

The Context for Cultural Policy – Old World and New World

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Abstract

A nation's culture mirrors its deepest roots, current state and vision of future. The cultural sphere develops along with national development in general, but there are the fundamentals that never change completely and influence every-day cultural life. Culture is often the result and always the cause for the cultural policy. There is a kind of circle: national background – national cultural policy – artistic product (institutions, individuals with their creations etc.) - cultural life of the country (which becomes the part of the context and finally - background) - again cultural policy - ...

And any changes, or improvements can only shape, adjust, optimize the long-existing tradition. This seems to be true both for relatively young countries, such as the USA, and those, having older traditions like Russia, France etc.

Keywords

National background, national cultural policy, artistic product, cultural life of the country.

Introduction

Each country develops its own cultural policy according to its national, historical, political, geographical, economical and other peculiarities. And while the up-to-date priorities of this policy might vary, the basic model as a kind of mission of a state in culture is not modified too often.

Consistent cultural policy results in the certain cultural network, infrastructure, artistic performance and in cultural (artistic) life of the country ultimately.

This way it makes a kind of circle: national background – national cultural policy – artistic product (institutions, individuals with their creations etc.) - cultural life of the country (which becomes the part of the context and finally - background) - again cultural policy.

Thus the particular national culture mirrors the particular nation's portrait with its deepest roots, current state and vision of future. And on one hand, this sphere develops along with the national development in general, but on the other – there are the fundamentals that never change completely and influence every-day cultural life. Culture is often the result and always the cause for the cultural policy at the same time. And any changes, improvements and like can only shape, adjust, optimize the long-existing tradition. It's true for relatively young countries, such as the USA, and those, having older traditions like Russia, France etc.

The objective of this study is to show, using the example of the USA and some European samples the correctness of this statement.

The Philosophical Foundations for Support of the Arts in Europe and the United States

Let us begin by comparing support for the arts in Europe to support for the arts in the US. European arts policy mandates public support for culture. The principal belief informing this policy is that art and culture are a nation's heritage and, therefore, they deserve to be, and indeed must be, supported by the government.

Put another way, the collective heritage of a nation deserves collective, that is, public or government support.

It can also be argued that government funding relieves or at least minimizes the pressure on arts institutions to fund raise. And, unburdened by this distraction, arts agencies and artists are free to pursue artistic endeavor.

Another very significant argument favoring public funding for the arts is that such funding frees the artist from the pressures of the market place.

The bases for funding the arts in Europe are, of course, far more complex than this. But, we can probably agree that preserving heritage, underwriting national culture, and assuring artistic freedom are key ideas behind arts policy as it has developed in most of Europe.

In the United States, the philosophical foundations behind contemporary arts policy are different. It is important to remember that the US is, in relative terms still a young country. As a nation, America still retains some of its frontier psychology. And, with that psychology, comes a belief in rugged individualism. Americans tend to believe in the primacy of the individual.

The history of the USA is one of individual action, or of voluntary action by groups of individuals who decide to do something together. As early as 1835, French historian and essayist, Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) commented on the unique nature of American philanthropy, characterized by individual, private efforts and volunteerism. He was impressed by the willingness of people to give their own funds to support social improvements and observed that when Americans saw the need for a school, hospital, church or cultural service, local citizens would form a committee to discuss the need, provide leadership and seek out sources of support. He wrote:

Wherever at the head of some new undertaking you see the government in France, or a man of rank in England, in the United States you will be sure to find an association.¹

As a nation, Americans founded universities, libraries, and arts institutions through private, individual effort. They did not expect the government to do such things for them. Of course the result was that such institutions often were not particularly democratic in nature.

One might be struck by the fact that the Marinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, built by the tsar, has multiple entrances – at least one for each class of people. The classes did not mingle, but all were afforded access to the theatre.

