



The role of cultural
institutes in the
European integration

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Abstract

The European integration process cannot be complete without cultural cohesion in the European Union. However, member States are afraid to lose their cultural identity during this process. One actor of the cultural diplomacy has an essential role in this fragile process: the system of cultural institutes abroad. This specific organization has the capacity to preserve and present national culture abroad, and at the same time, to build dialogue between different cultures. In fact, the foundation and the diffusion of cultural institutes helped the re-establishment of cultural relations in the frozen Europe. Furthermore, for the last years, the cooperation between cultural institutes has largely increased, strengthening so the European cultural cohesion.

Introduction

“We hope to see a Europe where men of every country will think as much of being a European as of belonging to their native land, and that without losing any of their love and loyalty of their birthplace. We hope wherever they go in this wide domain, to which we set no limits in the European Continent, they will truly feel “Here I am at home. I am a citizen of this country too”. Let us meet together. Let us work together. Let us do our utmost - all that is in us - for the good of all” – said Sir Winston Churchill on May 9th 1948 in Amsterdam. Two years later, on May 9th 1950, Robert Schuman, one of the founding fathers of the European Union, made his famous “Declaration”, giving birth to the beginning of an union between European States. In 1985, the 9th May, was elected “European Day”, in order to celebrate the unity and peace in Europe. However, even if the European Union exists and thanks to the numerous treaties has been transformed and evaluated for decades, Europe is far from being considered as Churchill said “the native land” by the citizens of the European Union. In order to transform the economic union into a political one, States must be culturally more integrated, without losing their own identity. To achieve this objective, one actor has an essential role: the cultural institutes. They have the specific character: they can represent and preserve national culture abroad, and in the same time, build a dialogue between different cultures. Thus, cultural institutes are a key for a further European integration, because through cultural cooperation, the differences can be understood and respected, and people can finally “feel at home” in an other European country.

The European integration is a process whose aim is to create an economic, socio-political and cultural unity between the European States. It begun after the 2nd World War (even if there were different theories on the subject before), and on the bases of the 1957 Treaty of Rome, it created the most important organization for this purpose, the European Union¹. In the European Union the integration is an on-going process and its evolution has

¹ The basis of this integration process begun in 1951, when the European Coal and Steel Community was formally established by the Treaty of Paris. This community was joined by two other communities by the Treaty of Rome in 1957: the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom). These communities were fused in the European Communities by the Merger Treaty in 1967, and this latter was officially transformed in the European Union by the Maastricht Treaty in 1993.

different developmental levels: there are areas in which the integration is advanced (e.g. economic and monetary union), in development (e.g. social questions), and mostly criticized (e.g. European citizenship). Moreover, the European integration can be defined also more broadly, as the process which make come closer the different cultures on the European continent, but the EU plays an important role also in this field through its enlargements including new member States, and its “neighborhood policy”². Since the European integration cannot be complete without socio-cultural integration, but at the same time the European States are horrified from the idea to lose their national identity, the whole integration process could be risked, that’s the reason why it must be treated very carefully, through different mediators. One actor of this mediation could be the institution called “cultural institute abroad”. This specific public, non-profit organization is generally founded and organized by a State, and its aim is to spread the national culture, customs, and knowledge in other countries. Even if cultural diplomacy exists since the beginning of international relations (e.g. from the origins of diplomacy, it has been usual to exchange precious gifts – artworks – in order to impress their counterparts), its organization through the foundation of cultural institutes abroad has appeared in particularly on the European continent, and just after the First World War, even if the bases of the modern diplomacy has already been established during the Congress of Vienna of 1815. Though, during almost the whole XIX century, which ended with the “Belle Époque”, moving between States was free, it was the first real opening of the world: the “First Globalization”. Thanks to the technological development it was also possible to take long journeys, in order to know new cultures and to learn from them. Just think about international cultural metropolis like Paris of the end of the XIX century, where artists, writers and other intellectuals made contacts and learned from each other, but also out of Europe, painters like Gauguin in Tahiti, discovered new horizons. These changes contributed to the common development of humanity. Unfortunately, the First World War broke everything, and the States closed themselves, rather than living once again the horror of the war. The world was frozen, thus the development was stopped, and a new game of powers begun. The first cultural institutes abroad were founded in the twenties and thirties (e.g. *Istituto Italiano di Cultura* of

² The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) is an instrument of the EU’s foreign policy, whose aim is to tie strong relations with the neighbor countries of the EU, and also, to help them in their developmental process. These States could be the future new member States of the EU.

