

# *Re-Imagining Public and Private Roles in International Cultural Engagement for the 21st Century*

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## **Executive Summary**

**T**oday's world is defined by increasing interconnections and interdependencies between nations and peoples. Despite this interconnectedness, age-old grievances rooted in political and cultural differences continue to exist. It is in our collective interest to learn to live together more harmoniously. The arts, which are recognized as vehicles that can promote goodwill and understanding across cultural divides, remain nominally utilized and supported in this regard. Why?

Nations differ in how they structure, value, support and participate in international cultural engagement. In the U.S. - my point of reference - this is a field without a center. It just happens. Culture remains a marginalized tool in advancing U.S. public diplomacy, under-valued in its potential impact and modestly supported despite the fact that American arts in general are highly valued and U.S. films and music are major global industries.

Despite their public stature, international cultural engagements are civil society weeds, sprouting up and nourished by NGOs, academic centers, commercial activities, and citizen diplomacy efforts. There is no over-arching strategy, no inter-agency coordination at the federal level or external organizing capability; no consistent funding, no information hub on international cultural engagement, and no educational or career path, outside of the Foreign Service, for becoming a "cultural ambassador."

Envisioning new public-private roles entails reckoning with our evolving world order and its challenges; re-defining appropriate objectives that have measurable impacts; and, dealing with the weaknesses and limitations in the infrastructure for international cultural engagement. Unless and until we address these issues, the field will continue to be an outlier rather than center stage where its inherent ability to contribute to today's challenges could be more robust.

## Our Evolving World, Circa 2012<sup>1</sup>

- Globalization is characterized by increasing worldwide integration and economic development. While this has brought nations and people closer together, it has also resulted in the loss of some individual cultural identities. Ease of travel, increased tourism, 24/7 international news cycles, and the exponential rise of interactive technological devices have all contributed to an increase in our interconnectedness. Nearly 60 percent of the world’s population now have mobile phones. Nearly half of these devices will soon be smart phones, and tablet sales are on the rise. All of this will accelerate the process of globalization.
- The hegemony of the United States is being transformed due to the economic and political rise of the BRIC countries and other emerging nations around the globe. While the United States accounts for 60 percent of the world’s GDP, its share is estimated to fall in the not too distant future, and its relative share of political and military power is expected to decline as well.
- The Arab Spring has ushered in the demands of the Arab population for a voice in self-governance, human dignity and jobs. With about 3 billion people emerging from poverty around the world, creating sustainable economies will be a huge challenge, along with the continued persistence of ethnic and religious wars and the threat of nuclear proliferation.
- Trans-national corporations operate across borders, while smaller companies use the Internet to market and distribute their wares globally. As political and economic issues increasingly impact the wider global community, trans-national and trans-regional organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, World Trade Organization, the Council of Europe, the International Monetary Fund, and The International Court of Justice become more important.
- Our current situation holds enormous implications for those invested in international cultural engagements. Those of us in the field need to reassess: Why do we engage? Where? When? And to what end(s)? How do we attain desired goals? How do we find partners, raise funds, and manage cultural engagements? How do we assess impact, determine what projects should be sustained and replicated elsewhere? And, how do we articulate the value of impactful projects to critical stakeholders?

## Let’s Talk Terms

**C***ulture* in its anthropological usage refers to the totality of values and activities that define a culture, including its religion, education, sports, and arts. Culture can also refer to the broad range of artistic expressions, from media to performing, visual arts, and interactive/fusion forms.

*Cultural Diplomacy* tends to refer to government use of culture to promote official policy, while *cultural engagement* references the activities of both public and private players involved in international cultural programming.

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1 Technology and global power shifts are more fully addressed in other white papers prepared for the Salzburg seminar.

For purposes of this discussion, I use *international cultural engagement* to refer to all forms of artistic expression engaged in by the entire range of players—government, foundations/trusts, NGOs, trans-national corporations and other commercial entities, trans-national or trans-regional organizations, citizen diplomats, academia, and “netizens” (those using the Internet exclusively to conduct exchanges).