On the other hand, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra was founded late in the 19th Century by the wealthy civic leaders of that city. These gentlemen built Chicago's Symphony Hall because the Auditorium Theater, where the Symphony first performed, was a working class theatre and they considered it too plebeian. The new hall did not have entrances for all. In fact, it was meant to exclude all but the privileged.

Europeans, it would seem, have learned that government is needed to make sure the collective good is safeguarded and, to some extent, equitably shared.² This lesson has not been fully learned in America yet. Today in the US, only the extreme position totally disparages public support for the arts. But most Americans tend to favor a combination of public and private funding with a very heavy reliance on the latter.

So, a first premise of American cultural policy is a belief that varied sources of funding offer the arts greater freedom than exclusive reliance on public funds. Such diversity, the argument continues, assures greater stability for the arts, because in periods of austerity government cutbacks will not subject arts agency to great pressure. However, no one has an idea what those in the arts are supposed to do when the stock market tumbles.

Second, it is said that the diversity of funding sources reduces the concentration of government power over arts policy. A strong private support base gives American arts institutions a freedom of action they would not have if they were dependent upon the government for their funds.

Third, because US arts agencies rely so heavily on fund raising, they must cultivate donors' attention and goodwill. The philosophical argument continues, "This means a broader constituency for the arts." And, because of the backing of donors, the artist remains relatively free from the distractions of the market place.

Again, the concepts behind policy in the US are complex. But, we can summarize by saying key ideas include the importance of private activity, the diversity of funding sources, and the assurance of artistic freedom. It is interesting to note that both European and American contemporary practices seek to assure artistic freedom, even if they pursue that end through different means.

Even if the various European systems of cultural regulation have in common strong state participation in cultural life, they are not the same. We can define a number of different cultural models, existing in Europe, which have quite clear origins, influencing their contemporary shape.

In Russia, for example, the collective heritage of the nation can be called *slavery-made*. And, as in some other European countries, that heritage was first of all inspired and instigated by the monarch (tsar, emperor, empress) – the deputy of God on the Earth and responsible for his people – concerned about his/her own luxury and, as an effect – speaking in the contemporary terms, the international visibility of the empire. The Russian Aristocracy, like those everywhere, used to follow the court fashion and in that way enlarged the future nation's heritage.

Different kinds of the state cultural monopolies along with total censorship turned the public arts into an instrument of internal state policy and manipulation. Meanwhile the artist became an obedient tool for the official policy, or a mouthpiece for provocative ideas. This way the arts became a subject of top interest in imperial Russia and from here emerged the statement that artist in Russia is more than just artist (read – he ought to be The Citizen) and is responsible for the minds' mood – the idea, which the contemporary Russian creators cannot completely get rid of.

The Soviet regime, at the beginning, gave power to the rich blossoming of diverse revolutionary arts, but quite soon it propagated carefully selected cultural expression, using it again as an ideological instrument. Gradually heritage was nationalized and all new creations were monopolized by state regulation, funding, censorship, ownership, distribution and control. Thus, there was the only one owner of the heritage – the state; and the only one client for the new works – the state. The first gave prestige and power to the nation in the World arena, the second became an instrument for the influence and manipulation the population.

There were short periods of relative freedom for the minds in Russia. As a rule, these followed the overcoming of greatest national disasters that united the people - for instance, the Patriotic War of 1812 (with Napoleon) and the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 (the Second World War). These short periods of euphoria were always followed by extreme conservatism both in the tsar's and in soviet times. This way the majority of the artists used to create in defiance of the official policy, balancing between need for the self-expression and the finance need. Undoubtedly that was the heyday of the underground art. Those times also gave a special unofficial status of "verity tribune" to the performing arts as the live, instant and therefore - less controlled kind of creativity.

The political changes at the end of the XX-th century in Russia influenced the general approach to the arts and culture in the country. And, the very first priority of the state in the cultural sphere at the federal level became the safeguarding of the national heritage and cultural traditions – the hallmark of the nation's strength and basis for its development.