Bratislava 1922; *Collegium Hungaricum* in Rome 1927; British Council 1934, etc.), but there real expansion begun after the 2nd World War. The ex-strong powers (e.g. France, the United Kingdom), the new ones (e.g. the USA, Germany) and the emerging countries (e.g. Eastern and Central Europe) had two objectives: to survive and to become stronger. Since the war with its horrors was no more considered as a possible strategy, they had to seek for other instruments: the cultural supremacy. Consequently, they have started a kind of cultural battle, and a tool for this was the diffusion of their national culture all over the world (e.g. the English language, the Francophone culture, etc.). Nevertheless, wasn't it a kind of opening toward other countries? How can we define the role of national cultural institutes nowadays, when we are living the European integration process and the 2nd Globalization?

After working for a couple of years in different cultural institute systems, i.e. French (*Institut Français*) and Hungarian (*Balassi Intézet*) institutes abroad, and studying the origins, the organization and the objectives of other models (e.g. British Council of Great Britain, *Goethe Institut* of Germany, *Istituti italiani di cultura all'estero* of Italy, *Istituto Cervantes* of Spain, etc.), it is evident how important role these organizations play in the integration process between different States: national cultural institutes abroad contribute to re-establish the peaceful international relations, since through the opening toward other cultures, the differences can be known, understood, and it leads finally to the respect of each other. In fact, the foundation of cultural institutes abroad is the first step toward the renewal of relations between European countries (I). Furthermore, these cultural institutes assure a solid base for further cultural cooperation (II).

Chapter I – The foundation of cultural institutes abroad is the first step toward the reopening of cultural boundaries in Europe

Originally, cultural institutes have been founded in order to serve, what we can call “egoist political objectives”. The implementation of these entities contributed to the survival of weakened world powers, to strengthen internal national identity, and to be considered abroad like a strong new nation. Nevertheless, all this tentative serves also an other – mostly unconscious – purpose: opening toward the other States.

A. The reopening of Europe through the implementation of cultural institutes

After the two World Wars, historically strong powers, like France and the United Kingdom, lost their influence; the political and economic center of the world has been positioned in other regions, particularly in the United States. The weakened powers tried to achieve cultural and linguistic domination through the creation of the system of French Institutes and British Councils worldwide. Weaker States and/or new-born nation-states, even if they were not ex-empires or did not have the language as common element, wished strengthen their position (e.g. Germany, Italy, Hungary). Since these new nation-states are weak in army and national identity, the internal and external diffusion of their cultural proudness seemed to be the perfect medicine to their problems.

Even if the national histories were different, the mission of these States was very similar through the implementation of cultural institutes in other European countries. First of all, the diffusion of the national language. From the beginning, it is organized on three levels: the cultural institutes are in the same time language school for students, formation school for language teachers and certificate centers for the release of language exams (e.g. DALF in French, CILS in Italian, DELE in Spanish, IELTS in English, etc.). Second, they work on the representation and promotion of the national culture, cultural heritage, society, customs

(e.g. fine arts, films, books, tradition, etc.). They make it by the organization of cultural events (exhibitions, concerts) or by the lobbying of national artists for instance on a local book fair or that of national films on a local film festival. Third, culture is also knowledge, science, so these institutes would like to help the studies abroad, to become attractive for smart-brains to bring them in their country to contribute to the national science, with scholarships. Fourth, these institutes must also diffuse the national convictions and beliefs. For instance, Italy must and can diffuse values which could create the bases of the ancient European identity, such as the Greek, Roman and Christian tradition or the values of the Renaissance and the Humanism. An other example appeared particularly during the Cold War, when the world was divided in two parts, and the Western cultural institutes tried to diffuse and strengthen their democratic values all over the world.

