



# CULTURE IN AN AGE OF UNCERTAINTY

THE VALUE OF CULTURAL RELATIONS  
IN SOCIETIES IN TRANSITION

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**This is a time of political and cultural upheaval.** Globalisation has brought many advantages, but also created challenges. The international order has been shaken, and the trend towards internationalism met with a resurgent populism. Western countries have seen a series of electoral surprises. Events elsewhere, from Russian foreign policy to unrest and mass migration in the Middle East and North Africa, are having knock-on effects. Yet certain fundamentals will continue to hold true.

Whatever happens with Brexit, for example, the long-standing relationship between the UK and Germany – based on closely aligned values and interests – should remain strong. The need for both countries to engage constructively with societies beyond their borders will continue to be vital. With many of those societies experiencing instability, finding the best mutually beneficial ways to engage with them will matter more than ever. And culture will still have a crucial role to play.

Cultural relations – mutual international engagement through culture and civil society – are one way of forging such mutually beneficial engagement. They are understood to build enduring ties of friendly understanding between peoples. As global challenges become increasingly trans-national, and other forms of international relations appear less effective at meeting them, cultural relations could make an increasingly important contribution.

This raises tough questions: How effective are cultural relations? Can their value be measured, without over-simplification, and how? How can they best support sustainable change in societies under pressure? These questions are notoriously hard to answer. The very nature of cultural relations – as a long-term effort to produce the powerful but intangible result of goodwill – makes their evaluation challenging.

Viewing the value of cultural relations in terms of numbers and league tables misses the richness of how they work in practice. A more sophisticated approach is needed.

Cultural relations are the business of the Goethe-Institut and the British Council. We are united in our belief in the importance of such activities. Recognising this importance, the two organisations have jointly commissioned research into the value of cultural relations and their impact on societies in transition. This is especially important given the instability affecting countries close to Europe, the impact of this on societies within Europe, and the need to make the case for cultural relations in challenging funding environments. The results of this project, and of the close collaboration between the Goethe-Institut and the British Council, will be of particular relevance as Germany and the UK strengthen their ties with their neighbours as well as with each other.

Whatever the relationship between the UK and its friends in Europe after Brexit, we will continue to find our values and interests strongly aligned. We will continue to co-operate intimately across a range of issues and regions. Cultural relations – particularly in countries in transition – will be one important area. It is hoped that this close collaboration between the Goethe-Institut and the British Council will play a small but valuable part in that vital joint endeavour.



Johannes Ebert  
Munich, November 2018



Sir Ciarán Devane  
London, November 2018

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The value of cultural relations in Egypt and Ukraine was analysed using an innovative methodology. Case-studies of cultural relations projects and surveys among cultural stakeholders provided valuable insights about the value cultural relations organisations provide, where they can improve, and the challenges they face. The conclusions of the research, summarised in this report, are as follows.

## THE VALUE OF CULTURAL RELATIONS

Cultural relations create value. Yet this value is a matter of perspective. The research found that the value of cultural relations is often perceived quite differently by beneficiaries. The following benefits were particularly appreciated:

- Better dialogue between peoples, countries, and cultures
- Greater engagement with overseas publics, enhanced connectivity, better outreach
- The acquisition of new skills
- Networking opportunities
- Funding

However, cultural relations organisations should communicate their goals clearly, and manage expectations across cultural boundaries to avoid raising false hopes. They should consider how best to agree on their mutual interests with local partners, particularly in political environments not conducive to their activities. When projects are locally inspired and led, value is maximised for users. Financial stability is necessary for civil society organisations, and it is important to avoid creating unrealistic funding expectations. Providing follow-up support and also ensuring the sustainability of newly established networks increases the value cultural relations activities can provide. Crucially, cultural relations organisations must address perceptions that they may be exclusive in the types of beneficiaries and local partners they work with. Finally, mutuality and reciprocity towards partners and beneficiaries, but also local staff, is an essential aspect of successful cultural exchange, while clarifying the terms of engagement can be critical to success.

## CULTURAL RELATIONS IN SOCIETIES IN TRANSITION

Cultural relations may not reduce conflicts directly, but can contribute to doing so by:

- Improving dialogue between different people, regions, and countries
- Offering safe spaces for culture
- Strengthening civil society organisations and independent cultural sectors
- Addressing conflict rather than avoiding it, and thereby managing tensions between, for example, independent and state actors
- Having a highly symbolic value simply by their visible presence

Dialogue can result in deeper trust yet does not resolve conflict unless properly managed. A 'dialogue between cultures' may work best if cultural relations organisations have an ingrained 'culture of dialogue'. They can then support productive dialogue between groups within states and with the states themselves. Managing these relationships is a difficult diplomatic dance. Legacy cultural relations organisations struggle to maintain visibility in an increasingly competitive field. Greater visibility is desired by many cultural actors, while invisibility can be a bonus for activists at risk from the state. Knowing when and how to make people or artworks visible requires the utmost tact and understanding of the local political context.

Cultural relations organisations in societies in transition should:

- Display high levels of creativity, flexibility, diplomacy, and awareness of their historic context
- Take into account cross-generational dynamics in societies undergoing demographic transition
- Engage all the key actors with the potential to help prevent conflict, rather than working with a narrow band of insiders or 'usual suspects'
- Address controversy, not avoid it, but balance reaching new audiences and challenging world views with respecting local sensibilities and adapting creatively to the contexts in which they operate

The research identified three different models of cultural relations activities. Mobilising networks of 'influencers' and intermediaries can be a highly effective approach in a digital world. Yet this network model may lead to conflicts of interest. Partnerships with local institutions are more sustainable. On the other hand, this diffusion model may unwittingly support entrenched

hierarchies. A cascade model, that involves cascading knowledge and skills via peer-to-peer support, can boost projects' impact yet may leave some participants behind. In practice these models overlap but knowing their strengths and weaknesses can help practitioners adapt their projects for particular contexts.

## IMPLICATIONS

The British Council and the Goethe-Institut welcome these findings. Policymakers can sometimes be sceptical of the value of cultural interventions, due to the challenges of measuring their impact. This nuanced but rigorous examination of the value of cultural relations in societies in transition should give further impetus to the culture, education, security and foreign policy communities to grasp more fully how cultural relations can contribute to wider foreign policy objectives.



## INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the results of a joint research project commissioned by the British Council and the Goethe-Institut and considers their implications. It aims to give a better understanding of the impact and value of cultural relations. In particular, it looks at how cultural relations can support societies experiencing substantial change.

Together, the British Council and the Goethe-Institut wanted to examine the ways in which cultural relations work, the conditions where they can provide most value, and the different types of value that come with different types of cultural relations activities. Therefore, they commissioned research which analyses cultural relations initiatives undertaken by the UK and Germany: two nations with some of the most comprehensive overseas networks and programmes. It focuses on case studies of British and German cultural relations activities in Egypt and Ukraine: countries which have faced serious instability in recent years. However, it is designed to yield broader insights into the theory and practice of cultural relations in general.

While existing models of impact measurement are often focussed on instrumentalist approaches and/or reductionist metrics, the British Council and Goethe-Institut believe it is necessary to take a broader view of cultural value. The aim has therefore been to develop a more sophisticated framework, which includes several dimensions of value that can be assessed from the perspectives of all the relevant stakeholders, and considers qualitative as well as quantitative measures. The 18-month study was conducted by a joint research team from the Open University in the UK and the Hertie School of Governance in Germany. The research consisted of a literature review, a combined methodological framework, overseas fieldwork, and joint analysis. The academic researchers set out to answer the following research questions:

- What is the value of cultural relations?
- Can cultural relations strengthen societies in transition?

