

INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL RELATIONS
CANADA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION
PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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The nineteen seventies were exciting times to be involved in the arts and culture in Europe, Canada, and many other countries and parts of the world.

The decade commenced with the first world conference ever held on cultural policies - the *Intergovernmental Conference on Institutional, Administrative and Financial Aspects of Cultural Policies* – convened by UNESCO in Venice in 1970. Not only was Venice the perfect place to hold a conference of this type, but also the conference created a great deal of enthusiasm among the member states of UNESCO and other countries around the world. At long last, the commitment made to rebuilding the devastated economies of countries involved in the Second World War was coming to an end and countries and governments were starting to turn their attention to other matters, one of which was international relations.

The historic conference in Venice was followed by the *Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies in Europe* held in Helsinki in 1972. By this time, a great deal of attention was being focused on international cooperation and what was called the “twin engines” of cultural development – democratization and decentralization - and making these engines the foundations and driving forces of cultural policy.¹ Not only was it necessary to democratize arts organizations to broaden and diversify the character, composition, and size of their audiences and let the fresh air in, but also it was necessary to prevent artistic and cultural activities from accumulating in Europe’s largest cities and get them out into smaller towns, cities, and rural areas as well as to other parts of Europe and the world.

Since Canada was defined as “part of Europe” for geographical and political purposes by UNESCO, it was included in the regional conference in Helsinki. As a result, democratization and decentralization became buzzwords in Canada and not only in Europe, so much so that what was going on in Europe at that time was also going on in Canada. A big push was put on to liberate the arts and arts organizations from control by powerful and wealthy elites and expand audiences to include a much

broader cross-section of the Canadian population, as well as to move artistic and cultural activities out of Canada's largest cities and spread them more evenly across the country. Governments and politicians were especially enthusiastic about this because democratization and decentralization fitted perfectly with their mandates and agendas, most notably in terms of convincing Canadians that spending their tax dollars on the arts and culture was legitimate and justified.

I was also swept up in the excitement at this time because I was involved with several others in creating the first academic program for training arts administrators and cultural policy-makers in the world at York University in Toronto in 1968 and 1969, and then teaching the first two courses on arts administration and Canadian and international cultural policy at this university from 1970 to 1974. Moreover, my document on *Aspects of Canadian Cultural Policy/Aspects de la politique culturelle canadienne* was published in Paris by UNESCO in 1976 as part of its series of studies and documents on cultural policies for members states. It was the first comprehensive publication ever written and published on cultural policy in Canada.

By this time, I had left York University, was self-employed, and had become keenly interested in Canada's international cultural relations. I was so interested in them that I drove to Ottawa on several occasions to try and convince authorities at the Department of External Affairs – later the Department of International Trade and Foreign Affairs and now Global Affairs Canada – that I should be contracted to research and write the first full-fledged document on Canada's international cultural relations. I felt this publication was badly needed because the Department was doing some important work in this field and very few people in Canada, Europe, and other parts of the world seemed to know anything about it.

Unfortunately, researching, writing, and publishing a document like this seemed pointless to authorities at the Department of External Affairs. It didn't take long to discover the reason for this. Virtually all countries and governments in the world were deeply immersed in operationalizing the economic interpretation of history by this time and were busy dividing their societies up into "economic bases" and "non-economic superstructures" and giving a high priority to the economic bases and a low priority to the non-economic superstructures. This practice was intensified and strengthened even more when C. P. Snow's book *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* was published in 1959.² In this book, Snow claimed that the western world was divided into two cultures – the artistic-humanistic culture and the scientific culture – and far more attention should be given to the scientific

culture and far less attention to the artistic-humanistic culture in educational institutions in the western world because this was necessary to come to grips with the world's most urgent, pressing, and persistent problems at that time.

