Building a joint approach in European Union cultural diplomacy: from soft power to intercultural cooperation ?

Construir uma abordagem comum na diplomacia cultural da União Europeia: do poder brando à cooperação intercultural?

Construir un enfoque conjunto en la diplomacia cultural de la Unión Europea: del poder blando a la cooperación intercultural?

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Abstract

European Union (EU) institutions in general and the European External Action Service (EEAS) in particular are working towards a new strategy on international cultural relations. How do European institutions and member states manage to cooperate, in a context of cultural and ideological difference, power discrepancies and national agendas? Our paper intends to analyse three main themes: history and evolutions of cultural diplomacy and external cultural relations in Europe, external cultural praxis of national institutes and the emergence of a shared vision and new practices in EU external relations through the EUNIC network (EU national institutes of culture. We are analysing conceptual coherence and consistency based on theoretical frameworks, underpinning it with empirical, qualitative research findings.

We are questioning the current approach of "adding up" national models to a common denominator. We wish to open up the discussion of a paradigm change in cultural diplomacy and intercultural action, beyond national perspectives.

Keywords

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Resumen

En general las instituciones de la Unión Europea (UE) y en particular el Servicio Europeo de Acción Exterior (SEAE) están trabajando hacia una nueva estrategia sobre las relaciones culturales internacionales. La pregunta es; ¿Cómo pueden las instituciones europeas y los Estados miembros cooperar, en un contexto de diferencia cultural e ideológica, discrepancias de poder y agendas nacionales? Nuestro trabajo pretende analizar tres temas principales: la historia y evolución de la diplomacia cultural y las relaciones culturales externas en Europa, prácticas culturales externas de institutos nacionales y el surgimiento de una visión compartida y nuevas prácticas en las relaciones externas de la UE a través de la red EUNIC (Institutos nacionales de la UE de la cultura. Se analiza la coherencia conceptual y la coherencia basada en marcos teóricos, que la sustentan con hallazgos de investigación empírica y cualitativa.

Cuestionamos el enfoque actual de "sumar" modelos nacionales a un denominador común. Queremos abrir la discusión de un cambio de paradigma en la diplomacia cultural y la acción intercultural, más allá de las perspectivas nacionales.

Palabras clave

Diplomacia cultural, acción exterior europea, poder blando, relaciones interculturales

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With this article we would like to account for the fact that the term "Europe" has been evolving beyond its geographical meaning, representing a political culture and supranational identity. Also, we would like to illustrate how the European Union (EU) is about to extend its role beyond that of an administrative governance body, incorporating the coordination of European external relations and diplomacy. Europe as a multi-dimensional, dynamic system is under the influence of various centrifugal and centripetal forces that are influencing its sense and perception amongst Europeans, as well as its image to the outside. Since 2013 we have conducted different pieces of research and have been examining official discourse, informal communications and interactions within EU institutions, such as the European External Action Service (EEAS), its Delegations (EUD) abroad, and civil society organizations, such as the network of European Union National Institutes of Culture (EUNIC). We observed a shift in European public diplomacy from a country driven, national approach towards a joint supranational approach of external relations in general and external cultural action across the world more specifically.

Based on an inductive research approach this article is aiming to account for recent evolutions in European external cultural relations. Various layers and dimensions need to be considered in order to elucidate influencing forces of a newly emerging system. Firstly, we are examining EU values and identity, Europe as an imaginary geography, which can be seen as the basis for "normative power". Then we are framing from a theoretical perspective the meaning of concepts like cultural diplomacy, soft power and cultural relations. This will allow us to distinguish amongst many different approaches towards external cultural action as they are applied by European nation states, clarifying key principles and characteristics. On an institutional level we are illustrating common denominators and potential tensions amongst national cultural institutes, as collaboration is intensifying. We are pointing out how informal discourse and individual attitudes and interactions on a micro level can be seen as a risk on the one hand and as constituents for a joint approach, starting in the field, on the other hand. Based on recent EU political evolutions in external action, we are clarifying how specific governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in the EU cultural sector interact, with the ambition to develop a "European approach" of cultural diplomacy.

In the end we will be questioning the nature of this "European" approach of external cultural action.

EUROPE, AN IMAGINARY GEOGRAPHY

After World War II a closer cooperation between European nation states was seen as necessary to maintain peace, freedom and democracy on the European continent. Five European countries, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and The Netherlands started to cooperate economically in 1951, within the European Coal and Steel Community and fostered this cooperation through the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957 through the Treaty of Rome. In 1973 Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom joined the EEC. In 1993 the Treaty of Maastricht entered into force and established key foundations of the European Community (EC). In addition to even deeper economic cooperation on the common market (freedom of goods, services, capital and citizens), the Maastricht Treaty added competences to the supranational body: closer cooperation on a police

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and judicial level for criminal matters, as well as a move towards a common foreign and security policy were agreed. In 2009, through the Treaty of Lisbon entering into force, the overarching legal body of the European Union (EU) was established, defining exclusive, shared and supporting competencies of the EU and putting into place the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Between 1995 and 2013, nineteen more states joined the European Union, making of the EU a federation of 28 nation states as of today.

