



Globalization and cultural policy: Ideas without Borders

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"Art and culture require public support and a special status in the context of global exchange."

As I talk to you about Ideas Without Borders or Globalization at the Beginning of the 21st Century, I must begin with the fact that culture and globalization are intimately and intricately interconnected phenomena. They have been so throughout the history of the civilized world.

If the example of history suggests that a powerful and open trading association is a rich stimulus to the development of culture, why, then, at present, do we see such widespread anxiety about the potential effects of globalization?

Globalization is principally a liberalization and intensification of world trade and a coincidental liberalization and intensification of world-wide communication.

Wealth and art

One does not have to delve too deeply into art history to discover that periods of intensification of trade and communication tend to be accompanied, or closely followed, by periods of rich artistic output. The wealth that trade creates, the variety of materials it brings to market and the creative ferment implicit in the exchange of artefacts and ideas all stimulate this cultural expansion.

It is not difficult to pile up historical examples. Phoenician traders spread the alphabet. The art of the Age of Pericles thrived on the links the Athenian trading empire created with the Ionian coast.

In the 8th and 9th centuries, the art, literature and scholarship of Andalusia owed its vitality to the unrivalled expansion of trade and the tolerant, open-door policies of its Muslim rulers.

Another example, instructive because it is essentially modern, is Florence. Florence was above all a mercantile city. It had no political empire (beyond a few nearby Italian towns that gave it access to the coast). Yet it became, economically and culturally, the most powerful city in Europe. Starting with a foothold in the cloth industry (a prime trade sector in the pre-industrial era), the Medici family revolutionized the European banking system. The gold florin became the sought-after, standard currency of Europe, underpinning an unprecedented level of European trade. In art, Florence was the cradle of the Renaissance, a movement in which almost all the countries of Europe participated, to their great benefit, over the subsequent two or three centuries.

In its modern form, globalization is a sibling of the industrial revolution. As Anne Golden of the Conference Board of Canada pointed out in a recent National Post article, the 19th century saw a steep rise in international trade's share of global production.

Let us think for a moment about the nature of the anxiety that many people feel in the face of modern globalization.

First, this anxiety, while very real, is by no means all-encompassing. People embrace many of the things that globalization brings. They want the freedom to travel, to explore the world's geographic and cultural diversity, to read foreign books and periodicals, see foreign films, and listen to exotic music. They want to watch international soccer matches, to buy luxury foreign goods and to buy cheap imports as well. By and large, they are increasingly able to do all these things.

The anxiety in the cultural sector about globalization is primarily, I think, anxiety that cultural practices we care about will be swamped, and that income from these practices will be lost, as trade opens up to an unprecedented degree all around the world under the twin influences of rapidly developing technology and an immense growth of capital.

Changing markets, changing policies

Markets are changing at a phenomenally rapid rate. This is both exhilarating and frightening: exhilarating because it creates many opportunities; frightening because the rate of market change far outstrips the parallel development of national or international policy instruments to manage it.

The massive migration of workers, skilled and unskilled, is also affecting trade patterns, both by creating greater cultural diversity and new markets within countries, and by creating new patterns of exchange abroad.

All nation states are party to these phenomena, both those experiencing a population influx and those experiencing a "brain drain."

One result is that nation states can no longer create national policy without taking very close account of its international context and ramifications. Hence the need for strong, sensitive, effective and universal international policy instruments. As Paul Martin put it in his speech to the G20 last week, "globalization is what we make of it.... Fundamentally, the answer lies in how we choose to govern ourselves as an international community."

The League of Nations was the first experiment in this line. The United Nations (a flawed but not a failed body) took account of, and avoided, many of the League's mistakes. UNESCO, in its slow way, has scored a number of successes. I, with many Canadians, was delighted and proud when UNESCO recognized Oscar Peterson with the International Council of Music/UNESCO Music Prize last year.

But UNESCO is not the answer to all our needs. In the cultural arena, more specifically focused international policy instruments will be necessary if we want to ensure that small and locally based "cottage industries" in the arts (non-profit performing arts companies, makers of fine crafts, and independent artists of all kinds) continue to claim a share of a large and valuable international market.

Moreover, time is of the essence. To quote again from Paul Martin's G20 speech: "International and multilateral tools cannot be laid aside; we must take them up as never before.... The time has come to take great strides in the place of small steps."

People from all continents - including politicians, government officials, representatives of agencies and NGOs, artists themselves and the presenters and producers who serve them - are increasingly looking to each other, across national boundaries, to formulate policy instruments that will strengthen and support the cultural output that, in all places, is such a fundamental indicator of quality of life.