What started out by dividing all subjects in educational institutions in the western world up into "hard subjects" and "soft subjects" eventually ended up dividing all activities in all parts of the world up into "hard activities" and "soft activities." Consistent with the economic interpretation of history but in a much more pointed and specific way, hard activities were activities that were concerned with the "fundamental in life," such as economics, agriculture, industry, technology, science, and trade, and soft activities were concerned with the "frills in life," primarily the arts, humanities, and leisure-time pursuits. It didn't take long for this practice to find its way in international relations and foreign policy, where a similar distinction was made between "hard diplomacy" and "soft diplomacy" but with precisely the same priorities, implications, and consequences.

However, back to Canada's Department of External Affairs for a moment longer. I was so persistent with authorities at the Department that finally the sky cleared and the sun came out. A senior official at the Department heard about my proposal, arranged a meeting with me in Ottawa, and ended up hiring me to research and write the first detailed document on Canada international cultural relations ever produced. Not surprisingly, it was called *Canada's International Cultural Relations/Les relations culturelles du Canada avec l'étranger*. It was published in English and French in 1979 and distributed to Canadian embassies and diplomatic posts abroad as well as a selection of people in Canada concerned with this matter.

No sooner was I was contracted to research and write this document than I set out to determine who the leaders in this field were and what they were accomplishing. As a result, the first chapter of the publication was devoted to tracing the ascendancy of international cultural relations generally and specifically after the Second World War, providing a great deal of information on France, Great Britain, and Germany as the principal leaders in this field by far, and proposing a set of principles that should govern international cultural relations in general and Canada's international cultural relations in particular. Included among these principles were: why cultural relations are an integral component of international relations and foreign policy; constitute a legitimate area of political activity and governmental responsibility, produce countless economic, political, social, artistic, academic, and

other benefits, and constitute an essential element in international relations in their own right as well as a fundamental aspect of foreign policy.”³

The first chapter of this publication began with a well-known and inspiring statement by Rabinbranth Tagore: “We must prepare the field for the cooperation of all the cultures of the world where all will give and take from each other. This is the keynote of the coming age.” The chapter was titled ‘*A Strategic Investment*’ because I felt this is what international cultural relations are really all about and I was aware by this time that governments usually follow the example provided by other governments and the leaders in the field rather than the theories, ideas, and ideals of academics, consultants, and practitioners.

The nineteen seventies were a very exciting time to be involved in researching and writing about cultural relations between Canada and Europe as well. Due to the vast number of Europeans who had emigrated to Canada and became Canadian citizens for several centuries prior to this, international relations were well established between Canada and virtually all European countries by this time. As far as international *cultural* relations were concerned, they covered a vast array of activities – the arts, the mass media, education, science, the crafts, youth, recreation, the environment, sports, multicultural affairs, and so forth – which were all documented in detail in the aforementioned publication.⁴ As a result of these developments, and others, there was an intimacy between Canada and Europe – Canadians and Europeans – at this time that was cherished, rare, valued, and appreciated on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

Unfortunately, things started to move in a different direction on both sides of the ocean shortly after this. This was due to many economic, political, technological, trade, and other developments during the nineteen eighties, nineties, and the first decade and a half of the new millennium. Included in these developments were: a much greater emphasis on developing the economies of these two parts of the world as well as all activities related to this; major shifts in political policies, practices, and ideologies; the election of a number of conservative governments; uncertainties over future needs, prospects, and possibilities; cuts in budgets for foreign affairs and international relations; and a great deal else.

In specific terms, Europe as a whole and many countries in Europe were strongly influenced by the creation of the European Union that came into existence in 1993 following the signing and implementation of the Maastricht Treaty. This treaty focused much more attention – and understandably and rightly so - on the

needs of EU countries and the possibility of adding new members in order to ensure the success of the EU and Maastricht Treaty. Moreover, the EU in general and Greece, Italy, Spain, and a number of other EU countries in particular were experiencing severe financial, fiscal, and employment problems at this time that required a great deal of attention and strengthened the need to focus on Europe in an internal sense rather than other parts of Europe and the world in an external sense.

