

THE POWER OF CULTURE TO CHANGE LIVES

Why culture should be at the heart of efforts to tackle some of the key challenges facing the international community

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The British Council has prepared this publication ahead of the world's first summit of Culture Ministers – The Edinburgh International Culture Summit – to stimulate debate about the role of culture in government, and the contribution it can make to tackling key international challenges.

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ABOUT THE BRITISH COUNCIL

The British Council creates international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and builds trust between them worldwide. We are a Royal Charter charity, established as the UK's international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations.

Our 7,000 staff in more than 100 countries work with thousands of professionals and policy-makers and millions of young people every year through English, arts, education and society programmes.

We earn over 75 per cent of our annual turnover of nearly £700 million from services which customers pay for, education and development contracts we bid for and from partnerships. A UK government grant provides the remaining 25 per cent. We match every £1 of core public funding with over £3 earned in pursuit of our charitable purpose.

FOREWORD

The Edinburgh International Festival has always been notable for ambition and innovation.

This year sees the Festival sharing in a remarkable innovation, the world's first International Summit of Culture Ministers. It is a pleasure to be asked by the British Council to write a foreword to this publication, designed to highlight some of the key issues to be discussed at the Summit.

Culture can and should play a role in bringing people together, even those with very different world views. Culture can undoubtedly change individual lives. Beyond that though, it can help to solve intractable social and economic problems; to raise understanding between people and nations; and to encourage solutions to some of the major international challenges we all face.

With the pressing economic, social and environmental issues which face the international community, the Edinburgh International Culture Summit will create a much needed and rare opportunity to look at the role of culture in government and governments in culture. It creates a significant new platform to think about key issues such as how Ministries of Culture, and their equivalents, can encourage the right environment for helping culture in all its forms to develop and grow.

The summit also provides an opportunity for Ministers, and other key figures in the international world of culture, to think about, and discuss together, how cultural policy in countries across the world can be enriched by the sharing of international best practice and co-operation.

This unique gathering coincides with the 2012 Edinburgh International Festival, perhaps the greatest cultural festival in the world. One of the great strengths of the Festival is the vast array of international talent that it attracts and showcases in Scotland's historic capital city. I hope and believe that this backdrop, artistic and physical, will stimulate discussion and serve also as a reminder that culture is richer when it transcends national boundaries and serves as a force to connect people around the world.



David Wilson
Lord Wilson of Tillyorn KT GCMG

Lord Wilson is a retired British diplomat and was Governor of Hong Kong 1987–1992. He has held a number of other distinguished appointments including Chancellor of the University of Aberdeen; Master of Peterhouse, Cambridge; President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh; and Chairman of the Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland. Lord Wilson is also a Knight of the Thistle.

REASSESSING THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN GOVERNMENT

At this first ever international summit of cultural ministers, now is a moment to reassess the role that culture can play in tackling some of the principal challenges facing nations across the world.

As governments battle with the critical geo-political issues of the 21st century: economic uncertainty; climate change; water, food and energy security; poverty; terrorism; extremism; conflict prevention; and demographic change, it is important to ask, what role can culture play in helping communities rise to these challenges? And perhaps most

importantly, what role can culture play in fostering the closer understanding and collective action between nations that will be required? In short, how can culture help to turn an often zero-sum world of statecraft and diplomacy into a positive-sum environment of co-operation and development?



THE POWER OF CULTURE

Cultural policy is often marginal to the political process, outside of the mainstream of heavyweight economic and social policy debates, or is appended as a supplement to them. Against this backdrop, perhaps now is the time to reappraise the role of the culture ministry and, in particular whether the often marginal role of culture in government should be reviewed. Many countries do not have dedicated culture ministries, relying instead on a range of different bodies and agencies, but the same issues apply. Given the tough challenges facing the international community, now is the time to ask whether culture should be placed centre stage in the governing process. Here are some reasons why:

1. Building trust and enabling dialogue

Culture can transform people's lives in ways that governments often struggle to achieve. Once in a generation, governments achieve remarkable breakthroughs in social relations or in improving the quality of life for their citizens. These step changes tend to be tied to particular historical circumstances or incredible acts of political leadership: the ending of apartheid in South Africa; the founding of the NHS in the UK; the New Deal in the US; or economic reform programmes in China and India, lifting millions out of poverty. However, these moments of political greatness are in reality very rare. Evaluations of thousands of government initiatives around the globe show at best a marginal return on investment. The political process in fact frequently acts as a brake on open debate about underlying causes of social problems.

The cumbersome bureaucracies inherent in many public sectors around the world are not always adept at

tackling deprivation and disadvantage, or in ensuring an adequate supply of public goods. Governments rarely make good agents of innovation. Furthermore, politics often drives an agenda of narrow national self-interest at the expense of the overall interests of humanity.

Culture treads different ground. Instead of trying to solve social, economic or environmental problems through direct intervention, it creates the space where individuals can express, explore and re-imagine difficult issues. This allows received views of the world to be questioned and enables the development of genuine understanding and the building of new communities, by the very people who are most affected.

