

Conference Paper

The Challenges of Assessment: The Projects of BRICS Cultural Diplomacy

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Abstract

This article explores the challenges of expert assessment of the projects in the sphere of cultural diplomacy organized between the BRICS countries. Such assessment is necessary whenever there arises a controversial or unclear moment relating to understanding of a given phenomena. In this case, a specialist or a group of experts in the required field of knowledge are appointed to carry out the research of the object and to provide recommendations. Assessment is an important management instrument essential for decision making process and for removing contradictions. The cultural assessment is aimed at revealing and identifying perspective and vectors of development for culture, for people and society, as well as forecasting the fundamental directions of communicative processes. For the BRICS cultural projects, the assessment is crucial first and foremost for developing the foundations of the future BRICS unified cultural policy, taking into account the characteristic features of this organization, identifying its strengths and weaknesses and opportunities for BRICS development and the growth of its global influence.

Keywords: cultural assessment, BRICS, cultural policy, cultural projects.

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1. Introduction

Expert assessment is a study, a research into the nature of some question or phenomenon of reality that leads to discussions in society or in professional environment; it is carried out by a specialist or a group of experts and requires special knowledge of a subject; its result can be formulated as a motivated conclusion or an act that reflects the obtained results. Assessment can be carried out in different spheres – legal, art, technical, scientific, ecological etc. It is carried out, as a rule, by specialists that have special knowledge in this sphere or, in other words, by experts.

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2. Materials and Methods

Due to the fact that our lives are becoming more complex and the cultural forms more diverse, there is a need for cultural assessment, or assessment in the sphere of culture. Its main goal is to provide assessment to a certain phenomenon in terms of its importance to culture and the people. This type of assessment uses the same methodological tools and fundamental principles as any other assessment. At the same time, its difference is in the assessment that is made based on the values of human existence. O.N Astafyeva defines cultural assessment as a special subfield of “theoretical modelling and forecasting of cultural dynamics, its goal is identifying the main vectors and perspectives, developing criteria and principles of communicative interaction between different social subjects that are involved in cultural creativity” [1. p.9].

Professional assessment plays a great role in society and its management, especially in making managerial decisions, choosing vectors of development, minimizing cultural and other ambivalences, conflicts etc. That is exactly the reason, why we think that using cultural assessment in culture-oriented projects of the BRICS countries is so essential.

3. Discussion

3.1. Characteristic features of BRICS

BRICS positions itself as a radically new form of international union that includes Russia, India, Brazil, China and the Republic of South Africa. The novelty of this organization is in the fundamental principle of this union, namely equality of all participants. In the context of classical diplomacy, it is really new because in classical approach any union is based on the authority of the leader and serves to promote its interest, while politically and economically weaker participants unequivocally accept the rules of the game. BRICS in this respect is a modern form of international collaboration. It acknowledges cultural diversity and authenticity of countries that are members of the union.

Another characteristic feature of BRICS is that it brought together countries that are very different from each other and are located at the opposite sides of the world, have versatile cultural foundations, languages, religion and philosophy and even political styles of government. It is declared that they are joined in their desire to oppose the hegemony of the USA as the global leader and in their wish to announce themselves as regional centres of influence that should be taken seriously in the decision-making

regarding all spheres of international life. It is stressed that values and provisions of the United Nations are priorities to BRICS.

Nevertheless, the equality of BRICS members is quite nominal. The richest country in this union is China. That is the reason why some researchers call BRICS the “Chinese globalization” built around the Silk Road. In the framework of BRICS, it pushes the policy of lobbying its own interests using the partners from the union for its own economic and political purposes. Greatly in need of natural resources for industrial production and agricultural lands and food supplies, this country seeks access to the resources of its partners. Let us take the relationship between Russia and China as an illustration:

People’s Republic of China overestimated the collapse of the USSR and its abandonment of socialistic ideology and now views Russia as a second-rate state that has been set back in its development by decades from the world leaders. This assessment forces China to bet on other partners while developing modernization process, while Russia should be used as a source of materials and territories for its economic activities. In Russia... both academic community and the people started expressing their fears regarding the danger of becoming the neighbour’s raw material colony along with the pressing nature and migration and ecological challenges that are fuelled up by Chinese domestic policies. In China, the public opinion leaned towards the necessity of more active and rigid actions on the international stage that would reflect the country’s power, and in Russia the public opinion focused on the unequal relationship. [2, p. 7]

Such situation may be described as typical for the People’s Republic of China and deeply connected to its culture. The demonstrated openness of the country is quite relative. The main character of its interaction with the outside world is in the strategic planning, which implies developing strategies with elements of subtle manipulation of the rivals. [3, V.1, p. 8]. Strategic planning has long been a part of Chinese diplomacy as a combination of military and diplomatic actions aimed at long-term plans and goals and not on the international legal norms. At present, researchers notice great interest in strategic thinking in China as a feedback to the pressure put by western countries.

There is a similar situation with Brazil, where credits led to significant dependence. Such model of interaction is labelled “resources in exchange for investment and cheap loans for infrastructure projects”. [4. p. 82]. China established diplomatic relations with the Republic of South Africa only in 1998. It was Chinese initiative to include the Republic of South Africa into BRICS, despite the fact that in terms of economic and military

development it is the weakest of all the BRICS members. In exchange for Chinese support, the Republic of South Africa provides China with access to the continent and also supports China in its claims for Taiwan's dependence on the international level. China also has territorial claims with Russia and India. Hence, it is quite difficult to insist that there is equality between the members of BRICS.

