



Symposium of experts on :

« Cultural Diversity in the light of globalization.

The Future of the Cultural Industries in Central and Eastern Europe »

organized in collaboration with Polish National Commission for UNESCO

(Warsaw, 30 June – 1 July 2000)

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A summary report drawn up by the Polish National Commission for UNESCO

On 30 June and 1 July 2000 an international symposium of experts met in Warsaw to discuss the theme of "Cultural diversity in the light of globalization. The future of Cultural Industries in Eastern and Central Europe". This UNESCO meeting was organized by the Cultural Committee of the Polish National Commission for UNESCO in collaboration with the Division of Creativity, Cultural Industries and Copyright in the Culture Sector and was placed under the patronage of the President of the Polish Diet.

The symposium looked at issues which have been widely debated over the last few years within UNESCO, the European Union and the Council of Europe. It continued debate on the themes of the Experts Symposium on culture, the market and globalization which took place in Paris in June 1999, and which was organized as a follow-up to UNESCO's Intergovernmental Conference on cultural policies for development which was held in Stockholm in 1998. The organization of regional meetings of experts devoted to cultural diversity was introduced into UNESCO's programme for the period 2000-2001. The Warsaw Symposium should also be viewed in a wider context in which figures the creation of an international group of governmental experts planned for the end of September and the second Ministers of Culture Round Table on cultural diversity which will take place in Paris in December 2000.

The debates, which began after the opening ceremony took place in the presence of the President of the Diet, the Minister of Culture and National Heritage as well as the President of the Parliamentary Commission on Culture and Communication and UNESCO's representative, included two main sections. The first one took a general approach and reflected on the notions of cultural diversity and globalization. It also analysed the main trends in the development of culture and cultural exchange today. The second section

presented the current situation of three cultural industry sectors: records, books and the audiovisual media – in Central and Eastern European countries.

The first section of the debate primarily concerned the cultural policies of the countries of the euro-atlantic region, particularly in the context of World Trade Organization negotiations (WTO) on the status of cultural goods in international trade. Two subjects dominated this part of the debate: global trends in the field of culture and the cultural specificity of Central and Eastern European countries.

The current situation on a global level is determined not only by the ease of trade and the absence of obstacles to the circulation of goods, both due to technological progress, but also by an important change in values. From the perspective of European civilization, it is clear that the model based on the contrast between “civilization”, “culture”, “Europe” and “the Enlightenment” on the one hand, and the rest of the world still seen as “uncivilized” and as a virgin territory subject solely to the action of “Culture” and “Civilization” is being abandoned. The model of a hierarchical culture which the enlightened elites pass on to the masses and to peoples is in the process of disappearing (has it already disappeared?) and is being replaced by a model which introduces the coexistence of different, sometimes contradictory, values and attitudes. The collapse of traditional opposing positions is leading to a relativization of cultures, recognized value systems and of values themselves. It is time, therefore, to question the legitimacy of formulating proposals aimed at evaluation, of the possibility of developing a social model in which such proposals are absent, or the consensus concerning fundamental values. All values can be called into question. This includes human rights as well as everything which constitutes a value judgement of other cultures. For example: what can be qualified as “good” in artistic creation, what phenomena linked to the consumption of cultural goods can be viewed as “good”? Consequently, is there a body – if the answer is yes, what is this body? – which has the right to privilege certain cultural goods to the detriment of others? In what way might culture – or “which culture”? – make the coexistence of groups and individuals living in such a diversified, but also unified world, possible.

Such dilemmas – which are today both clear and complex – determined the debate’s outlook on cultural policies, globalization and cultural diversity.

Two ways of understanding the notion of globalization emerged. The first approach presupposes the questioning of the existence of a global culture. The notion of global culture would be defined as “the complete range of goods accessible everywhere and at all times” – the impact of the market, of new technologies and of the free circulation of goods and services. Observation of market trends has led many to conclude that the widely feared process of cultural uniformisation is no longer a factor. The model of consumption governed by the motto “Be yourself” and the individualization of the consumption of cultural products is contributing to the development of the market. The market is therefore one of the factors encouraging diversity, if not one of the main factors of creation.

As a result, in order to survive in the global circuit, cultures must transform their “assets” into marketable goods and market products. Commercialization would also be the only effective way they have to ensure their continued existence. Refusal would lead to a loss of vitality and cultures becoming little more than “museum pieces”. However, if a global culture does indeed

offer diversity, it is a diversity made up of elements originating, certainly, from different cultures, but which are generally transformed to such an extent, that they are stripped of their original context and, as a result, meaning.

According to others, globalization can be defined as an intensification of communication and exchange owing to technological development. Globalization is therefore a phenomenon to which culture gives meaning. Culture which is incredibly diversified by its very nature. It is important to understand that it is not the market which generates diversity, but the sensitivity determined by culture.

