

Country Profiles: Sweden

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1. Introduction and Research Method

During the past 60 years, Sweden has become an increasingly multicultural society, and today around 200 nationalities are represented within the country's borders. Even though values of tolerance and solidarity are strong, the political debate has become more polarized in recent years. Thus the necessity of cultural diplomacy is ever more important in Sweden for peaceful and tolerant coexistence between different groups to be a reality. But what is cultural diplomacy? According to Milton C. Cummings the notion of cultural diplomacy is defined as 'the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding'¹. Following this notion, it is possible to understand any person interacting with people from cultures other than her or his own as a facilitator of cultural exchange. In engaging in cultural exchange, communication and respect are increased between individuals, as well as between societies through improved mutual understanding of values as well as reduced susceptibility.

This way of understanding the concept of cultural diplomacy differs from what we can call 'traditional diplomacy', which is primarily focused on nation branding and advertising a country abroad. Instead, cultural diplomacy emphasizes the facilitation and initiation of cultural exchange. It is also important to mention that this form of cultural diplomacy can be facilitated in many different fields, including the arts, sports, literature, academics etc.

The goal of this report is to research how and through what means cultural diplomacy is exercised in Sweden, thus offering a broad picture of cultural diplomacy in Sweden. Since this report is not sufficient to deal with the whole field of cultural diplomacy in Sweden, some methodological issues need to be dealt with. First, to examine cultural diplomacy in all sectors of the Swedish society, cultural diplomacy initiatives or organisations will be presented from the public, private as well as the civil society spheres. For these initiatives or programmes to be seen as examples of cultural diplomacy, they need to have at least one of the following aims: To promote the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture with the intention of fostering mutual understanding.² In this report, 'cultural diplomacy in the public sector' relates to organisations or programmes initiated or currently directed by public institutions and offices. 'Cultural diplomacy in the private sector' refers to foundations, projects or programmes initiated or currently directed by private enterprises and businesses. 'Cultural diplomacy in civil society' considers organisations or programmes initiated or currently directed by agents of civil society (such as NGOs, foundations, philanthropists etc.).

In arriving at conclusions about cultural diplomacy in Sweden, the report will include the following sections. First, a contextual background of Sweden will be presented focusing on cultural diversity in Sweden, integration and multiculturalism, and current challenges the country is facing in these regards. Second, an overview of contemporary cultural diplomacy programmes in Sweden will be presented in three parts: cultural diplomacy in the public sector, cultural diplomacy in the private sector and cultural diplomacy in civil society. Lastly, an analysis of projects and programmes found in the Swedish context will be provided.

¹ See Milton C. Cummings definition of "Cultural Diplomacy" at the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy's website http://culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_culturaldiplomacy

² Ibid.

2. Contextual Background

2.1 Swedish Multiculturalism and Integration

Due to high levels of immigration during the past sixty years, Sweden has become a highly multicultural society. One reason for this is the country's accessible migration policies, which aim to protect the right to asylum and to facilitate the freedom of movement across borders. Currently about 200 nationalities are represented among Sweden's 9.4 million residents and today almost 20 per cent of the population have their roots outside of Sweden. Amongst other nationalities, Finnish, Iraqi, Somalian and Bosnian people are well represented.³

A consequence of Sweden's quite generous immigration policies is the focus upon enhanced integration, diversity and equality within the Swedish society. In the public sphere, issues of integration and equality are vociferously debated. But in contrast to its Danish neighbour which opts for assimilation, the need for multiculturalism, diversity and anti-discrimination is strongly voiced by the Swedish state as well as in the private and civil society sector.⁴ The promise of intercultural exchange and mutual understanding are highlighted in the political as well as social spheres of Sweden and in its relations with other countries. This is reflected in a recent study published by the British Council and the Migration Policy Group, that contends that Sweden is better at managing integration than any other of the European countries, the US or Canada.⁵ The strengths highlighted in the study are the Swedish laws concerning family reunification and anti-discrimination and policy of offering overall good conditions for migrants to participate in society, including finding employment. It is also important to mention that laws related to housing and education were considered less advantageous, although still ranking high.⁶

