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WORKSHOP 3

WHAT ROLE FOR CULTURE IN FOREIGN POLICY: HOW IMPORTANT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS? BY KIMMO AULAKE

There are plenty of concepts in this discussion: on one hand we have foreign policy, international relations, external relations, development policy, soft power, and public diplomacy and on the other culture, arts, intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity, cultural goods and services.

When talking about the role of culture in foreign policy the first question, therefore, is the role of what and where?

To me, the key has always been to distinguish between culture in external relations and culture's external relations or, simply, international cultural policy. Culture in external relations, obviously, refers to the role of culture in another policy sector while international cultural policy refers to something within the cultural policy sector. These are, at least partly, two different issues. However, I will argue that after closer scrutiny and at the level of policy objectives, the similarities far outweigh the differences.

The European Commission and High Representative Communication "Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations" is a kind of a hybrid between the two approaches.

Unless we can clarify this conceptual 'mess', it is difficult to have an informed discussion.

When discussing the role of culture in foreign policy, the objectives of foreign policy naturally drive the agenda. Different governments have different objectives for their foreign policies, but most seek to ensure peaceful cooperation with other countries while promoting their own interests. Traditionally this has meant harnessing political and economic relations and cooperation.

During the last decade or so, increasing attention has been given to people-to-people dialogue, which usually means direct cooperation in fields such as education, culture, youth and sport, as a complement to more official government-to-government political and economic relations. But

from foreign policy perspective, people-to-people dialogue still serves general foreign policy objectives, which is fully legitimate. It simply reflects the realisation that the opinions and feelings of 'the people' matter when countries are trying to maximise their political capital. This is also the main reason why almost all countries around the world are so keen to harness their soft power and public diplomacy.

Is culture then subordinated or instrumentalised when it is brought into the world of foreign policy? Well, it depends. The way culture works and connects people follows its own logic which cannot be affected or steered from the outside. What an individual will get out of participating in culture or enjoying art is always unique. The vast majority of people wouldn't appreciate something that is not authentic.

All informed people, including in the ministries of foreign affairs, know this and why would they bother with non-authentic cultural projects (so called embassy culture) that would have no or very limited consequence?

Where foreign policy may have a role is in choosing, in some specific instances, what kind of culture is being offered and to whom. But out of all cultural offer available, this will be a rather microscopic part.

The real issue here, I believe, is our ability to go beyond the surface to the level of policy objectives and to assess how different measures actually help in attaining them. A related issue concerns the public perception of culture. Insofar as culture is still generally assimilated to 'high art' of course it cannot be a political priority but rather "something that a society may indulge" as John Holden put it already years ago. Getting the message on culture's capacity to contribute to other policy objectives through is, as we know, still far from being a *fait accompli* and we are pretty much in the beginning of a long journey.

As regards culture's external relations/international cultural policy, the starting point is the UNESCO Convention for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions. This Convention forms the *Magna Charta* of international cultural policy.

Although I'm sure we are all familiar with that Convention, it is worth recalling some of its basic starting points as they demonstrate what international cultural policy is all about.

According to the preamble:

- “cultural diversity creates a rich and varied world, which increases the range of choices and nurtures human capacities and values, and therefore is a mainspring for sustainable development for communities, peoples and nations,
- cultural diversity, flourishing within a framework of democracy, tolerance, social justice and mutual respect between peoples and cultures, is indispensable for peace and security at the local, national and international levels,
- cultural interaction and creativity... nurture and renew cultural expressions and enhance the role played by those involved in the development of culture for the progress of society at large”.

Now, the question arises whether these starting points are actually different from those of foreign policy. My reply is that of course they are not.

After all, public policies seek to promote the public good. The preambles I just quoted refer to sustainable development, peace and security and the progress of society. Moreover, in the cultural policy circles, we have been discussing for years, or decades, about how culture can foster democracy and freedom of expression, strengthen and diversify economies as well as promote civil society and equality. As it happens, these are also key objectives of foreign policy and especially development policy. From this perspective, it would be strange if culture and cultural policy experience and measures were not integrally incorporated in foreign policy, in the spirit of mutual supportiveness and non-subordination.

But because different policies have their distinctive development trajectories, they are also at different levels of maturity. This, together with divergent tools that different policies operate, easily leads one to think that there may be more or less fundamental differences or even conflicts between and among policies which is not the case. There are, nevertheless, concrete examples of conflicting interests between culture and other policies but these do not stem from policy objectives but from different measures that these policies apply. The difficulty of reconciling culture and trade policy is the best example.

My experience leads me to conclude that:

1. Culture, in its different forms, is an integral part of almost all human life. We know that it can foster democracy, economy, well-being and empowerment.

2. Therefore, measures promoting culture also contribute to the attainment of many other policy objectives.
3. Maximising this contribution should be in the interests of all the relevant policies, including those of foreign policy.
4. The impact of culture, cultural activities and participation in culture is not easy to measure or quantify, but we have sufficient evidence that it is real. Therefore, one needs to take a strategic and long-term perspective to have positive results.
5. Because of its very nature, culture cannot be arbitrarily subordinated to other policies, or instrumentalised to get quick returns. Because there are no conflicts between different policy objectives mutual supportiveness and genuine policy coherence must be adhered to in order to unlock culture's full potential, also in the world of foreign and development policy.