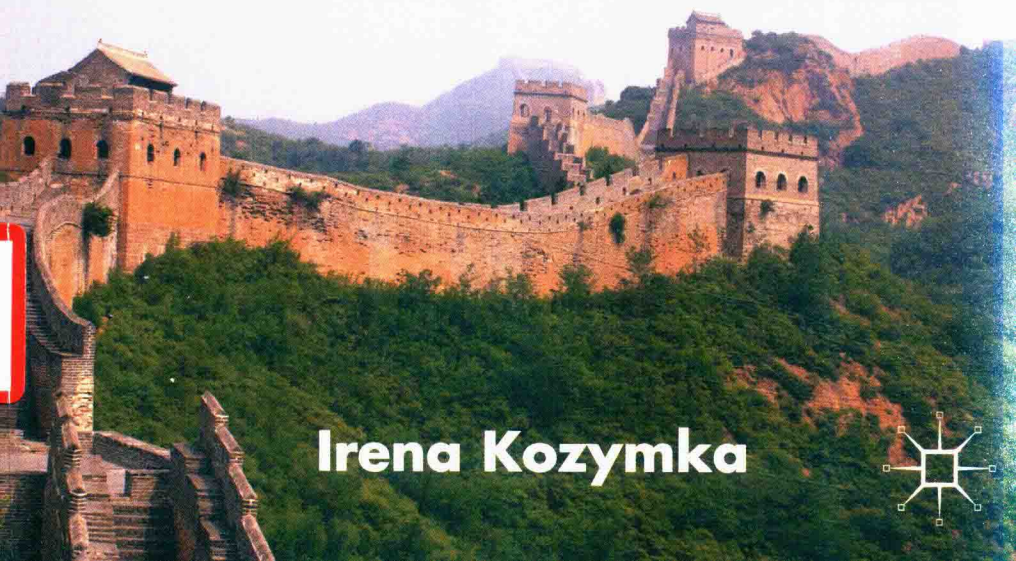




THE DIPLOMACY *of* CULTURE

The Role of UNESCO in Sustaining Cultural Diversity



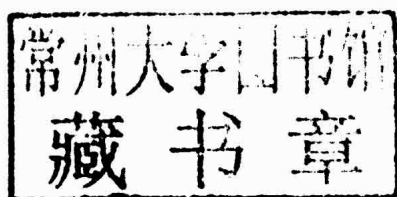
Irena Kozymka



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THE DIPLOMACY OF CULTURE

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Disclaimer

The ideas and opinions expressed in this book are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the view of UNESCO.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Theoretical Perspectives	9
Chapter 2 UNESCO's Responses, Past and Present	29
Chapter 3 France: Cultural Diversity or Cultural Exception?	51
Chapter 4 The United States: A Laissez-Faire Approach	77
Chapter 5 Cambodia: Cultural Diversity from a National Point of View	103
Chapter 6 Brazil: Challenges in Sustaining and Managing Cultural Diversity	129
Chapter 7 UNESCO's Difficulties in Handling Cultural Diversity	153
Chapter 8 Conclusion	177
<i>Appendix: Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions</i>	193

<i>Notes</i>	215
<i>Bibliography</i>	261
<i>Index</i>	283

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, culture and identity rather than ideology have been increasingly recognized as key forces shaping global order. The rise of identity politics and religious revivalism have been feeding debates on the “clash of civilizations” and Islam’s challenges to the West. In parallel, debates have been focusing on globalization, broadly defined as an empirical process of increasing worldwide economic, political, technological, and cultural interconnectedness. Globalization’s impact on culture has been viewed as both a blessing and a curse: on the one hand offering unprecedented opportunities for interactive and enriching cultural exchanges and therefore increasing cultural diversity, and on the other leading to uniformity or tensions between cultures.¹ In many parts of the world, globalization is perceived as a threat to national cultures and traditional forms of identity.² As a result and contrary to earlier predictions of “the end of history,” the forces of globalization appear to be more nurturing than destructive of the reaffirmation of sovereignties and, in reaction, of the demands for recognition of regional and local differences.

In these conditions, managing cultural diversity is increasingly becoming one of the major issues and concerns of the day, intrinsically linked with international security, social cohesion, and development. Indeed, cultural diversity at the international level overlaps with the now extensive debates on multiculturalism within states. This book approaches the question of cultural diversity through the prism of international relations, which is a surprisingly neglected subject. The existing academic literature on cultural diversity is predominantly focused on the issue of multiculturalism (i.e., cultural diversity within countries) or on the issue of cultural globalization. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is hardly ever mentioned in these publications.³ On the other hand, the existing academic literature on UNESCO is largely silent on its role in sustaining cultural diversity.⁴

In particular, this book aims to examine the role of UNESCO, the only United Nations agency responsible for culture and the main forum for international diplomacy on the issue of cultural diversity.⁵ The main questions this work attempts to address are: How did cultural diversity become an issue of international relations? What is the international community's understanding of cultural diversity? How is UNESCO handling cultural diversity? And to what extent is an international normative framework applicable to cultural diversity?

The book will discuss UNESCO's efforts to sustain cultural diversity by:

- first, analyzing the organization's engagement with the issue of cultural diversity in a historical perspective, with a particular emphasis on its relevant legal instruments;⁶
- secondly, examining, through four contrasting case studies, the dynamics of the interrelationship between UNESCO and its constituent members as regards cultural diversity;
- and thirdly, identifying UNESCO's strengths and limitations in sustaining cultural diversity.

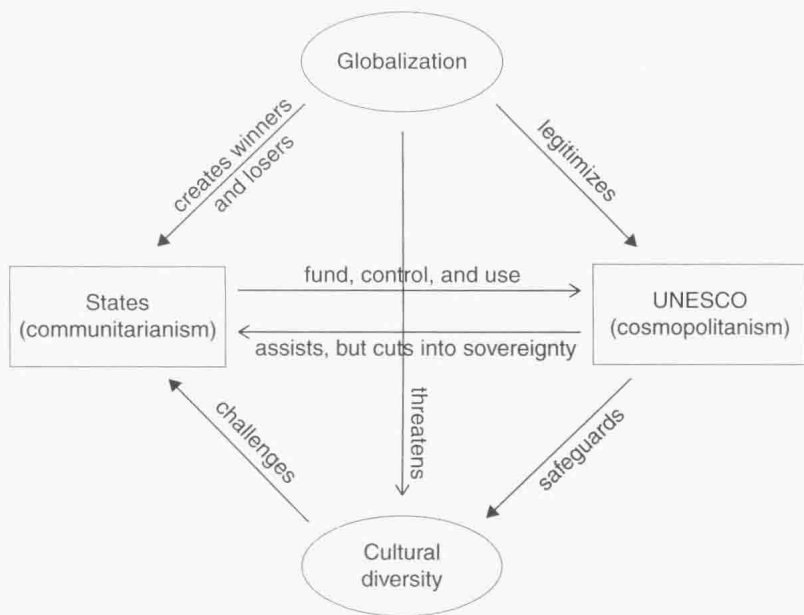
The broader purpose of this publication is to promote understanding of the role of international organizations in their field of application. Such a role, of course, is subject to the specific historical circumstances in which these organizations operate. While a historical approach has the obvious advantage of allowing for hindsight, analyzing contemporary phenomena in international relations is nevertheless important if we are to gain an understanding, however limited, of the direction in which the society of states is moving. Studying cultural diversity, one of the key current issues of global pertinence, is instructive in this regard. The special salience of the issue of cultural diversity stems from its place at the intersection of the domestic (as referring to multiculturalism, identity, nationalism, democracy, security, religion, heritage), the international (cultural diversity among states, culture as a tool of foreign policy, international security, migration, international trade in cultural goods and services), and the transnational (mixed identities, diasporas, the transnational power of religion). Therefore, studying cultural diversity—an issue that challenges the understanding of international relations as relations between states—through the magnifying glass of an international organization offers useful and innovative insights into the interplay between the relevant levels of international society.

The inherent tension between *sovereignty* and *internationalism*, which is at the heart of debates on cultural policies, is meanwhile

intrinsically linked with a persistent tension between *the state* and *society*. The role of UNESCO in sustaining cultural diversity cannot be properly studied without a reflection on the role of the state. As societies are becoming ever more culturally heterogeneous, a major challenge for the state arises in managing its internal diversity. Groups formed around different identities are increasingly demanding legal recognition and resource allocations from the state in order to preserve and protect their cultural specificities.⁷ In these circumstances, what can an international organization do to sustain world cultural diversity, most of which is confined within the “great Chinese wall” of national sovereignty? Can it do anything to ensure the viability of a minority culture, for instance of the Dong ethnic group shown on the book’s cover, which may face challenges to its culture within the state and globally. At the same time, globalization poses a challenge to the nation-state in controlling cultural flows and processes not only from within, but also and increasingly from without. And this is bad news for the state, since culture is intrinsically linked with some of the most important building blocs for the existence of the state: peace, security, development, human rights, social harmony, and human well-being.

Every state’s right to exercise sovereignty over its territory lies at the heart of its existence. Insofar as globalization may result in cultural deterritorialization, which means that “our cultural experiences, identities and practices are becoming separated from the places we inhabit,”⁸ the state risks losing control or even influence over a fundamental element of state-building. Notwithstanding increasing interconnectivity, states continue to retain great control over the movement of people. Yet if the movement of cultural expressions and influences across borders keeps accelerating, fuelled by the growing use of modern technologies, the state will find it increasingly difficult to affect cultural processes on its territory. Understandably, states feel urged to react to such developments, though their reactions vary greatly. One can go so far as making the provocative suggestion that the perceived threat of cultural homogenization and commodification from without the state might be exploited by it in protecting and promoting its national culture at the expense of minorities’ cultures within, thus making UNESCO a tool of modern nationalism. These are, in brief, some of the key elements about the relations between the state, cultural diversity, and globalization that need to be kept in mind while examining UNESCO’s engagement with the issue of cultural diversity.

The following figure illustrates the interrelated nature of this global configuration.



Such complexity is the reason why discussing the diplomacy of cultural diversity is both challenging and intellectually rewarding. Being at the confluence of several scientific disciplines, such discussion unavoidably ventures into different fields, from international public law to politics and from anthropology to sociology and economics. It is just as interested in policy outcomes as in the ideas that shape them. It is a study of changing visions on the importance of regulating cultural processes and how these were used to achieve common human action in circumstances where individual nations could not satisfactorily act alone.

As UNESCO is an intergovernmental organization, Member States suggest themselves as obvious units of analysis. Surely, it is not possible to present a case study on every Member State of the organization due to their great number—195. More importantly, the central question under examination concerns UNESCO's proper role in sustaining cultural diversity as distinct from the states' role. Yet since the organization's action springs from its Member States' ideas, needs, and interests, it is logical to root the analysis in several case studies representing different categories of states as well as different problems with sustaining cultural diversity. Four countries have been selected as case studies for this work: France, the United States, Cambodia, and Brazil. They have been carefully chosen as most representative of

the following general categories, to the extent that any categorization as regards different countries is possible: (1) a developed country actively engaged in UNESCO's cultural work; (2) hegemon/skeptic of UNESCO's role; (3) a poor developing state in need of technical assistance; and (4) emerging power, pro-international organization but suspicious of Western cultural domination. In deciding how many and which specific case studies to chose, the author was guided by preliminary enquiries into the main questions under examination, which revealed that the four selected countries have very different understandings of what cultural diversity is and whether and how it should be protected and promoted by UNESCO. By serving as contrasting illustrations of states' different interests, means, and needs as well as of the varying levels of success in UNESCO's work and therefore, by relating to the main questions of this study in different ways, they generate evidence of the types of challenges the organization is facing in sustaining cultural diversity.