Artistic engagements between nations and peoples have been staples of human history and will continue to be so. Along with being shared for their intrinsic value, the arts have been the handmaidens of various non-artistic goals. For example, they have been used to promote official government policy, for nation branding, to build hemispheric and regional solidarity, and to reinforce political alliances. They have been called into service to promote certain economic and political ideals or practices, such as democracy, free-market capitalism, meritocracy, accountability, freedom of expression, and equality; to create trust, respect and mutual understanding globally; as well as to address social issues, such as population migration, gender equality, economic growth, conflict resolution, health, economic development, and diversity. The arts have been employed to supplement and reinforce business and economic ties for corporations and governments, to promote specific products and to publicize celebrities.

Given the lingering recession in the Western world and the pressing need to reduce deficits, funding for cultural engagement has dwindled in the United States and Europe, even while the need for international outreach and cooperation has increased. This awareness has allowed more cash-rich nations, such as China, to ratchet up their international cultural programs, while “deficit nations,” including many former stalwarts of cultural diplomacy in Europe, are being challenged just to maintain existing support, as government budgets tighten amidst conditions of economic austerity.

## The Infrastructure of International Cultural Engagements Data Deficits

**D**o those who are invested in international cultural engagements think of themselves as participating in an “activity,” a “field”, or a “profession”? If so, can we speak of a field or profession in the absence of an infrastructure? At a minimum, an infrastructure should include a delineated history, a databank, a cluster of service organization(s), and some kind of an advocacy arm. Many professions also have international components as well.

Data on international cultural engagement is often non-existent, sketchy and insubstantial. Statistics are usually nation specific, and not geared to the global arts community.

The International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies (IFACCA) 2010 Discussion Paper, *Supporting international issues for national arts funding agencies*, reported cultural agency expenditures for 11 countries. The German Federal Cultural Foundation’s expenditures on international cultural programs were almost 100 percent of total allocations, as their mission is exclusively to support such programs. At the

other end of the spectrum, the arts funding agencies of Burundi, Ireland and the U.S. dedicated 1 percent to international cultural programs.<sup>2</sup>

In the United States, data is de minimus, and what exists is often rife with methodological limitations. A few examples of studies that have attempted to quantify trends and patterns include:

- A 2011 Congressional Research Service Report, requested by the John Brademas Center for the Study of Congress at New York University, Wagner School, identified and sketched out expenditures from federal departments, agencies, and organizations that received federal monies for international cultural engagements in 2008. Many of the surveyed entities do not track arts expenditures separately. However, a rough estimate tracked \$900 million in such outlays (including \$115 million from non-U.S. government funding sources).
- A 2008 study noted in the U.S. Center for Citizen Diplomacy’s, *Initiative for Global Citizen Diplomacy*, that there were 300 U.S. non-profits with international missions and 5,000 organizations with an international component to their mission. How many of these organizations focus on cultural engagements remains unknown.
- A Robert Sterling Clark Foundation study, *Promoting Public and Private Reinvestment in Cultural Exchange-Based Diplomacy*, was the first to benchmark trends in the U.S. among diverse organizations engaged in international cultural exchange. The Report documented declines in U.S. Government and foundation support for U.S.-based international cultural engagement projects over time. The study also proposed a series of activities that might be undertaken by private foundations to reverse this trend.
- Americans for the Arts, 2011 study, *Think Locally-Act Globally: How Local Arts Agencies are Acting on the Global Stage*, found that 75% of Local Arts Agencies participated in international arts activities.

It is noteworthy that no known research, to date, has attempted to track international corporate engagements.

## The Mechanics

There are numerous factors that can affect the success of international cultural engagement, most of which could benefit from review. Questions worth asking include:

- What are the benefits and downsides to the creation of quasi-governmental agencies such as the British Council model or the Alliance Française missions abroad to undertake such activities?

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<sup>2</sup> International Federation of Cultural Agencies and Arts Councils: *Supporting International Issues for National Arts Funding Agencies*, Discussion Paper, September 2010. Burundi, 1%; Ireland, 1%; United States, 1%; Sweden, 3%; New Zealand (Creative New Zealand), 5%; Scotland, 5%; South Korea, 7%; Australia, 7%; Canada, 8%; New Zealand (ministry), 11%; Germany, nearly 100%.

