

## STARTING A DIALOG: UKRAINIAN CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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*The cultural diplomacy* for decades have been used to promote interests of the state abroad. Despite increased discussions in the Government and Parliament of Ukraine about the importance of African continent and naming Africa a strategic partner, there is no strategy of cooperation with the African continent. There are a number of topics that Ukraine and South Africa share and it would be useful to explore them more in a systemic way. The aim of this article is to look into particularities of cultural diplomacy of Ukraine in South Africa based on case study “Ukrainian Days in Cape Town” and Ukrainian-African project “I’ll be waiting for you under the Kaice-drat”.

The article suggests that at the time when there is little opportunity for political cooperation cultural diplomacy plays an important role for building centres of cultural diplomacy and ensure the dialog between the societies in different countries. Ukrainian community can play an important role in implementing cultural projects but can not be a single responsible institution. There is a need for Diplomatic Institutions, Ukrainian community, artists and cultural experts cooperate to create the centres of cultural diplomacy.

**Keywords:** cultural diplomacy, Ukraine, South Africa, cultural project.

### Introduction: South Africa why does it matter for Ukraine?

In March 2017 Ukraine and the Republic of South Africa have celebrated 25 years of diplomatic relationship. African countries are defined by the Ukrainian Government among the new strategic partners of Ukraine [1]. It could be mentioned such activities that are demonstrating the interest of Ukraine to the African continent as establishing of Ukrainian-African Business Council in 2014, academic forums (round tables “Ukraine and Africa: prospects for economic cooperation” at the National Institute for Strategic Studies and at the Chamber of Commerce of Ukraine in 2014).

Nevertheless, Africa as a continent remains undervalued for the Ukrainian

foreign policy. There are only 11 Ukrainian Embassies covering 61 African states [2]. Ukrainian diplomatic presence in South Africa is also very limited. The Embassy is situated in Pretoria, one of three capitals in South Africa and covers five more African states: Botswana, Namibia, Madagascar, Zambia and Zimbabwe. There is no consulates in major cities e.g. Parliamentary capital of South Africa – Cape Town which also limits the intervention of official diplomacy. As a result, Ukraine remains unknown for majority of South Africans.

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Strategic interests of Ukraine in South Africa can be defined as [3]:

- economic cooperation (trade);
- lobbying for voting at the international level;
- informational policy.

*South Africa is one of the most influential countries on the continent. Being the 25th-largest country in the world by land area, and with over 52 million people [4] this country plays a leading role in Southern-West Africa. Its economy is the second largest in Africa and the 34<sup>th</sup> largest in the world [5]. It is also one of the most influential countries in the African Union – the international structure targeting to strengthen links between African countries and to promote intergovernmental cooperation. In addition, South Africa is active in UN structures, and is member of G20 and the Brazil- Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS).*

Ending of the apartheid in a non-violent manner allowed South Africa to become one of the most diverse societies by multi-ethnic composition with wide variety of co-existing cultures, languages, and religions. Nevertheless, the country with 11 official languages, that is often referred to as the “Rainbow Nation” is still struggling to embrace its diversity and to build inclusive society.

The process of reconciliation in the society where majority (over 80 % of population) was suppressed and whose human rights were widely violated is very challenging. On top of that South Africa is facing new xenophobic attacks as the economic uplifting is not as fast as promised, but large numbers of migrants from neighbouring poorer countries, like Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Congo and others see it as an opportunity for employment.

South Africa is using different methods including the cultural reconciliation to rebuild the connection between its citizens. In particular, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May the Africa Day is celebrated within the country. Africa Day is a platform to promote unity amongst African nations and foreign nationals residing in South Africa [6].

*South Africa has historically little connection with Ukraine.* In South Africa, unlike Brasil, Argentina, Canada and many other countries around the world there was no organised migration of Ukrainians after the first or second world wars. Thus there are no organised centres of Ukrainians that would play a role of information centre about the country and its culture. Those individual Ukrainians who moved to South Africa for work or family reasons before and after the South African independence would join the post-soviet associations or assimilate with the local population. Thus there are no Ukrainian cultural centres, churches of the Ukrainian language service and till recently there was no Ukrainian school.

Organised Ukrainian community tracks its history only since 2014, when after the Revolution of Dignity and Russian aggression against Ukraine Ukrainian citizens residing in South Africa and South Africans of Ukrainian descent started to disintegrate from the post-soviet groups. Similar to other Ukrainians around the world, Ukrainians in South Africa has started to form different response campaigns and united their forces for organising of protests.