The findings are set out in full elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> This report summarises those findings before discussing their implications for international cultural relations organisations and policymakers in the field.

# BACKGROUND AND DEFINITIONS: WHAT ARE CULTURAL RELATIONS?

**THE MEANING, HISTORY, AND PRACTICE OF CULTURAL RELATIONS IS COMPLEX AND NUANCED. YET THE RESEARCH ARGUES IT IS NECESSARY TO UNDERSTAND THEM IN ORDER TO COMPREHEND THE VALUE OF CULTURAL RELATIONS.**

What do we mean when we speak about cultural relations? Different people understand them through different lenses. The British Council, for example, has a definition of cultural relations encompassing their contribution to soft power. In contrast, the Goethe-Institut focuses on managing good international relations in line with Germany's multilateralist foreign policy. Each may view culture, and therefore cultural relations, as an end in itself but also as a means to further ends, like strengthening civil society and stability in 'societies in transition'<sup>3</sup>.

Although there is not a single agreed definition of cultural relations, for the purpose of this project they are understood as: *...reciprocal transnational interactions between two or more cultures, encompassing a range of activities conducted by state and non-state actors within the space of culture and civil society. The overall outcomes of cultural relations are greater connectivity, better mutual understanding, more and deeper relationships, mutually beneficial transactions and enhanced sustainable dialogue between people and cultures, shaped through engagement and attraction rather than coercion.*

As the academic literature review, conducted as part of the research, highlighted, cultural relations are part of a semantic field that includes cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, and soft power. They are not a distinctive phenomenon, but a set of activities that take place within those broader fields. In Germany policymakers and practitioners work under the umbrella term 'foreign cultural and educational policy' (Auswärtige Kultur- und Bildungspolitik, AKBP). This term is associated with managing relations across cultures, accentuating people-to-people relations, and cultivating mutuality. But distinctions remain concerning the actual and desirable role of the state, the degree to which engagement

is seen as an instrument, and the difficulty of juggling mutually beneficial international relations with national interest.

This conceptual confusion can enable useful flexibility. However, the literature review suggests that from a user and beneficiary perspective, it can also mean that cultural relations organisations are not well understood. They may be perceived simply as 'foreign funders', and users may not clearly understand their goals. Moreover, because of this ambiguity, users might pursue goals which are entirely different to those of cultural relations organisations themselves. False expectations might be raised, which might hamper mutual exchange.

These are the contexts in which the cultural relations institutes operate. Further important differences in conceptions of cultural relations and the approaches taken by different countries have arisen from fundamental differences in their histories and their conceptions of culture.

## **CULTURAL RELATIONS IN GERMANY AND THE UK**

Germany has traditionally had a 'strong' concept of culture, as tied to language, nation and identity, leading to a desire to promote German national culture on the world stage. International cultural relations became an important tool for this. In the 1920s, Germany's political elite looked towards cultural foreign policy as a surrogate for traditional foreign policy. This period saw a proliferation of the German 'Mittlerorganisation': cultural organisations that are part of civil society but work at arm's length for the German Federal Foreign Office. Cultural relations experienced a huge setback during the Third Reich, when the Mittler were forced to follow party lines, which included blatant cultural imperialism. After the War, West Germany's AKBP was in line with her general foreign policy goal of rehabilitation on the international stage. In the 1970s its policymakers and academics formulated a new AKBP as a third pillar of foreign policy, alongside diplomacy and economic foreign policy. Mittler like the Goethe-Institut would put this policy into practice.<sup>4</sup>

Today, practitioners again stress the relative independence of Mittler from politics, and are eager to prevent the instrumentalisation of culture for diplomatic purposes<sup>5</sup>. While cultural relations are seen as a practice that creates relationships of trust within which governments may seek to influence outcomes; any such benefits are a happy by-product, but sharing art and culture is viewed as an intrinsic good in itself. Meanwhile, the equation of nation, language, and culture in German cultural relations remains present today. However, practitioners and policymakers in German cultural policy are increasingly arguing for a post-national cultural policy.

In contrast, this equation of nation, language, and culture was always less intuitive for the UK – a state based on liberal individualism, and in which British empiricism and pragmatism led to a mistrust of the word 'culture'. The UK was therefore a relative latecomer to the world of cultural relations, with the British Council and the BBC World Service created in the 1930s. The Times newspaper tellingly congratulated the founders of the British Council for avoiding 'culture' in its title, describing the word as one which 'comes clumsily and shyly off the Englishman's tongue'<sup>6</sup>. Over the following decades Great Britain lost its imperial possessions and global power. The country's appetite to remain at the top table of world politics, without the resources to match, was powerfully served by these organisations' international status and the reflected prestige they bestowed on the UK, though the difficult legacies of decolonisation complicates their work. Rather like the German Mittler, they have had to reconcile proximity to the UK Government through funding and strategic orientation, with the autonomy allowed by being an arms-length body, which is so critical to their cultural credibility.

Historical legacies also frame how cultural relations organisations are seen among users, and are central to understanding limitations faced in the present. Historical relationships between British or German actors and, for example, Egyptian or Ukrainian ones, shape the practice of cultural relations in those countries today.

For example, the British Council has been working in Egypt for over 80 years, through the colonial and post-colonial periods, and older generations still see it as a colonial organisation. German-Egyptian relations do not suffer from the same history. In Ukraine, by contrast, the British Council was one of the first foreign organisations active on the ground in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union and is seen as a partner in democratisation and a liberalising European force in Ukraine. Although Germany does not have a much longer record of cultural relations in Ukraine<sup>7</sup>, German-Ukrainian relations have a much more complex and difficult history.

The complex and nuanced nature and history of cultural relations suggests that attempts to evaluate them will themselves have to be sophisticated, nuanced, and sensitive to the different contexts in which they take place. This research therefore set out to build and use just such a method of evaluation. Instead of spending further time on the question of what cultural relations are, this project focused on developing a methodology for analysing what they can do.



Audience at a film screening at the film week (Filmwoche) of the Goethe-Institut in Cairo in 2018

# METHODOLOGY: A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSING THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL RELATIONS

**A NEW CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND A RICH METHODOLOGY COMBINING BOTH QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE METHODS PROVIDE THE BASIS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE CONDITIONS IN WHICH CULTURAL RELATIONS CAN CREATE MOST VALUE.**

The framework applied in this research adapts and combines two distinctive approaches, which have already been used in other contexts: the cultural relations diamond<sup>8</sup> and the cultural value model<sup>9</sup>.

The approach was guided by the desire to:

- combine participatory evaluation (an insider view), with an external analysis (outsider view) of the same phenomena, bringing together qualitative and quantitative data
- offer a multi-perspective approach that considers all relevant stakeholders

