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(European) Cultural Policy in Poland

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The difficulties related to the European Union enlargement concern historical, political, economic but also cultural issues. The mention of "effects on" in the title could suggest that culture is being passively exposed to an influence that might prove damaging. Considering the lack of state involvement in the area of culture, the young age of Eastern democracy and its fragile capitalism, but also the fast-changing society, it is almost impossible to rely on public support and have long-term development plans. Does the third sector have a role to play in preserving culture? Despite the common history of the whole former East Bloc each candidate country has a unique background, and enlargement will only highlight the differences. This short presentation will focus on the Polish case.

Poland is passing though a period of instability and identity crisis, which can be explained by the country's historical context, pre-war development and years spent under socialism, by the reforms undertaken or needed, by the economic transformations and the growing social gap. Bereft of 45 years of its history, Polish people are trying to find themselves and are experiencing a crisis of values. Corruption, political rivalries, family values, superstitions, sects... Except for religion, it is difficult to say what the Polish people still

believe in. However, in spite of the difficulties Poland has had to face since the 18th century (partitions, wars, repatriations, changing borders), a strong feeling of national affiliation persists and does so thanks to the attachment to religion and to the Polish language.
Meanwhile, a wild version of capitalism, delayed when compared to the western countries, has developed and is growing at a pace difficult to control. The rapid changes provoke a fear of losing one's landmarks. The need of preserving the common memory is seen in the erection of historic monuments - witnesses of the past that was lost and regained - like Katyn or the Warsaw insurrection, in the adherence to folklore and the Polish landscape, whose shape will change upon joining the EU.

Politically, the State is also in a stage of transition, complicated all the more by the upcoming presidential elections.
The speed of changes in Poland is probably due to the roundtable agreements that recognized Solidarnosc and authorized the opposition to sit in the Parliament. The collapse of socialism in Poland, the first in Eastern Europe, allowed the birth of a democratic system. But an actual need of "purifying the past" has emerged, an example of which is the procedure for screening politicians' pasts.

Given political and economic deadlines, culture seems to be of minor importance. Election programs of presidential candidates do not include cultural projects. The Ministry of Culture has to fight against three illusions: the specter of the Ministry for Culture and Propaganda, the conviction from the post-centralist times that no cultural policy is the best policy and finally the myth of a romantic artist. Furthermore, it is still difficult to impose a strong Ministry of Culture and to define what cultural policy should be like.
However the current Minister for Culture and Heritage[1] has

defined the ten priorities of Polish cultural policy[2] and has appointed a public officer responsible for cultural integration. But what can really be done considering the fact that the budget for culture constitutes approximately 0.3% of the state budget, and that amount is largely allocated to big national institutions such as the national opera? Furthermore, during the last ten years, the ministers' very short terms of office have not allowed the creation of tools necessary for a coherent long-term policy.

This context affects the overall situation of culture and of all organizations and individuals promoting it. The public institutions, survivors from the communist period, often suffer from unfinished reforms. That is the case of the Polish Academy for Sciences (PAN) and Teatr Wielki, which is now divided into two independent institutions: national opera and theater. As a consequence, the organizations which are not viable are slowly dying or, at best, are underused. The institutions created after the 1980s, such the Zamek Ujazdowski Contemporary Art Center, are generally more flexible. Obliged to seek complementary subsidies, these public structures are struggling to finance their activities, but are also becoming more independent. In that context, one can easily understand that cultural operators from NGOs feel at a loss. These initiatives, weakened by the burden of economic imperatives, seem totally forgotten among the state priorities and are not benefiting from the effects of decentralization and the administrative reform of 1998. Cultural industries also need to find their own way of overcoming difficulties. Swamped with American cinema and TV programs or German capital in the publishing industry, domestic production is slowly declining and often tries to follow foreign models to succeed financially.
Is this to say that culture is in danger, threatened by the changes linked to enlargement?

