

University of Alberta High School Model United Nations 2011

GA2: Economic and Financial Committee – The Question of Globalization of the Cultural Industry

Scope of Problem

Culture is a term that is often difficult to define, as its boundaries are often vague. When thinking about culture, many aspects come into consideration, such as the practices, attitudes, traditions, values, and other qualities that would holistically reflect upon a single state or unified body of people. Sometimes aspects such as religion or economic status play a role in defining a certain culture. In the global political sphere, the globalization of the cultural industry has been heavily debated, often in regards to the question of whether or not globalization implies Americanization. It has been argued that as countries continue to develop and grow, the homogenization of culture across the globe occurs, most notably changing towards culture associated and originating with the United States – the most powerful economic player.

Many have wondered whether or not cultural diversity is a threat to unique national cultures. This issue has been raised in UN summits such as the Blouin Creative Leadership Summit, which discussed the impact of globalization within the framework of food sources and commodity issues, health issues, as well as business regulations. Cultural respect was crucial in determining health and financial aid to countries in need, and was highly debated in terms of the Millennium Development Goals established at the Millennium Summit in September 2000.

The initiative of the UN to embrace cultural diversity has been prominently seen through foundations such as the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development by UNESCO on November 2001, and the General Assembly, in Resolution 57/249. The UN has also developed a common vision of promoting international access, utilization, and the sharing of information in order to improve quality of life for developing countries. This was initiated in part by the creation of the World Information Society, discussed at the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva in December 2003.

The globalization of culture works in ways tied to the open, free-market paradigm of global economic development. Cultural products are treated in a way as any other consumer products are. The so-called ‘logic of the marketplace’ holds that better and more cultural products will be produced within a non-restrictive setting. To illustrate free trade logic by example: a company in the Germany produces nails at the cost of 5 cents. A company in Zimbabwe produces the same nail at the cost of 2 cents. If Germany lowers its trade barriers, all Germans will buy Zimbabwean nails, because they are cheaper, and the German company will either have to start making cheaper (or better) nails, or go bankrupt. Consumers, however, will benefit from either result, and the thrifty Zimbabwean producers will be rewarded. A contentious issue, however, springs up when this same mindset is applied not to nails, but to, say, the television. Because Western media tends to have the competitive advantage of huge budgets, they are able to create

and advertize more competitive films. In this case, the Zimbabwean film industry does not even have a chance at competing against Hollywood, due to little start-up capital. The result is the Zimbabweans are swamped with American films, which are not necessarily ‘artistically better’ or more applicable to Zimbabwe – they are just better filmed and better advertized. The result is a loss of cultural capital to the West, a trend which worries several countries.

Other international developments such as the growth of the fast food industry have also been dominating the global sphere. American restaurants such as McDonald’s have been rapidly expanding worldwide, with over 31,000 locations open across the globe. The chain’s popularity and growth have increased in such way that none of its competition can rival its dominance. Another aspect of American culture in the world is seen when evaluating the number of top 100 films rated in the world. In 2009, 88 out of 100 films were American made films. This questions whether or not global culture is really just becoming American culture.

Possible Solutions

The UN has not outlined any specific solutions to the globalization of culture specifically, and little action has been placed to deal with the repercussions that follow from assimilated and transnational changes. As previously mentioned, the UN has done some work to promote open cultural boundaries, but the matters of inequalities and sensitivity to less prominent cultures still exists. Moreover, debates over effective global oversight mechanisms are still to be established.

Resources

Additional resources for this topic can be found below:

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml>

http://www.un.org/Depts/dhl/cultural_diversity/

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/gaef3287.doc.htm>

<http://www.un.org/partnerships/>

<http://businessfightspoverty.ning.com/page/inclusive-business-workshop>

<http://www.un.org/en/development/devagenda/information.shtml>