As a consequence of the Treaty of Lisbon, The European External Action Service (EEAS) was established in 2011 becoming the EU supranational body in charge of external action and European diplomacy. The new institution has been built up step by step over the last six years. Regarding diplomacy, EU Delegations (EUD) constitute official diplomatic representations of the European Union abroad and are hence the prototype for "European embassies". The EU has shown an increasing interest in cultural diplomacy and cultural relations, in order to make culture. As the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini (2016), stated, *"an integral part of the external action of the European Union."* Along with energy and economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy has definitively become a new dimension of EU external action. (Global Strategy,2016:49)

Throughout the process of European integration multilateral cultural cooperation has not only been envisaged by the members of the EU. Already in 1955 the Council of Europe, a broad institution counting 47 European member states as of today, declared in the European Cultural Convention the goal of establishing a common approach of cultural action amongst all members, in order to *"preserve and disseminate European culture"*.[1] However, as economic integration has been seen as a priority since then, the ambition of a common external action and cultural action was only reiterated more than 50 years later by EU member states and stipulated in the Treaty of Lisbon (article 167), supported by the Unesco convention on the protection and promotion of diversity in cultural expression of 2001. According to the

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[1] Conseil de l'Europe, Convention Culturelle Européenne,19/12/1954, Paris, retrieved from http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/fr/Treaties/Html/018.htm :« Considérant qu'il est souhaitable à ces fins, non seulement de conclure des conventions culturelles bilatérales entre les membres du Conseil, mais encore d'adopter une politique d'action commune visant à sauvegarder la culture européenne et à en encourager le développement. »

UNESCO Universal Declaration of Cultural diversity culture should be regarded as *"the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs"*.

The need arises to depict the nature of European external cultural action. It seems crucial to us to distinguish between cultural action that is conducted by civil society organizations on the one hand and governmental bodies on the other hand.

Europe, not only the EU, as a culturally diverse entity has certainly undergone cultural transformations and dissemination of national cultures, due to ever enlarging free trade agreements and continuously extending degrees of free movement of citizens, since the Schengen agreement (1985). Europe is more than the European Union and its political structures. Different authors, such as Maria Todorova (1999), Larry Wolff (1994) or Edward Said (1993) are referring to 'imaginary' or 'symbolic' geography, affirming that Europe represents an imaginary society, that allows overcoming its own static borders. They are combining the imaginary concept with a political view. Indeed, in the discourse and works of scholars, European institutions, as well as civil society organisations, the notions of "European values" and "European identity" emerged in the 1990s and have been part of public communications since.

As Edgar Morin (1987:22) stated, *"the difficulty of thinking about Europe is first to think of the one in the multiple, the multiple in the one. Because Europe is a 'complex' (lat. complexus, which means woven together), whose characteristic is to assemble the greatest diversities, without confusing them, and to associate opposites in a non-separable way."* Given this complexity we suggest to consider systemic interdependencies, which are leading to the dissemination of ideas, attitudes, norms and values across the entire system 'Europe'. Moreover, the high degree of complexity led us to recognize the limitations of 'defining', 'thinking' and 'reflecting' on European values and identity. We therefore examined interactions and communications amongst actors in the field, in cultural institutes, who are continuously contributing to the evolution of European identity as such.

The current motto of the European Union "*United in Diversity*" (lat.: in varietate Concordia) is one example that reflects the European Zeitgeist: Italian Nobel peace prize winner Ernesto T. Moneta pronounced in the early 20th "*In Varietate Concordia / In Varietate Unitas*" – Unity in diversity, which is a concept of "*unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation*", according to Lalonde (1994). This motto was selected by the European Commission through a call for participation in the year 2000: "*It signifies how Europeans have come together, in the form of the EU, to work for peace and prosperity, while at the same time being enriched by the continent's many different cultures, traditions and languages.*" The motto is based on the hypotheses that diversity is enriching for human interactions and that a complex kind of unity is possible despite all cultural, linguistic, political or ideological differences. It also witnesses the commitment of EU member states and other European countries to the UNESCO Universal Declaration of Cultural diversity of 2001, as we can exemplify with the help of a few extracts:

- *"Affirming that respect for the diversity of cultures, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation, in a climate of mutual trust and understanding are among the best guarantees of international peace and security,"*
- *"Aspiring to greater solidarity on the basis of recognition of cultural diversity, of awareness of the unity of humankind, and of the development of intercultural exchanges,"*
- *Article 1 – Cultural diversity: the common heritage of humanity Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. ...*
- *Article 2 – From cultural diversity to cultural pluralism In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together. [...] Indissociable from a democratic framework, cultural pluralism is conducive to cultural exchange and to the flourishing of creative capacities that sustain public life".*