Even if the original objectives could seem “egoist”, all these policies have contributed to an objective far more important in the long term: the reopening of Europe. These institutes could not be closed from the cooperation with the local culture and actors, otherwise, they could not be survive. Very soon, to the basic objectives were added other purposes, like to foster cultural relationships with the recipient country, as such as to further the cultural and the scientific cooperation. More than this, they could learn a much from the recipient country. Still in the twenties, following the idea of its minister of culture at the time, Kunó Klebelsberg, Hungary founded its first cultural institutes abroad (1924: Vienna and Berlin; 1927: Rome and Paris). These institutions were called “*Collegium Hungaricum*”, where every year about ten painters, sculptors, theologians, writers, and other artists, scientists studied, it was also called “the Roman school”.

B. Coming closer by the strategic diffusion of cultural institutes

There are basically two types of system : the capillary system and the strategic system. Mostly, it depends on the resources of the country in question, but also on the internal politico-administrative organization of the State. Thus, traditionally strong European countries with complex bureaucratic system usually have worldwide important cultural institute networks. For instance, the French network is composed of almost 150 cultural centers and institutes, more than 150 services for cultural cooperation and action, and 1.040 Alliances françaises in 136 countries. Great Britain has 220 offices in 109 countries, and Germany has more than 180 in 83 countries. Italy and Spain has less cultural institutes abroad (90 and 70), but there are countries who has even fewer, like the Czech Republic (21) and Hungary (19). Indeed, these little countries have no financial instrument to cover the costs of such an institute abroad, but it is also clear, that these latter system has a strategic vision on cultural diplomacy, and the most important for them is to be present in the strategically crucial countries: so the neighbor countries, and some world power, like the US, Japon or China.

What is clear that these countries implemented the first cultural institutes on the European continent. The European Union could become larger and larger, because the cultural cooperation, the diffusion of national art and knowledge in an other European States, brought closer the different nations. In fact, at the two last steps of the European enlargement, those of 2004 and 2007, Europe was enlarged to countries between which the most have lived for almost 50 years under the opposite politico-socio-economic direction than the rest of the continent. Thus, the historically democratic and developed Western Europe could include the ex-communist, emerging countries of Eastern and Central Europe. However, instead of this opposition, their cultural cooperation was historic and in an advanced state thanks to these cultural institutions, so the passage was quite automatic.

Chapter II – The cultural institutes serve as instrument for a further evolution in international cultural cooperation in Europe

In the current international context, cultural institutes worldwide play their real role: mediation between different conceptions of the world, contributing in this way to the development of humanity. On the one hand, cultural institutes cooperate in order to build together bilateral or multilateral cultural initiatives (A). On the other hand, in the current globalization process, it is no more enough to deal with only national cultural cooperation, but cultural diplomacy is more and more focused on the collaboration between regions of the world, so Europe must be represented unified (B).

A. Stronger internal relations in Europe through multilateral cooperation between different cultural institutes

A cultural institute present in a foreign country is no more interested in the only representation of the national culture and customs abroad, but it is far more important and interesting to help artistes from different cultures to professionally grow through specific projects. A cultural institute can play the role of intermediate between associations of artists from two or more nationalities. In this way, artistes can exchange their own experiences, their culture, and can learn a much from each other. In the recent years, fortunately, the number of examples of this kind of multilateral cooperation, helped by a cultural institute abroad, has been increasing.

One of the most interesting projects in the last years was the collaboration between sculptors from two countries (Italy and Hungary), in order to celebrate the memory of a the famous sculptor, Amerigo Tot, whose life links together the two countries. The idea came from Pál Németh DLA, who is actually also an ex-beneficiary of the art internship of the Hungarian Academy in Rome. During his stay in Rome, he had the opportunity to make

contact with local sculptors, and a couple of years later, from this experience was born an international cultural association, the *Fonderia*. For Amerigo Tot's 100^o anniversary of birth, with the help and sustain of the Hungarian Academy of Rome, they constructed a monument in a public square in Rome. Additionally, this beautiful international project included also different exhibitions in Italy and Hungary.