Canada was also engaged in a number of specific problems at this time that required a great deal of introspection and deflected attention away from Europe and external matters. This is especially true for patriation of the Canadian Constitution and the passage of the Constitution Act and Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, as well as the cultivation of much closer ties and stronger relations with the United States. This commenced with the trade agreement that was signed between Canada and the United States - the Canada United States Free Trade Agreement (CUSFTA) in 1988 - which ultimately led to the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 that included Mexico as well. Somewhat ironically, this propelled Canada, Europe, and the European Union further apart, despite the fact that the NAFTA agreement was modelled largely on the success of the European Economic Community from 1957 to 1993. However, it had the effect of drawing Canada much more fully in the orbit of the United States and Mexico, thereby reducing Canada's relations with the EU, Europe, and other parts of the world.

Despite the fact that international relations between Canada and the European Union were headed in different directions, had their ups and downs, and were concerned largely with internal rather than external matters between 1980 to 2015, a number of important partnership agreements and working arrangements were created in areas of mutual concern between these two parts of the world during the final decade of the twentieth century and the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century. Among other developments, this included the commencement of negotiations towards a Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) in 2009, the Declaration on EU-Canada Relations signed at the Ottawa Summit in 2014, and sustaining many existing cultural relations that had been established years earlier. Nevertheless, the biggest development of all occurred in 2017 when Canada and the EU finalized CETA that was provisionally applied and removed 98% of the prevailing tariffs between these two essential parts of the world.

Then, in 2018, the annual Report on the State of the EU-Canada Relationship was released and revealed that the European Union and Canada had committed to

developing “a set of common values and priorities such as sustainable development, gender equality, progressive free and fair trade (which was influenced by the protectionist policies of Donald Trump in the United States), and to jointly shape globalization to ensure the benefits are more equitably distributed.” The report also included “the determination of the EU and Canada to work through their closer bilateral cooperation to preserve the rules-based international order and to strengthen the multilateral system”.⁵

This was accompanied by the EU-Canada Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) that emphasized comparable commitments to deepen and broaden bilateral cooperation on such matters as human rights, democracy and the rule of law, international peace and security, counter-terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation, sustainable economic and environmental development, science, technology, and innovation, dealing with climate change, relations with specific countries and areas of the world, and others. This indicated that things were getting back on track as far as EU - Canada relations were concerned, despite the fact that there was very little specific information on how these matters with strong *cultural* implications and overtones could be worked out between these two parts of the world.

Generally speaking, this is where matters stand at present with respect to relations between the EU and Canada. Most of the energy and enthusiasm is focused on developing stronger economic, trade, industrial, manufacturing, technological, and political relations and ties, sustaining a number of cultural relations in areas that were established earlier, and following up on commitments to a number of areas and ideals that have profound cultural implications - such as sustainable development, gender equality, human rights, democracy, free and fairer trade, and international peace - but with few indications or clues concerning how these areas and ideals can be developed in fact. This is especially important for Canada as it tries to escape from the “staples trap” it is in at present, lessen its dependency on the United States, and develop relations with other countries and parts of the world.

And this brings us to the future. How should cultural relations between the EU and Canada be cultivated and conducted in the years and decades ahead?

There is no doubt that the EU and Canada will be totally preoccupied over the next few years with recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and the disastrous effect it has had on jobs, income, employment, and economies, catastrophic declines in stock market prices and drastic plunges in the value of financial assets and real estate, and rapid escalations in the size of public and private debts as governments

and citizens alike struggle to come to grips with the consequences of these and other complex and debilitating problems. This will require strong actions in both Canada and EU countries to rebuild their devastated economies and generate the economic activity, expenditures, and investments that are necessary to recover from this dreadful situation and reverse it in the future. And this is not all. Waiting in the wings after recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic is assured is the need to come to grips with climate change, global warming, and the environmental crisis that will also require a great deal of action and attention, albeit in a very different way.