An example of a cultural diplomacy initiative in Sweden, in form of a public policy, is the 'hemsprak' (home language) policy. Efforts to teach newly arrived immigrants Swedish is an important public integration tool, but it is also acknowledged that it is easier to master a new language if you are proficient in your mother tongue. Thus the 'hemsprak' policy was introduced in such a way that children with a mother tongue other than Swedish are given the opportunity to develop a 'mastery' of their native language within the framework of the public education system, in tandem with learning the Swedish language.⁷

2.2 The Sami People

The Sami people are the only indigenous group in Sweden, living mainly in the northern parts of the country, constituting a population around 20,000. Unfortunately, the lack of a deeper cultural understanding between modern day Swedes and Sami feeds a cultural divide. This divide has deep roots, originating from the industrialization process in Sweden. When Sweden started to exploit natural resources on Sami land it threatened their traditional reindeer herding

³ Sweden.se "Migration in Sweden" Available at:

<http://www.sweden.se/eng/Home/Society/Migration/> (Accessed: 2011-09-29); Palmer, Brian C.W.P "Sweden". Available at: <http://www.everyculture.com/Sa-Th/Sweden.html> (Accessed 2011-09-27)

⁴ Peter, Laurence (2006) "Sweden sticks to multiculturalism", BBC [online] September 15 2006. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5348622.stm> (Accessed 2011-09-27)

⁵ The Local (2011) "Sweden best at integration: study" The Local [online] February 28th 2011. Available at: <http://www.thelocal.se/32316/20110228> (Accessed 2011-09-27)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The Local (2011) "Sweden's hemspråk: teaching kids their parents' language" The Local [online] May 12th 2011. Available at: <http://www.thelocal.se/33736/20110512> (Accessed 2011-09-25)

and thus their livelihood. Miscommunication and lack of mutual understanding led to the marginalization of the Sami. Attempts to bridge these difficulties have been made, most notably by the introduction of Sametinget (the Sami Parliament), aiming to facilitate indigenous affairs on national level.⁸

⁸ Lola Akinmade L kerstr m (2011) "The Swedish Sami Consciousness" The Local [online] April 28th 2011. Available at: <http://www.sweden.se/eng/Home/Society/The-Sami-People/Reading/The-Swedish-Sami-Consciousness/> (Accessed 2011-09-25)

2.3 Challenges

Sweden often regards itself as a master of multiculturalism and integration, but Sweden nevertheless faces several serious challenges connected to these issues. Although there is an overall rhetorical consent among the political parties represented in the Swedish Parliament about the importance of cultural plurality, intercultural exchange and enhanced mutual understanding, the 'multicultural consent' has become challenged. Various far-right groups are increasingly present in the political debate, arguing for the need of a homogenous Sweden and the need for assimilation instead of integration policies. In the general elections of 2010, the nationalistic party Sverigedemokraterna (the Swedish Democrats), aiming at a culturally homogenous Sweden, for the first time crossed the four percent threshold needed for parliamentary representation.⁹ Thus it is becoming increasingly evident that Sweden, like many of its European counterparts, is experiencing a rise in anti-immigrant sentiments as well as an increasing politicization of the issue of immigration and multiculturalist discourse. But in comparison to both Norway and Denmark, where far-wing parties have been part of the government coalitions in past years, Sverigedemokraterna and their supporters have had less success in their political endeavors to date.

⁹ Peter, Laurence (2006) "Sweden sticks to multiculturalism", BBC [online] September 15 2006. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5348622.stm> (Accessed 2011-09-27); Valmyndigheten (2010) "Val till Riksdagen - Röster" Valmyndigheten [online] September 23rd 2010. Available at: <http://www.val.se/val/val2010/slutresultat/R/rike/index.html> (Accessed 2011-09-25)

3. Overview of Contemporary Cultural Diplomacy in Sweden

The concept of cultural diplomacy („kulturell diplomati“ in Swedish) is officially used and endorsed by the Swedish state, most notably in the work of the Swedish Institute, a department under the Swedish government. The Swedish Institute states that the cultural diplomacy of Sweden is a part of its public diplomacy, which rather than focusing on relationships between the Swedish and foreign governments (traditional diplomacy), is focusing on ‘...communicating and developing relations directly with the general public and civil societies abroad. This has taken on increased importance in an era of democracy, mass communication and mass consumption where borders are erased and individuals, through their choices and opinions, are to an ever greater extent the ones who set the agenda.’¹⁰