Indeed, stimulating interculturality, developing cultural interaction and promoting plurality of cultural expressions constitute likewise the

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overarching goals of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and EU delegations in the field. We suggest that continuous transformations in European culture, values and norms are enduring and are strongly characterizing "Europeanness" as of today. Europe can be described as a mental construct in permanent change. According to Jacques Derrida (1995b :10), Europe is and has been characterized by uncertainties in terms of geo-political borders (in the center, from the west to the east and from the north to the south) and spiritual borders (ideas of philosophy, ratio and religious influences), as well as in terms of collective memory. He saw Europe as an open system, with multiple sources of philosophy and other influences, reaching beyond ancient Greek foundations (1992; 2010). Europe is permanently changing, and its people are re-inventing narratives and identities, deliberately and intuitively.

We can state, for example, that within a national / political culture (macro-level), the intrinsic understanding of a concept such as "Liberty" does influence organizational cultures (mezzo level). Furthermore it has implications on interactions within an organization, on the collaboration mode of a team, as well as on interpersonal relationships and individual attitudes and behavior (micro-level), as illustrated by Cloet and Martel (2014). Also, as Michaler Bruter (2003: 154) stressed *"when two individuals claim to 'feel European', they might mean totally different things in terms of both the intensity of the feeling they describe and the imagined political community they refer to"*. In other words, there is not a common understanding of what is 'European identity' among member-states' citizens. Identification with European identity varies from country to country, but also from individual to individual. Citizens within the different member-states interpret the concept of a common European identity in different ways.

To the inside the relationship between national, sub-national and European identity remains complex and varies depending on national and regional trends. European-wide polls such as Eurobarometer (2015) or EuroNat (2006) allowed to gain insights into various degrees of "feeling of belonging", as expressed by EU citizens. Surveys undertaken by Eurobarometer, the EU's polling service, have found that nearly 60% of the residents of the EU identify to some degree with Europe, often in addition to

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national and regional identities. Even if only a modest 5% identify themselves solely as European, without referring to a national identity, this amounts to about twenty five million people, almost equivalent to the combined population of Belgium and the Netherlands.

Based on Yvon Pesqueux (2011: 17) we can state that consciously decreed and projected values are a factor of coherence on a macro-level as well as on a mezzo / institutional level. Thus, within EU institutions, co-created values are instrumental to the cohesion of the institution or the team. Values are key constituents of the cooperation and the common project. Though, its collective expression within the notions of culture, identity or ideology has boundaries and is therefore questionable. Collectively decreed and projected, as well as consciously co-created values are leaving an infinite room for interpretations and evolution: on an overarching macro-level, on an institutional level as well as on an individual level.

To the outside "Europeanness" can be seen as a manifestation for the respect of cultural diversity and pluralism. International relations and people-to-people dialogue of different natures within Europe and across the world have been shaping the way Europe and European culture is perceived in Europe and abroad. However, perceptions and interpretations of Europe as a cultural entity are of great variety, depending on national cultures, historical context and situational filters. Europeanness seems to be constituted by individual socialization on a local and national level, and more largely by the general Zeitgeist. For the purpose of understanding European external cultural relations it seems crucial to us to consider that the meaning of "Europeanness" is imaginary and symbolic, that it is not binary and static, but highly complex, multidimensional, volatile and "*liquid*" (Baumann: 2005).

EXTERNAL CULTURAL ACTION: PROJECTING, EXCHANGING OR CO-CREATING?

For some time now, academic literature has been preoccupied with distinguishing the various terms cultural diplomacy, cultural relations, soft power, propaganda and cultural imperialism. Whatever models exist for cultural diplomacy, the large variety of approaches is striking. There is an

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abundance of terms and that these are used vaguely, loosely and sometimes interchangeably. Moreover, scholars reiterate the dichotomy between 'the cultural', on the one hand, and 'politics related matters' on the other hand. Gienow Hecht and Donfried (2010: 9-10) summarized it as follows*: "One set [...] of authors grapples with the tension between propaganda and diplomacy, another set accentuates the use of diplomacy as an instrument to work at the exclusion of politics, a third defines cultural diplomacy beyond the realm of the state."* Bourdieu (1987) drew attention to the fact that the arts are not a suitable tool for promoting social integration, but rather one of differentiation. Decades later Bennett e*t al.* (2009) and Savage *et al.* (2013; 2014) underline the fact that culture can be understood directly as constitutive of social positions such as class. Arts managers and cultural creators are seen as having the potential to unite an increasingly heterogeneous society and to counter the anxieties that populists use to promote their goals. However, some defend that cultural diplomacy as such is inherently harmful arts and other cultural practice, as political considerations are predominant in decision-making processes (Nisbett: 2013a).