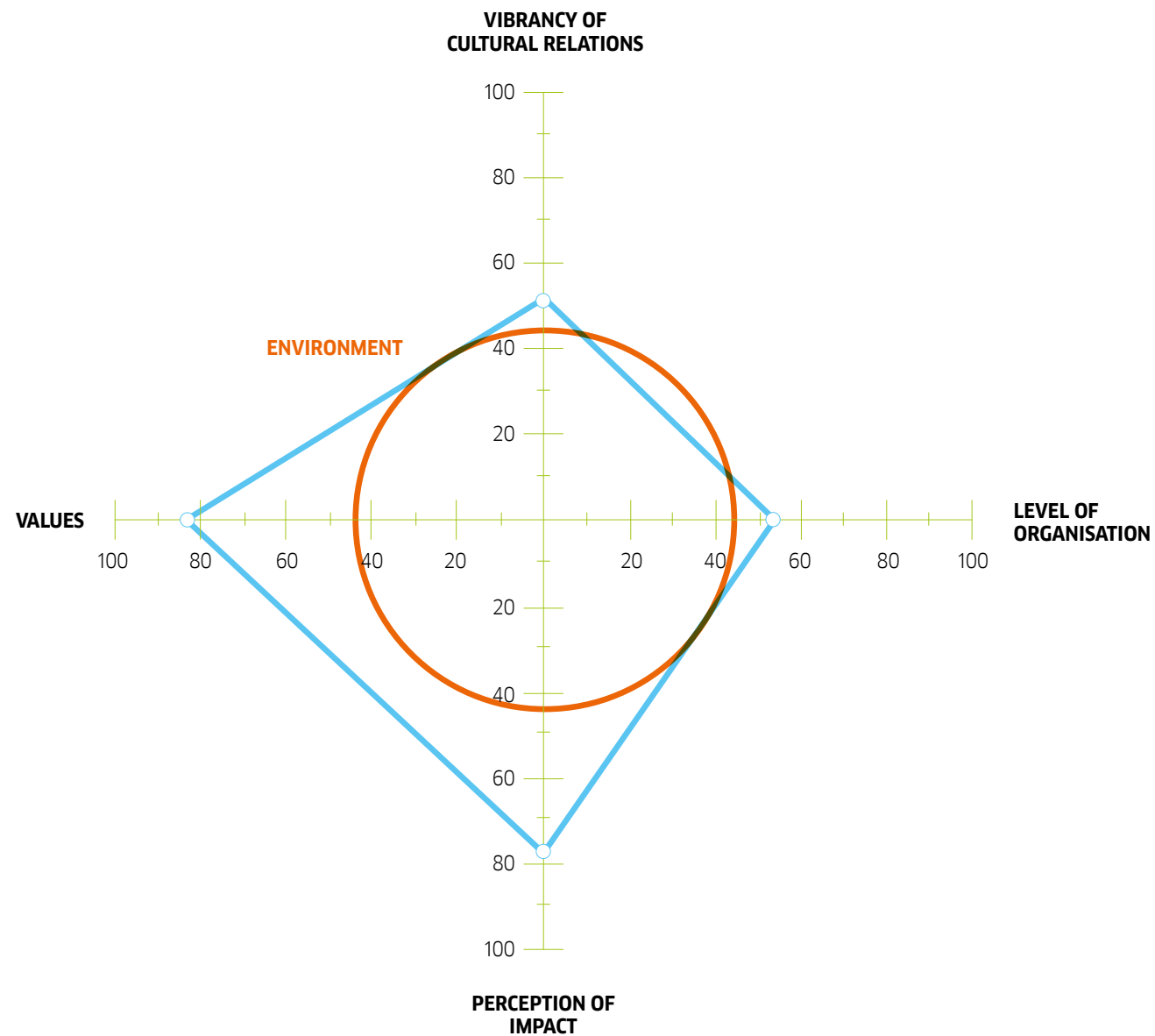
## **THE CULTURAL RELATIONS DIAMOND**

The approach of the Hertie School of Governance was to use a big picture view to allow cross-national comparisons of cultural relations in Egypt and Ukraine.

In a first step the researchers aggregated information about a large number of cultural actors and cultural relations activities in each country. This was done through intensive desk research, the support of local experts, and workshops with representatives from the British Council and the Goethe-Institut. The information gleaned yielded data in the following ways. Firstly, it provided overviews or maps of the landscape of cultural relations in Egypt and Ukraine. Secondly, it served as the grounds on which participants for the next steps of the research, that is quantitative surveys and detailed case study research, were selected.

## CULTURAL VALUE DIAMOND DIAGRAM

EXAMPLE VISUALISATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE HERTIE SCHOOL OF GOVERNANCE'S RESEARCH FOR EGYPT



A survey of cultural actors and organisations in both countries was undertaken to measure the state of cultural relations in the respective countries. The survey assessed various aspects of the value of cultural relations work, as perceived from cultural organisations, and aggregated them into five dimensions:

- the inclusivity and variety ('vibrancy') of activities offered by international cultural relations organisations
- how cooperation with cultural relations organisations affects local cultural actors' sustainability and their collaboration with other societal sectors ('level of organisation')
- subjective perceptions of local cultural actors of the impact of the cultural relations activities they were involved in and of international cultural organisations more generally ('perception of impact')
- the extent to which the cultural relations scene of a country is perceived to uphold, transfer and generate values ('values')
- the economic, social and political context ('environment')

Additionally, information was collected through desk research, population surveys (EU Neighbourhood Barometer<sup>10</sup>, Gallup World Poll<sup>11</sup>) and other well-known indicator data sets (data from Freedom House and the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project)<sup>12</sup>. To test and enrich the data collected, the results of the surveys were then discussed in focus group workshops in both countries, with experts representing the local cultural scene and other foreign cultural institutions and embassies. The results for each dimension are assessed on a scale of 1 to 100 and visualised in graphics resembling the shape of a diamond, an example of which is shown on page 10 for the results on Egypt.

### THE CULTURAL VALUE MODEL

The researchers from the Open University conducted five detailed case studies, analysing how particular cultural relations programmes generate value for all stakeholders involved. Data sets were gathered during participatory workshops, followed up by interviews. Participants of the workshops that formed the core of the case studies represented one of three stakeholder groups:

- A** 'strategic' (cultural relations organisations' staff and programme funders)
- B** 'delivery' (programme delivery teams)
- C** 'users' (beneficiaries of programmes)

The selection of the five case studies (see page 14-15) was based on the cultural relations activities map developed by the Hertie School of Governance, the guidance of regional experts, and advice from local staff of the British Council and the Goethe-Institut.

They illustrate and exemplify different types of cultural relations activities by the two organisations.

For the analysis, components of value were identified through an extensive literature review, preliminary discussions with staff, an analysis of programme documentation, and a first round of participatory workshops with stakeholders involved in the programmes. Subsequently, participants were invited to a second round of workshops to assess the value of cultural relations programmes and activities along those agreed components, taking into account their specific needs and expectations.

Each case study was assessed on a scale of 1 to 7 against the following components of value:

1. **Effective and sustainable partnerships** between foreign and in-country organisations, and between in-country organisations themselves
2. Enhanced sustainable **dialogue** between people and cultures
3. Active **participation** of a wider range of users of specific target groups
4. **Professionalism** in terms of adequate training, support and resources for staff
5. High **quality** of content and specific activities
6. Good **collaboration** and communication with internal and external actors
7. Mutual **appreciation** and reciprocal relationships on all sides
8. **Utility** and relevance of activities for users
9. Activities providing **opportunities** for development and/or progression of educational and/or cultural enrichment

The workshops were complemented by a series of guided in-depth expert interviews with insiders - key interlocutors who are closely involved in the local or national cultural relations scene - and questionnaires to test and calibrate the findings beyond the specifics of the workshops and in the broader context of Egypt and Ukraine.

The results were depicted in case study specific models (see page 12).