The banner under which they rally is emblazoned "cultural diversity."

It is important that we look closely at this term. If our efforts to support the arts world-wide through the creation of new instruments are to have a useful outcome, we must have a clear understanding of what cultural diversity implies in the context of globalizing economic forces that have now become inescapable and largely autonomous.

Diversity and diversification

Many proponents of cultural diversity fear that globalization, if not constrained, will bring cultural uniformity and homogeneity in its wake.

Having had the experience of growing up in a small Ontario town, I must beg to differ.

From the point of view of the individual citizen *sur le terrain*, it is hard to imagine a period of greater cultural diversity than we now enjoy. That must be perfectly obvious to anyone who ever went out in search of dinner in the Ottawa of the 1950s. The diversity

that we once had to travel thousands of miles to find is now brought to our doorstep, by our local Lebanese or Vietnamese grocer, and by a host of adult education courses in everything from feng shui to tango. For those who still want to travel thousands of miles, the exotic travel industry is booming.

This trans-border cultural diversity informs the work of writers of the stature of Michael Ondaatje, Anne Michaels and Rohinton Mistry and Yann Martel and visual artists like Jamelie Hassan and Paul Wong. The disappearance of geographical barriers has been very enriching for art. Far from being a homogenizing force, globalization is a force for cultural diversification.

I hope you caught that subtle change in terminology: from diversity to diversification, from a state to a process. I believe that as globalization furthers the process of cultural diversification, the cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural stimulus to the creative mind will be enormous.

In "Our Universal Civilization," an address delivered to the Manhattan Institute of New York in 1990 and recently reprinted in the National Post, Nobel Prize winner V. S. Naipaul spoke of "the extraordinary attempt of this civilization to accommodate the rest of the world, and all the currents of that world's thought."

We live in a dynamic, multinational, capitalist system, and in the 21st, not the 17th, century. To barricade ourselves against globalization (assuming it can be done, in the long run) is to invite the world to pass us by. As U.S. Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan said in a recent speech to the International Institute for Economics, "One would be hard pressed to cite examples of free and prosperous societies that shunned the marketplace."

Creative potential of globalization

The alternative to barricading and isolating ourselves with trade tariffs is not to sit tight and see what happens, but rather to embrace the idea of globalization with all its creative potential. We must encourage international cultural exchange, seek out world markets for our artistic products, foster international opportunities for our artists and cultivate our own advantage as we participate actively in the global fair. The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade has to put its money where its mouth is and take culture seriously as "the third pillar of foreign policy." Globalization will serve us well if we embrace the economic and creative freedom it offers. It will not serve us well if we sit back and wait to be governed by it.

Literature is one area where this proactive approach has paid off. The annual Frankfurt Book Fair, for example, has become a major market for Canadian publishers and authors.

Of course, as the world evolves, some arts and techniques will be lost. We see the stress of adapting to modern audience and market demands in forms as various as Haida basketry and symphony orchestras. But as we watch this often-painful process we must

keep in mind that the value of the arts lies not in preserving forms that have lost their meaning, but in enabling the vital artistic expression of the full range of our dreams and imaginings, our spiritual lives, while respecting the cultural roots from which they spring.

In 1980, Zacharias Kunuk, a soapstone carver living in Igloolik, took all his savings from carving and bought a video camera. Last May, he won the Caméra d'or at the Cannes Film Festival. *Atanarjuat, the Long Distance Runner*, filmed in Inuktituk and subtitled, is now being screened around the world. It is Canada's entry in the Oscars. This is the kind of endeavour and achievement that an open world market makes possible.

My main point, then, is that cultural diversity is enhanced, not threatened, by globalization, because globalization is itself a diversifying force that can stimulate creative output.

Artistic creativity, as Marshall McLuhan pointed out decades ago, is found on the borders, where cultures meet and hybridize: "a border is ... an interval of resonance."

Our practical endeavor must be, not to protect our cultural output from world markets, but actively to seek out world markets because they can sustain, encourage and support the diversification, development and presentation of our artists' work.

Protest against globalization on the cultural front is both futile and counter-productive.

In a global context, what we must do to preserve and enhance the civility and cultural diversity of today's world, is to strengthen national and international instruments that can channel globalization, that can civilize the activity of corporations and that can provide effective economic avenues for serving the niche markets that culturally diversified societies create in such numbers.

Within our borders, what we can and must do to ensure the ongoing cultural diversification of Canada, a process that has so enriched our lives over the past half-century, is to provide a broad-based stimulus to our country's best creative work through public funding mechanisms. Without running foul of NAFTA, we can encourage and nourish excellence wherever it crops up.