There is another opinion that insists that BRICS isn't an alternative but rather "an additional support that allows the bourgeoisie to buy time and prepare dominating positions in the post-capitalist world" [5]. The arguments that support this point of view state that economic and political ties of countries in BRICS organization with countries of the first-world nations are much closer than between each other. The doubts are raised whether this organization can offer any alternatives to capitalism because 50% of labour in their economies is manual labour, which prevents this union from becoming a serious economic, technological and military power that can compete with the first-world nations.

Nevertheless, the author of this article is positive that BRICS has all chances of offering an alternative to capitalism if this organization starts paying more attention to the development of ideological foundations for its existence and use soft power for their promotion. BRICS is a very young organization that is just ten years old, and its first years were spent on defining economic challenges and solving them. Only four years ago in 2015 an agreement on cultural collaboration was signed and in 2017 specialized structures were created within BRICS, including in the sphere of culture.

3.2. Soft power of BRICS' cultural diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy is a part of the soft power concept developed by Joseph Nye. The main idea of this concept is that soft power is based on the appeal that an object has, and its goal is to form appealing image of the object using the means of soft power. According to O. Shtunkel, soft power consists of three components: cultural diplomacy, ability to establish an agenda and society's appeal. [6].

The author of this article thinks that the main goal is to develop unified ideological platform that would become an alternative to current unified culture politics in BRICS countries. If we compare this organization with EU, we can see that despite cultural diversity European Union has common territory, history, religion, close languages, which makes developing common European values and organizing sociocultural projects both on the territory of the union and outside it more logical and natural. Moreover, EU countries and the USA have resources to finance programs of cultural diplomacy. At

the same time, it is much harder for BRICS to find common axiological grounds, as well as finances. To be objective, it is mainly Russia and China that have opportunities to support their cultural programs both within its own countries and abroad. [6]. The impact of these programs is complicated with two factors – inability to formulate their agenda on global scale and lack of appeal of BRICS countries that are viewed by the remaining part of the world (58%) as disadvantaged, dangerous and repressive societies.

3.3. Expert assessment of BRICS cultural projects

We divide BRICS cultural projects into several categories: the projects that take place during summits of the BRICS countries; the projects that have BRICS logos that are timed to coincide with the summits; the projects that have been organized outside summits and without BRICS logo, but they demonstrate developing relations between countries-members of the union.

It is crucial to have a template or a model for any assessment that can be used by an expert. In case with BRICS cultural projects we take American cultural projects as a template because they have global nature and can serve as a great example of shaping the public opinion through the tools of soft power.

According to our research, the main shortcomings of BRICS cultural projects are that very few people see them, visit them and know about them. [7]. Despite the fact that BRICS unites 42% of the world population, only 3% out of 42% know about these projects and if we take the whole 100% of the world population this indicator will be significantly less. Taking into consideration this minimal coverage, the influence of BRICS in the world in terms of guiding the public opinion on the global scale (shaping the agenda), developing unified system of values, identity is quite low, especially if we compare it with the influence of American and European cultural projects.

The other shortcoming is in our opinion in the fact that members of BRICS are themselves under the influence of the global leader. This is but one more goal that has to be solved by BRICS in the process of developing cultural politics and initiating cultural projects – reviving cultural authenticity and independence of internal politics, including cultural politics, that has to become one of the most essential themes in cultural projects launched by this organization.

The main idea of the projects that take place simultaneously with BRICS summits is to demonstrate equality of cultures included this union and to introduce lifestyle of people from local cultures to summit guests. This goal can be accomplished by organizing such

projects as photographic exhibition, film festival and media forum that were launched after signing the agreement on cultural collaboration. [8].

In the context of cultural assessment, these projects are a fantastic example of communicative interaction between the BRICS members. The main ideology behind this union requires understanding the cultural authenticity of the BRICS members not just in the minds of the delegation heads but, what is even more important, by the citizens of these countries. Films are the best way of doing it. Dialogue of cultures that takes place at the film festivals is a chance to determine the main vectors of BRICS cultural and social development and formulate the agenda for the future. At present, we see that films accentuate cultural differences more than similarities.

It does not mean that we should reject that living creativity of BRICS members, but it would be wise to use more hands-on methods, especially since both Russia and China have a lot of experience in shaping the audience's desired worldview. The main question that we always come back to is what the philosophical grounds are, what is the ideology that is supposed to underlay the foundation of BRICS. As a matter of fact, it is the most crucial issue that leaders of BRICS should tackle if they really see themselves as the heads of new regional centres of power in the multipolar world of the future.

4. Conclusions

Developing criteria and principles of communicative influence of the BRICS countries cultural production should become the main goal of cultural assessment for the participants of this organization. The goal of BRICS is to create new image of the alternative future. Agreements about film-making should also be rooted in the same idea because, as we can see now, every participant of BRICS is trying to use this organization for promoting its own goals, there is a shortage of resources and it is very difficult to be a unified entity. That is the reason why inviting specialists in culture, philosophy, history to help with the development and construction of BRICS' future is so essential.

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