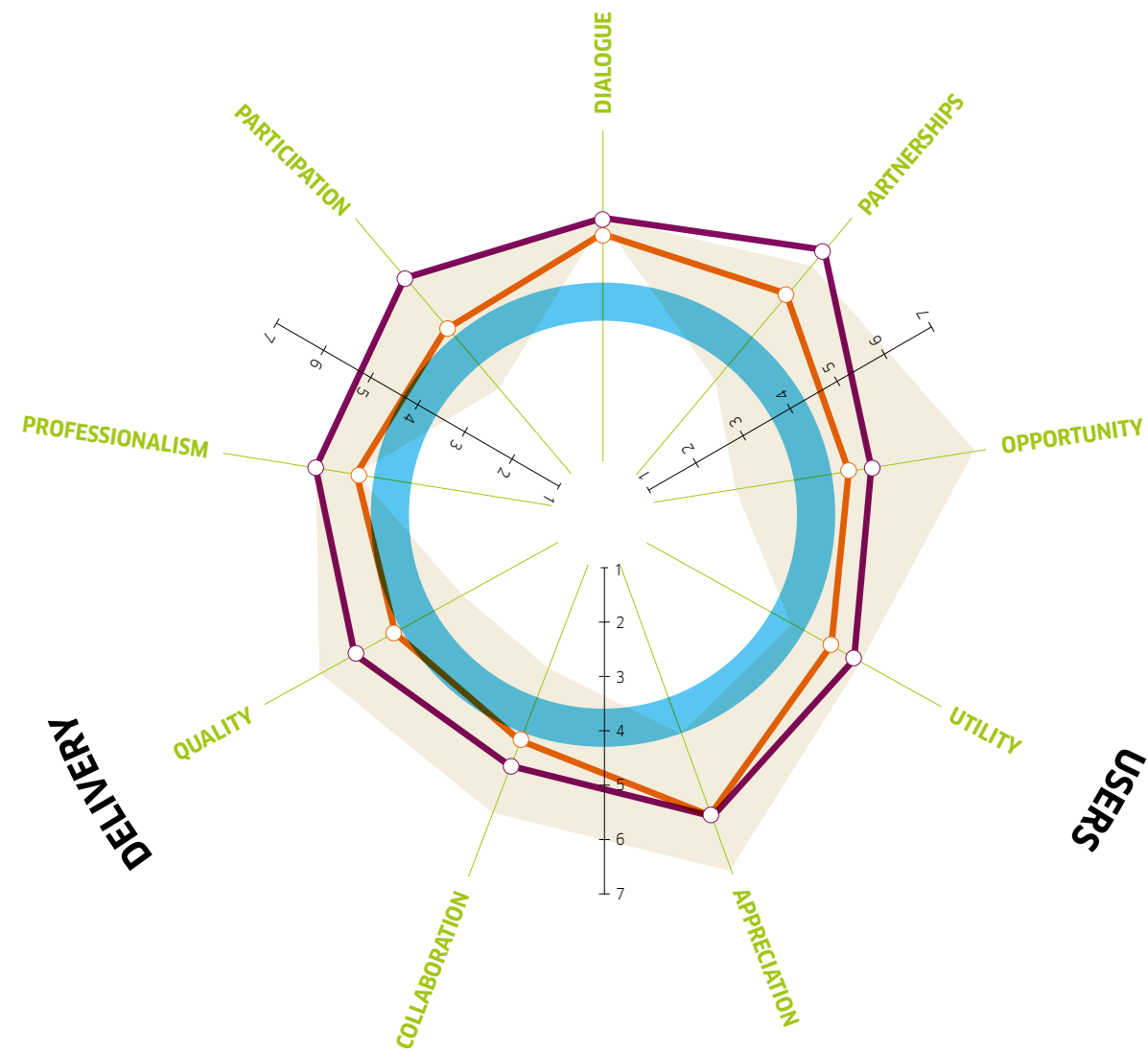
### A COMBINED METHODOLOGY

Throughout the research process, both methodologies forged collaborative synergies to ensure that the approaches dove-tailed. The results laid out in this report summarise the findings generated by the two methodologies on a general level.

## CULTURAL VALUE MODEL CONSTELLATION

EXAMPLE VISUALISATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY'S RESEARCH FOR THE ACTIVE CITIZEN'S CASE STUDY IN UKRAINE

### STRATEGIC



- Surveys
- Groups
- Variance of responses

#### SUMMARY OF RESEARCH:

- A literature review of cultural relations, the history of cultural relations in the UK and Germany, and the political, economic, and societal context in Ukraine and Egypt
- A mapping of cultural actors and the cultural relations landscape in Ukraine and Egypt
- One quantitative online survey among cultural organisations in Ukraine and Egypt
- Four expert workshops with cultural managers and foreign cultural actors
- Ten qualitative, participatory workshops as the core of the case studies
- Five online surveys and one paper survey among users of the programmes that were part of the case studies
- 40 additional expert interviews with cultural relations organisations staff, cultural diplomacy insiders, cultural activists, lecturers, teachers



Active Citizens from Ukraine at a networking event in Kiev in 2018

Detailed results on the specific models on the case-study or country-specific level can be found in the full academic report.

The two approaches complement one another, bringing distinct perspectives to bear on the same research questions. In this way the methodology has the advantage of bringing micro and macro perspectives into one framework, yielding broader conclusions that are firmly rooted in practices. This fills a yawning gap in the field of cultural relations research that usually adopts either a top down, overly theoretical, empirically-void approach

from the perspective of policymakers, or a bottom-up, practitioner perspective that fails to connect with wider structural, political, strategic, and organisational dynamics. By combining the analysis of quantitative, qualitative and ethnographic data, the two approaches were designed to become more than the sum of their parts, and threw up a rich range of findings relating to the impact of cultural relations in the particular context of the case study countries - to which this report will now turn.



## THE FIVE CASE STUDY PROGRAMMES

### REPRESENTING A VARIETY OF CULTURAL RELATIONS ACTIVITIES

#### ► UKRAINE



**ACTIVE CITIZENS** This is a social leadership programme for promoting intercultural dialogue, trust, and community-led social development. It aims to connect people and develop their skills to build fairer and more resilient societies. It follows a core methodology, adaptable to diverse contexts. Since 2009, the programme has trained over 240,000 people in 68 countries. Working in partnership with local organisations, the British Council trains facilitators who go on to cascade their training within their communities, generating ideas for social action. Active Citizens works through a hybrid cascade-network model of cultural relations: individuals can become facilitators themselves, and therefore become brokers between the British Council and local communities, enacting civil society values through local projects. In Ukraine, the programme has focussed on social cohesion as well as youth empowerment; connecting young people with local authorities and helping them secure funding to address issues in their communities. This has included supporting universities displaced by the conflict in Donbas.



**LUHANSK'S ARTS & FACTS** Luhansk's ARTS and FACTS is a collaboration between the Goethe-Institut and the Youth Organisation 'STAN' with financial support from the Federal Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany, under the Eastern Partnership initiative, with consultation from the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum in Berlin. The project aims to address the misconception that there is a lack of culture in Eastern Ukraine and particularly Luhansk through a website that serves as an online digital museum, and also collects and curates artefacts representing the cultural life and social activism that took place in the Luhansk province between 2004 and 2013. The project is part of the Goethe-Institut's efforts to intensify its capacity building programmes for NGOs in Ukraine, particularly supporting civil initiatives at the grass root level, in order to promote decentralization and citizen participation.

#### ► EGYPT



**AL-AZHAR ENGLISH TRAINING CENTRE** This is a joint programme between the British Council and Al-Azhar, one of the oldest universities in the world. It aims to enhance the English language skills of its students to help them engage in dialogue about moderate Islam with the English-speaking world. It also aims to train Egyptian teachers in pedagogical methodologies, mentoring, and management. The programme has been running since 2007 and currently consists of several complementary strands, including Al-Azhar English Teaching Centre (AAETC), which was the focus of this study. The teaching centre provides English classes through a General English Programme and an English for Religious Purposes course (ERP), as well as soft skills to selected students from the Islamic Studies faculties. The Training Centre is an opportunity to better understand the interplay between cultural relations and social change, as well as the boundaries between cultural relations and what can be perceived as soft power.