To put aside the ancient heritage, Russia has created its national heritage in part, to gain the revenge over the European countries. Peter the Great decided to change the nation's clothes into the Dutch fashion and manners and rituals into the European style, his successors moved much further. So, since then Russia has tried to overtake Europe (Western world) in all directions, including cultural. Initially it was considered that Europeans had moved rather further in the field of civilizing the people (first of all, aristocracy and merchants). Today, when Russia has much to be proud of (theatre, for example), the habit to verify the ideas or ideals by the western standards stays ineradicable for many Russians. In combination with the specific snobbism and sense of the nation's exclusivity with its mysterious soul this habit yields impressive fruits in the artistic field.

Speaking about cultural competition, it is necessary to point out that France and Russia during the long historical period used to rival, follow the fashions and borrow inventions from each

other in various fields, including cultural. These two countries with all their differences are still similar, especially in their early (in the XVI-th century) absolute centralization, both political and geographical. The exchange of revolutionary ideas facilitated the export-import of cultural models: first the French concepts of the Age of Enlightenment had been warmly adopted by the emperor's Russia; later, in the XX-th century, socialist ideas from the USSR flowed back into France, where the conservative government of General de Gaulle founded the Ministry of Culture (1959) (in the USSR – 1952), and its first Minister Andre Malraux opened the second period of the cultural decentralization by spreading all over the country the soviet practice of the Houses of Culture (Maisons de la Culture). The Presidents of France and Soviet communist leaders inherited the royal habits in culture and tended to immortalize themselves in visible artistic creatures. The results of this policy are, for example: the Art's Centre of George Pompidou and the "Grands Travaux" of Francois Mitterand in France³; the huge pentagonal star shape theatre of the Red Army ("Teatr Krasnoi Armii") in Stalin's times in the USSR. The failure of the Soviet Union gave rise to the total restructuring of the political system of the Russian Federation, where decentralization of the cultural administration became an integral part. In the end of 1990, the Ministry of Culture of France had experienced another restructuring and became the Ministry of Culture and Information. In Russia it happened in 2004, when culture and information became joined under the aegis of the one ministry. What will be the next?

Of course, we are exaggerating here. And there is always danger in the studies like this to slip into the schematization and misunderstanding of the history in search for the answers on the today's questions in the past. France and Russia have many similarities in their history, but these two countries, their cultures and their cultural policies are not the same. Our task is to illustrate with short examples the dynamics of their development and mutual influence on this way.

For instance, unlike France, where Directions Regionales des Affairs Culturelles work under the central control⁴, in Russia it is different, and for that there are historical and geographical reasons. Russia occupies a huge territory and even in the imperial and soviet times the governors/first secretaries of the communist party regional committees used to exercise real power and ideology on the territories, which they supervised. Government/"oblast"/ republic as the main political-geographical unit of the state reflected the general structure of the country, including the strongly centralized and controlled ideology (policy in culture). Today's democratization, 'deideologisation' and decentralization of Russia resulted in the strengthening of its regions and regional cultural administration as well. There is still a large number of institutions, objects and events that exist under the aegis of the Federation, but the regions by law have considerable independence from the center and the right to realize the regional cultural policies. In practice the result (read – policy) depends on local traditions, resources and the current leadership – more or less independent and, let us say, business-like. This makes the contemporary Russian model of cultural policy partly allied to the German or Swiss models.

Though dissimilar, France or Russia both used to be polycentric without a single capital and all those attributes that are typical of strongly centralized states. For many centuries Switzerland remained a confederation, a loose alliance of cantons, speaking four languages. It was only in the 19th century that the country adopted a federal constitution, still keeping in practice the strong independence of the regions.

