

Contemporary German-Irish Cultural Relations in a European Perspective

Exploring Issues in Cultural Policy and Practice

Joachim Fischer, Rolf Stehle (eds)

IRISH-GERMAN STUDIES

DEUTSCH-IRISCHE STUDIEN

LÉANN NA GEARMÁINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN

6

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E-Mail: wvt@wvttrier.de

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Forewords

On this occasion, two German words come to mind: firstly *Begegnung* – encounter or meeting: This volume offers its readers an encounter with culture and intercultural relations from many different and enriching perspectives. And secondly, *Freundschaft* – friendship: Ireland and Germany have enjoyed an excellent, long-standing political and economic relationship. Culture, mutual trust and common values have always been at the core of our relations. As the German ambassador said on the occasion of a celebration of twenty years of German unity in 2010, the European Union is our common home.

This volume is the fruit of a partnership between the Centre for Irish-German Studies at the University of Limerick and the Goethe-Institut Irland in Dublin. Cultural policy makers, cultural practitioners and academics have come together to discuss, among other themes, cultural relations of the EU, the diversity of cultures within the EU versus a common European culture. Some of the areas of research offer a fascinating backdrop which will add significantly to intercultural exchange and dialogue. Topics include societies in transition; challenges and opportunities for cultural policy in times of economic crisis; Irish perceptions of Germany; and changes and continuities in the German image of Ireland. This volume presents an opportunity not only to look back but also to look forward. A further emphasis is laid on Irish-German cultural relations within a European context, and on language learning, language policy and multilingualism.

What exactly are cultural relations? What is cultural policy? If I were a student of German taking part in the annual, very successful inter-schools' German debating competition, I would have to start with a definition of cultural policy. Not an easy thing to do, and in the German language!

An "Agreement on cultural co-operation between the Government of the Republic of Ireland and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany" has been in place since 1983. What does it mean in practice? Bilateral cultural exchange is well established; the following are some examples of such cultural exchange at work in the field of education:

The German Language Assistants' scheme facilitates schools in Ireland having a native speaker and representative of the target-language community in their classrooms. This scheme is reciprocal, as it also provides opportunities for Irish students to spend a year in German schools and classrooms. German-Irish teacher exchange is also facilitated. The most beneficial professional development for a language teacher is an opportunity to refresh his/

her linguistic skills as well as his/her cultural awareness in the country of that language.

For many years, the German government has provided scholarships to Germany for our students at second and third level. There is nothing more rewarding for young learners of German than to be a recipient of a German scholarship.

St Kilian's Deutsche Schule Dublin is a German school where both German native-speaker and Irish students can complete part of the Leaving Certificate in the German language, if they so wish.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the German government for providing such opportunities to students, teachers and schools.

This volume marks fifty years of the Goethe-Institut in Ireland. The Goethe-Institut has played a pivotal role in the promotion of the German language and in supporting the continuing professional development of teachers of German in Ireland. For this, we also wish to express our appreciation and gratitude.

If one were to ask any student of German in Ireland what impact the work of the Goethe-Institut has had on their learning, they would reply with the following: "to have the possibility of watching a real German film" or "to participate in the German debating competition". As part of the Goethe-Institut's initiative Schools: Partners for the Future, two schools in Ireland have received recognition for excellence in German.

A crucial aspect of the work of cultural institutes such as the Goethe-Institut is support for and promotion of the arts. The conference from which this volume emerged also served as a platform for representatives from the arts and other participants to exchange valuable information and experiences.

The German-Irish Chamber of Industry and Commerce has recently celebrated thirty years of existence. Over three decades, the German-Irish Chamber has initiated a multitude of business partnerships and investment projects, supporting both Irish and German companies in their endeavours.

There are many examples of cooperation based on partnership and dialogue between our two countries. It is my sincere belief that this volume will enhance our mutual understanding of each other's cultures and serve to foster already well established relations between Germany and Ireland.

An old Irish saying comes to mind which I think applies to our endeavours: "Strength comes through working together" or *Ní neart go cur le chéile*.

Ruairí Quinn
Minister for Education and Skills

This volume takes a European perspective on German–Irish cultural relations. This indeed is most timely. Europe figures prominently in both our countries’ day-to-day discussions at the moment but, as we all know, in quite a different context, primarily an economic one. The cultural dimension of Europe is being largely overlooked. Yet, even though originally the European project was predominantly about keeping peace in this war-ridden continent, its promoters knew that the peace project would only become a lasting success if it was based on our common European cultural heritage. In the overwhelming success of the economic development of our Union, and indeed in its current problems, we have almost forgotten these roots. To bring them back into perspective may even help us to climb out of the psychological trenches that are being dug in some on-going debates. European culture unites all Europeans: we cannot opt out; it has grown over so many centuries and we all have our share in its genesis. This bond is stronger than any treaty we have signed, a treasure we are allowed to raid without remorse, with great benefits for us all.

