

'Cultura': an introduction to culture and cultural diplomacy



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From ancient times, culture seems to have had a great importance for the people. The culture is the glass that reflects the image of the country. It includes customs, habits, history and mentality of people in each place.

As we head back in the ancient cultures, we can clearly note that back then, people tend to diversify themselves based on their culture and furthermore do anything possible to protect their own culture from other civilizations. Great examples of such civilizations are the Persians, the Egyptians, the Greeks and many more.

Culture seems to be one of the most important things of the whole world. It is a common ground where we take steps to advance and create more and more things which give us aesthetics, facilities and artworks which free our minds and make life beautiful. Individually, each one of us conceives the reality of culture in a different way, but there were, there are and there will always be things that we all think of as culture.

So as long as we create, we are part of the culture, not one country's culture but the impact of humanity's culture on our earth, in our home! And step by step this comes closer to what we consider today as culture in comparison to the past. The only living object in this world is Culture and by saying living Culture we are deploying a Culture which always advances and enriches itself not in a long time period but in everyday life by people's actions. As "Culture" is a word that has its origins in

the Latin "culture", which comes from the verb *colo / colere*, meaning "to cultivate the earth", "to live". Its definition has evolved over time: Since the time of illuminism, culture is associated with civilization and the care that is given to the spirit, the progress.

According to UNESCO's official definition: "Culture is considered as the set of unique intangible and substantial, intellectual and emotional traits that discriminate a population or social group. Culture traits include arts, letters, lifestyles, human values, faith, and traditional habits". Simultaneously, it is an important source of income and an important economic pillar for the country.



Picture Cultura (Source: <http://acc.libfl.ru/debates-club-cultural-diversity-and-cultural-differences/>)

Culture as an utmost tool in International Relations

Famous artists have always been in the vicinity of the courtyard of any State President. Pablo Neruda was both poet and ambassador of his

country, Chile, at Paris. Rubens was both court artist and ambassador as well. Artists were at the service of the Nazi regime in Germany in the 1930s. Particularly, the famous film maker Leni Riefenstahl, as well as the known architect Albert Speer was employed in the Nazi court.

There was a geopolitical tension between the Soviet Union (East) and the United States (West) following the World War II, called the Cold War. This Cold War was heavily associated to inter-country differences concerning cultural issues such as Abstract Expressionism, Bolshoi Ballet or even achievements in the field of Space exploration. Surprisingly, a famous collection of British precious clocks of the 17th and 18th century is found in China at the Beijing Palace Museum. These watches were offered to Chinese leaders and government officers as gifts by diplomats or visiting emissaries. Many cultural scholars from West countries have visited the place and studied the collection. These clocks as a valuable cultural heritage disclose utmost information's in a refine manner.

We could admit then that culture tightens the international relations as culture offers tangible advantages in different surroundings. Most countries have developed cultural structures for spreading of their language and civilization in other countries. The 'British Council' (UK) has been established since 1934. Accordingly, the French 'Institut Français', the Spanish 'Instituto Cervantes' and the German 'Goethe-Institut' have developed similar international aims. Recently, the Chinese created the 'Confucius Institute'. The above structures have long-term commitments and engagements through international cultural relations to diffuse cultural issues and the language of their countries.

Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural Diplomacy is a bit different of Law. Law, in contrary with cultural diplomacy tends to reach a conclusion based on what it seems legal or illegal, right or wrong.

Cultural diplomacy consists the third pillar of foreign policy, between traditional diplomacy and armed conflict on an international level. It is the subject of modern international relations, especially in the last few decades. Witting sources dating from the first thousand years (B.C.) testify that transnational relations including the exchange of gifts, valuable objects and artworks were common among Leaders.

Macedonians of Alexander the Great and Rome of Julius Caesar, supported their sovereignty and supremacy in the exercise of cultural diplomacy in Susa, Afghanistan, Egypt or Galatia.

Recognition and respect of the culture issues of the conquered populations by Alexander the Great is a kind of mild penetration and assimilation by maintaining the status quo and peaceful domination. Other researchers place the beginnings of cultural diplomacy in the Middle Age, with marriages of interest between kingdoms, which were, sometimes competing, subject to the international system.

Byzantines, even in the periods when they felt and were strong, avoided war and did not spend on needless wars or quarrels, compromising the Empire's auspicious course. Making war is highly costly and induces economic bleeding of the population without any certainty about the outcome. They exercised their policy by engagement of ambassadors for the advancement of the Byzantine ideas and culture and the promotion of trade. Moreover, they organized missions for the Christianization of the neighboring people. Marriages of members of the imperial family with the local conquered populations to strengthen alliances and avoid conflicts were established.

The welcome of foreign ambassadors in the Byzantines times included an entire ritual. Initially, the Masters of the Ophikians were entrusted with the task of entering ambassadors into the territory of the Empire as well as of the welcome reception of foreign diplomats. The Masters of the Ophikians were responsible to bring ambassadors and diplomats in places of cultural interest and national monuments, such as palaces, public buildings, and culture centers. Moreover, they were charged to organize festivities for them or inviting those to cultural festivals.