The use of the arts, science, and culture to achieve ideological and diplomatic goals has been leveraged in international relations throughout the 20th century. Nation states established various models to build and foster international influence, leaving aside some of the political or military power used during the 18th and 19th century. One example, amongst others, of European soft power is the diffusion of European languages across the globe. Influence and persuasion through language, education and cultural expression became a lever for colonial powers to maintain influence, even after colonized states had gained independence. As Babaci-Wilhite (2015) argues, colonial legacy is still perpetuated today when so-called 'global' languages are promoted in education in Africa or Asia. Entire countries and regions are still utilizing English or French as instruction languages in education, binding populations to European education systems and cultural expressions, such as literature, films or other kinds of media.

In diplomacy the notion of 'soft power' appeared for the first time in the United Kingdom in the late 19th century, but it became widely cited in contemporary international relations, based on Joseph Nye's book "Bound to

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lead" (1990). Nye illustrated how the United States' external power schemes had gone beyond the 'hard power' of military action or a 'deterrent force' forbidding certain actions to the other party and relying on the possession of an arsenal and the ability to strike. Soft power is represented by intangible expressions and goods of a nations' culture, including literature, arts, legal systems, economic models or ideologies. We would like to emphasize at this occasion that not only liberal democracies have deployed soft power in their national interest. Also authoritarian systems and dictatorships such as the Soviet Union, Germany under the National Socialists, fascist Italy under Mussolini or the Franco regime in Spain promoted their image and ideology to intellectuals and elites abroad, as underlines Brydan (2016).

According to Nye's U.S.-centric perspective, the assets that put soft power in action are the aspects that are attractive for the interlocutor, such as national politics, when they are perceived as legitimate from abroad or political values when they are recognized as positive by others (Nye 2008: 97). However, the utilization of the term soft power has transmuted over time and is used as a vague concept as of today. As Nye often related, his investigation did not actually concern culture and power / the power of culture, but multilateralism and foreign policy.

According to authors like Diez and Manners (2007) or Whitman (2011) it would be more suited to adopt other concepts, such as "normative power", which account for the specificities of nation states and even for supranational institutions like the EU. Moreover, soft power is a one-directional approach, projecting values, educational approaches or cultural productions to "target countries", driven by national interest and without taking into account cultural diversity and values of these countries or regions. Therefore, we suggest that the term 'soft power' is inadequate if we judge it on its ability or potential for intercultural dialogue and cooperation, its ability to promote cultural diversity, as it is understood by the EU and the UNESCO (see above).

For Ang *et al.* (2015) today's cultural diplomacy needs to be seen in the context of a changing architecture of international relations, taking into account the evolving role of the nation state, due to globalization and contemporary geopolitics.Yet, 'diplomacy' has connotations of negotiation, peacekeeping and international relations and governments directly and

indirectly do fund cultural diplomacy. Whilst it is frequently, but not systematically, seen as part of foreign relations it is unclear how seriously politicians take it, compared to other external actions (Mitchell 1986). Some argue that cultural diplomacy is more nuanced and tactful as of today, more characterized by what Raymond Williams called a "*cultural policy of display*" (1984). For the political scientist Milton C. Cummings, cultural diplomacy is "*the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding*" (2003:1). This definition does neither suggest that cultural diplomacy is a state matter, nor that its purpose is political. The notion of 'exchange' points to a bilateral and multilateral approach, rather than projection.

EVOLUTION OF EXTERNAL CULTURAL RELATIONS IN EUROPE

In order to promote European national cultures and languages internationally, European nation states have established cultural institutes and language institutes abroad, since the end of the 19th century, based on private and public initiatives, e.g. the Alliance Française (France), the British Council (UK), the Società Dante Alighieri (Italy). During war times some of these networks have been used for propaganda purposes, whereas their official commitment shifted to cultural dialogue and peace keeping after World War II. As of today, national cultural institutes or 'operators', such as the Goethe Institute (Germany), the Polish Institute (Poland) or the Instituto Cervantes (Spain) are independently developing international relations through cultural action, often based on a nation specific vision and understanding of what external cultural action entail, what its goals are (Babaci, Campillo, Martel, 2013).

Some actors, like the Institut Français, the Polish Institute or the Austrian Cultural Institute are fully integrated into the nation states' Foreign Affairs institutions and ministries, being understood and explicitly referred to as instruments for public diplomacy. Cultural diplomatic strategies are developed and determined by national governments and steered through national embassies and consulates across the world. Consequently, external

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cultural actions are not separated from the policy in power and can be defined as "cultural diplomacy".

Cultural diplomacy as projection, of national values is visible, for example, in the official discourse of the Institut Français. The promotion of French language, knowledge and ideas are the key mission, the promotion of French culture and civilization. The notion of "rayonnement" of the French nation has been used since the late 19th century, synonymously to the expansion of its civilization.[2] As state Babaci *et al.* (2013), other institutes are asserting the fact that they operate 'at arms' length' from national governments, like the German Goethe Institut, the Danish Cultural Institute or the British Council, meaning that the nature of external cultural projects are not determined by foreign offices and only a minor part of their budgets are funded by governmental institutions. The national institutes' headquarters, regional networks and local institutes are determining cultural action strategies, with little or no supervision from the national governments.