There is no doubt that we could do much better: languages are just one example. Understanding others begins with knowing their language, knowing their literature, their poems and plays. I was shocked to learn recently how few German literary titles are translated into English compared to the large number of works from English translated into German. Think of the Irish language alone, whose wealth was so highly valued by German scholars down through the ages. We need to do more to revive interest in, and passion for, foreign languages. It is not just the younger generation who realize that, in a globalized world, knowing other peoples’ languages and attitudes can add significantly to their chances in life.

The European perspective on German–Irish cultural exchange, the subject of this volume, will hopefully lead us to more active and closer cooperation. Investing in culture and cultural exchange offers a much safer long-term return than all the investments that have been the subject of recent public debate. Culture is not a luxury but a basic necessity. A shortage of funds is no excuse but an invitation to explore new ideas and approaches.

Busso von Alvensleben
German Ambassador to Ireland (2009–2011)

Cultural Policy in the European Union, German-Irish Relations and the Goethe-Institut Irland's First Fifty Years: An Introduction

Joachim Fischer and Rolf Stehle

These times of crisis for Europe, for the Euro currency and for the European Union project may not seem the most appropriate and auspicious time to reflect on cultural policy, either European or national. Exchequer funding for the arts tends to be among the first to be cut when money becomes scarce, often with widespread support from the electorate and despite forceful protests by artists and other cultural practitioners. Art and culture are perceived as the icing on the cake in times of plenty. It is probably true to say that this attitude is even more deeply ingrained in Ireland than may be the case in mainland Europe, particularly in Germany, where serious public funding of the arts, based on comprehensive cultural policies, has a long tradition. There is of course the Janus-faced nature of state funding of the arts: the twelve years of Nazi rule clearly demonstrated that state involvement in the sector is by no means always to the benefit of the arts themselves. Still, it can be argued that it is precisely in times of crisis such as this, when European solidarity seems at its lowest and national interests are resurgent, that we should recall the words of one of the founding fathers of the European Union, Jean Monnet. Looking back over a long career, he concluded: "If we were beginning the European Community all over again we should begin with culture." Without going into the complex issue of defining culture (highlighted in this volume in Andreas Wiesand's contribution), Monnet appears to have realized that a sense of European togetherness, an emergent European identity, and European political and economic integration are indeed closely linked to cultural concerns and that cultural policy should be at the centre of the EU project.

Culture expresses the thoughts, feelings and sentiments, the hopes and fears of citizens; knowing those of citizens from other cultures provides a real bridge between peoples. It is in the fields of culture and education that citizens can most easily interact with those in other member states and contribute to the creation of a European public sphere, the absence of which Jürgen Habermas has identified as one of the main reasons for the stalling of the European integration dynamic and indeed as an effective means of rescu-

ing democracy within the European Union.¹ Hans Magnus Enzensberger's recent essay *Sanftes Monster Brüssel oder die Entmündigung Europas* identifies the same "endemic shortcoming of the integration project".² In a recent review of the state of the European Union *Die Zeit* journalist Ulrich Greiner deplores the lack of cultural ambition in European integration debates and the consequent disengagement of intellectuals from them. The EU is little more to him than an "ökonomischer Zweckverband" – an association for purely economic purposes.³

Cultural policy became an area of community action with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. The complexity of the cultural dimension in a European context, attempting little less than the squaring of the circle, is expressed in Article 128.1 of the Maastricht Treaty:

Article 128. 1. The Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore.

2. Action by the Community shall be aimed at encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, supporting and supplementing their action in the following areas:

- improvement of the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples;
- conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage of European significance;
- non-commercial cultural exchanges;
- artistic and literary creation, including in the audiovisual sector.

While the EU might be interested in the second aim of "bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore", member states will want to make sure that the specificity of their national culture continues to flourish. Cultural policy is the area in which member states' insistence on retaining the ultimate say is most readily accepted. After all, since Herder's time culture and education are considered close to the core of national identity. Consequently, in comparison to national budgets, the EU's spending on culture as a percentage of its overall budget is indeed miniscule. The cultural budget is one of the smallest the commission commands and the post of Commissioner for Culture is not among the most coveted; her/his remit is generally merged with other areas,

1 Jürgen Habermas, most recently in *Rettet die Würde der Demokratie. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 5 November 2011, p. 31.

2 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Sanftes Monster Brüssel oder die Entmündigung Europas*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011.

3 Ulrich Greiner, *Europa vergisst seine Wurzeln. Die Zeit*, 29 September 2011.