While these two problems have had devastating economic effects on the EU, Canada, and other countries, neither of these problems can be solved by the international system as it is presented constituted because it is designed to produce goods, services, and material and monetary wealth and is not designed to deal with problems as multidimensional, universal, vast, and life-threatening as this. And what is true for these two problems is also true for other problems that will confront humanity and the world in the future, such as the intermingling of people and populations with very different worldviews, values, value systems, customs, traditions, and beliefs, as well as conflicts and tensions between the diverse races, religions, ethnic groups, countries, and cultures of the world.

Problems like this were foreseen some time ago by three distinguished cultural scholars - Paul J. Braisted, Soedjatmoko, and Kenneth W. Thompson. Here is what they had to say about situations like this in their book *Reconstituting the Human Community*:

Mankind (humankind) is faced with problems which, if not dealt with, could in a very few years develop into crises world-wide in scope. Interdependence is the reality; world-wide problems the prospect; and world-wide cooperation the only solution. As a tool for sensitizing people to the reality and the prospect, stimulating them to attempt the solution, and creating the kind of empathy and understanding essential to both sensitivity and stimulation, *cultural relations are, and will increasingly become, a decisive aspect of international affairs.*⁶

Why is this so essential? It is essential because as the aforementioned authors went on to explain:

... cultural relations cannot be seen apart from the setting in which they occur. Put more broadly, the setting itself is part of the problem, especially because now it is becoming clear that the setting has become dangerously unstable. It is no exaggeration to say that all systems on the basis of which

the world is organized are facing a dead end, at least if present trends are allowed to continue. And insofar as they do not face a dead end, they are on a collision course.⁷

This goes right to the heart of the matter because it has to do with the “*context*” within which all international relations - cultural and otherwise - are situated and the dire need to change it. But where do we find the clues that are necessary to achieve this? There is no doubt that Johan Huizinga put his finger on the crux of this matter when he said following his assessment of many different cultures in the world:

The realities of economic life, of power, of technology, of everything conducive to man’s (people’s) well-being, must be balanced by strongly developed spiritual, intellectual, moral, and aesthetic values.⁸

Why is this remarkable insight into the human condition and domestic and international affairs so imperative going forward into the future? It is imperative because what has been occurring in the world over the last seven or eight decades has been antithetical to this. In the process of dealing with the “realities of economic life, of power, of technology, of everything conducive to man’s (people’s) well-being,” we have not cultivated “strongly developed spiritual, intellectual, moral, and aesthetic values.” In fact, the more attention that has been paid to the former area, the less attention – not the more, the less – has been paid to the latter area. This is confirmed by numerous developments throughout the world, such as declining attendance at many religious services in different parts of the world, educational systems that are committed to preparing people for consuming more goods and services and accumulating more material and monetary wealth, drastic cuts in arts educational budgets and artistic activities in many parts of the world, and a decline in moral values that was so evident in the world that the World Commission on Cultural and Development made the need for “A new global ethics” the first chapter of its report *Our Creative Diversity* in 1995.⁹

Like many outstanding cultural scholars over the course of human history such as Cicero, Voltaire, Tylor, Burckhardt, Sorokin, Mead, Benedict, Williams, Hall, Campbell, Soyinka, and others, Huizinga not only provided us with an incredible insight into what is needed to come to grips with the present world situation, but also a specific way of achieving this in the future when he said:

The balance exists above all in the fact that each of the various cultural activities (stated above) enjoys as vital a function as is possible in the context of the whole. If such harmony of cultural functions is present, it will reveal

itself as order, strong structure, style, and rhythmic life of the society in question.¹⁰

Herein lies the key to the challenge in international relations that confronts the EU, Canada, and all other countries in the world in the future. The context of these relations must be changed so that the destructive division between “hard and soft activities” and “hard and soft diplomacy” is brought to an end and replaced by a context that is holistic rather than polarized. Hopefully, this will also bring to an end the practice of subdividing societies into economic bases and non-economic superstructures, giving the former area a central priority and the later area a marginal priority in the overall scheme of things, assuming that if we look after economies properly everything will turn out for the best, and possibly even what Gandhi meant when he said “a nation’s culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people.”