The official cultural diplomacy activities undertaken by the Swedish state have two main objectives. The first is to increase the overall interest and trust in Sweden abroad, for example through academic exchanges and through increasing the awareness about what is seen as Swedish core values; democracy and human rights, within the framework of Swedish aid and development assistance. The second is to aim towards an international understanding about the importance of intercultural exchange, understanding and dialogue to meet the challenges in today’s globalised world.¹¹ Less explicitly stated cultural diplomacy objectives can be found in the official cultural policy of Sweden, which stress the importance of making culture and cultural activities available for everyone. The importance of enhancing international and intercultural exchange and cooperation within the area of culture is also highlighted in this policy document.¹²

Within the private sector of Sweden, the notion of cultural diplomacy is not commonly used. But the need of multiculturalism and diversity within this sector is becoming more and more focused upon. Programmes and initiatives to enhance the cultural diversity within private companies and businesses are becoming more visible. This has to do with that the private sector also has come to acknowledge that increased globalization affect not only trade structures, but also structures within and between companies and that Swedish companies can gain in extend its cultural diversity.

The civil society of Sweden is highly engaged in the Swedish cultural diplomacy, both within Sweden as well as abroad. The initiatives for increased diversity and broaden cultural representation are manifold, and span over various integration projects, arts-and cultural initiatives, sports etc. Below, various cultural diplomacy projects within the public-, private-, and civil society sector are introduced to offer a picture of the current state of cultural diplomacy in Sweden.

¹⁰ Swedish Institute (2011) "Public diplomacy: Building relations with people abroad" Swedish Institute [online] March 29th 2011. Available at: <http://www.si.se/English/Navigation/About-SI/Sweden-in-the-world/> (Accessed 2011-09-27)

¹¹ Swedish Institute (2011) "Kulturell Diplomati (Cultural Diplomacy)" Swedish Institute [online] March 24th 2011. Available at: <http://www.si.se/Svenska/Innehall/Sverige-i-varlden/Offentlig-diplomati/Kulturell-diplomati/> (Accessed 2011-09-27)

¹²Kulturrådet (2011) "Kulturpolitiska mål" Kulturrådet [online] 2011 Available at: http://www.kulturradet.se/sv/om-kulturradet/kulturpolitiska_mal/ (Accessed 2011-09-25)

3.1 Cultural Diplomacy in the Public Sector

The Swedish Institute (SI)

Agent of Cultural Diplomacy: The Swedish Institute

Agenda: To enhance Sweden's position abroad as well as to contribute to intercultural exchange between Sweden and countries around the world

Vehicle of Cultural Diplomacy: Various arts- and culture exhibitions ,on tour', academic exchange programmes.

Target Audience: The Swedish public as well as people interested in learning about Sweden and its culture.

After the Second World War, the Swedish government aimed at increasing its international relations and corporation. As a tool in this effort, the Swedish institute was founded to enhance cultural exchanges with other countries, as well as to spread the knowledge about Sweden.¹³ Today The Swedish Institute (SI) is the public body for cultural diplomacy in Sweden, working on the mission of the Swedish government. The cultural diplomacy activities and initiatives of SI are undertaken within the areas of foreign affairs, development and education. Thus, SI could be understood as the primary actor in the official Swedish work with intercultural dialogue and communication and nation-branding. SI acknowledges that to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future, cultural diplomacy is crucial, but it can also be used as tool to ease the facilitation of Swedish international policy and to spread Swedish business and culture over the world.¹⁴

The more specific aims of the Swedish Institute are to¹⁵

- Increase the international knowledge, understanding and interest of Sweden abroad; Enhance creativity, innovation and development within Sweden and its partners around the world, through stimulating the exchange of knowledge and talent;
- Enhance democracy and sustainable development through working with human rights, freedom of expression and equality;
- Enhance the global consciousness about sustainability, climate and environment;
- Contribute to economic, social and cultural development in the Swedish development work;
- Contribute to the minimizing tensions and the risk of conflicts through stressing the need of knowledge, dialogue and understanding between people within Sweden and between Sweden and other countries

To fulfill its aims, SI works in close collaboration with the Swedish embassies and consulates abroad, and in collaboration with various Swedish and foreign partners.¹⁶ During 2010, the institute contributed with support to exchange in 124 countries and undertook information

¹³ Swedish Institute (2011) "Historia - Föreningen som blev myndighet" Swedish Institute [online] July 12th 2011 Available at: <http://www.si.se/Svenska/Innehall/Om-Svenska-institutet/Historia/> (Accessed 2011-09-26)