Cultural diplomacy is mainly a situation that happens between two or more states for a dispute over a cultural good, most of the times tangible, but sometimes as well intangible (here is related with politics for disputes over history for example). A tangible cultural good is consider being for example a national treasure, a monument, a sculpture, an artwork or something tangible with an intrinsic value represented and expressed in any kind of form. The main target of Cultural Diplomacy is in any kind either by Law or with other means the resolution of cultural disputes and the protection of arts and culture. One of the ways to achieve such a thing is the mediation. In mediation a representative can be from one or the other country but

the two should agree upon that or there should be a neutral mediator. World's most famous Organizations such as UNESCO have as a target this kind of cultural protections, as well as the integrity of cultural goods and the protection of artworks during time of a war.

In Cultural Diplomacy we face disputes and try to find resolutions to cases which are really interesting. A very in-point example would be the Parthenon marbles, the so-called "Elgin marbles" which were elaborating Parthenon for centuries until Greece was occupied by Turkey and then they were "sold" to Lord Elgin. Nowadays those unique pieces of marble are in the British Museum. Cultural Diplomacy is not going to take someone's party even if someone is right or wrong, on what it concerns the dispute of Great Britain and Greece. Cultural Diplomacy is going to find a middle solution, which will help both countries achieve their targets. This is the mediation needed to be able to characterize this type of intercultural agreements as Intercultural Diplomacy since the neutrality is the only way for all the possible disputes to feel that they start from the same common point and not in advantage or disadvantage by the country with which a cultural dispute exists.

In the digital era many more examples came out and even cultural diplomacy was enriched and of course the law is getting better and better. As we referred above Law is getting always better since Law is never stable, it's like being in a living condition such as the Culture as internationally every year a new 'venture' of law will present and things will change. The fact that Law always progresses and advances as long as human do the same is a weapon that can be used whether for human benefit or for corruption. But Law always tries to find-out ways that protect first the citizens and the country and then every other part of a society. All these things in combination with technological advantage set new ways of claiming cultural objects which are over a dispute in a more direct way, in a way that interacts with everyone.

Technology came-out and Museums are getting more and more into technology and interactive means. In this way they can easily make clear interactive messages to the visitors over their claims from other museums. Digital platforms presented in museums are becoming more and more famous and people tend to be a part of the influence and the pressure for disputes.

In Cultural Diplomacy there is nothing to blame on one country or another, a solution is the main concern of it. In hard situations

mediators are those who have to find this solution and what happens is to try to convince countries and make them take a decision. The role of the mediator focuses on reaching a profitable agreement for both countries, as it is the case of a cultural article to be returned to its home country. That's why sometimes "even if there is no line to return a particular cultural object for a State, it may still be in a position to profit from the benefits of such a return".

Cultural diplomacy in the digital era

Without any doubt, we are living in the era of globalization and velocity. Actually, the profile of communication is changing as online communication allows a faster reaction and response. The classical way of writing letters or post mailing several documents was completed by fax technology (facsimile, telecopying, telefax) in the 1980s, considered at that time as innovative.

However, the current profile of online communication by emailing messages, successfully connects countries and makes a faster communication. Furthermore, cultural promotion of a country through different platforms and webpages creates an international image more attractive and prevalent. The internet and all these new forms of communication are known as the cyber-diplomacy. It is true that on one hand internet embeds a double entity as in a way it offers massive information but on the other hand it facilitates false information by illegal manipulators or hackers. Today's multiple internet tools were developed known as social media which are applied for diplomatic purposes; Facebook-diplomacy, twitter-diplomacy or YouTube-Diplomacy.

Communication with other States is made more easily in our times as means of transport have improved considerably. People are traveling easily around the world, and this made diplomatic communication and actions easier. Tourism, exchanges, visits are more frequent than ever. Television provides a flow of rapid information and mobile telephones bring us closer to our partners. Strategic communication events, campaigns, congresses, promotional events of tourism are becoming more abundant. Yet, it must be determined that these communication actions could be direct without any mediating channel between partners or through media getting information.

Cultural diplomacy uses the channel of direct communication to

develop its tools, as it is believed that it builds higher trust between bilateral players, individuals, and ethnicities. Cultural diplomacy invests on long-lasting relations between partners. However, in order to establish this communication, a genuine dialogue and essential skills in foreign language are imperative for a good communication in our global living milieu.

Conclusions

I had sought to present an issue that has received much less attention than it deserves. Strategies and policies are constantly shifting due to the destabilized environment where we are living today.

Cultural diplomacy acts as the utmost tool to bring efficient solutions in many aspects of foreign policies by promoting intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding. Illicit traffic of cultural goods following armed conflicts or criminal behaviors consists of a cultural genocide which is condemned internationally. In this context, Greece is the leader to ask repatriation of Parthenon marbles and other cultural goods to their land of origin. The Greek Ministry of Culture is engaged to many consistent actions for preservation of our cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, despite these differences in choosing the tactic to follow, it is generally accepted that coordination, communication and engagement of fruitful dialogues are of utmost importance. The interplay includes multiple stakeholders as, Cultural Departments of Ministries, National Cultural Institutes, Houses of Culture, Languages Institutes, Artists, Scientists, Famous Personalities, Diplomatic Delegations, UNESCO and Council of Europe. Furthermore, it should

not be forgotten that digital technologies and media play a key role in the advancement of cultural production, cultural consumption and creativity.



Picture How past Culture should influence us for Future Cultural Creations Skyscraper Plan designed by Klyukin Vasily Vasilievich. (Source: <https://wordlesstech.com/winged-victory-of-samothrace-skyscraper/>)