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Serhiy HAVRYLOVYCH

PhD student at the Department of Creative Cultural Industries, National Academy of Culture and Arts Management, 9 Lavrska str., Kyiv, Ukraine, 01015

ORCID: 0009-0007-5013-6087

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INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES OF THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE PROJECT ART AXIS: FEATURES OF IMPLEMENTATION AND DYNAMICS OF CULTURAL DIALOGUE

*This article explores the origins and development of the International Project Art Axis, led by the Nonprofit Organization “Center for Cultural & Arts Initiatives.” It highlights the distinctive aspects of Art Axis, especially its role in international communicative activities and its broad inclusiveness. **The study aims** to reveal the results of the analysis of Art Axis as a unique cultural event that serves as a platform for showcasing the creativity of contemporary artists worldwide. **The research methodology** incorporates collecting field materials, employing observational methods, comparative analysis, the phenomenological method, the cultural studies approach, and the principle of historicism. **The scientific innovation** lies in systematizing the exhibition practices of the Art Axis project as a platform for the inclusive representation of creative potential across all social strata. Analyzing various types of inclusion in the project confirms their effectiveness, thus demonstrating the practical value of this work. This study can help develop methodological recommendations and lecture courses for students and postgraduates in creative industries and related disciplines. Additionally, organizers can implement some of these practices in other creative projects.*

***The conclusions** summarize the results of empirical research and support the hypothesis that the personal activities of its initiators—the cultural elites—play a crucial role in the international cultural dialogue, a form of cultural diplomacy. The project organizers have transformed the involvement of professional and amateur artists and creators from all social categories and age groups into an exclusive practice in exhibition activities. The project notably unites all participants around a creative theme from various countries, ages, experiences, and execution styles.*

The study also focuses on Art Axis’s “Art Treasure of the Project” fund, enriched annually with works from participants. This collection primarily promotes the culture of memory.

The International Art Project Art Axis navigates creative development and reflects contemporary artistic culture globally.

Key words: cultural dialogue, sociocultural space, cultural diplomacy, inclusion, exhibition practices, art project, visual arts.

Сергій ГАВРИЛОВИЧ

аспірант катедри креативних культурних індустрій, Національна академія керівних кадрів культури і мистецтв, вул. Лаврська, 9, м. Київ, Україна, 01015

ORCID: 0009-0007-5013-6087

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МІЖНАРОДНА КОМУНІКАТИВНА ДІЯЛЬНІСТЬ КУЛЬТУРНО-ТВОРЧОГО ПРОЄКТУ ART AXIS: ОСОБЛИВОСТІ РЕАЛІЗАЦІЇ ТА ДИНАМІКА КУЛЬТУРНОГО ДІАЛОГУ

У статті розглянуто обставини виникнення та процеси розвитку Міжнародного проєкту Art Axis, проведеного Громадською організацією «Центр Культурно-Мистецьких Ініціатив». Звернено увагу на особливості

Art Axis, зокрема на його функцію міжнародної комунікативної діяльності та широку інклюзію. **Мета роботи** – оприлюднення результатів аналізу Міжнародного проекту *Art Axis* як одного із унікальних культурних івентів, який став платформою для репрезентації творчості сучасних митців світу. **Методологію дослідження** становлять збір польового матеріалу, методи спостереження та компаративного аналізу, феноменологічний метод, культурологічний підхід та принцип історизму. **Наукова новизна** полягає у систематизації виставкових практик міжнародного проекту *Art Axis* як однієї із платформ інклюзії творчого потенціалу усіх верств соціуму. Аналіз застосування у проекті різних видів інклюзій підтвердив їхню ефективність, відповідно доведено практичну цінність праці, яка може бути корисною для розробки методичних рекомендацій, лекційних курсів для студентів, аспірантів зі спеціальності креативних індустрій та суміжних профільних дисциплін, окремі практики можуть бути імplementовані в інші творчі проекти.

Висновки узагальнюють результати емпіричного рівня дослідження та підтверджують припущення, що ключову роль у міжнародному культурному діалозі, як однієї з форм культурної дипломатії, відіграють особистісна діяльність його ініціаторів – культурних еліт. Зауважено, що ідея залучення у проект *Art Axis* художників-професіоналів, митців-аматорів, творців усіх соціальних категорій, вікових груп та інших статусних ознак трансформувалася у ексклюзивну практику виставкової діяльності. Проаналізовано, що однією з оригінальних особливостей цього міжнародного проекту стало єднання навколо пропонованої творчої теми усіх її учасників з різних країн, віку, досвіду та манер виконання.

Окрему увагу звернено ще на одну особливість *Art Axis* – фонду «Скарб Проекту», який щорічно збагачується творами учасників. Колекція виконує насамперед мнемонічну функцію для популяризації культури пам'яті.

Міжнародний проект *Art Axis* є своєрідним навігатором креативного розвитку та індикатором рефлексій сучасної художньої культури у світі.

Ключові слова: культурний діалог, соціокультурний простір, культурна дипломатія, інклюзія, експозиційні практики, мистецький проект, образотворче мистецтво.

Relevance of the Problem. Despite the complex political, economic, and social situation and the pandemic, cultural and artistic projects in Ukraine over the past decades convincingly demonstrate significant development not only within the country but also at the level of international art events. However, most of these events are oriented towards commercial activities, promoting the brand of a private owner or a financially invested party with specific interests. In contrast, socially-encouraging creative projects remain an underdeveloped niche within the creative industries. During the implementation of such projects, new creative personalities emerge, showcasing their professional levels and talent, particularly those who previously lacked the opportunity to present their achievements independently. Therefore, the cultural study of the development processes of open creative platforms is timely, considering their social orientation, relatively easy integration into the artistic environment, and, importantly, the leveling of the conventional status divide between “genius” and ordinary artists.

Modern trends in visual arts compel the study of the specifics of their representation in exhibitions (Havrylovych, 2023a). Exhibitions allow observers to trace not only the style and themes of the artworks and installations but primarily the moods of the authors. This socio-psychological aspect reveals the artists' experiences and reflections on societal events.

A comprehensive study of the phenomenon of art exhibitions, especially internationally, is crucial for cultural studies and art history, sociology, and international relations. Interdisciplinary approaches typify the studies on exhibition forms within the International Art Project *Art Axis*, the focus of this article.

Analysis of Recent Research and Publications. Primarily, valuable insights in this scholarly work have come from general theoretical works by M. Cummings, J. Nye, P. Goff, D. Stelowska, M. Protsyuk, N. Otrshko, O. Kalakura, and I. