

## The World Needs More Canada. Canada Needs More Canada

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Canadian government has demonstrated a persistent inability to mobilize the resources needed to make a serious cultural diplomacy policy operational. That cultural diplomacy is a real policy priority is among the most durable of Canada's foreign affairs myths. Whenever officials, politicians and other Canadians take time out to reflect on the directions they want to go in our foreign policy, the notion of cultural diplomacy as a fundamental instrument of our presence abroad consistently ranks near the top. But the doctrine of plain language fails us here. It might be posted on the website, but it seems that we do not really mean it.

Consider the government's response to the 1994 cross-Canada foreign policy consultations. Tabled in parliament in its 1995 Foreign Policy statement *Canada in the World*, the government set out three objectives for Canadian foreign policy and for the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade:

- the promotion of prosperity and employment;

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- the protection of our security within a stable global framework;
- *the projection of Canadian values and culture in the world.*

Two years later, the priority had apparently lost no ground. The Department's self-assigned *raison d'être*, the Mission Statement of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, which was tabled in the House of Commons in 1997 reads like this: "To act for Canada and all Canadians to enhance prosperity, employment and security and work toward a peaceful world *by the promotion of Canadian culture and values.*"

And yet cultural diplomacy and "the promotion of Canadian culture and values" remains at best a sidebar activity with marginal resources and staffing in the Department which is responsible for its execution and management. There is equally marginal collaboration and support from the various cultural and funding agencies of the federal government.

## 2. WHAT IS CULTURAL DIPLOMACY? A COMPONENT OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Public diplomacy is generally understood to be what governments do (usually, but not always, through their embassies and consulates abroad) to influence foreign democracies *through their citizens*... public diplomacy consists of initiatives for shaping public opinion abroad. There are usually three main components of a complete public diplomacy program:

- **Media relations:** explaining contemporary national issues and national objectives to, and through, the foreign media;
- **Academic relations:** building and strengthening links between foreign intellectuals and future decision-makers (students in higher-education), and their counterparts at home;
- **Cultural diplomacy:** "making yourselves interesting" to opinion makers and decision makers and the public abroad.

As is the case with international media relations and academic relations, cultural diplomacy has an unabashed and pragmatic national-interests rationale. The cultural diplomacy idea is to get decision-makers in other countries to think about us whenever they are looking for alliances and partners to collaborate in pursuit of common goals, be they human security, environmental, economic, social or academic. At its most effective, an embassy's cultural diplomacy program usually targets a specific demographic. The target population is chosen according to the decision-maker profile of the host country. That target demographic profile can range from elite to popular. The choice is usually a function of the degree and nature of the country's democratic evolution..., the degree to which citizens influence public policy decisions.

But heads up! It is important not to confuse the notion of Cultural Diplomacy with the notion of International Cultural Relations. International Cultural Relations, as funded and encouraged by national governments, generally have a different objective, cultural development..., that of building a country's competence and capacity for its own artistic expression through international exposure and collaborations abroad with other artistic or cultural professionals. The Alliance française, the Goethe Institute, the British Council, the Japan Foundation and even Canada Council were founded in varying degrees on the cultural development/international cultural relations rationale and less as tools designed exclusively for cultural diplomacy.

Notwithstanding their differing primary objectives, Cultural Diplomacy and International Cultural Relations are intimately linked and can in fact lead to similar kinds of initiatives abroad. Activities undertaken in either file (or either budget line) almost always deliver important benefits to the objectives of the other. It is difficult in fact to avoid the by-product benefits of "making oneself interesting" in a foreign policy sense when engaging in a cultural exchange with far more altruistic objectives. And the opposite is equally true: mobilizing cultural professionals to "make us interesting" cannot but help to build the experience and capacities of a nation's artists to discover, express and refine their own cultural character. *But the challenge for foreign policy policy-makers and for those who would influence them, has always been to understand the subtle but distinct objectives of the separate activities, and the consequent distinct centres of policy responsibility and budget lines.*

But, alas, these two files do share, along with most other cultural programs of governments in Canada, one unfortunate stigma. The costs of delivering their programs and policies are inescapably measurable in monetary terms whereas the benefits are stubbornly measurement-resistant when using a dollars ac-

counting yardstick. The consequence of that shared stigma, the costs-benefits handicap, is well known amongst arts professionals everywhere. When times are tough, the tough cuts start here.

### 3. A GLANCE AT FOUR SUCCESSFUL NATIONAL CULTURAL DIPLOMACY MODELS

**France**, the country which can claim to have invented the idea of cultural diplomacy, still puts about one third of its foreign affairs budget into cultural and academic relations (at one point recently, that one third was the equivalent in spending power of the total Canadian Foreign Affairs budget). The French have a *Mission civilisatrice* which quite simply seeks to demonstrate and generate respect for French artistic and intellectual supremacy. The effectiveness of maybe three centuries of French cultural diplomacy is so persuasive that many other European countries have been pulled into its vortex. Many governments try, few succeed, to compete with the French model on its terms rather than on their own. If one ever needed persuading that cultural diplomacy has exploitable economic or trade consequences, just note that we pay more for a litre of French “designer” bottled water than we do for a litre of high-octane for the BMW. And the high octane is 75% domestic tax. That *Mission civilisatrice* translates just as effectively to foreign exchange earnings power through international markets for French fashion, jewellery, wine, food products... in fact the high-end of almost the entire spectrum of “essential” luxury products and, of course, tourism. A love of French culture has long established it as by far the number one world tourist destination.

The **USA** feels the need for neither international intellectual supremacy nor a domestic ministry of cultural affairs. But the Americans have decided that cultural diplomacy is becoming so important that their State Department has taken full control of the venerable US Information Service. The State Department is now training its diplomats as never before, about how to employ cultural diplomacy in the advancement of many of its objectives abroad. But we are not in French territory here. The motivation is largely driven by a desire to demonstrate the *US Model of Democratic Capitalism*... the model of the supremacy of private enterprise. Why is there no need for a cultural ministry to back it up? Because, as somebody we all know once said, “the medium is the message”... the US government’s cultural diplomacy partners for helping the world to understand the benefits of US democratic capitalism, are the American entertainment/cultural industries themselves.

Since the end of the war **Japan** has set itself a clear cultural diplomacy mission aimed at escaping an overly tenacious image of a closed and strictly traditional society. Theirs is a *Mission modernisatrice* (!), one which seeks to demonstrate (and to market) the remarkable Japanese competencies in “Western” technologies, western design, culture and the arts too. Rather than setting out to differentiate themselves from their neighbours, Japanese cultural diplomacy is bent on showing target audiences that, in terms of tastes and preferences “we are just like you... only we do it better in some very interesting ways.” And because they claim it abroad they set out to do it at home.

The **Australians** have just come out of a major cultural diplomacy *blitzkrieg*... the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympics. The Australians capitalized on the once-in-a-century opportunity to demonstrate before a global audience their uniquely *Australian National Style* of self-confidence, enthusiasm and energy. That renewed Australian image will doubtless require an extensive and expensive long-term program of public-diplomacy maintenance and it will be interesting to see if that happens and if it can be made to work. Can they continue to make space for Australian voices outside Australia?

As for **Canada**, there seems to be less to say when describing our current mission abroad. So let me propose some policy clarification.

#### 4. TWO ARGUMENTS FOR AN ENHANCED CANADIAN CULTURAL DIPLOMACY PRIORITY

4.1 **The first argument** is in terms of Canada’s international affairs’ objectives. Shall we call cultural diplomacy what it is?... self-interested national-propaganda, distributed, broadcast or “narrowcast” internationally. From that perspective, objectives for our cultural diplomacy might include:

- generating more interest in Canada by foreign tourists, investors, importers, researchers, brain-gain immigrants, foreign students;
- generating more export business for our cultural industries, books, films, and tv productions, and professional artists services in all disciplines... the more Canada you sell, the more Canada they “buy”... and that can include Canadian ideas and perspectives;

- building “Soft Power”... with few guns and fewer \$s, Canada’s international public image and consequent persuasiveness abroad is all we have to bring others to our point of view on major global issues;
- assisting the emerging democracies and helping bring peace in the world’s troubled regions. More justice and better human rights abroad saves costly peace-making and peace-keeping interventions (peace-keeping in the former Yugoslavia alone has cost Canadians \$5 billion in the past ten years). In order to be convincing about a spending priority for cultural diplomacy, it is often useful to demonstrate net financial benefits to national accounts. Cultural diplomacy, which suggests, however subtly, how the Canadian model for governing its diversity might be employed to assist peaceful coexistence, could well be money in the bank for taxpayers... the peace-dividend argument.
- making us interesting. Others who have established themselves as “interesting” are pushing us off the screen and out of the news. Just like the other “niche” or small cultures in an overpowering *national* cultural environment, fighting for survival *internationally* means staking out space for Canada in the international media. Silence leaves us disenfranchised and without influence or legitimacy in the global arena. There is a persuasive argument along the lines that because Canadian culture is precisely non-distinctive, that it accommodates rather than excludes, our message requires not less effort and resources but much more, and more original, initiatives to make ourselves interesting, understood and influential. The arts and cultural diplomacy can deliver that message for us.