This would mean that international relations between countries in the future would be treated in the holistic manner and all challenges, problems, and possibilities would be addressed according to what tools, techniques, and vehicles are most appropriate and effective in confronting and dealing with specific challenges, problems, and possibilities regardless of whether they are economic or non-economic in nature. This would give international relations - and with this international *cultural* relations - a unity, equality, and parity that does not exist at present but is of vital importance in the future. A step in the right direction in this regard may be found in a report released in Canada by the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade in 2019 - *Cultural Diplomacy at the Front Stage of Canada’s Foreign Policy* - which concluded that cultural diplomacy should be a “main pillar of Canada’s foreign policy” in the future as its first and foremost recommendation.

Over the long term, this may also provide the key to seeing all relations between countries from a cultural rather than economic perspective. Paul J. Braisted had something profound and powerful to say about this at another exceedingly difficult time in history:

Cultural cooperation is so directly a national interest that it should furnish the fundamental motivating principle in governmental foreign service, replacing or reordering all lesser motives. It should become the controlling principle in personnel selection and training, in the establishment of new standards of service, and fresh criteria of effectiveness.¹¹

And this bring us, via a rather circuitous but persistent chronological route, to the EU and Canada and their role in all this in the future. Given the strong “historical

continuities” that have existed between European countries and Canada for many centuries and have begun to assert themselves once again through specific relations between the EU and Canada over the last few years, surely it is time for the EU and Canada to step up and intensify their relations in this field, as well as to provide the leadership, networks, and examples that are needed by all countries and can be adopted and emulated in all parts of the world. Without doubt, this would make a remarkable contribution to international relations, global development, and human affairs at a crucial time in the history of humanity and the world.

¹ See, for example, Augustin Girard, *Cultural Development: experience and policies* (Paris, UNESCO, 1972), Chapter 8, pp. 129 -145. Also see Herbert Shore, *Cultural Policy: UNESCO's First Cultural Development Decade* (Washington: U.S. National Commission for UNESCO, 1981) for an assessment of the period from 1969 to 1980 and the key role UNESCO played during this time through its international and regional conferences in Venice, Helsinki, and other regions in the world.

² C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959).

³ D. Paul Schafer, *Canada's International Relations/Les relations culturelles du Canada avec l'étranger* (Ottawa: Department of External Affairs, 1976), Chapter I, pp. 1-11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Chapter III, pp. 27-38.

⁵ Annual Report of the State of the EU-Canada Relationship. (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2018).

⁶ Paul J Braisted, Soedjatmoko, and Kenneth W. Thompson, (editors), *Reconstituting the Human Community*, A Report of Colloquium III, held at Belagio, Italy, July 1972 for the program of inquiries, *Cultural Relations for the Future* sponsored by the Hazen Foundation (New Haven, Connecticut: The Hazen Foundation, 1973), p. 14 (insert and italics mine).

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 10.

⁸ Karl J. Weintraub, *Visions of Culture: Voltaire, Guizot, Burckhardt, Lamprecht, Huizinga, and Ortega y Gasset* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 216 (insert mine).

⁹ World Commission on Culture and Development, *Our Creative Diversity*, Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development (Paris: UNESCO, 1995), Chapter 1, pp. 24-51.

¹⁰ Karl J. Weintraub, *op. cit.*, p. 216 (insert mine).

¹¹ Paul J. Braisted, *Cultural Cooperation: Keynote to the Coming Age* (New Haven: The Edward W. Hazen Foundation, 1945), p. 25.

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10. *Canada's Foreign Policy: Principles and Priorities for the Future, The Position Papers*. Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons Reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy, November, 1994 (Ottawa: Department of Foreign Affairs, 1994) See especially: John Ralston Saul, 'Culture and Foreign Policy.'

12. Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Cultural Diplomacy at the Front Stage of Canada's Foreign Policy* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2019).