**Two Kulturakademie (cultural academy) programmes were analysed: Kulturakademie NANO (MENA) and Kulturakademie Ägypten (Egypt).**

**KULTURAKADEMIE NANO** Kulturakademie NANO is a regional programme, which offers training in cultural management and cultural policy for those working or aspiring to work in the cultural sector in the entire MENA region. Since 2011, Kulturakademie NANO trains independent, non-state actors from different cultural disciplines. Usually, it is conducted by German trainers (in English). In 2016, it was also conducted by Arab trainers. It moreover comprises a six-week training course in Berlin. Project participants will be supported to pass on their newly acquired skills and knowledge as multipliers within their institutions.

**KULTURAKADEMIE ÄGYPTEN** is the local/national version of Kulturakademie NANO. Since 2013, it aims to 'professionalise' up to 20 staff from the Egyptian Ministry of Culture as well as other state-funded cultural institutions. In addition to participants from Cairo, participants from Alexandria and other provinces also participate. Two-day modules on various topics of cultural management, such as basic project management or marketing for public institutions, are offered by experts from Germany. A Training-of-Trainers (ToT) module then links former participants in the Kulturakademie Ägypten with the Egyptian alumni of Kulturakademie NANO and trains them as multipliers who then disseminate their skills and knowledge within their institutions.



**GOETHE-FILMWOCH** Goethe-Filmwoche is a Goethe-Institut film festival that has taken place annually since 2013, featuring new German and Arabic films and documentaries in various cities in Egypt. Films are shown subtitled in English and/or Arabic and entry is free. Topics of 2017's film week included migration, definition of home, revolutions, wars, family, and women in society. They were discussed by and with filmmakers, experts and the audience during the week. Goethe-Filmwoche thereby provides a relatively 'safe space' for public debate about important and relevant social issues through the film screenings. It provides networking opportunities for the Egyptian film scene and foreign filmmakers, and aims to reach larger local populations in big cities and rural areas with more popular independent films.

The data collected for Goethe-Filmwoche was enhanced by questionnaires collected at a similar film screening in Cairo, also organized by the Goethe-Institut: 'Montags in Missaha'. It regularly screens movies in the premises of the Goethe-Institut in Cairo, amongst others aiming at bringing perspectives from Germany to the cultural scene in Egypt and exchanging those with Egyptian perspectives.



## CONTEXT: AN ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL RELATIONS IN SOCIETIES IN TRANSITION

THE RESEARCH HELPS EXPLAIN HOW RECENT POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIETAL, AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS SHAPE THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE OF CULTURAL RELATIONS IN UKRAINE AND EGYPT.

### EGYPT IN TRANSITION

As in other countries in the Middle East and North Africa, the so-called Arab Spring Revolutions took place in Egypt in 2011. Mass protests, with their focal point at Cairo's Tahrir Square, led to the ouster of Hosni Mubarak after some 30 years of rule.

Mubarak's fall was followed by a phase of military rule until the 2012 parliamentary and presidential elections, which saw the Muslim Brotherhood 'Freedom and Justice' party emerge as the strongest force in parliament and Mohammed Morsi, an Islamist, elected president. Morsi's presidency in turn was ended by a military intervention in July 2013, which was followed by a referendum on the constitution in 2014. A new presidential election brought former army chief Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to office in 2014<sup>13</sup>. Since then, his administration has been ostensibly aiming to enact macroeconomic reforms backed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and combat sluggish growth, whilst criticised by some for extending government restrictions on political civil liberties. In March 2018, President el-Sisi won a second term.

The 2011 Egyptian uprisings galvanised a new range of civil society-led initiatives, while raising awareness about youth unemployment and social inequalities. For a brief period of time, the 2011 Egyptian uprisings allowed more space for political forms of artistic expressions. Despite the lack of economic prospects, curators and artists invested in what they believed was about to become a vibrant independent art scene and a few new art galleries opened in Cairo. Street art and graffiti temporarily invaded the urban space, reaching out to different social classes, as parts of Egyptian society experimented with creative approaches to citizenship<sup>14</sup>. In this context, different foreign

cultural offices introduced initiatives to create opportunities for social change. For example, the Goethe-Institut launched its Tahrir Lounge project in April 2011, dedicated to community capacity building and designed to stimulate civic engagement.

The enthusiasm faded, however, not least because of the increasingly polarised environment and instability in the aftermath of the 2013 military intervention. Since then, human rights advocates, independent artists, and journalists have complained of their freedom of expression being increasingly challenged<sup>15,16</sup>.

#### A SHORT ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURAL SCENE

Egypt's cultural scene looks back on a long history. Today, as depicted by the research, it is marked by a clear separation of actors in distinct functional fields. The art scene in particular is divided into separate state and independent civil society groupings. In general, one can assume that the priorities and values of the various stakeholders differ significantly. The position of foreign actors, including foreign cultural centres, in between independent and state actors indicates both possible opportunities for building bridges between them and challenges in balancing expectations and sensitivities.

The great majority of cultural relations activities identified by the research involve performance, visual arts, and other cultural programmes, and target the general public. The types of cultural activity observed on the ground are shaped by the current political environment. When the political situation is tense, as is the case in Egypt, then it is understandable that such activities tend away from broader programmes revolving around values, in favour of more arts-related programmes, which can be presented as being apolitical. Programmes related to performances, especially music festivals, are likely to raise fewer eyebrows with the authorities.

The scope of the programmes varies. In Egypt the majority of cultural relations activities can be classified as mass events, which involve relatively small amounts of funding and reach a large audience. Other cultural relations activities are niche programmes, which require low budgets but also reach relatively small audiences. High-budget programmes and events are few. The preponderance of low-budget cultural relations activities could well reflect the modest financial resources available for cultural relations, or a desire to get the most 'bang for buck' out of existing resources.

Interestingly, more than half of the activities identified here involve no foreign partner. Instead, they are most often

implemented by or in association with the Ministry of Culture, or a state actor such as the Cairo Opera House. This gives an indication of the apparent dominance of the state and state arts scene. This could also indicate that the work of independent cultural actors might be marginalised from the mainstream cultural sphere. Moreover, it points to the difficulty foreign organisations might have in acting in Egypt without being on good terms with the state.

#### UKRAINE IN TRANSITION

Over the last two decades, Ukraine has experienced two 'revolutions': The Orange Revolution in 2004 was a wave of mass protests against electoral fraud and manipulations during the presidential elections. The revolution referred to as EuroMaidan started with pro-European mass protest and civil unrest in 2013, and escalated into an international crisis in 2014 as the government fell. Fighting broke out in the East of the country, and Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula, resulting in a conflict in which thousands have died and hundreds of thousands have been (internally) displaced<sup>17</sup>. Yet, Ukrainians have demonstrated extreme resilience, and expert expectations of further escalation of war, the rise of nationalism, state failure, or economic collapse have not come to pass<sup>18,19</sup>. Moreover, there is some indication that civic identity is gaining ground at the expense of ethno-nationalist identity<sup>20,21</sup>.

The language of public cultural diplomacy has come to the forefront in Ukraine in reaction to the 2014 crisis. Amid the urgency of war and the perceived aggression of Russia's informational and hybrid warfare tactics, the British Council, the Goethe-Institut, Institut Français and Polish Institute are taken as examples to emulate in a struggle as much cultural as kinetic. The pressure of Russia in the 'marketplace for loyalties' is felt severely. Since the colour revolutions of the early 2000s, Russia has also mimicked Western cultural relations institutes. These are used both to influence opinion about Russia in the West and to provide language, cultural, and informational resources to 'compatriots' across the post-Soviet region<sup>22</sup>. While the Roszarubezhtsentre (Russian Foreign Centre) was set up in 1925, and is still operating in Ukraine, the Russkiy Mir Foundation, founded in 2007 by presidential decree, has since opened 11 cultural centres in Ukraine promoting Russian language and culture.