It occurs also, that two cultural institutes cooper on the organization of a whole cultural season. For instance, France made 2011 the year of the celebration of Franz Liszt's bicentenary, the worldwide famous Hungarian composer (*Année Liszt en France 2011*). The organization of this cultural season, composed of four central events and hundreds of concerts, lectures and exhibitions everywhere in France, was directed by three organizations: the *ad hoc* created Commissary of the Liszt Year, the French Institute of Paris and the Hungarian Institute of Paris.

The deepest cooperation between cultural institutes is when all of them present in a foreign city work together in a common association. The unique existing example for this kind of specific cooperation is in Paris, where are present the most of cultural institutes in one city (52). The organization created by these institutes is called FICEP (*Forum des Instituts culturels étrangers à Paris – Forum of Foreign Cultural Institutes in Paris*), founded in 2002 on the initiative of the Canadian Cultural Institute, with the aim to give more value and importance to the cultural institutes in the promotion and preservation of cultural diversity. Between their many programs, the most interesting are the yearly *Semaine des cultures étrangères* (Week of foreign cultures), where the cultural institutes propose numerous events related to their culture and langue, and the Jazzycolors festival, which promote the jazz music abroad. Every cultural institute invites a national jazz band, and then they give concerts in other cultural institutes.

B. Clustering cultural institutes for the representation of Europe out of the continent

Cultural diplomacy should really serve a noble objective: to bring different cultures closer. Nowadays, it is not just a question on the old European continent, but also further. Thus, projects like EUNIC help to complete the globalization also from an other perspective: being good neighbors in this world by understanding each other.

EUNIC (European Union National Institutes for Culture) is the network of the international cultural relations institutes from the member states of the European Union. Formed in 2006, it has 29 members from 24 countries. EUNIC has its global office in Brussels, the strategy is set by the heads of EUNIC members, and around the world cultural institutes work together in clusters (currently there are 85 worldwide) on local projects. Moreover, there are specific groups which cooperate on a well-determined strategy. For instance, the project “Language Rich Europe” is led by the British Council, and its aim is to diffuse the learning of languages in the EU.

The EUNIC could be considered as a “regional cultural institute”, whose aims are similar to those of a national cultural institutes abroad (language, culture, cooperation, etc.), the only difference is that this organization works on a higher level: its mission is to represent the whole European continent. Consequently, EUNIC plays a crucial role in the European integration: it helps the internal cohesion, and the external cultural relations of the EU at the same time.

In fact, its programs work also on two levels: inside and out of Europe. For instance, there is a program which deals with the countries from the ex-soviet bloc. The program “generation 89” is led by the Belgium, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania clusters, which get meet young people born in '89 in different countries to make a dialogue on Europe’s future. On the other hand, there are special projects which link Europe with other continents, such as the “European-Chinese Cultural Dialogue”, in order to bring nearer the old Europe with the new world powers, which in generally are less known cultures. This program, led by the Danish Cultural Institute and the Goethe Institute, helps the contact and the exchange of

ideas between intellectuals. The dialogue with the other countries of the world, like China is crucial in this globalized world. It is also a further representation of the European unity, because we are about to become one region of the world, and we must cooperate with the others; and to achieve this dialogue, we must understand and respect each other.

Conclusion

Cultural institutes are a key for a further European integration, because member States can strengthen their cultural relations through them. Indeed, their foundation helped the reopening of the European States towards each other, their diffusion contributed to the understanding and respect of the other cultures, their cooperation strengthens the internal relations between the European countries, and their clustering in a common European cultural institute is the affirmation of the unity of the European continent toward the rest of the world.

The importance of the model of cultural institutes cannot be better illustrated as the fact that also new born powers, which aspire to find their position in the current global order (e.g. before Japan, nowadays China), choose the same strategy: the implementation of cultural institutes all over the world. Thus, since 1972 Japan has founded 22 Japanese Foundations, and China since 2004 396 Confucius Institutes and Classrooms all over the world.

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