When Parliament created the Canada Council in 1957, it instructed the Council to work in the international sphere to promote the work of Canadian artists, and to organize exhibitions, performances and other events to disseminate this work.

Over the past decade, with the growth of world trade, artists and arts organizations have been cultivating foreign audiences as never before, and the Canada Council and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade have received a growing stream of requests for international tours, co-productions and performances at international festivals and exhibitions.

The Council has responded by launching international co-production programmes in dance and theatre and creating an audience and market development office to support the cultivation of foreign audiences.

In 2000-2001, a partnership between the Canada Council and DFAIT to promote Canadian literature abroad funded 86 translations. Demand is heavy and the Council's contributions over five years have more than doubled. The Council has also increased funding for foreign launches, promotional tours and festival readings.

Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces*, winner of Italy's Giuseppe Acerbi Literary Award, has been translated into more than 30 languages. The Italian translation of Mordecai Richler's *Barney's Version* has sold over 100,000 copies and is in its 6th print run. Gaétan Soucy's *La petite fille qui aimait trop les allumettes* has recently been translated into Mandarin.

The story goes far beyond literature. For the past five decades, artists like Glenn Gould, Anne Hébert, Maureen Forrester, Ben Heppner, Douglas Cardinal and Robert Lepage have been keeping Canada's name front and centre on the international stage. With only a modest nudge, I could provide you with another hundred examples. I'll settle for one, in the discipline nearest my heart.

In May this year, *The Paradise Institute* by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, presented by Winnipeg's contemporary "Plug In" gallery and supported by the Council and DFAIT, won a special jury award at the Venice Biennale.

I think that there is considerable public pride in the demonstration of Canadian excellence in the arts and a corresponding willingness to support the cultivation of excellence. It is important that we keep up the momentum.

As we strengthen our national programs of support, therefore, and send our artists out onto the international stage to try their wings and find new audiences, we must also play a leadership role in creating an international infrastructure that will serve as a stage for their talents.

How can we best devise international instruments to encourage and manage opportunities for artists and audiences - how, that is, can we best serve the interests of artists and arts organizations in fostering international exchanges and trade?

New cultural networks

There are a number of instruments in different stages of development that hold out considerable promise.

One, especially promising because it is so practical, is the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA). I speak out of real conviction, not just as its Interim Chairman.

IFACCA and several other Canadian-led initiatives form a useful grouping for the international expression of various interests in the cultural arena. Let me give you a brief look at them.

The International Network for Cultural Policy (INCP), created out of a conference of 20 ministers of culture held in Ottawa in 1998, provides an annual forum for integrating and strengthening cultural policies among nations and for advancing international, national and local dialogue on cultural issues. Membership has more than doubled since the initial meeting. This is a forum in which broad cultural policies can be brought under international scrutiny by politicians themselves.

The International Network for Cultural Diversity (INCD) is a parallel association of non-governmental organizations from about 50 countries. Founded in 2000, it meets annually in tandem with the INCP meeting. Essentially, it is an international lobby group. It provides for the direct expression of the voices of artists and arts organizations in an international policy development context.

A third fledgling international organization, the Coalition for Cultural Diversity (CCD), unfortunately organized an initial conference that coincided with the events of September 11, so the jury on its effectiveness is still out. It has considerable potential value, however, in looking at the international scene from the point of view of nationally-based cultural industries.

The value of IFACCA, within the context of the work being undertaken by these other instruments, is in its intensely practical focus on creating mechanisms for artistic exchanges, information sharing and capacity building among member arts councils.

IFACCA grew out of the World Summit on the Arts and Culture held in Ottawa in December 2000. At the Summit, delegates recognized the considerable scope of their common concerns, shared support for cultural diversity being key, and voted unanimously to create a Federation to advance their interests. These interests include developing models for national funding strategies, sharing data bases, engaging in advocacy and promoting exchanges.

Australia, the home base of IFACCA's Executive Secretary, has provided strong support. The Board has already dealt with a host of urgent practical matters and has approved two important initiatives: an online arts council news service and a Young Leaders exchange programme.

Public support and special status

The fundamental message that we hope to promote through IFACCA and the network of cultural instruments, of which it is part, is that art and culture require public support and a special status in the context of global exchange. The arts will be strengthened and diversified if their supporting bodies around the globe can make common cause to foster greater cooperation and exchange. Our goal must be to ensure that the arts remain

dynamic and diverse and to find ways for them to thrive by working through the process of globalization, not against it.