That Poland will join Europe seems obvious. But opening up the borders, adapting laws to the common market and making the civil society aware of the changes will probably take longer than forecasted. Besides, many important questions need to be resolved within each candidate country before entering the EU.
Joining the EU culturally entails adopting the objectives defined in Article 128 of the Maastricht treaty.[3] But above all it means approaching culture from different angles and accepting it as a specific domain. A major difficulty is in the delicate transformation of an organizational model, deeply anchored in the mentalities, in which the pyramid structure was the rule. The American model for private financing of culture or for a solid cultural policy is yet to be established. But considering the need for reforms, the difficulties of the transition and the deadlines, it would be natural to assert the role of the state. Local authorities should be conscious of the role of culture and of the necessity of supporting it. EU membership could help to mobilize energies and indicate some necessary reforms.
The danger is in neglecting the real needs of cultural operators in Poland and in the brutal application of European rules. For instance concerning cultural industries, many questions should be more widely discussed and opened to a public debate. An amendment regarding quotas in broadcasting has been voted on and the copyright issue has been addressed, both exactly in line with European figures.

"If we were to remake Europe, we should start with culture." Even if that well-known quotation of Jean Monnet is spurious, let us consider the idea itself.
Joining Culture 2000 (cultural program of the EU) before economic integration would be an essential strategic approach. It could help to prepare people psychologically and to show that

European borders are not only economic. In the process, regions and local authorities would be involved in the information campaign. That could contribute to an assertion of culture as a specific domain and enable EU member countries to appreciate the cultures of new entrants.

Besides, each EU country participating in Culture 2000 has the mission of supporting the development of an information office, the Cultural Contact Point (CCP). The main role of these offices is to disseminate information concerning Culture 2000 and the European programs that can support cultural projects and to provide concrete assistance in preparation of files of grant-application forms. They should be autonomous and can play the role of bridges between local initiatives, state and European institutions. They will network with other CCPs and many European institutions or informal organizations: the Council of Europe, Forum of Networks, European Forum for Arts and Heritage, etc. The main partner of the CCPs within the state administration, with which the CCPs must coordinate their actions, are the departments for foreign affairs in the ministries of culture. Even if at their first stage of development they are mostly hosted by ministries of culture, the role of the CCPs in the East is of great importance. They have tremendous potential. They can be a tool for networking or enabling cross-border synergies, thus creating an environment conducive to realizing additional complementary projects or sharing know-how. That would help local projects or weak initiatives to some extent and promote the mobility of ideas.

One must bear in mind that cultural networks have been active in Europe since the 1980s. Networking started in northern Europe in response to various needs of professionals from the cultural field (most of them from NGOs): the necessity of informal meetings

with professionals from other countries that face similar problems ("It is a question of mental wealth," according to a French cultural operator.), that of spreading the right information at the right time, and last but not least, that of an effective lobbying organization to represent its members' position. As they operate totally in opposition to any hierarchical organization, networks are free areas allowing innovation and invention. They could play a determining role in European construction and help states and European institutions. By bringing their know-how to intercultural projects, cultural development and lobbying they are the real protagonists of cultural cooperation.

It is not possible to impose European rules in Poland so quickly. The Polish population has to be prepared and convinced it is part and parcel of Europe and will not disappear in a kind of jungle. Which means that cultural considerations are essential to development. Western Europe should also accept the fact that it is not a kind of annexation but a new perspective for its identity. And this could be possible thanks to the third sector, which transcends all sorts of borders and is able to voice urgent needs and bridge existing gaps.

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[1] The notion of heritage appeared recently.

[2] The desire to create a solid legal basis (concerning public financial support for national institutions, goodwill to self-managed initiatives, intellectual property, VAT on books, protection of Polish culture on the international stage, artistic education, etc.).

[3] 1. Contribute to the flourishing cultures of member states, respecting their national and regional diversity while showing the

common cultural heritage; 2. encourage the creation of contemporary culture; 3. foster cultural co-operation with partner countries and competent international organizations and in particular with the Council of Europe.