On the cultural front during EuroMaidan, artist groups used live performance and installations to convey their opposition to the regime, independent online media grew to prominence, and a group of the country's top PR executives started what is



Artist Slava Bo presents one of his artworks at an exhibition in Kiev as part of Luhansk's ARTS & FACTS in 2016

Ukraine's first public diplomacy institution, the Ukraine Crisis Media Centre. Thanks to both state and non-state actor investment, the cultural scene and creative industries have flourished since 2014, and in 2017, the Ukrainian government set up its first official cultural diplomacy institution, the Ukrainian Institute<sup>23</sup>.

#### A SHORT ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURAL SCENE

The landscape of cultural relations actors revealed by the research shows that there is a diverse scene in Ukraine and therefore a broad spectrum of stakeholders with sometimes varying priorities and perceptions of value. Civil society actors occupy the most space in this snapshot, in many clusters sharing room and roles with state actors. Foreign actors also have a prominent position. The Eastern Partnership initiative of the German Federal Foreign Office for example, focuses on the further development of the civil society. Notably, well-connected individuals are seen as influential throughout the cultural scene, in a sense tying it together and presenting clear targets for the foreign cultural actors in their programming.

A majority of identified cultural relations activities revolve around broader value generation in general and education in

particular. This fact could be evidence that cultural relations actors in Ukraine, such as the British Council and the Goethe-Institut, have significant latitude in setting up value-focused programmes, as opposed to merely supporting cultural performances. This could enable them to have a larger leverage to have a positive impact on the societal and political transformations that are underway in Ukraine at the moment.

Moreover, a large share of these cultural relations activities target professionals and not only the general public. Possibly, this is a reflection of the Ukrainian cultural scene, which is perceived to be influenced at least as much by individuals as institutions. This ties in with one strategy of cultural relations organisations: by targeting key individuals and using them as multipliers, cultural relations institutes can effect change throughout large networks of cultural actors and civil society organisations.

Against these backgrounds, the research points to a wide range of specific findings about the value of cultural relations activities and their potential impact on societies like Egypt and Ukraine.

# FINDINGS: THE VALUE OF CULTURAL RELATIONS

**THE FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH, SUMMARISED HERE, SHOW WHERE ORGANISATIONS, SUCH AS THE BRITISH COUNCIL AND THE GOETHE-INSTITUT ARE ON THE RIGHT PATH, WHERE THERE ARE SHORTCOMINGS TO BE ADDRESSED, AND HOW THE POTENTIAL OF CULTURAL RELATIONS CAN BE BETTER REALISED.**

## WHAT IS THE VALUE OF CULTURAL RELATIONS?

**CULTURAL RELATIONS ACTIVITIES CREATE VALUE.** They create different forms of value for different types of stakeholders. Cultural value is therefore a matter of perspective. The research found that the purpose and priorities of cultural relations are often perceived quite differently by users. With each form of value come difficult trade-offs that have to be negotiated. Typical trade-offs include that high reach can undermine quality, while a primary emphasis on quality can create a perception of exclusivity; and while artists and organisations seek and highly appreciate increased exposure for their work, some organisations - especially in difficult or hostile political environments - prefer invisibility and the safe spaces that foreign cultural organisations can provide.

## CULTURAL RELATIONS ARE HIGHLY VALUED IN THE COUNTRIES THEY TAKE PLACE FOR A NUMBER OF SPECIFIC BENEFITS. THOSE COMPRISE:

**Better dialogue between people and cultures** is one desirable outcome identified by many respondents. Generally, the work of cultural relations organisations was highly valued as building bridges between countries. A large majority of respondents saw their own work as leading to deeper international relationships and thus generating significant value. In Egypt, some participants emphasised how collaboration was a major benefit, while others focussed more on the value of intercultural dialogue and inclusive debate about controversial issues. In Ukraine, cross-regional dialogue to combat conflicts and divisions was particularly valued. Even though participants

rated the importance of promoting dialogue highly, they questioned whether it was always being realised.

**Greater interest from the public**, enhanced connectivity, and better outreach for their own programmes and events were frequently cited benefits by the survey respondents who had cooperated with international cultural organisations. Extending audiences in this way can contribute to longer-term organisational sustainability.

**Acquiring new skills** was also mentioned as a key benefit by respondents, even though skills development per se was only in some cases the focus of cultural relations activity. Local actors seem to benefit in terms of organisational capacity by engaging with cultural relations organisations. However, the suitability of skills was also at times questioned. For example, skills training was deemed by some to be based on European models of cultural management and cultural policy and unsuited to the Egyptian context.

**The opportunity to network** with other people and organisations is highly valued by survey respondents. Among those participating in the research in Egypt, the main benefit was seen as international networking across the MENA region, but also internationally. In Ukraine, enhanced national networking was seen as a key benefit.

**Funding** is among the most important benefits but is perceived differently by various stakeholders. Clearly, the funding provided through cooperation with international organisations gives a boost to local partner organisations, helping them achieve their objectives. Yet the type of funding available is

often necessarily short term, because seed corn funding is supposed to avoid the disempowering forms of dependency that can accompany foreign aid. The downside is therefore a potential lack of sustainability, which was observed in some of the case studies.

## CULTURAL RELATIONS CAN CREATE EVEN MORE VALUE IF THEY ADDRESS A NUMBER OF COMMONLY IDENTIFIED DEFICIENCIES:

**Difficulties acquiring funding.** Among the respondents, more respondents reported that it was difficult to obtain funding from cultural relations organisations than reported that it was easy. In both Ukraine and Egypt the research suggests that those individuals and groups that do succeed in gaining funding (and sometimes repeated funding) usually possess knowledge of funding concepts (buzzwords) and processes (completing the forms appropriately), or have an intermediary to do so on their behalf.

**The sustainability of networks.** Participants in many of the activities studied here called for further and more sustainable opportunities to network with their peers, both within the country and outside it. In this respect, it was noted that better use of digital media to support international and cross-regional networking would afford greater connectivity and sustainability, but skills development in this area is required.

**A lack of follow-up support.** Delivery teams and users in the workshops bemoaned the lack of follow-up support, as noted above, and stated that some form of post-project support network would be helpful. Clearly, foreign cultural relations organisations have a difficult trade-off to manage between offering financial support while avoiding disabling dependency and promoting autonomy. They wish to support their users and to help initiate local projects, but they also have to work within budget constraints. The most successful projects are deemed by beneficiaries to be those that are sustainable either through opportunities to apply for further funding or through some form of continued support.

**Hierarchies** can mitigate against the development of good cultural relations. The hierarchical nature of foreign cultural relations organisations often relegate local cultural relations professionals and brokers to the lower echelons of the organisation, while their European peers tend to head up or take lead roles in the organisations, and might also enjoy higher salaries. As a result, local brokers, who are essential to

the work of good cultural relations do not always feel fully valued and rewarded by foreign cultural relations organisations with equal opportunities, recognition, and pay.

**The inclusivity of activities.** Many benefit directly from cultural relations. But who benefits is a key question that requires constant vigilance. The research found that many in both Egypt and Ukraine perceived a certain exclusivity in those benefiting from cultural relations that tends towards cities, the wealthier and more educated, and high-profile organisations. It is usually a fairly small group of artists and cultural workers, especially those with a good track record, who benefit often from repeated funding. This means competition among international cultural relations organisations to work with a relatively small pool of people, which can have a knock-on effect on the cultivation of future civil society leaders. In a country like Egypt, for example, where access to cultural goods and services beyond television for most is quite limited, reaching broader audiences with activities geared toward reducing social or political tensions requires either significant resources or remarkable creativity.