It can bring together protagonists from intellectually or culturally opposed or disparate groups and build trust and dialogue in a way that nothing else can. It provides a powerful means to engage people in issues they may otherwise

fail to see or choose to ignore: issues of gender, ethnicity, religion, community and conflict, and it can do so in a way that is both sensitive and at the same time brutally honest. It is one of the most powerful means of exploring and addressing the major challenges facing communities, nations and the wider international community today. Given the unprecedented levels of international co-operation required to address challenges such as climate change, global poverty, or terrorism, culture is a crucial tool in bringing people and nations together; to build the trust that will be required to enable joint political action.

2. Kick-starting economic development

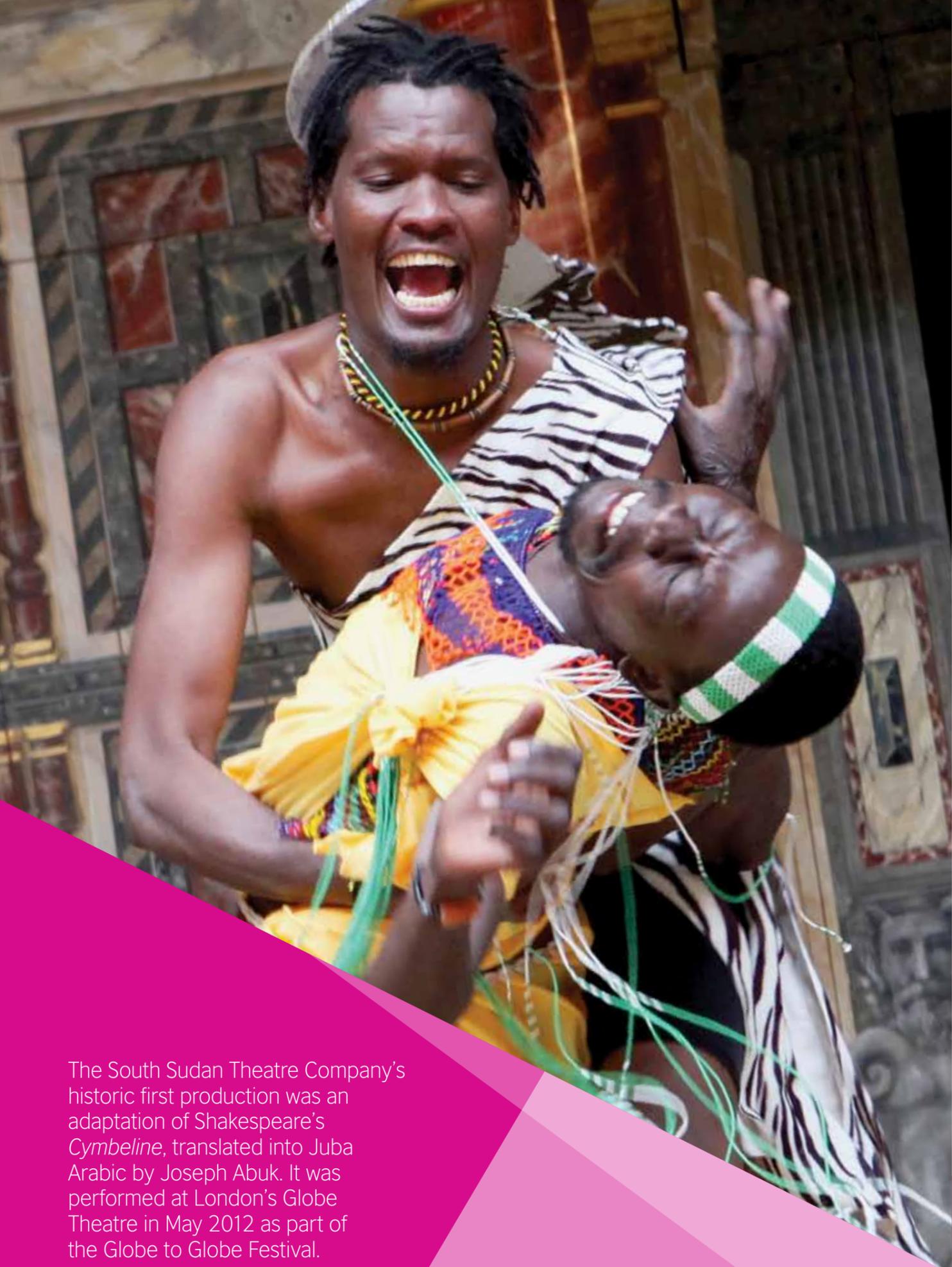
Culture has long been used to tackle difficult challenges at a local level. In the past 30 years, for example, governments have had significant success using cultural investment to kick-start economic development and regeneration. In the UK, examples include the way that the city of Edinburgh has harnessed the power of culture to develop some of the most successful festivals in the world – bringing huge economic, social and artistic benefits to the city. Transformational regeneration of East London arising from the Olympics, and bold civic leadership in other cities across the UK, notably Glasgow in the 1980s and 1990s, and Liverpool during and after its year as European Capital of Culture, have enabled many places to reinvent themselves and regain their confidence. In Newcastle/Gateshead,