In March 2014, the first protest in South Africa against occupation of Crimea took place in Cape Town, in front of the Russian Consulate. It has become a trigger for Ukrainians to unite and to organise other activities directed towards awareness raising and information provision about Russian aggression against Ukraine. The groups of Ukrainians were formed in major cities: Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town. At the same time Ukrainian-specific social platforms, facebook pages: Ukrainians in Cape Town and Ukrainian Community in South Africa were established. The new informal networks of Ukrainians allowed to connect compatriots who lived in South Africa for over 10 or 20 years but were never part of Ukrainian community. For example, before 2014 there was no presence of Ukrainian group in Cape Town, but now the informal network is uniting over 116 Ukrainians. While initially the group was meeting for traditional celebrations of Christmas, Easter, Ukrainian Independence day, protests against political prisoners and other events.

It is important to state that on the international level the South African Republic has been supporting pro-Russian side during majority of international voting. For example, during the General Assembly voting on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2014 Resolution al voting. For example network is uniting over 116 Ukrainians. When there is little opportunity to cooperate on the political level the cultural diplomacy remains the opportunity for an influence.

### What is cultural diplomacy?

Cultural diplomacy is an important instrument to develop the connection between two countries. Naturally, there is little research concerning the cultural diplomacy organised by communities that are themselves in the process of self-development and self-defining. Thus, the authors based this article on the concept of cultural diplomacy as it is defined by Ukrainian academic discourse. The academic discourse defines cultural diplomacy as both individual events and systemic state policy. The topic of cultural diplomacy is researched at the National Institute for Strategic Studies (NISS). In 2016 few events for designing policy of cultural diplomacy that involved governmental institutions and the networks of public diplomacy within ‘Global Ukrainians’ were organised by NISS [7]. One of such events resulted in publication “The Policy of Cultural Diplomacy: Strategic Priorities

for Ukraine” which includes different views on development of cultural diplomacy and recommendations for state policy [8]. The issue of cultural diplomacy as a part of public diplomacy is researched by V. Yablonskyi, T. Chernenko and S. Gutsal from the NISS.

The majority of academic publications on cultural diplomacy in Ukraine appear in the journal “Agora” which is published by the Kyiv office of the Kennan Institute. The Agora publication became the platform for gathering academics in the area of cultural diplomacy. Different theoretical and practical concepts and approaches of cultural diplomacy are discussed in the Agora volumes 2015–2017. One of the leading authors is Natalia Musiyenko, an academic and connoisseur who is developing research methodologies around cultural diplomacy and testing it through the “Art of the Maidan” project [9].

The recent study on the interests of Ukrainian diaspora, conducted by Natalia Kolesnichenko-Bratun, includes methodological recommendations for state policy on cooperation with Ukrainian diaspora [10]. The comparative study on cultural diplomacy and successful practices of other countries in this area are dedicated publications of T. Peresunko, V. Civatyi and others.

In Ukrainian academic research, the cultural diplomacy is defined as activities, events, projects and programmes that promote Ukraine and its interests among citizens of foreign countries. These events are not directed toward Ukrainian diaspora itself.

The subject of cultural diplomacy is usually state and independent artists. But the recent change in the interests and positioning of Ukrainian communities residing abroad makes them a subject of cultural diplomacy as well [11]. Ukrainian communities are getting actively involved in sharing information about Ukraine, its image, lobby of its political and economic interests.

### **What are examples of cultural diplomacy between Ukraine and South Africa?**

There were few initiatives to open the dialog between Ukraine and Africa, but none of them were specific to dialog between Ukraine and South Africa.

In 2014 Pavlo Gudimov curated a project “Pulse of Africa” that presented combination of the Ukrainian painters’ art with African masks and sculptures from private collection. As Gudimov has sensibly commented during the opening of the exposition “There is nothing further than Africa, but there is also nothing closer” [12]. This exposition at the Dnipro city has showed the parallels of trajectories of Ukrainian and African cultures.

More recently in April 2017, the visual art of Dineo Seshee Bopape (South Africa) has received the Future

Generation Art Prize which once again has raised discussions around parallels and importance of common issues for Ukraine and Africa. Among the nominees of the Future Generation ArtPrize 5 out of 21 participants represent African continent.

The other project that is opening the communication between Ukraine and African countries is Kaice-Drat. It has started in 2015 from translation of some of the African poets into Ukrainian and grew first into the platform for a dialog based on contemporary African and Ukrainian poems. The project then continued with literature performances in different Ukrainian cities. During the performances 10 Ukrainian poets were reading both their poems and translated poems of the African poets which talked to the common issues. In 2016 the translated and created poems for the project have been published as the anthology “Kaice-Drat lives where it wants” [13]. The leading motive of this book became the topic of forced and awaited travels, loss of home and meeting the new, the topic of resettles and acceptance in the society of the foreign as well as discovery of yourself via the world of others.