Such an approach is at the heart of the position adopted by some European countries, including France, in negotiations with the World Trade Organization (WTO) when they argue for a different status for culture goods by demanding that they be treated differently from other marketable goods. From this angle, globalization is viewed as a factor allowing access to different cultures, but also as a danger which could lead to the absorption of some cultures by others. Cultural goods are not only a commodity and that is why they can not be treated as if the law of the market decided alone their emergence and circulation.

In the first part of the debate particular importance was given to a reflection on the cultural specificity of Europe, especially Central and Eastern Europe. The participants expressed, on several occasions, the idea that cultural identity has a dynamic identity which is dependent on many diverse and variable factors. The determining factor in the role of Europe as cultural center is precisely – as Jacques Derrida underlined – the acceptance of diversity and a permanent research of identity. Emphasis was placed on a long tradition of *cohabitation* which, in the past, characterized populations of different religious and ethnic identities living in the regions of Central and Eastern Europe, important from both a political and cultural point of view, such as historical Poland and Lithuania, the Principality of Transylvania or, during certain periods of its history, the Habsbourg monarchy. These traditions are not only historical fact, but are above all a cultural fact, whose importance has to date not been sufficiently appreciated.

Speakers on the protection and promotion of cultural diversity in Europe underlined that governments must implement policies aimed at protecting national cultures while admitting that “protectionism” was not an acceptable solution. Among effective cultural policy measures, they mentioned tax relief and public subsidies for the production and distribution of cultural goods, as well as the quota system imposed by the European Union with respect to the audiovisual media of its member countries (this measure was not considered to be protectionist since it applies to European production and not to that of a particular country). In some countries such as Great Britain, where cultural industries contribute substantially to GDP and are an important source of employment, great importance is attached to the promotion of national cultural products abroad. Thus, for example, British cinema has a representative in Hollywood whose mission has been to promote the British film industry (and film directors). This approach has been successful. Still in Great Britain, great importance is attached to the analysis of the needs of cultural industries and to the creation, by government, of favourable conditions for its development. To this effect, the British government has created a task force in which a regular exchange of information between the government, creator and producer associations and individual creators and producers takes place.

The second section of the debate looked at the situation of the record, book and audiovisual media industries in Central and Eastern countries. The first speakers presented an overview of the general situation of cultural industries in the region after the collapse of the communist system.

Several speakers underlined a clear improvement in the situation due to the suppression of censorship and to the disappearance of other political and administrative obstacles (often a decisive factor) restricting the freedom of creation, production and distribution of goods. But the changes of the last few years have brought other problems, often linked to the process of globalization, which are therefore similar to those faced by western countries. As the presentation of the situation of cultural industries in Central and Eastern countries showed, these countries are faced with additional specific problems created by deep social and economic change.

A lack of data in many European countries makes any study of cultural industries difficult.

The record industry

In order to illustrate the situation in this sector, speakers used the experience of Slovakia and Poland.

In both countries, national production is marginal in terms of market share, but while in Poland this figure (calculated according to the criteria of the index) is 35%, in Slovakia it is not higher than 11%. Despite this limited presence in the national market and despite the lack of support given to national producers by the authorities, Slovakia's representative expressed the wish that multinationals would enter the Slovakian market: their presence would assure greater promotion of Slovakian music in the international circuit.

A common problem in many Central and Eastern European countries, including Poland, is phonographic piracy. Effective national legislation with regard to the protection of intellectual property is today not sufficient to eliminate this phenomenon. Yet statistics were presented showing that piracy in Poland has dropped from 90% of market share in 1994 to 20% today – after the implementation of appropriate legislation. In addition, the source of piracy is no longer the same: illegal production comes above all from abroad. During the discussion, the participants drew attention to the relationship which exists between piracy and the high price of records: the latter plays a dissuasive role within a large part of society.

The book industry

The situation in this sector was analyzed by experts representing Croatia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Ukraine and Poland.

In all of these countries, the collapse of the communist system has brought extremely positive changes in the book sector linked to the transformations mentioned above: the suppression of censorship and other obstacles to the freedom of creation and publication. Today, the book market is privatized either totally or to a large extent. Following a period of market dispersal, a phase of consolidation and stabilization is currently underway. On the other hand, some worrying phenomena have been observed.

These include a reduction in the number of readers, observed notably in Poland and Croatia. This phenomenon is linked to change in cultural models, but also to the appreciable rise in the real price of books and to the lowering of living standards of a large part of the population.

The reduction in the number of readers is accompanied by an often spectacular shrinking of the library network, which makes access to books more difficult, especially in small towns and villages.