- Within governments, should more attention be paid to inter-agency coordination of such initiatives and to assisting public/private partnerships, perhaps even private endeavors?
- What is the state and status of professional development of personnel to carry out such activities both within governments and in private sectors?
- Should there be a central clearinghouse to provide information about visas and customs, foreign taxes, work permits, fee structures, guidelines for creating effective partnerships, managing international touring, marketing exchanges, the role of the presenter, curator or programmer, funding prospects, partnership opportunities, international festival listings, travel arrangements, and, or language translators?
- How can participants identify impacts, assess “best practices”, evaluate what successful programs might be replicated elsewhere, and advocate for the field?

Select information on these issues exists, but it is usually aggregated by artistic discipline, within a specific nation, and nowhere is it coordinated for global use.

Although few organizations attempt any rigorous efforts to evaluate the impact of international programs, there have been recent attempts to do so. The British Council insists on “impact-led planning” for every project, small and large, and reserves funds from every project’s budget for evaluation purposes. Americans for the Arts’ *Animating Democracy* program has devised evaluation indicators for arts projects that promote social change, although they are more applicable domestically than internationally. COMPENDIUM has a Good Practices database for European projects that focus on inter-cultural dialogues.

The mechanisms noted above are the cogs in the wheel of cultural engagement. But who pays attention to these questions in a manner that might make a difference? The participants in this fledgling arena need to sharpen their focus, their tools, and their information sharing systems, both nationally and trans-nationally, to bring them into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## The New Approach: The Past: Top-down

**H**istorically, cultural diplomacy has been a tool of governments, a stepchild of public diplomacy used primarily to promote political policies and advance national culture. Defeating communism and totalitarianism while promoting democracy and “telling America’s story” to the world were precepts of U.S. policy during the cold war. Nations also tended to promote their cultural accomplishments as a source of pride, an aspect of what we now call “nation branding,” and to boost trade and tourism.

Most cultural engagements were one-way and short-term. They tended to be evaluated anecdotally, and made use of elite cultural institutions and established artists as ambassadors. Their target audiences were usually the governing elite of a country, not its citizenry.

## Into the Future: Bottom-up

In recent years, there has been some serious reassessment of the role of culture in addressing the new global challenges. This is reflected in new verbiage contained in a number of policy documents.

The U.S. Government's recent report on "Strategic Communications" emphasized the importance of the "synchronization of words and deeds" in U.S. foreign policy. Statecraft also defined the notion of "smart power" and "soft power" as a contrast and compliment to "hard power." The Institute for Government in the U.K. ranked 26 countries on a "Soft Power Index."<sup>3</sup> The Council of Europe's programs on "Inter-Cultural Dialogues" were targeted to reduce racism, xenophobia and intolerance among multi-cultural communities. These activities clearly reflect a growing acknowledgement that the diplomacy tool kit should contain tools other than military might and economic persuasion—tools that might even prove more appropriate and effective in today's world.

## Components of the New Approach

Aspects of the new approach are used in different ways by practitioners of engagement depending on what they hope to achieve. Yet, there is a growing awareness that greater understanding needs to be paid to cultural differences. The following components are gaining currency:

- Understanding host cultures prior to engagement;
- Connecting with foreign publics rather than elites and foreign officials;
- Listening to others' stories rather than telling one's own;
- Creating innovative public and public/private partnerships;
- Undertaking longer-term, two-way engagements and residencies that often include singing, dancing and creating together; and
- Increasing the use of social media such as Facebook, texting, email, Twitter, YouTube postings, portals, etc. to broadcast and publicize such engagements.

The older approach co-mingles with the new. China's recent foray into cultural diplomacy emphasizes telling its own story. The 320 Confucian Institutes around the world teach Chinese language and their new bureau in Washington, DC, The China Central TV, reports on current affairs in China—selectively, to be sure. Turkey recently re-focused its international relations agenda putting greater emphasis on soft power activities including promoting its Ottoman cultural heritage.