They are most often civil society institutions, defining 'people-to-people dialogue' or 'intercultural exchange' as their missions. In Germany the separation of cultural and intellectual activities ('Geist') from power ('Macht') has become a strongly protected principle, even before the abuse through the Nazi regime. This principle was evoked as early as the eighteenth century, amongst others in Schiller's works: *"... the culture and character of the nation, which are independent of political spells."*

This observation reflected a political reality: before 1871 a German cultural nation existed without the existence of a German state. Even today the Goethe Institut's relative independence from the state and its objective of "*asking questions and unsettling*", reflects the role of culture as a tool for expressing criticism. (Babaci and Martel, 2017)

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[2] 8e édition du dictionnaire de l'Académie Française "Le rayonnement d'une doctrine, d'une civilisation, son expansion. »

	"A world leader in cultural relations, building long-term relationships and trust between people in the UK and other countries, for mutual benefit"
BRITISH COUNCIL	
GOETHE INSTITUT	"Open doors between the arts, education, science and development and trust in the power of art and its ability to ask questions and unsettle"
INSTITUT FRANÇAIS	"Contribute to Frances 'rayonnement' abroad whilst being in dialogue with foreign cultures. Promote French language, knowledge and ideas. … "Respond to the needs of French diplomats"
Instituto Cervantes	"A public institution promoting Spanish language and co-official languages of Spain and diffuse culture of Spanish speaking countries."
deBuren	"A forum for arts, culture, society and politics of Flandres, the Netherlands and Europe in Brussels. A platform for debates and reflexion and information for European citizens.

Source : Official mission statements, 2013

Figure: Abstracts from official discourse of national cultural institutes: British Council, deBuren, Goethe-Institut, Instituto Cervantes, Institut Français, Polish Institute, Swedish Institute (Babaci, Campillo, Martel, 2013)

In the United Kingdom there does not seem to be a 'natural' connection between state and cultural action neither. The British Council is operating more independently from government than the Institut Français. This is on the one hand reflected in official discourse of institutes (see figure 1), but also in personal statements that we have collected during interviews, for example the statement of a director of the British Council (Babaci, Campillo and Martel, 2013):

> *"The Goethe Institute and ourselves we have a much wider*
> *definition of culture. I think we have the widest of all. We have*
> *an anthropological definition almost, so we include society in*
> *our definition of culture, whereas most cultural institutes*
> *have a high culture "arts" definition and certainly the French*

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do and most of the other institutes, the Rumanian, the others as well. Our definition of culture is more like the Raymond Williams definition of culture, much bigger, wider, inclusive."

As these examples show, the definitions of external cultural action across Europe are multiple, depending on national culture, political traditions and historical context. There seem to be as many different national perspectives in Europe as there are nation states. As we analyzed personal statements, collected through more than 30 interviews in 2013, we found a strong propensity amongst directors of institutes, to compare own national views of external cultural action, to other institutes' approaches, in a judgmental and ethnocentric manner. The own approach and model of external cultural relations were put forward quite frequently as 'the one best way'. We realized that the national view remains in the foreground, and other ways of practicing cultural action / diplomacy are not necessarily considered as a valid alternative. Several judgemental statements made us wonder to what extend the ambition of a 'European' vision of external cultural relations is a utopic ideal. One example: *"Cultural diplomacy as it is practiced by F. doesn't work. - Frankly. I mean, it's just projecting the nations values and it's just talking up people."*

Until the beginning of the years 2000, European national cultural institutes have only collaborated on an *ad hoc* basis on a local level and mostly bilaterally However, pilot projects of colocations and local cooperation, e.g. between the Institut Français and the Goethe Institut in Palestinian Territories, were successful in working through budget constraints and raising a "European voice", as analysed by Babaci and Martel (2017). The creation of the civil society network EUNIC, European Union National Institutes of Culture, in 2006 helped to facilitate multilateral collaboration amongst national institutes. With 36 member institutes from 28 member states (status in January 2018), EUNIC federates according to official discourse "*national institutes and ministries responsible for cultural relations and cultural diplomacy*". As stated, national cultural institutes are more or less close to governmental institutions, due to historical motives and diplomatic traditions. Based on our explorative studies in the EUNIC network and European Delegations, conducted between 2013 and 2017, this seems to be a barrier when it comes to defining an acceptable joint operating

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mode. In parallel, national institutes continue conducting cultural exchange projects independently, fostering each their distinct national model.