¹⁴ Swedish Institute (2011) "För Sverige i världen" Swedish Institute [online] March 24th 2011 Available at: <http://www.si.se/Svenska/Innehall/Om-Svenska-institutet/> (Accessed 2011-09-26)

¹⁵ Swedish Institute (2011) "Sveriges främsta globaliseringsmyndighet" Swedish Institute [online] March 24th 2011 Available at: <http://www.si.se/Svenska/Innehall/Om-Svenska-institutet/Sveriges-framsta-globaliseringsmyndighet/> (Accessed 2011-09-26)

¹⁶ Swedish Institute (2011) "Sveriges främsta globaliseringsmyndighet" Swedish Institute [online] March 24th 2011 Available at: <http://www.si.se/Svenska/Innehall/Om-Svenska-institutet/Sveriges-framsta-globaliseringsmyndighet/> (Accessed 2011-09-26)

work in over 220 countries, making the institute the ‚globalization department‘ of Sweden.¹⁷

Examples of current projects carried out by the Swedish Institute include various art and design exhibitions on the topics of climate and sustainability, democracy, human rights and innovation. Another important part of the work of SI is grants for academic exchange, targeting both Swedish and international students and scholars. These academic exchange programmes aims at creating long-term relations with other cultures and societies; something that develops from intercultural exchange.¹⁸

¹⁷ Swedish Institute (2011) "Sveriges främsta globaliseringsmyndighet" Swedish Institute [online] March 24th 2011 Available at: <http://www.si.se/Svenska/Innehall/Om-Svenska-institutet/Sveriges-framsta-globaliseringsmyndighet/> (Accessed 2011-09-26)

¹⁸ Swedish Institute (2011) "Stipendier - Långsiktiga relationer och ömsesidigt lärande" Swedish Institute [online] March 23d 2011 Available at: <http://www.si.se/Svenska/Innehall/Stipendier-och-utbyte/> (Accessed 2011-09-26); See the Current Projects' of the Swedish Institute at: <http://www.si.se/Svenska/Innehall/Aktuella-projekt/>

Swedish Arts Council¹⁹

Agent of Cultural Diplomacy: The Swedish Arts Council (Statens Kulturråd) in cooperation with among others, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Federations of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies and Arts Baltica.

Agenda: To implement the national cultural policy determined by the Swedish Parliament

Vehicle of Cultural Diplomacy: The Swedish Art Council is cooperating with cultural bodies, from the domestic level to the international arena, in co-organizing and funding cultural projects in the fields of dance, theatre, literature, public libraries, music and museums. The Council also functions as a research institute collecting data that evaluates state spending in the cultural sphere.

Target Audience: All residents of Sweden, especially youths and children as well as foreigners

As any government authority in Sweden the Swedish Art Council is part of a particular government department. The Council is sorted under the Department of Culture and its budget and remit is determined annually by the government. The Swedish Arts Council was founded in 1974 and the activities of the Council adhere to the Swedish cultural policy which was laid down the same year. Of the total 5.5 billion SEK that is allocated for culture by the Swedish government 1.8 billion goes to the Swedish Arts Council. The council distributes about 1 billion to performing arts all over Sweden, from the local scene to the national. The Council also gives out grants to independent dance, theatre and music groups as well as to professional organisations of cultural workers. A special focus is directed at initiatives that work towards reaching youths and children. The Swedish Art Council understands a challenging, independent and dynamic cultural life to be one of the prerequisites for freedom of expression, and in the long run for a well-functioning democracy.

The main objectives of the Swedish Arts Council include the promotion of opportunities for everyone to experience culture, participate in educational programmes and develop their creative abilities; the promotion of quality and artistic renewal; the promotion of a dynamic cultural heritage that is preserved, used and developed and the promotion of international and intercultural exchange and cooperation in the cultural sphere

All these objectives are essentially aimed at safeguarding the Swedish cultural scenes ability to both be a preserver of cultural heritage and a progressive force in the society. To enable Sweden to have a cultural scene that fulfills this, the Arts Council, even though being a government body should make sure that the cultural scene can be independent without direct political ties. Apart from giving support to cultural organisations and supporting cultural workers the Swedish Arts Council also gives out grants to increase the production, distribution and reading of art periodicals. On top of this the Arts Council functions as a research institution that monitors and analyses the Swedish cultural sphere in order to detect where there is problems with funding and quality. It also in charge of producing statistics concerning museums, the conservation of cultural sites, study organisations, libraries and money spent on culturally related matters.