In some countries (e.g. Ukraine), the existence of a network of public libraries with a system of free loans has stopped the decline of reading. On the other hand, it has been observed that libraries which charge (e.g. Croatia) have the effect of lowering the number of readers. *Nota bene*, in the case of Poland, there has been a reduction in the number of bookshops as well as in the number of free libraries.

The gap between book prices from one country to another is considerable and this between countries which are at the same stage in their transition. It was underlined that in Hungary – and especially in the Czech Republic where reading is widespread – books are a lot cheaper than in Poland, with the average price of a hardback in the Czech Republic being only \$4. And yet, Polish GDP is lower than that of the Czech Republic, while its market is bigger. In the Ukraine, the high cost of local production is one of the reasons for its lack of competitiveness faced with the import of books from abroad.

In all these countries, negative changes in the structure of the book market have been observed. “Quality” literature is losing out to low quality production. Although they only represent 1.5-2% of market share (sales products), public subsidies have come to the rescue of this industry as they allow the publication of non commercial works which, without this aid, would never have reached the general public.

With regard to the structure of property in the book sector, the fear of seeing national cultures threatened by the domination of foreign capital have not been born out by the facts. In reality, the arrival of foreign companies in the book market has encouraged the restructuring of local producers.

The existence of non-governmental national and international initiatives aimed at promoting books and reading was also noted. The Observatory of Culture for Central and Eastern Europe in Budapest as well as the Open Society Institute are responsible for the collection of data originating in all the countries of the region; the Open Society Institute and the Croatian Association of Independent Publishers are implementing strategies which aim to provide books to Serbian libraries.

The audiovisual media

In order to present the situation in this sector, the speakers focused on two areas; radio and television on the one hand, and cinema on the other.

Experts from Bulgaria, Latvia and Poland analysed the situation of radio and television. They underlined the particular role of public television due to the limited access to newspapers and books owing to their high price. Thus, radio and especially television, are taking over the function of newspapers as sources of information and are replacing the role of books in the development of moral and social attitudes.

In this context, the speakers tried to define the role of public television: it would have to determine the central themes of development and raise the level of production to that of all of the audiovisual market. In Poland, public television also subsidizes movie-making.

The danger which threatens television and radio and which may compromise their public service mission is the temptation of commercialization. It was pointed out that where public channels are in part financed by advertising revenue, their programme schedule is drawn up in such a way as to increase this revenue, meaning that there is a preference for programmes and films aimed at the general public which attract a lot of viewers (listeners), without taking artistic values or the quality of information into consideration.

Representatives from Bulgaria and Latvia also mentioned the material problems facing television broadcasters in the region's smaller countries. The fact that the markets in these countries are so small does not allow the broadcasters to make the necessary investment in technical equipment. Furthermore, there is still need for an economic education on the conditions of the market economy. In this area, the assistance of the British Council could not be overestimated.

The situation of cinema was illustrated by an analysis of three national film industries, in Latvia, Russia and Poland.

The problems in Latvia are representative of a small country where, for obvious reasons, national production is not profitable due to the insufficient number of filmgoers. This applies above all to feature-length films, but the problem is not foreign to the producers of documentary films. What is necessary is cooperation between small film industries (such as those in the Baltic countries), the absence of which has been surprising to date.

The changes in Russian filmmaking date back to the years of "*perestroika*". It was during this period that state intervention was first limited and attempts were made to introduce "the American model". Cinema – production as well as distribution – were subjected to the law of the market, without any participation of the public authorities. In an atmosphere of creative freedom, film production boomed. But this flowering only lasted two years: one of the reasons for this spectacular quantitative change was money laundering by criminal groups. In 1992, production dropped as video piracy developed. The films made throughout the 90s were, for the main part, mediocre. Today, Russian filmmaking receives public subsidies, but the main source of finance is private sponsors found thanks to the personal contacts of the directors themselves.

The emergence of negative phenomena in the filmmaking industry coincided with the collapse of the distribution network. Today cinemas show bad quality films, especially American ones (yet Category "A" American films are not affected by video piracy). On a more hopeful note is the opening of a cinema chain financed by American and Russian capital, which shows Category "A" films. But this chain only has a few cinemas, not more than a dozen, situated in Russian cities; in addition, the tickets are several times more expensive than in other cinemas. The only French "theatre-cinema" open in Moscow, with the participation of France, is today in decline.

The Polish representative focused on the situation of new directors. While their films benefit from almost no promotion, an unknown creator has little chance of being noticed on the market. This is why films made by new directors – who are the future of filmmaking – should

not be considered as the first steps in an “adult” world subjected to the law of the market, but rather as the final stage of an education as a young director. Yet, the workshop created in the 1980s to promote new filmmakers had its subsidy cut at the start of the 1990s. The lack of a system aimed at promoting new artists would appear to be one of the main factors in the ageing of Polish cinema.