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3 Institute for Government, London, England, "*The New Persuaders: An International Ranking of Soft Power*", Jonathan McClory, December, 2010. The UK, USA and Germany were nos. 1, 2, and 3 out of 26 respectively. The UAE, Turkey and Russia had the lowest three scores.

## Snapshots

Aspects of the new approach have been making their way into a handful of innovative engagements as exemplified in the examples cited below, most of which are U.S. initiatives, reflecting this writer's focus. Importantly, many of these involve partnerships across multiple sectors (public-private-commercial).

- Hip Hop, the American art form that emerged in the 1980s, has gained immense popularity around the globe. Singer/Songwriters have adapted it to their own cultures and situations, often addressing controversial issues that have wide appeal for youth audiences.  
American film industry partnerships are helping Middle Eastern countries develop their own film industries to tell their stories to the world. Examples include The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences exchange visit with the Iranian House of Cinema in 2009, the Sundance Foundation's work with Jordan's Royal Film Commission, and the Red Sea Institute of Cinematic Arts' (RSICA) work with the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts. These collaborations open up channels of understanding and cooperation.
- The U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, began under Madeline Albright's tenure as Secretary of State, boasts some 500 projects that have provided assistance to restore historic buildings and sites in countries throughout the world. These projects are designed to reflect our respect for the cultural heritage of others.
- The American Idol model has been successfully copied and adapted throughout the Middle East. *Afghanistan Star and Millions' of Poets* has been seen by millions of viewers around the Arab world. Cultural performers such as poets and singers are judged by officials and members of the public, who vote via smartphone. This adaptation encourages merit-based activity and democratic practice. The latest incarnation of the American Idol model is, *Sing Egyptian Women Let the World Hear You*, a partnership between a commercial U.S. organization, Share the Mic, the U.S. Embassy in Egypt, and an American academic, Cynthia Schneider. Its primary goal is to assist women's empowerment in a male-dominated world. The winner will travel to the U.S. for a visit and a recording session.<sup>4</sup>
- Sesame Workshop, broadcast internationally, aligns itself with local artists and arts organization members who, rather than simply dubbing in American versions, customize the Sesame Street characters and their stories to reflect their own cultures in the program.
- One Mile Square, a project of Visiting Arts, U.K., brought artists and biologists together in 7 cities—London, Delhi, Dhaka, Johannesburg, Karachi, Shanghai and Tehran—to explore the aesthetic, cultural and biological diversity present in a one square mile multi-ethnic neighborhood in each of these cities. The intent was to break down entrenched cultural stereotypes, strengthen

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<sup>4</sup> See Cynthia Schneider on the American Idol Model, [www.ted.com/talks/cynthia\\_schneider\\_the\\_surprising\\_spread\\_of\\_idol\\_tv.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/cynthia_schneider_the_surprising_spread_of_idol_tv.html). On the Egyptian Women Sing project, see <http://fb-212093.strutta.com/entries>.

- inter-cultural understanding, and improve the biodiversity and ecological balance in these communities. The projects reached wide audiences and attracted substantial media coverage. An evaluation component was integrated into the project to measure its efficacy and a website was established to report findings. The original project has become a springboard for replication in other countries.
- WORLD CULTURES CONNECT, a newly designed web portal due to launch in 2012, is a partnership between two U.K. nonprofit organizations, Visiting Arts and Librios, and the Resource Center for Cultural Engagements in the United States. WCC is a social networking and information hub designed for the global arts community. Individual artists, arts organizations, countries, states, regions, cities, policy makers, embassies, and educators will be able to post their contact numbers, showcase their activities and communicate with one another online: Users will be able to obtain practical information about cultural engagement including funding, festivals, and immigration issues, as well as visa, customs, and foreign tax information. It is expected that WCC will help forge new partnerships and provide examples of impactful engagements that can be used to advocate for support for the field.

