: 1993-2002* (Washington, DC: Center for Arts and Culture, 2003), 14-15.

¹² *Cultural Diplomacy: The Linchpin of Public Diplomacy*. Report of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2005), 15.

The IDEA Society and the PANGAEA initiative hope to place the arts back in the mix at a higher level than politics so that their true power can be felt through positive communication. By increasing the openness of the Arts and allowing artists the freedom to formulate their messages as they see fit, cultural diplomacy can function at a much higher level than it presently does either in the European Union or elsewhere in the world. The IDEA Society promotes this free exchange of ideas within the artistic and diplomatic communities to promote art for the benefit of all humanity. It is a visionary approach and one that is much broader and open than presently envisioned anywhere else.

Culture has a vitally important role to play in relations between states, not only as a tool of Realpolitik to assert and maintain power but also as a means in itself for communication and construction of lasting relationships. The dominance of Realpolitik over Kulturpolitik since the 1950's has led cultural diplomacy to be relegated to the fringes of discussions about diplomacy and cultural policy. It is now time for Kulturpolitik to reassert itself in a world gone awry, both economically and politically. The arts, as holders of values and unfettered ethical stances, can provide a corrective to the ills of the world. As they have in the past, the Arts provide an antidote to crassness and cynicism, to frustration and despair.

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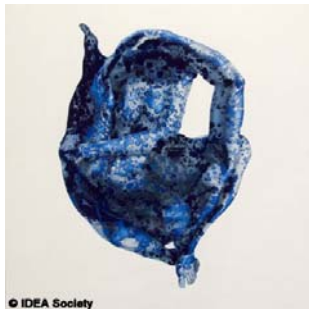
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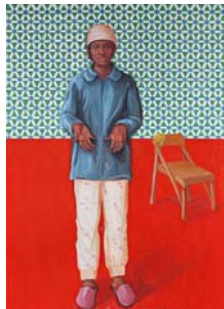
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