Nationally influenced perspectives led in the past to openly expressed incongruity and conflicts amongst partner institutes (Babaci *et al.*,2013), as the following statements illustrate :

- British Council (director): *"There is an issue of vision and different understanding of the ambitions of cultural relations. So it tends always to be the lowest common denominator and it tends to be a film festival or a book festival or whatever."*
- Austrian Cultural Institute (director): *"With EUNIC we have not found yet a common vision on cultural relations."*
- Goethe Institut (director): *"Indeed, the major problem with EUNIC are due to institutional egoisms."*

However, shared so-called "European values" and joint goals are seemingly providing a platform to deliberately co-create a European approach towards external cultural action. The importance of cultural diplomacy as part of external action, has been underlined by a former president of the EUNIC network as follows: "*Cultural diplomacy is the glue that holds alliances together, so that they can cooperate in solving the most pressing issues in today's world."* (2011;20) Based on the Treaty of Lisbon and the UNESCO declaration of cultural diversity, 2001, this view has become more and more a consensus in EU external relations in general, as well as amongst national cultural institutes more specifically.

Over the past 10 years, as the collaboration on few cultural projects has been extended through joint projects under the umbrella of EUNIC, public funding sources for European national cultural institutes have shifted from national calls for projects to EU funded projects, in line with the European Union's continuous integration process. In order to access to such European budgets, which are distributed through the European External Action Service and its Delegations (EUD) abroad, cultural institutes need to build consortiums of institutes that are representative for at least three, often more, European member nations.

"In 2014, EUNIC was selected as one of the cultural networks co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme (2014-2017). Crossroads for Culture is aimed at strengthening EUNIC's capacity to enable cultural players from all EU Member states to work transnationally, internationalise cultural and creative sectors and further enhance European influence and attraction inside and outside of Europe. In 2017 EUNIC was awarded another grant for the period 2017-2021."

When it comes to collaboration in the field in EUNIC 'clusters', common initiatives and joint projects have contributed to cohesion amongst partners, letting emerge new practices. The feeling of "being European" seems particularly strong when being abroad, as this statement from a French EUNIC representative in China illustrates: *"Despite all differences, here in Beijing, mutual understanding is a given. You realize when you are in China how easy it is to understand each other and to work together, when you are amongst Europeans. We are from the same world."* (2013) Nation specific convictions and visions remain in place, amongst others due to established structures and traditional understanding of what cultural work entails. However, we have observed that declaring and sharing "European values" contributes to a coherent official discourse to the outside. European values are even declared by some as being universal values: *"Yes, indeed, European values of cultural diversity, multilinguism and respect are fundamental values, it is just impossible not to agree on this type of values."*

Since 2016 the official mission statement of EUNIC, the European Union National Institutes of Culture states: *"Building trust and understanding between the peoples of Europe and the rest of the world through culture".* The principles stated in a joint declaration with the EU Commission and the European External Action Service defined three principles:

- *Promoting culture and intercultural dialogue for peaceful inter-community relations*
- *Supporting culture as an engine for sustainable social and economic development*
- *Reinforcing cooperation on cultural heritage*

Also, in official discourse EUNIC members agreed on a common definition of culture in 2016: *"Culture embraces a wide and inclusive range of policies and activities, which includes not only the arts and literature, but also, among others, inter- cultural dialogue, education and research, the creative industries and tourism, heritage, sport, artisanship as well as development cooperation. For this reason, a cross-cutting approach to culture should be encouraged."* The people-to-people dialogue within Europe and to the outside, by the means of culture reflects the civil society dimension of cultural relations. However, official discourse also exposes that EUNIC is more and more aligned with and bound to EU governmental bodies: *"Inspired by the European Commission's approach to working with countries around the world, we have divided clusters into three main groups, EU and its neighbourhood, Strategic Partner Countries, Developing Countries."* This means that strategic priorities are going to be defined by EU institutions, to be simply executed by EUNIC members (clusters of national institutes), with little power to influence the overall strategy, whatever the national member institutes' operating model is.

The joint communication of 2016 also called *"relevant EU stakeholders at all levels to join forces to ensure synergies in advancing cultural cooperation outside the EU. In this context, it proposed, inter alia, 'enhanced cooperation with Cultural Institutes through a new form of partnership between the EEAS, Commission services, national cultural institutes and their umbrella organization (EUNIC)".* This is a strong indication that EUNIC is following strategic guidelines and political objectives of the European Commission. According to administrative arrangements signed in 2017, the EUNIC network agreed to consult with EU embassies ("Delegations") and to be supervised by them:

- *"In consultation with EU Delegations and local stakeholders, EUNIC clusters are developing cultural relations strategies…"*
- *"The joint pilot activities should help test method(s) of 'enhanced cooperation' between EU Delegations (or Headquarters when relevant) and cultural institutes in partner countries, including aspects of planning, resourcing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.*

Furthermore, some central projects that are conducted in Brussels by EUNIC member institutes are clearly focused on "cultural diplomacy":

> *"The British Council, Centre for Fine Arts/BOZAR, EUNIC Global, European Cultural Foundation and Institut français have formed a consortium, led by Goethe-Institut, to support the implementation of the Cultural Diplomacy Platform. The Cultural Diplomacy Platform has been launched early March 2016 by the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments of the European Commission, to support the EU institutions in the implementation of a new 'EU Strategy for international cultural relations."*

By having become "an operator" for the European commission, EUNIC's independence and its separation from politics and governmental powers becomes questionable. However, the joint communication 'Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations' (June 2016) that was adopted by the Commission and the EEAS leaves the door open to go beyond the projection of European values and culture, when referring to the statement of the Council of the European Union: *"The Council of the European Union stated the need to go beyond projecting the diversity of European cultures in order to generate a new spirit of dialogue, mutual listening and learning, joint capacity building, co-creation and global solidarity."*

This points us to an approach of external cultural relations that goes beyond soft power and beyond cultural diplomacy, pointing to the UNESCO Universal Declaration for Cultural Diversity.