In 1871, a number of bigger and smaller semi-autonomous kingdoms, principalities and duchies constituted Germany in its nearly contemporary geographic shape. During more than a hundred years this territory had been experiencing revolutions, wars, totalitarian dictatorship,

and forced partition. Finally, contemporary Germany after all its transformations became a powerful, united country with strong and clearly expressed federation features. In both Switzerland and Germany, the federal center (capital) is the center of foreign policy, rather than intrastate centers⁵.

Such political structure today, as before, results in the cultural life and cultural policy of the both countries. In their territories there have never existed all-national museums like the Louvre or theatres like the Mariinsky. In Switzerland the arts used to be commissioned and preserved by the Swiss trading magnates and the noble citizens according to the common cultural, linguistic and religious peculiarities of each canton. "For most of Germany's history, culture (Kultur) has been idealized as a specific German tradition setting Germany apart from and above most other European countries"⁶. And in the German duchies their kings or princes (like Ludwig), and some time bourgeoisie were those, who inspired the cultural development. Thus it is historical rather than political merit that phenomena like the Dresden Gallery or the Zurich Opera are considered as part of World patrimony and are associated in our perception with Germany or Switzerland in general.

Today with exception of quite few subjects of national heritage culture in Germany is under the jurisdiction of the regions (Länder), which formulate and implement their separate cultural policies⁷. Intensifying world-wide integration influences the internal integration processes within single countries, even in exclusive and discrete ones such as Switzerland is. In this reality in Switzerland almost no canton has a clear policy in culture that, as before, keeps developing without carefully designed direction. Swiss cantons keep their distance from each other in the cultural milieu and are more aligned with neighboring countries according to their cantonal language. Paraphrasing Andreas Kotte, it is possible to say that the micro-organization of the state is reflected in the picture presented by its cultural life⁸.

Conclusion

National cultural models are as various as various are the countries. Two contrary poles are presented by the continental part of the Old World and the New World. Somewhere in between there are the UK and its creative followers such as Canada.

Slavery-made treasure - self-made society; common responsibility-instrumental approach; monarch (state) responsible for his people – the priority of individualism are on the list of the contrapositions for the comparison. It is known, that such contrasts have complex backgrounds and philosophical bases.

Today we can hear strong discussion (especially in the post-soviet space) about the changing realities and the involvement of the arts and culture in the market place. Yes, it is necessary to forget about total support (along with the total control) from the side of the government and feel the personal responsibility for the cultural sphere, to see the state as the part of the market that requires its special attention and needs to be deserved along with the other kinds of support, but not the only one. Such approach is new not only for the former socialist countries, but for almost all continental Europe. Artists and cultural institutions there learn how to fundraise because public money cannot keep pace with the developing cultural sector.

However, the centuries-old European tradition of the royal (that is to say – state) ownership – supervision – preservation – distribution – and, finally, support and development of the arts despite of the all pessimistic forecasts and complaining still remains the strongest factor of the

cultural life there. This is right, as before, both for the wealthy countries and for those on the post-soviet space.

As a contrast to the general European practice to really understand arts policy in the United States, one needs to look not only at government policy, but at the behaviors and activities of the funding community – including the business community and sponsors, foundations, and gifts from individuals – especially wealthy individuals such as, most recently, Alberto Vilar.

It is in the nexus between public agencies, foundations, corporations and individuals that policy really is made in the US. And, to fully understand arts policy in America, we should have to say it is also necessary to look at the market place.

That is why when it comes to the non-profit arts sector, American cultural policy is created and shaped in multiple arenas. As a result, cultural policy is formulated not only by government and public agencies, but also in the private sector.

Those, who had settled in American in the deep past, brought their native cultural traditions, achievements and habits, but not their government and hence, not the policy. They rejected the political regimes of their mother countries and created the multicultural society with an absolutely original system of relationship between the nation and culture.

The grass is always greener elsewhere, but we can not always transplant it on our native ground: this soil might not fit all herbs. The same is with the national background, artistic life and policy that influence each other and create the unique cultural landscape and identity of the country, which can be enriched by the else's experience, but not totally changed.

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