¹⁹ For information about the Swedish Arts Council see www.kulturradet.se

3.2 Cultural Diplomacy in the Private Sector

Diversity Challenge

Agent of Cultural Diplomacy: Academic Search

Agenda: To enhance diversity and multiculturalism in the business life of Sweden

Vehicle of Cultural Diplomacy: Through the programme 'Diversity Challenge', Academic Search is offering young academics with experience and knowledge about diversity and multiculturalism paid internships at some of the most well known companies in Sweden, thus raising focus on the importance of issues regarding diversity both within these companies and among young academics of Sweden.

Target Audience: Young academics

Academic Search, one of Scandinavia's most merited recruiting companies, introduced its programme 'Diversity Challenge' in 2005 and its seventh programme is starting up on October of 2011. The aim of the programme is to increase diversity and pluralism in the private sector of Sweden, particularly within Swedish companies. 'Diversity Challenge' offer young academics with experience of and competence in diversity paid internships at some of the most attractive employers in Sweden, including companies such as Ikea, Scania, SEB and Vattenfall. The programme has also initiated the Academic Search Mångfaldspris (diversity prize) of 10,000 SEK, which one student annually is awarded. The prize goes to the student with the best ideas on how a company practically can work with diversity. 'Diversity Challenge' moreover organizes thematic seminars (the first one of 2011 was on the topic "Diversity Makes a Difference") and education and workshops for companies within the area of diversity.²⁰

In offering its partnership companies the opportunity to come in contact with ambitious and highly performing academics with knowledge and experience of diversity, Academic Search is through its programme 'Diversity Challenge' contributing to cultural diplomacy within the private sector of Sweden. Academic Search acknowledges the importance of increased diversity also within the private sector and has through the programme taken a concrete step towards making a difference in the work of this sector.

²⁰ For information about "Diversity Challenge", see <http://www.diversitychallenge.se/>, Academic Search "Diversity Challenge". Available at: <http://www.academicsearch.se/home.nsf/Pages/CSIN84RGKW?OpenDocument&UDID=DADN77DK6C&SUBUDID=CSIN7DLEY9> (Accessed 2011-10-04)

Mångfald i Arbetslivet

Agent of Cultural Diplomacy: Svenskt Näringsliv (The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise).

Agenda: To increase diversity within the private sector of Sweden as a path to success for both Swedish companies and for the Swedish economy at large

Vehicle of Cultural Diplomacy: Since Svenskt Näringsliv is one of the most important actors within the private sector of Sweden, their aim to increase diversity and the view of the need of diversity within Swedish companies, their project 'Mångfald i Arbetslivet' can be seen as an important vehicle for cultural diplomacy in the Swedish private sector.

Target Audience: The organisation, the member companies of Svenskt Näringsliv, the media, politicians and opinion-makers.

The project 'Mångfald i Arbetslivet' (Diversity within the labor market) was initiated by the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise in 2011, an organisation within the private sector of Sweden that represent about 60,000 Swedish companies and enterprises. The idea behind the project is that cultural, ethnic, religious as well as gender diversity is crucial for both the success of Swedish companies and the Swedish economy at large. The organisation believes that 'Diversity contributes to creativity and innovation'. Furthermore, the organisation acknowledges that the establishment of new markets requires knowledge about other cultures and also that businesses that work actively with diversity more easily can adjust its products and services to an increasingly diverse market. Thus, the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise felt the importance of initiating a project dealing with the topic of diversity within the private sector.²¹

The goals of 'Mångfald i Arbetslivet' are to²²:

- Increase the awareness of the advantages and benefits of diversity in the business life and for economic growth at large;
- To broaden the view of competence;
- To increase diversity on leading positions within the private sector;
- To raise the profile of Svenskt Näringsliv as an important and trustworthy actor in these issues.

In aiming to increased public openness for individual and cultural differences as well as to in a more effective manner acknowledge the worth of various competences, the project is working within the following areas:

- Making diversity an important parameter for companies when recruiting.
- Realizing and publicizing research and writings on diversity in the labour market.
- Arranging seminars on the topic of diversity.
- Bringing forward positive examples of companies that make use of and develop diversity as an important strategy for growth and profit.