Nonetheless we would like to stress that the Council of the European Union that pronounced the statement consists of the heads of state or government from the member states together with the President of the European Commission, who are meeting for the purpose of planning Union policy. This means that the civil society network European Union Institutes of Culture (EUNIC) is no longer an independent from governmental bodies, but committed to following to a certain degree political objectives and policies. Thus, the emerging operating model is more and more similar to models of cultural diplomacy, such as it is operated by France, Poland or Austria. The independence of the arts and the willingness to establish

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intercultural people-to-people dialogue through EU external cultural relations is questionable. Moreover the question arises if new, alternative, supranational models will have the room to emerge.

Overall, as of today only minor parts of budgets and the minority of projects are conducted as "European" cultural initiatives. As long as national and civil society funding sources are part of the mix, a relative independence might be insured. The EU funding programme Creative Europe allocated for the timeframe 2014-2020 funds for 1.46 billion € to three subcomponents: the culture sub-programme (all sectors) receives around 30% of the funding; the media sub-programme (audio-visual sector) receives around 55% of the funding; the cross-sectoral strand (transnational policy cooperation and Guarantee Facility) receives around 15% of the funding. The last stream is the funding source leveraged by EUNIC. After having received funds from the Creative Europe initiative 2014-2017 of 245.457 € annually, EUNIC was chosen again as one of many cultural operators for the period from 2017-2020. This budget helps to run the network and to facilitate some local projects on cluster level. Whilst national budgets for external cultural relations have been shrinking, institutes are looking out for partners and new funding sources. An incentive for national institutes to work together in EUNIC "clusters" in the field, might be a future increase of funding for joint cultural projects. However, beyond all earlier considerations concerning official discourse and EU external cultural action strategies, this amount only accounts for around 1% of the overall cumulated EUNIC budget of all national member institutes during the same timeframe.

Also, legal structures and the independence of national cultural institutes remain in place, in line with the Treaty of Lisbon. The Treaty stresses that cultural activities as the sovereign domain for member states. In addition, article 167 of the Treaty stipulates that *"The Union shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore."* This is the basis for future cooperation between member states in the domain of external cultural action, in order to *"improve the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples, conserve and safeguard cultural heritage of European significance,*

non-commercial cultural exchanges, as well as artistic and literary creation, including in the audio-visual sector."

TRIGGERING A PARADIGM CHANGE IN EXTERNAL CULTURAL ACTION?

As the EU and its institutions have been evolving from an economic community towards a more and more complex supranational union, one can observe the emergence of shared political and military goals abroad. Since the creation of the EEAS, European External Action Service, in 2011, EU external public diplomacy is superposing with national, bilateral actions. Since 2016 the agreement between the civil society network EUNIC and the European Commission attaches external European cultural action to supra-national bodies. EU external cultural action as such is being conducted in the interest of EU member states, corresponding therefore rather to the notions of cultural diplomacy and soft power, as we illustrated in the theoretical framework.

As we saw in some example cases, national models of external cultural action vary across Europe. They are either integrating these activities into foreign relations strategies, driven by state interests and diplomatic instances, either preserving a certain independence from the state and focusing on cultural relations and exchange rather than projection. However, many nuances distinguish all national models from others, due to political and historic conditions.

We illustrated that national traditions in public diplomacy and external cultural relations a platform for moving towards a shared practice in "European" external cultural relations or diplomacy. A shared vision of EU external cultural action was officially communicated recently, but its strategy is still emerging and practices are piloted in the field. The participation of numerous stakeholders from governmental, supranational and civil society institutions makes the development of a joint strategy a complex matter and an ambitious mission.

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The high degree of complexity is not only due to the large number and variety of stakeholders, but also to the imaginary concept underlying "Europeanness". The projected image is not only based on decreed "European values" and influenced through the interaction with non-European partners, but also affected by the self-image that Europeans develop of the EU as fundamental component of their political identity. This might point us to the limitations of defining, thinking and reflecting on European values and identity for future "dissemination" of European culture across the world. We saw how the moto of "unity in diversity" is put into practice when it comes to operationalizing policies and finding new ways. But the temptation of applying national models of cultural diplomacy to a new supranational set-up, the EU, can be seen as a barrier. In order to defend existing national structures and to dominate partnering states, member states might tend to impose their approach of cultural diplomacy without questioning its suitability for a supra national union. Also, as illustrated above, most national models are based on models of public diplomacy, dating more than a century back. It is likely that "big countries", meaning financially strong and politically influential member states will impose their vision.