Chapter 1 aims at introducing the issue of cultural diversity—the subject of the enquiry—and UNESCO, the main protagonist. Chapter 2 takes a historical perspective by tracing how the issue of cultural diversity has been developing throughout the organization's history, with particular stress on the standard-setting instruments relevant to cultural diversity. The evolution of the question of cultural diversity is superimposed against the background of the key geopolitical modalities and events that have occurred since UNESCO's foundation in 1945, that is the aftermath of the Second World War, the Cold War, decolonization, the end of the Cold War, and the rise of identity politics. The ensuing four chapters (chapters 3–6) present the aforementioned four case studies: France, the United States, Cambodia, and Brazil. This is followed by a critical appraisal of UNESCO's role in sustaining cultural diversity analyzing the difficulties the organization faces and highlighting its limitations and shortcomings (chapter 7). Lastly, chapter 8 presents the main findings of the work, and considers what conclusions may be drawn from them. The full text of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, adopted by UNESCO in 2005, is included in appendix for ease of reference.

UNESCO's main mechanism to protect and promote cultural diversity in all its forms and expressions—tangible and intangible—is its cultural conventions. Among these, the most important are the 2005 Convention, but also the World Heritage Convention and the Intangible Heritage Convention. The focus of the first two case study discussions—France and the United States—is the 2005 Convention,

because it was born out of the ambition to have a cultural diversity convention and ended up being a much-reduced text on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions. Examining the gap between original ambitions and the Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and then analyzing what UNESCO fails to do in this regard and why are the main focus of the discussion.

It should be stressed that the four case studies—France, the United States, Cambodia, and Brazil—are not exactly parallel in their focus and structure. Nevertheless collectively, they shed light on the difficulties and limitations of UNESCO's engagement with cultural diversity. The case studies of France and the United States, respectively the main protagonist and opponent of the 2005 Convention, highlight the organization's challenge to reach consensus in producing an international legal instrument on the diversity of cultural expressions, which is but one aspect of cultural diversity. In these two case studies, the focus is the negotiation of the Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. By contrast, Brazil and especially Cambodia took very little if any part in the negotiation of this legal text. Yet cultural diversity is much more than what superficially appears to be covered by the 2005 Convention. Sustaining cultural diversity implies protecting cultural heritage in all its expressions. UNESCO's strengths and failures in this respect are highlighted in the case studies of Cambodia and Brazil. The former sheds light on the challenges UNESCO faces in enforcing its other two main mechanisms in sustaining cultural diversity—the World Heritage Convention and the Intangible Heritage Convention—and the latter presents other important gaps and challenges in UNESCO's engagement with cultural diversity, namely the lack of provisions to protect indigenous languages and cultures and the cultural diversity-related social challenges of racism and discrimination.

The primary sources for this work include documents (constitutional texts, reports, and speeches by the Director-General, UNESCO's medium-term plans, the organization's press releases, records of debates by Member States, minutes of experts' meetings, decisions, resolutions, declarations and conventions adopted by UNESCO's governing bodies and during other meetings, and the organization's archival files) as well as interviews with diplomats, officials, relevant UNESCO staff members, and specialists in the field. Secondary sources include print media and a great number of published works, which chiefly relate to three subjects: first, culture and cultural diversity; second, UNESCO; and third, politics and international relations more generally. The secondary sources relevant to

history, politics, society, and culture of each of the four case studies have also been explored.

A number of limitations have been borne in mind while using the above sources. First, interpreting official documents is a challenging task, since at times the wording of consensus and political disengagement may cover up real differences of opinion. Secondly, sole reliance on the organization's public records would provide only a partial view of the questions being researched. Negotiations are often conducted and decisions shaped in private conversations outside the public space and therefore not recorded. Such lacunae may be compensated for by conducting interviews. Thirdly, however, it may be difficult to obtain genuine answers from UNESCO officials or government representatives if the questions are politically sensitive, as they often are. In this regard, off-the-record conversations with some civil servants and diplomats have brought useful insights. Lastly, there is the danger of concentrating too heavily on the organization's official documents and formal structural arrangements. Its actual operations can only be understood with reference to the world of politics and its ultimate results can be properly evaluated only in terms of their impact on the ground. While the former can be approached through the use of secondary sources (journals, books, and news), the latter greatly lacks systematic treatment in the existing sources. It is thus accepted that the full picture will not emerge.