**A lack of reciprocity** is sometimes perceived by users. Cultural relations, like all social relations, involve power relations and divisions across social, ethnic, cultural and linguistic boundaries. Case study research found that some users, though appreciative of the opportunities afforded to them by a project, did not feel sufficiently valued as professionals on an equal footing with European colleagues, or respected as equal members of the partnership. Cultural relations work best when the organisations demonstrate the values that they seek to promote: for example, ethnic and linguistic diversity and equality of opportunity.

**A lack of exchange** is sometimes perceived by some cultural relations beneficiaries. Regarding the goal of mutual cultural exchange, differences emerged between policy and strategic teams about what they aspire to, what delivery teams do and what users expect in terms of a meaningful cultural exchange. Some cultural relations organisations' understanding of mutuality might not be to expose local culture abroad, but to ensure that both countries can learn from the engagement and that the relationship is based on mutual respect. This can lead to mismatched expectations. At the level of specific cases in Egypt, the mutuality of relationships in this sense was brought into question by some local partners, project staff, and also beneficiaries. Al-Azhar participants, for example, reported a sense of being treated as passive recipients of

British culture, while having insufficient access to it – either through opportunities to travel to the UK, communicate with British people, or consume cultural and artistic products. And, while Kulturakademie and Filmwoche participants experienced a greater sense of mutual exchange with German culture, they still see room for improvement regarding its relevance.

**Unclear rules of engagement** and failure to set clear expectations at the outset can lead to misalignment of goals between foreign actors, delivery teams, and local participants. For example, partner organisations and users involved in programmes researched in the case studies did not always understand the limited nature of the funding or the terms of engagement with foreign cultural relations organisations. Often the result was a sense of disappointment at expectations that were not met – sometimes on all sides.

It should be noted that working with businesses and working with the state were not deemed by survey respondents in either country as significant practical benefits of collaborating with foreign actors in cultural relations activities. In the case of cooperation with business, participants in the workshops discussed the desirability of attracting interest from the business sector, especially with regard to sponsorship and fundraising, but many obstacles seem to prevent this. In terms of working with the state, the views of local organisations involved in cultural relations in Egypt differed from those in Ukraine: twice as many Ukrainian respondents saw chances of working with state agencies as a bonus. This difference stems from the different relationships between independent and state cultural actors in each country.

### **CAN CULTURAL RELATIONS STRENGTHEN SOCIETIES IN TRANSITION?**

Cultural relations organisations can create particular value in societies in transition. In many ways they are uniquely suited for addressing the particular challenges often found in such contexts. Yet they must remain conscious of those challenges at all times.

### **CULTURAL RELATIONS CAN STRENGTHEN SOCIETIES IN TRANSITION. THEIR ESSENTIAL CONTRIBUTION IS DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS:**

**International cultural relations organisations play an essential role in ‘societies in transition’ by offering ‘safe spaces’ for dialogue** and opportunities for cultural actors – especially activists – to work together and network, independent of state oversight. The research found that this is hugely appreciated,

as expressed by users in Egypt and Ukraine in the workshops. The provision of secure places can enable sustainable dialogue to flourish and partnerships to develop that, in the long term, could help to reduce conflict. Some cultural relations project goals are necessarily modest with low reach but still very important (e.g. Luhansk’s ARTS & FACTS). The opening up of spaces of dialogue between conflicted groups may be a ‘good enough’ achievement, especially when dialogue is well managed. Such bridge-building between opposing factions is especially fruitful when goals can be clearly communicated and shared.

**Cultural relations can help promote the development of the independent cultural sector** and civil society projects, in particular when they offer avenues for expression and open up new opportunities for users. The case studies reveal that such projects work best when they are locally initiated, user-centred and involve locals at each stage of development – at conception, creation, design, enactment and assessment stages. Managing the relationship between the state and non-state cultural actors can be among the most difficult diplomatic dances that cultural relations are required to perform in ‘societies in transition’. Difficult decisions and trade-offs have to be negotiated about whether and to what extent to support the state in its efforts to reinvigorate the independent cultural sector and decentralise in Ukraine. Or, as in Egypt, negotiation over whether bridging divisions between the state and independent sector is even the role of cultural relations was an important question raised in the case study workshops.

**Cultural relations cannot resolve or reduce conflicts directly, but can contribute to doing so over time.** The very presence of cultural relations in ‘societies in transition’ like Egypt and Ukraine is symbolically significant. Maintaining a visible presence and respectful relations with local stakeholders (citizens and governments who may be at odds with one another) is seen as of primary importance by foreign cultural relations organisations. However, cross-generational dynamics in ‘societies in transition’ can affect the success of cultural relations activities. For example, the focus on targeting youth in Luhansk’s ARTS & FACTS in Ukraine was aimed at cultivating future leaders, but in doing so it created tensions with older generations who saw themselves as equally capable of being future leaders.

### **CULTURAL RELATIONS CAN STRENGTHEN SOCIETIES IN TRANSITION MORE EFFECTIVELY IF THEY TAKE THE FOLLOWING OBSTACLES INTO ACCOUNT:**

#### **Historic perceptions of foreign cultural relations organisations shape how users approach and engage with organisations.**

Perceptions of Britain and Germany were very clearly articulated and expressed in all workshops. They are evidently historically shaped, deep-seated, and hard to budge. For example, Britain’s imperial history in Egypt looms large in the public imagination and nurtures fears of neo-colonial domination by large organisations like the British Council among some cultural actors, especially activists. Perceptions of Germany as efficient but unapproachable were in some cases also voiced in workshops. Such perceptions, accurate or not, can and do influence how local users interact with cultural relations organisations.

#### **The visibility of foreign cultural relations organisations is limited.**

Cultural relations organisations and other foreign cultural actors occupy significant space in the Ukrainian cultural scene, and in Egypt they are placed between the state and the independent culture scene. Interviewees in Ukraine noted in particular that most foreign cultural relations organisations are hardly visible, making for limited awareness and audiences. In Egypt, interviewees noted that legacy cultural relations organisations struggled to maintain their reputation, status and visibility in an increasingly competitive cultural relations field. Several suggested that they should showcase their national culture more accessibly, to enable them to have more visibility than as language teaching institutions. As noted above, invisibility is a bonus for activists and those working in the cultural underground who are at risk from state surveillance, violence or imprisonment, as in the case of Egypt. But greater visibility is eagerly desired among artists and organisations who are able to work out in the open. Other factors influence the ability of cultural relations to have an impact. Generally speaking, strengths and weaknesses in organisational capacity on the ground, especially financial sustainability and skills, may influence whether cultural actors have the wherewithal to engage in cultural relations activities with broader aims, including conflict prevention and resolution. Furthermore, the economic, social and, above all, political environment can either enable or constrain cultural actors of all sorts in their efforts to reduce conflict and its socioeconomic effects.

**Cross-generational dynamics are important to take into account if cooperation is to work** effectively in societies undergoing demographic transition – by, like Egypt and Ukraine,

experiencing (respectively) a ‘youth bulge’ or ‘youth crunch’. A focus on young people might mean that cultural relations under-exploits the potential of the middle-aged to contribute to cultural exchange and possibly to conflict resolution, particularly in societies undergoing demographic contraction. It can also lead to an unnecessary time lag in seeing the fruits of cultural relations efforts.