4.2 **The second argument** for an enhanced national project of cultural diplomacy can be made in terms of *domestic* Canadian objectives:

- to develop and strengthen our cultural and arts communities at home, our capacity to express ourselves as a people and be better able to understand the cultural expressions of the “others” amongst us;
- to make Canada interesting... to Canadians, through discovering what makes us interesting to others;
- to build an improved identity awareness within Canada... to assist in the location of a national iden-

tity and in doing so to contribute to our own social cohesion (willingness to share, to act together);

- to legitimize and build upon our diversity at home, through demonstrating Canada's diversity advantage abroad;
- to provide a stage for more French-English or two-solititudes collaboration in a national project abroad, through the low-risk medium of joint cultural initiatives;
- to counter-balance the pressures of global homogenization. Under the hypnotic attractions of global commercial entertainment, as a nation we can lose the habit of self expression... and end up by having nothing to say. Some (Canadian) critics say we are already there, that we are so fully anesthetized by global commercial programming and by the culture of commerce, that we have become exclusively consumers of other peoples cultural expressions and productions;
- to engage Canadians through our artists, intellectuals and entertainers in global conversations. Zero cultural diplomacy is not an option. Silence implies indifference and that we have nothing to say. That degree of disengagement from the global village is one of the few things which might merit the label of being culturally "un-Canadian";
- to provide the federal government with a window for facilitating the nation's cultural expression. Cultural diplomacy is an international activity, on federal government turf. The provincial governments' claimed monopoly on domestic cultural affairs (which may tend to compromise pan-Canadian cohesion) can be legitimately accompanied at the federal level through cultural diplomacy. The increased facilitation of cultural expression abroad is an under utilized low-risk technique for building Federal relevance in cultural affairs;
- to capitalize on the phenomena of the "conditioning stereotype." We may eventually become what we claim to be. Cultural diplomacy can have an important impact on domestic policies by instigating national compliance with our own image abroad. It is more difficult to sin while you are claiming saintliness. Some past conditioning stereotype examples which have inspired us to work to improve public policies include:

1. The impact which international criticism of our forest management practices has had on making policy changes at home. Our self-image as being environmentally responsible was offended and has led to better citizen monitoring of the forest industries;
2. Our claim to being champions of human rights led to extreme public discomfort when the living conditions of our First Nations became international news;
3. As self-proclaimed humanitarians, we have been mobilized to change practices with respect to leg-hold traps for trapping wild animals and the harvesting of seal pups;
4. As proud peace-builders the comportment of some members of their armed forces in recent missions abroad was devastating to Canadians. As a result the Armed Forces are now launched into a twenty year program to bring their culture into line with that of their citizen-shareholders.

These are all examples where a public desire to live up to our international and self-image has driven major policy changes at home. At a provincial/national level the Québec government has used the conditioning stereotype factor by mobilizing its own international cultural diplomacy program to demonstrate its “national character” abroad and to ensure that its remarkable success abroad is understood at home.

## 5. CONCLUSION: *Une mission canadienne?*

Could the persistent absence of a credible federal government response to its own long-recognized need for a vibrant cultural diplomacy program, be the result of an inability to come up with a theme, *une mission canadienne*? The DFAIT mission statement quoted in the introduction to this paper, while implicitly embracing the logic for cultural diplomacy, fails to suggest what is meant by “Canadian culture and values” or how the promotion of that abroad, might contribute to global stability, Canadian prosperity or the well-being of Canadians. If we have difficulty with beavers, mounties, hockey, forests, furs, fish, maple syrup, mining and cold winters as worthy of a sustained and marketable national image abroad, what is left? “Eh”? What have we got to talk about which is relatively unique to Canada and yet supportive of

both our international and domestic objectives? What kind of Canadian public image abroad is going to reinforce and sustain our soft power, our ability to persuade others to share Canadian perspectives and values in the multilateral fora and in bilateral relationships as well? What images of Canada and Canadians can make us more attractive to tourists, investors, qualified immigrants, foreign students, academics and researchers? And finally, what characteristics and experiences could we showcase abroad, which would provoke positive public policy and citizen responses at home?

Is the answer to those questions the national mobilization of cultural diplomacy as a prime vehicle to articulate and improve upon the handing down of the *Canadian Model for governing and building on its diversities*? A new program of cultural diplomacy should both assert and demonstrate that our version of democracy-for-diversity, is worthy of examination for its potential as a route to peaceful coexistence and stability across national and international differences. This re-jigging of the founding French notion of the *mission civilisatrice* for cultural diplomacy would become in Canadian hands *une mission de civisme...* of civility. It would highlight the dividends potential of making space for otherness in the many communities everywhere which are experiencing inescapable or no-choice diversity. It would demonstrate the ennui of the kinds of homogeneity proposed by proponents of racism and religious fundamentalism. Through cultural and arts and academic initiatives, a strengthened cultural diplomacy would showcase the creativity and innovative advantages of our diversity governance model and its relevance to knowledge-based economies and societies of the twenty-first century.

And a cultural diplomacy mission built around such a model would surely generate profound national embarrassment whenever we were caught sinning against it through image-inconsistent practices and policies at home. Wonderful!

But no matter how that model or mission might be defined, just embracing it in the objectives and mission statements of federal departments and agencies is not enough. Like toothpaste, it only works if you use it. The wisdom of those good intentions will make little difference to our success either abroad or at home until we act on them. Over to you DFAIT, Canadian Heritage, Treasury Board, PMO and the provinces.