²¹ Svenskt Näringsliv (2001) "Mångfald i Arbetslivet - en förutsättning för tillväxt" Available at: http://www.svensktnaringsliv.se/multimedia/archive/00000/M_ngfald_i_arbetslivet_104a.pdf (Accessed 2011-09-26)

²² Ibid.

3.3 Cultural Diplomacy in Civil Society

Tamam²³

Agent of Cultural Diplomacy: Tamam

Agenda: To contribute to the integration of newly arrived immigrants in Sweden as well as enhancing intercultural exchange both within Sweden and abroad.

Vehicle of Cultural Diplomacy: Activities for immigrant children and young adults, such as study groups, excursions and cultural and sports activities, aiming at facilitating integration; Volunteer exchanges between Tamam volunteers in Sweden and its partner countries; Tamam as an overall meeting ground for children and young adults from all over the world.

Target: Audience: Immigrant children and youth in Sweden as well as volunteers

Tamam is a non-for-profit and non-partisan organisation, based in Lund in the south of Sweden. It was established in 2003 and in the early stages Tamam existed mainly as a network of voluntary groups that initiated activities for newly arrived immigrant youths and children, aiming to reduce the risks of alienation and to enhance integration. During the past few years the activities have rapidly expanded to including activities in collaboration with local sports- and culture associations, various excursions and trips within Sweden and abroad, and study-groups offering home-work support. Due to this rapid change Tamam transformed into an impartial aid organisation in 2008, with a stated mission to work with children and youths in risk of alienation or exclusion in Sweden as well as abroad. At the end of 2010 Tamam consisted of 1594 members between the age of 7 and 25 and in addition to the headquarters in Lund Tamam has currently local offices in Malmö, Uppsala, Stockholm, Göteborg and Eslöv.

With the slogan 'Friendship without borders!' always in mind Tamam seeks to create meeting grounds characterized by diversity, curiosity and happiness for children and young adults. Through the initiatives taken by the organisation young immigrants are involved in activities that will create a foundation for turning challenges into possibilities, and thus making them take charge of their own future.

During 2011, Tamam initiated two development projects beside its regular work. The first project is called *Nytt Land Nya Möjligheter/Internationen* (New Country - New Possibilities), aiming at creating contact areas between newly arrived immigrants and students at the University of Lund. The second project is called *Social inkubator för unga idéer* (Social Incubator for Young Ideas), aiming to make Tamam a place where young people can turn up with their own ideas regarding social projects, as well as offering help and guidance to bring about the realization of these projects.

In addition to the integration work carried out in Sweden, Tamam also carries out work in Albania, Mexico and Paraguay. An important spillover effect of these country offices is that they open up for volunteer exchange opportunities between the countries. Tamam in Albania is working with kids and youths that have suffered traumatic experiences. In the village of Marquinet, Tamam offer free English and French courses and organize social and cultural activities with children and young people. Tamam in Mexico runs a daycare center for alienated children in the village of Pedernales. The children get help with homework, are engaged in various cultural and sport activities as well as taken on excursions and trips. Tamam in Paraguay is working in collaboration with the local organisation Fundacion Vida Plena running a daycare center for children living in extreme poverty.

²³ For information about Tamam see "Tamams verksamhetsberättelse 2010" Available at: <http://www.tamam.se/pdf/verksamhetsberattelse10.pdf> (Accessed 2011-09-24)

Intercult

Agent of Cultural Diplomacy: Intercult through its projects and initiatives

Agenda: To gather artists from all over Europe in various projects with the mission to encourage intercultural and interdisciplinary art works.

Vehicle of Cultural Diplomacy: Intercult gathers artists and audience from all over Europe, creating unexpected meetings for new relationships to develop across borders and disciplines

Target Audience: Artists and audience in Sweden and other European countries

Intercult is a production group and resource center based in Stockholm, Sweden. Since 1996 Intercult has initiated and carried out a wide span of projects aiming at cultural collaboration and development of intercultural/international project competence, in Sweden and Europe.