Based on the analysis of the situation in the three sectors concerned, the participants expressed some considerations with regard to national policies, European cooperation, regional cooperation between Central and Eastern European countries and UNESCO’s role:

1. With regard to national policies:

- a) Each country should elaborate its own cultural policy which, - while respecting the principle of pluralism – should take into account the demands of the free market and the freedom of cultural expression.
- b) States should support artistic creation through the adoption of legislation which protects creators and creativity and supports artists’ associations.
- c) The cultural policy of the countries concerned should aim to facilitate the market access of cultural goods by, among others, improving their distribution networks. This recommendation applies to all cultural industry sectors, but above all to the book industries.
- d) Public authorities are responsible for the elimination of piracy.

2. With regard to regional and sub-regional cooperation:

- a) It is necessary to improve the systems of collection and exchange of information in the area of cultural industries.
- b) Pilot projects should be set up in the different cultural industry sectors, especially with regard to cooperation in the area of cinema and audiovisual media.

3. With regard to UNESCO’s commitments:

The Organization should support the national cultural policies of Central and Eastern European countries (by providing, among others, expert aid and facilitating the introduction of international norms) in the following ways:

- organize training programmes and implement policies (among others, organize meetings of politicians, civil servants, professionals) which encourage increased awareness and a deeper reflection on areas such as aid to artistic and literary production and the protection of intellectual property in all cultural industry sectors.
- encourage the exchange of information (among others, promote the creation of Internet “portals”)
- support networks of international and interregional cooperation.

These aspects underlie the proposals which were identified and developed in the conclusions of the Rapporteur and which were approved at the end of the meeting.

The Symposium debate was followed by a round table on cultural diversity. Before the closing session, the speakers at the round table engaged a lively debate on the notions of mass and high culture, the relationship between these two forms of culture, as well as the role of elites in today's society. This brought the discussion to the question of the transmission of ethical values.

The round table debates began with a moving speech on the loss of cultural identity in Russia where the values of national culture are being replaced, without any reflection, by an eclectic mixture of elements from diverse origins. In the case of each society, the loss of cultural identity, and the consequent loss of reference points and respect for one's own traditions, brings the risk of a strengthening of brutal nationalism as substitute for the values of national culture, and the outbreak of violence as a degenerate form of a struggle for dignity. If this was this case, it would be a negative scenario of globalization.

Other more optimistic speakers insisted upon the fact that globalization, together with democratic values, reduces the risk of the emergence of authoritarian and totalitarian systems due to, among others, the generalization of access to information via Internet and satellite. Thus – owing to these political implications – globalization encourages the continued existence of authentic regional cultures and encourages their renaissance. The historical experience of Central and Eastern European countries is at the heart of the growing awareness of the relationship which exists between the emerging global culture and democratic values.

Globalization is thus bringing hope. This is, furthermore, a process which has been underway for a long time and which consists in introducing local cultures into a wider cultural circuit which leads to their transformation. In one sense, the term “globalization” means modernization: it is the widening of access to cultural goods produced in different cultural areas and the generalization of access to cultural supports. This encourages the emergence of cultural goods aimed at a new public.

An anecdote quoted by one of the participants illustrated this transformation and called for a reflection on its importance. Several decades ago, a woman of high society asked to whom so-called “bad” literature was destined. When she heard that it was read by cooks and maids, she was surprised because she did not know that cooks and maids knew how to read: when she was young they were all illiterate. The question, therefore, is whether, for certain groups of people, this bad literature is in fact good, because only it allows them to participate in a global culture. Certainly, it can be argued whether culture, passed on in this manner, is still culture.

Thus the same questions keep coming back (and arose several times during the debate): should cultural values be decided by a democratic majority? or in a different way: what legitimates the pretensions of the elites to decide? What is the status of the elites in today's world where hierarchies are collapsing? But these hierarchies, are they really collapsing? As one of the participants in the debate remarked, the criticism of elites and the questioning of their right to decide values in the name of the society also emanates from the elites themselves. _

A proposal which avoids some of the aporia outlined above would consist in the education of a certain model likely to create the basis of a “global” society, based on responsibility, understanding, and the respect of differences and diversity. The objective of this education would be to encourage an approach based on an attitude of comprehension, the research of the meaning of phenomena, the aptitude to appreciate their complexity and their place in an

increasingly wide context. Such a training programme appears to be the main challenge of education if cultural or social diversity is to be respected. Identity based on such an attitude which can be called “open regionalism”, is an identity open to otherness.

The Symposium presented an occasion to identify the problems facing the cultural industries of Central and Eastern European countries, to compare the cultural policies implemented by these countries and by western ones and to deepen awareness of the need to find new solutions. The Symposium, which gathered together experts with different professional and intellectual experience, seems to have contributed towards helping people better understand the current situation of culture and cultural industries, define the different contexts of this situation and develop possible measures to be implemented.