#### **Cultural relations has the potential to strengthen civil society and future leaders,**

but their impact cannot be pinpointed in a definitive way. That impact will be greater the more they reach out beyond a narrow range of beneficiaries. A majority of respondents in Egypt, and to a slightly lesser extent Ukraine, report that cultural relations organisations succeed in strengthening future leaders and/or civil society organisations, despite differences in the cultural and civil society landscapes of the two countries. In Egypt, for example, civil society space is limited by legal and other constraints and civil society actors engage in important yet rather circumscribed sets of cultural activities, which mainly involve performance and mass events rather than broader value creation, since this could attract unwanted attention. In Ukraine, by contrast, civil society actors occupy the most space across the cultural actors map, suggesting high levels of activity and much potential. That the majority of cultural relations activities identified on the Ukrainian cultural relations map revolve around broader value generation in general, and education and training of professionals in particular, indicates greater leeway in what is and can be done. At the case study level however, the often implicit goal of developing leadership skills is rarely made explicit by strategic and delivery teams, and participants at Kulturakademie and Filmwoche workshops in Egypt acknowledged that they were personally not sufficiently aware of the opportunities to develop such skills. There was limited evidence available to substantiate such claims about promoting civil society and leadership in both Al-Azhar in Egypt and Active Citizens in Ukraine – at least in the sense of achieving a publicly visible profile. In any case, to do so in Egypt would pose a personal security threat.

This study highlights the difficulty of answering the research questions in a definitive way. However, the research sheds light on the conditions that would be favourable to training and promoting cultural brokers, to identifying and building future leaders, and to strengthening civil society. Finally, it suggests that addressing controversy and conflict rather than avoiding it may be most effective in contributing to strengthening civil society in societies in transition.

## MODELS OF CULTURAL RELATIONS

### THREE MODELS OF CULTURAL RELATIONS WERE IDENTIFIED DURING THE COURSE OF THE RESEARCH.

**NETWORK MODEL** Some cultural relations focus on particular individuals and their networks (e.g. Luhansk's ARTS & FACTS). Mobilising the networks of 'influencers' can be a highly pragmatic and effective approach in some contexts. This is the case in the Ukrainian context, where a visible landscape of NGOs was lacking in recent years. However, this network model (working in a horizontal fashion around key nodes in a non-hierarchical network) may come at the expense of sacrificing deeper and longer-lasting relationships with organisations and may lead to a perception of exclusivity – no matter how unjustified. Non-hierarchical models allow for diffuse forms of power and influence but can become inefficient with no central lead organiser.

**DIFFUSION MODEL** Collaborating with strong and stable local and national institutions (e.g. Al-Azhar) reaps benefits in terms of sustainability and longevity. It can allow for a diffusion of key values over time that serve the strategic interests of cultural relations. Such a diffusion model of cultural relations working from institutional centres to peripheries, however, can be perceived as neo-colonial and may unwittingly support what are perceived as entrenched hierarchies and power relations in legacy cultural relations organisations.

**CASCADE MODEL** Training programmes that involve a multiplying of knowledge and skills via a system of local and regional peer-to-peer support can work very well. This cascade model (that works in top down fashion) helps increase the impact of a project or allows a programme to grow organically. Trainees become trainers and pass on skills to other locals and even across regions. In practice, these models of cultural relations are not mutually exclusive, but they forge different relations of power and influence. Both Kulturakademie programmes and Active Citizens, for example, operate through a hybrid network and cascade model, providing initial training for key individuals who then go on to provide training for others.



Both pictures:  
Active Citizens from Ukraine at a  
networking event in Kiev in 2018

# CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS AND POLICYMAKERS

Cultural relations organisations can take a lot from these findings. Translating them into everyday work and learning from them to inform strategic decisions will be crucial to further improving their impact.

This study has demonstrated the value cultural relations organisations provide, particularly through their work in societies in transition. It has indicated manifold benefits, as perceived by a range of stakeholders. The fact that they are appreciated as organisations that build bridges between different perspectives, regions, and countries, and that strive to build capacities in the field of culture, are just two important findings. The study underlines the importance of this work in general and highlights specific strengths of some projects in particular.

This study has also shown that as international cultural relations practitioners pursue their mission, organisations must take care of the language they use and consider the expectations they raise among participants in their programmes. These will often have different backgrounds, goals, and assumptions. Making those assumptions explicit, to themselves as well as to their partners, should be standard practice.

The question of impact, quality, and reach is one which must always be grappled with. It is an issue that has become more significant as connections and communication between many individuals is now unlimited and instant, and the role of the expert intermediary is less powerful. It is necessary to consider the best ways of achieving a balance between impact and scale while maintaining trust and understanding. Considering this question through the three different models of 'Network' (i.e. via individuals), 'Diffusion' (via institutions), and 'Cascade' (i.e. peer-to-peer programmes) helps with programme design.

A stable and sustainable presence of cultural relations organisations ensures stability and reliability, and builds trust in societies in transition. With high levels of ambition, UK and German cultural relations practice is focused on establishing and preserving self-sustaining networks, and programmes are designed with this in mind. There is a risk that in not putting in enough resource, interventions may not always have the long-term value that was intended. Particularly in societies with significant social and economic challenges, longer-term post-programme support is sometimes required to reap the intended long-term benefits.

It is crucial to the reputation and effectiveness of cultural relations organisations that they are seen to be and are inclusive not exclusive in terms of target audiences, whether based on geography, socio-economic status or other factors. International cultural relations organisations rely on both a moral and legal licence to operate in other countries, and providing even-handed public benefit is part of that. Strengthening digital formats, networks and channels of communications more generally could be one way to foster more inclusive cultural relations.

Cultural relations organisations have an interest in developing the knowledge and skills staff need to deal with some of the challenges and sensitivities presented by working in politically difficult environments. Much of this knowledge already exists, but is implicit: stored in the heads of practitioners and transferred through practice from one cohort to the next. However, cultural relations organisations could better record, verify, and share their knowledge, both inside their organisations and between them.

This study provides a unique perspective, from the cultural field, of the development of two countries in transition, which are

strategically important for both the UK and Germany. Policy-makers with an interest in development, security, and foreign policy should take time to digest how international cultural relations provide value and connect with the socio-economic and political context as well as the cultural sector. They should consider how this insight might inform their strategies.

Yet this study provides nuanced but rigorous evidence of the value cultural relations bring, using methods designed specifically for that purpose. It is hoped that this will start a more meaningful conversation with other stakeholders in the culture, education, development, security and foreign policy communities about what, where, and how such activities can - and cannot - contribute to addressing wider foreign policy issues and international cooperation.

The research set out in this report describes how cultural relations activities have the potential to create real value. In particular, it suggests how they can do so in societies under pressure. Cultural relations practitioners and policymakers should be more aware of how conducting cultural relations with sensitivity to all the complexities and nuances of those contexts is necessary - and how it can make all the difference.

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## TITLE PICTURE

Active Citizens from Ukraine at a networking event in Kiev in 2018; Photo: Oleksandr Filonenko.

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# ABOUT THE GOETHE-INSTITUT

The Goethe-Institut is the cultural institute of the Federal Republic of Germany, active worldwide. It has 159 institutes in 98 countries, with 12 in Germany itself. In many other places the Goethe-Institut cooperates with partner organisations, catering to demand for language courses, examinations and cultural programmes.

We promote knowledge of the German language abroad and foster international cultural cooperation. We convey a comprehensive image of Germany by providing information about cultural, social and political life in our country. Our cultural and educational programmes encourage intercultural dialogue and enable cultural involvement. In this way, we strengthen the development of structures in civil society and foster worldwide mobility.

# ABOUT THE BRITISH COUNCIL

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. We do this by making a positive contribution to the UK and the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust. We work with over 100 countries across the world in the fields of arts and culture, English language, education and civil society.



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