## Reflections on Field Building

**F**our trends were identified for discussion at the Salzburg Global Seminar that conveners believe will alter current thinking and practice in the field of international cultural engagement. These include:

- the changing roles of public and private sector players;
- the emergence of a multi-polar world resulting from shifts in global wealth;
- increasing cultural diversity around the globe; and,
- increased participation in international cultural engagement through advances in digital technology and social media.

When 58 participants from 28 countries gathered to reflect on these issues and share their experiences, concerns and future goals, the Seminar highlighted the wide range of contexts that circumscribe the practices and possibilities for advancing cultural engagement on the global stage. More specifically, we learned that Mexico's budget for international cultural engagement has increased dramatically, while many countries in Africa and the Middle East have no official cultural policy in this arena. Art exchanges that emanate from the non-profit sector are widespread in the U.S., but are rare in countries that are more centrally controlled. We learned how varied the objectives of this work are in different parts of the world. In the U.K., the focus is on developing international respect and understanding among nations while China's primary goal is to build a national brand that will advance its cultural industries abroad. At the same time, many independent arts organizations working across borders are interested in sharing their art globally and learning from artists in other countries. We have little information regarding how educational institutions or distinct regions, cities and states are involved in international arts exchange. We acknowledged that the information that is needed to engage in exchange is often non-existent, sparse or not easily accessible. We agreed that



advancing the case for international cultural engagement requires concrete examples of impact for advocacy purposes.

Finally, we agreed that a reappraisal of the field is in order in light of our changing global ecology. Sixty percent of the Seminar's participants felt that the current world economic recession has impeded the advancement of the field. Only 22% claimed that their country was currently broadening its international arts programming, while forty-seven percent said their country had no official policy regarding international arts engagement. Despite frequently heard laments about the lack of support for the arts in general and international cultural engagement in particular, 77% of the participants were optimistic about the long term prospects for the field.

Their collective optimism appears to be supported by data showing that the arts account for 5-7% of GDP among developed nations, and developing countries are eager to grow their cultural industries. Entertainment and cultural tourism are flourishing globally. The arts remain a source of national identification and pride with exchange of art objects and artistic events establishing growing connectivity between nations and international populations. Everyone, everywhere engages in some type of artistic activity, be it dancing, singing, painting, weaving, taking photos or going to arts events. The arts are part of our individual and societal DNA.

Importantly, the arts are in a distinctly advantageous position in our contemporary world. There is a grave discrepancy between our increasing global interdependency and the existence of worldwide cultural diversity. The arts are uniquely poised to help bridge this gap, and to help individuals from diverse cultures know, respect and live together with greater harmony.

Among the many excellent suggestions brought to the fore at the Salzburg Global Seminar, none, by this writer's account, has the potential to make as significant a contribution to the advancement of the field as an interactive, information internet hub.

Technology has given us the tools to create an interactive community of interest for those involved in international cultural engagement. Practitioners need to consider the potential this holds for individual arts organizations as well as the field as a whole.

A dedicated internet site would address a number of concerns articulated at the convening. Communicating with others was earmarked as a necessity and a priority. An Internet site would be inter-active, allow practitioners to stay in touch, to post their activities and concerns, and forge new partnerships. Sharing information on the mechanics of cultural engagement was identified as another priority. An Internet site could aggregate essential information such as festival listings, and provide visa, customs, international tax and funding information. By sharing information on exchanges that worked (and didn't), the field would be in a position to identify 'best practices'—documentation critical to galvanizing financial support—another Seminar priority.

WORLD CULTURES CONNECT (WCC) which I mentioned earlier in this paper, and briefly presented at the Seminar, is being developed to address these needs. The WCC --- or a similar site --- could become the 'GO TO' place for our field. It could be the 'Mothership'— its Facebook and de facto service organization. As such, it could provide a quantum leap forward.

Finally, the gift of a convening such as the Salzburg Global Seminar is that it brings together practitioners from around the world to network and share experiences and ideas. There is no substitute for person-to-person interactions. And while such convenings are expensive and the benefits accrue primarily to those who attend, it is our expectation that lessons learned at the Seminar will make their way back to the participants' home countries to be shared with local practitioners.

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