the city has been rejuvenated through investment in projects such as the Sage Music Centre and the Baltic Arts Centre. The same can be said for regeneration internationally, Bilbao for example, transformed into one of the most visited cities in Europe through the Guggenheim Museum. In other parts of the world, investment in culture is also seen as key to social or economic development. In China, the government has said that the cultural and creative economy will grow to become one of the country's "pillar industries" by 2015. Across the globe, where visionary investments in the arts and culture have been made, economic development has followed, bringing investment and jobs. With it have also come those new skills and abilities which increase confidence and self-esteem, improve literacy and enhance an individual's quality of life.

3. Post-conflict reconstruction

Culture also plays a key role in helping countries emerge from periods of conflict. The Edinburgh International Festival itself was established in 1947 specifically to help heal the wounds of a devastating world war. The development of the Iraqi National Youth Orchestra, and the recent high profile staging of *Cymbeline* by a South Sudanese theatre company at Shakespeare's Globe in London, are recent powerful examples of the strength of culture to change individual lives and to symbolise national renewal and healing. Indeed, one of the first priorities of the transitional government in Libya has been to establish a Ministry of Culture with a clear remit to influence the development of post-conflict civil society, particularly through skills training and capacity-building.





The South Sudan Theatre Company's historic first production was an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, translated into Juba Arabic by Joseph Abuk. It was performed at London's Globe Theatre in May 2012 as part of the Globe to Globe Festival.

4. Tackling international challenges

Culture also plays a key role in fostering success on the international stage. Throughout history, relationships between countries have often been improved via cultural exchange or celebration. To put it simply, the arts can reach places that traditional diplomacy cannot. As a result the emotional links created by culture can be more enduring and more powerful than any short term political alliance. It is little surprise that the global influence of music, film and the creative industries gives countries such as the US a huge benefit in pursuing their international and economic policy objectives, which is reflected in several indexes of 'soft power' and something which many others are attempting to reproduce.

Indeed the work of Joseph Nye and other leading international relations academics have increasingly seen the development of 'Soft Power' and nations' cultural 'attractiveness' as the keys to success in gaining international influence and attaining foreign policy goals.

In an increasingly interdependent and globalised international community, many of the principal challenges facing humanity will require unprecedented levels of co-operation across national boundaries. Culture can be a key tool in creating the conditions for this to be successful.

5. Its influence on young people

Culture is by no means subordinate to politics. It provides the operating context for politics through language, education, the arts and popular culture. Indeed, cultural icons such as Lady Gaga in the US, David Beckham in the UK, Youssou N'Dour in Senegal and Amitabh Bachchan in India, have frequently had a higher profile and debatably a greater influence, particularly over young people, than many international political figures.



THE ROLE OF CULTURAL MINISTRIES

Given that culture and the arts have a unique power to influence people and change lives, perhaps now is an opportune time to reassess the role of culture ministries and their position within government.

Given this context, can culture ministers and international cultural leaders develop a compelling shared view about the place of culture in tackling the major global challenges of the 21st century? Can they collectively make the case for putting culture at the heart of both domestic and international policy? And can they make a compelling case for protected and enhanced cultural investment at a time of austerity in many countries?

In considering the role of government in supporting culture there are key considerations that must be asserted. First and foremost, by its very essence, culture is about people not governments. History has repeatedly shown that governments cannot successfully manufacture or create culture – it must come from the people. If a nation's culture is to be truly transformational in the domestic and international setting, direct state intervention in the creative process can risk undermining the power of artistic expression to tackle key social issues.

At a time when foreign ministries across the world increasingly use the term 'soft power', and develop structures and processes to coordinate their cultural diplomacy, we must remember that culture is not diplomatic. In many ways, culture is everything diplomacy is not. If diplomacy is about government, culture is about people; if diplomacy is about compromise, culture is about honest difference; if diplomacy is about state control of the agenda, culture is about the dispersion of power and influence to the many.

If government is therefore to successfully harness the power of culture, without stifling artistic expression and creativity, a carefully constructed policy response is required. Key questions that Ministers of Culture may wish to explore in this context are:

- How far can governments go in supporting culture and the arts, before their involvement becomes counterproductive?
- When is it best for governments to support and when is it best for them to take a back seat?
- How can governments help to facilitate the development of sustainable cultural and creative ecosystems, with sustainable funding models and support arrangements for the arts, which make their country an attractive international partner?
- How can ministries of culture and cultural agencies help marshal the cultural assets of their societies to build international trust and co-operation?
- How can culture make countries more attractive to business investment and what role can creativity play in fostering growth?
- How can cultural ministries develop more active international strategies to increase the sharing of cultural policy and practice from around the world?
- How can international cultural exchange be better harnessed to support and enrich creativity and artistic development domestically?



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