The poems of four South African poets were included to the anthology. However majority of them are South Africans by origins, which currently live outside of the country. The topic of migration has been extremely important for South Africa for decades. It has also become important to Ukraine due to the conflict in the East which resulted into large numbers of internal migration and need for integration of resettles into their new communities.

The work that is performed by the project team is an example of a new cultural diplomacy of Ukraine which is a dialog about common issues in a language of art instead of simply presentation of your own culture.

Symbolically, the place under the tree “Kaice-Drat” (in traditional cultures of West Africa – is a place under the biggest tree where community gets together to discuss different issues), – the ideal location for such discussion.

The concept of the discourse was defined when musicians and singers have joined the project [14]. These were Ukrainian afro-drummers who collected folklore songs in Western Guinea, “AfriKAN” and singers from the East of Ukraine, participants of ethno-theatre “Dyvyna”, who had to move to Kyiv from their homes in Donetsk due to the occupation of the East of Ukraine. That was how the topics of forced migration, feelings of the migrants became the key issues for the dialog within Kaice-Drat.

The other important idea of Kaice-Drat was revisiting stereotypes. “I am convinced that you can gain the right not to be looked at through the lenses of stereotypes only when you yourself take off those lenses” – states Olena Guseinova, the editor of the Kaice-Drat anthology [15].

### Case study: Ukrainian Days in Cape Town

In the beginning of 2017 the voluntary association “Ukrainians of Cape Town” has designed and implemented successful precedent of the informational campaign about Ukraine named “Ukrainian Days in Cape Town”. The particularity of this pilot is that it was Ukrainian community of South Africa that took a lead in cultural diplomacy.

It is important to state that all events were fully funded by Ukrainians residing in South Africa and the funding from the Embassy of Ukraine to South Africa was not available due to multiple reasons e.g. inability of the Embassy to provide any information about potential financial support, long periods of approving State Budget and allocating funding to different Embassies.

Ukrainian Days in Cape Town aimed at promoting information about Ukraine among South Africans via cultural diplomacy. The Press Release of Ukrainian Days in Cape Town stated:

*This is an attempt of Ukrainians living in South Africa to tell more about their country and culture to Capetonians.*

*We believe South Africa and Ukraine have lots in common and thus there is a potential for productive cultural dialog. We want to talk about the social transformation that Ukraine is going through from communism to democracy, about inclusiveness and forming of civil society, about Russian-Ukrainian conflict and what it means for Ukrainians that are living in the area and for the world. All these topics raise challenging questions that we want to discuss with South African public.*

Ukrainian days in Cape Town was a series of events organised between 28<sup>th</sup> February and 16<sup>th</sup> of April that included talks on Ukrainian literature and troubled relationship with Russia, book exhibits at 4 libraries, First Ukrainian Festival and screening of documentaries and fiction movies at the Labia theatre.

The libraries that have strong book clubs and high levels of attendance in different geographical locations were selected for the project: Colin Eglin Sea Point Library, Central Library Cape Town, Table View Library and Somerset West Library. The book exposition included tourist guides, books on Ukrainian art, History, Cuisine, Culture, Language, modern literature, children’s books and unique copies of State collection of Ukrainian Museums. All books were in English. It is important to note that all libraries were interested to host the exposition and stated lack of information about Ukraine e.g. tourist books or literature books. Only one library had one book about history of Ukraine and one book of modern Ukrainian literature.

Two talks about Ukrainian literature were organised at Sea Point Library and at the Central Library in cooperation with the poets from Ukraine, participants of Kaice-Drat project and writer/poet Oksana Zabuzhko over skype.

In cooperation with the Embassy of Ukraine to South Africa the talk of the Ambassador was organised at the South African Institute of International Affairs “Ukraine’s price for European Choice: a Troubled Relationship with Russia. The roots and origins of conflict in Ukraine”. SAIIA is the most recognisable institution in South Africa that deals with international relationship.

The movies for the project were selected in cooperation with experts from DocuDays, International Human Rights Festival to ensure the high quality of selected movies. The final selections of movies were selected not only to talk about situation in Ukraine but also to raise issues that would resonate in South Africa and included: EUROMAIDAN. ROUGH CUT (2014) – the movie talks about the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine, about rediscovering history. Similar processes of taking down monuments and students protests to reshape the future and history took place in South Africa during “Fees must fall” and “Zuma must fall” campaigns in 2016 and 2017.