Through engaging in trans-boundary art and cultural projects, Intercult is linking local and international arts and culture activities, thus working as an important actor for cultural diplomacy. Intercult works actively across a wide span of networks and shares its experience through conferences, lectures and courses in Sweden and in Europe.²⁴ Example projects include:

Black/North SEAS

The SEAS project is a platform for art that Intercult arranged during four years, between 2006 and 2010, targeting an audience of over 80,000 people. The project brought together culture producers, artists and researchers from twelve countries, reaching from Scandinavia to the Black Sea. The project gave the artists an opportunity to meet and work across boundaries, leading to new collaborations between artists from the North and the South of Europe. The result was 20 new interdisciplinary art works, all of them inspired by intercultural exchange between artists around political, social and environmental issues.²⁵

Four Corners of Europe

The Four Corners of Europe project is a joint initiative between organisations and cultural actors in Europe. During 17 months the project aims at creating future joint productions within the cultural sector of different countries in Europe. One part of the Four Corners of Europe initiative is the Corners Caucasus Expedition, in which 22 artists and researchers from ten countries travelled by bus from Turkey, through Georgia, arriving in Baku in Azerbaijan. During the journey, the artists met people from the region and looked for stories and inspiration for new art works.²⁶ Thus, the Four Corners of Europe project can be seen as an excellent example of cultural diplomacy, creating an opening for intercultural exchange both between the artists involved and between the artists and the people they will meet on the way, eventually leading to new and exciting art works.

Fast Forward

Fast Forward is a platform for joint collaboration between arts practitioners of different disciplines. Focusing on Sweden and the Balkan region, the project aims at exploring the socio-political contexts in these societies with the mission to encourage interdisciplinary and intercultural art. One part of the Fast Forward project is the Fast Forward Dance and Dramaturgy Lab that over the course of one week gathered ten dance experts from the Balkan region and Sweden in Skopje, Macedonia to explore the possibilities that personal and impersonal narratives offer to the creation of art work.²⁷

²⁴ For further information about Intercult see www.intercult.se

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

4. Analysis and Conclusion

Sweden has both comparatively extensive policies on diversity and integration and widespread public activities in cultural diplomacy. These can be understood to mirror the highly multicultural society of Sweden, but they also work as vehicles for overcoming challenges such a society faces. This report shows that in the public sector of Sweden, cultural diplomacy is mainly enforced by the Swedish Institute, but aspects of it can be found in the work of other official bodies as well, since intercultural exchange and diversity is of great importance for the Swedish society as a whole. However, more always be done; in being a highly culturally diverse country with over 200 nationalities represented, Sweden has to continue working hard with various integration measures, in which cultural diplomacy activities are crucial.

The importance of cultural diplomacy measures is becoming increasingly acknowledged, not just in the public sector but also in the private sector. As Svenskt Näringsliv points out, increased diversity within companies and businesses can be regarded as not only a question of equality, but also as a tool for profit. In spite of this it is important to note that the Swedish private sector has a long way to go in this regard. Finding current cultural diplomacy projects or initiatives within this sector was the hardest part of the research for this report as such projects are few and far between. In this regard, much remains to be done in terms of private sector interaction with cultural diplomacy. For example, more companies need to include policies for increased diversity and intercultural exchange. In this regard, Academic Search can be seen as a very good example of a company that in an extensive manner seeks to integrate cultural diplomacy programmes in its company profile, though targeting both young academics as well as big companies.

The civil society sector of Sweden works extensively with various projects and programmes that can be connected to cultural diplomacy. The two different programmes presented in this report can be seen as quite representative for how cultural diplomacy in the civil sector is carried out. Even though workings within different areas, Tamam works mainly with integration and Intercult within the arts- and culture sector, the programmes are highly focused on intercultural exchange for broadening mutual understanding between people.

Whilst the organisations and programmes presented in this report are not representative of all cultural diplomacy initiatives and activities going on in these sectors, it is evident that many organisations and programmes significantly contribute to 'the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs and other aspects of culture' within different areas of the Swedish society. This is important, since for cultural diplomacy to make a real impact it needs to be implemented in all spheres of society. With that said, however, many challenges are still to be overcome; at the moment, this is best illustrated by the spreading of anti-immigrant sentiment which pursues a more 'homogenous' Swedish society. But as this report hopefully demonstrates, Sweden is well on its way and could perhaps be viewed as an example for other countries to follow regarding how to utilise cultural diplomacy within the public-, private- and civil society sectors.

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<http://www.diversitychallenge.se/>.

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http://culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_culturaldiplomacy (Accessed 2011-09-25) Intercult,
see www.intercult.se.

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