The scope of this book is understandably not sufficient to do justice to the highly intricate subject of managing cultural diversity. All the project can hope to do is to throw light on one corner of what is a much larger and more complex picture, namely on the role of UNESCO in sustaining cultural diversity. A number of important questions remain unaddressed: What are the other international, regional, national, and local actors involved in sustaining and managing cultural diversity? Is cultural diversity under threat? What are the implications of a reduced cultural diversity? Does cultural diversity matter, and if yes, to whom? Who should engage in sustaining and managing it? What is the relationship between cultural diversity and such notions as peace, international security, development, and human rights? It is hoped this analysis will eventually form part of a broader multidisciplinary discussion on cultural diversity and contribute to the study of international relations by offering a new focus.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Perspectives

The classical notion of cultural diplomacy entails using culture as a component of traditional diplomacy, and it has been mostly confined to the promotion of one nation's culture abroad to strengthen relations with other nations, to enhance cooperation or to promote national interest.¹ This notion is progressively evolving, challenged by the growing global interconnectedness that fast-developing information and communication technologies facilitate and the resulting shift in cultural exchanges from the public to the private sphere. In parallel with this development, diplomats are increasingly engaging in the new activity of the *diplomacy of culture*, in which culture is a field of international relations in its own right as much as a tool of foreign policy: diplomacy for the purposes of culture rather than culture for the purposes of diplomacy. This understands culture not just as the arts, but in its broad definition, as reflected in the growing recognition of culture's role in promoting human development, fostering intercommunity dialogue and understanding, building peace, broadening education, achieving environmental sustainability, and even combating HIV/AIDS. This broad notion of culture also underpins UNESCO's mission on the international arena as the only UN agency with an official cultural mandate and therefore the key player in the field of the diplomacy of culture.

Cultural diplomacy in its traditional sense continues to be practiced at UNESCO: nations use the organization as a means of projecting soft power and a place for exhibiting national cultural richness. At the same time, UNESCO is the place where the international negotiations on those cultural matters that are considered of international public interest take place. Both platforms open new avenues for countries' foreign policy: cultural diplomacy is used for the promotion of

national cultural heritage and contemporary expressions in a multi-lateral setting, while the diplomacy of culture is practiced to shape international legal frameworks in the field of culture. Participation in these frameworks—the negotiation of cultural conventions, definition of their operational guidelines, follow-up on these instruments’ implementation, the various global heritage lists, participation in committees and meetings, the sharing of best practices, and so on—gives countries an opportunity not only to strengthen international cooperation, but also to reaffirm their cultural and international credentials. This is especially important for developing countries.

UNESCO is a diplomatic forum in which the international discussion on cultural diversity has been taking place over the past decades. This opening chapter aims, amongst others, to introduce the issue of cultural diversity and to set up a theoretical framework for studying UNESCO as an intergovernmental organization by looking into the factors that delineate how it functions—namely its structure, actors, and nature.

Definitions

It would seem necessary to begin this discussion by attempting to define culture in order to understand the notion of cultural diversity. This is where a great difficulty lies since culture is a concept of the highest order of generality and notoriously contested in its meanings. It is so encompassing that it can easily be taken to the extremes of defining it as a total way of life. As Clifford Geertz remarks, this leads to *pot-au-feu* theorizing—the throwing of anything and everything into the conceptual stew that is the complex whole of human existence.²

For the purpose of this book, which is not chiefly concerned with culture as an anthropological or social phenomenon, but rather with its diplomatic dimension, it would be reasonable to accept the definition of culture used by UNESCO. This will avoid embarking on a long theoretical debate on a largely epistemological issue that is outside of the scope of the present work. This definition, inspired by a broader anthropological understanding of culture, was first used at the World Conference on Cultural Policies held in Mexico City in 1982. UNESCO reaffirmed it in its Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, unanimously adopted by its General Conference on November 2, 2001, stating that “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