LOOKS LIKE HOME (2016) by Directors: Oleksandr Nazarov and Angelina Kariakina talks about the internal resettlement that is a big issue in South Africa. In Ukraine citizens resettling because of the war but in South Africa there is a large number of political migrants and internal economic migrants.

The movie “UKRAINIAN SHERIFFS” (2015) by Roman Bondarchuk is raising extremely important topic for South Africa, how communities taking control over police function. The distant village in Ukraine appoints two community members to play a role of policeman. In South Africa during 2015–2017 there were a number of cases when communities took control in their hands due to unavailability of police officers.

ALIVE (2016) by Taras Khymych the movie about the Ukrainian insurgent army and suppression that Ukrainians had to go through after the second world war has also parallels with the suppressions of the local African movements during the times of apartheid.

The culmination of Ukrainian days in Cape Town was First Ukrainian Festival that was organised similar to popular in South Africa food markets on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March. South African families could come to the festival to learn about Ukraine, try different crafts (pysanky, dolls-making, painting petrykivka and Mariya Pryimachenko style, making bread-birds “zhaivoronky” and others). Visitors could also taste Ukrainian food, listen to folk and pop music and see folk dances. The project Kaice-Drat has performed

Ukrainian poems translated into English and fusion of Ukrainian and African folk music. This event was attended by over 1000 people, many of whom wanted to receive more information about Ukrainian events in South Africa.

The project “Kaice-Drat” has participated in Ukrainian Days in Cape Town and raised the discussion on issues of deep social transformations that are important for both countries, despite the geographical distance.

At the National Museum of English literature in Grahamstown the participants of the Kaice-Drat project poets Oksana Kutsenko and Ganna Yanovska have presented the project and introduced the challenges that Ukraine is facing. An important result of the meeting was the translations of Ukrainian poems into English made by Robert Berold. The acceptance of the Ukrainian poesy and culture in the audience of Grahamstown and Cape Town has demonstrated high interest among South Africans to Ukraine.

### Discussion

The experience of Ukrainian Days in Cape Town has demonstrated that Ukrainian community can be a strategic partner for initiatives of cultural diplomacy. It is also showing that there is need for more systemic information provision and cultural diplomacy initiatives in South Africa.

At the same time, Ukrainian community cannot ensure systemic interventions and those should be responsibility of the official Diplomatic Institutions. Recent Decree #165 from 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2017 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine foresee cooperation of Diplomatic Institutions with Ukrainian communities abroad to support cultural diplomacy projects that are targeting establishment of positive image of Ukraine. Nevertheless, the process of projects selection and criteria for projects assessment remains unclear.

The case study of Ukrainian Days in Cape Town shows that there is interest for cultural projects between Ukraine and South Africa. At the same time it is important that cooperation is ensured in a systemic way.

The proposed network of Ukrainian Institutes [16] could be a solution for deeper interventions. However at the moment there is no provision to establish such an institute in Cape Town, shall it be established it would allow organise cultural projects and disseminate information about Ukraine not only in Cape Town but also in Southern Africa.

The future for cultural diplomacy project would be to ensure cooperation between state, NPOs and cultural experts. Local communities of Ukrainians have deep understanding of social challenges that the foreign countries are facing. But Ukrainian communities are not able to replace the systematic information provision that would

### Conclusions

There is a need for strategy of cooperation between Ukraine and African countries, including South Africa.

African countries that are going through the period of transformation from post-colonialism to democracy have many similar challenges with Ukrainian society. The language of art provides societies with an important opportunity to exchange their experiences and allow for a dialog to happen.

In particular, South Africa and Ukraine have a number of topics that could be explored via cultural initiatives: reconciliation, building inclusive society, dealing with victim – syndrome, protests and rebuilding democratic institutions, dealing with social issues of miners and many more.

It is important that the cultural diplomacy strategy of Ukraine unpacks the continent into different countries as only specific approaches can ensure productive dialog. Each of African countries is unique and despite some common pan-African topics it would be more efficient to design projects around specific issues that are uniting each African country and Ukraine. While Kaice-Drat project has started as a pan-African project within “Ukrainian Days in Cape Town” it was tailored to the specific needs of South Africa and ensured best dialog between poets of South Africa and Ukraine.

The experience of “Ukrainian Days in Cape Town” has shown that there is interest in South Africa to Ukrainian culture and there are a number of topics that can be jointly explored.

Despite success of once of initiative like “Ukrainian Days in Cape Town” there is a need to establish permanent structures that would be systemically work on cultural dialogs. Only systemic work on cultural diplomacy projects can ensure productive dialog between the societies. Such permanent intervention can be ensured via establishment of Ukrainian Institute in Cape Town.

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