Whilst analysing discourse of EU institutions on different levels, we observed the persistence of an essentialist, static approach towards Europeanness and European identity, even though the concept of European identity can be seen as multidimensional, ambiguous and dynamic phenomenon. As identities are formed in the long run, rather than in response to a short-term policy, empirical effects of increasing power of EU institutions should be considered and revisited continuously. This will pave the way for intensified policies and initiatives of the EU with regards to a common European identity. It would be relevant to further explore how the current common denominator, as stated in the joint communication of 2017, was negotiated between EU governmental bodies, the civil society network EUNIC and its 36 national institutes and ministries. Furthermore, following up on future agreements, strategy building and operations might further elucidate decision making processes and alternative options.

Many questions remain open. Is European external cultural action a means to initiate and to foster people-to-people dialogue, to inspire "genuine

dialogue amongst cultures" and "intercultural cooperation" in line with the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001)? Is it a platform for exchanging cultural practice and diffusing cultural productions? Or is it positioned and used as a tool for public diplomacy to achieve economic, ideological or political goals, establishing influence and extending "soft power"?

A means to define a more contemporary and more relevant image might be to change perspectives: how is Europe as a whole and "European culture" and values perceived abroad? Which are the messages that are conveyed in the field through joint European cultural projects? How would local partners wish to see evolve a cultural exchange with the European Union? As a matter of fact, self-rhetorical representation, public debate and mirrored images are fundamental components of a political identity in the making like the EU/ropean one. For this reason, it can be useful for future research to understand how internal and external images emerge and how they evolve over time. Analysing affective, cognitive and symbolic interactions on a micro/institutional level is certainly relevant. Including the perspective of host / target / partner countries across the world, as well as artists perceptions might provide valuable additional insights, too.

Scholars tend to share an underlying optimism towards the potential of the European Union to play an important role in international relations (Tonra, 2011). The EUNIC pilot programmes that are currently being conducted in the field across the world can be seen as unique in its sort and therefore as an opportunity for researchers and practitioners. The European Union External Action Service is a very recent institution and its decision making processes and models of involvement with civil society partners might be a platform to trigger a change in paradigm in international cultural relations for EU members, European countries overall and maybe beyond.

CONCLUSION

The moment of a nation's cultural projection is that of its most polished, sublimated, and hence, artificial representation. Projecting national culture abroad is essentially about performing the nation, converting the nation into a performance, and thus, ironically, disclosing its fundamental truth as a cultural construct, as an elaborate artwork. However, as the European Union and its institutions in charge of external relations are more and more interacting on a multilateral level, we are witnessing a paradigm shift in external cultural action. We believe that contemporary international relations and EU external relations have an increasing responsibility for intercultural dialogue within each region, but also globally. The relevance of external cultural relations managed by non-governmental stakeholders, such as local cultural centres, partners, artists, scientists etc., might motivate political entities to reshape and to reinvigorate public cultural diplomacy, developing joint intercultural collaboration strategies.

From a constructivist point of view, developments in the European cultural and political sphere are continually transformed by dynamics produced by national and European policy-makers through top-down and bottom-up approaches. The variable geometry of European integration gives rise to the construction of contested, incomplete, but also future-oriented European cultural diplomacy and external cultural relations. This means a significant step forward in raising intercultural awareness and self-awareness, by mirroring collective and individual values, norms and practices. As one of our interviewees put it: *"To the inside diversity, unity and the respect of otherness are in the centre of everything, but to the outside we are presenting an attractive, polyphonic unity, colourful and European."* [3]

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[3] Director of Goethe Institute, EUNIC member, 2013. Babaci L, Campillo S., Martel K., (European National Institutes of Culture : Challenges and driving forces of an intercultural and multilateral network), Master II - Thesis, Master in Intercultural Management; Faculty of Management, Diversity and Social Cohesion, Paris Dauphine University, 2013

According to Raymond Weber (2007: 82), transnational networks represent beyond territoriality a new dimension, *"situated permanently on the crossroads between transnational dynamics and local logic, [...] they introduce simultaneously intermediate forms of expression, between conformity and deviance, between order and disorder."* Thus, multilateral networks and transnational institutions such as the EEAS or EUNIC are in need of new ways of collaborating, acting and interacting collectively towards common goals. Creativity and new thinking could possibly be nurtured through the dissemination of national cultures on the one hand, but also and more importantly by understanding different models and positions amongst partners across the globe: Opening up and taking into account global transformations of the 21st century. Clarifying explicitly the notions of cultural action, cultural diplomacy, external cultural relations for the European context in particular is a prerequisite for developing a supranational model of intercultural exchange. Not only would it foster mutual understanding and respect and acknowledge existing practices, but it would open new horizons in the area of international relations in general.

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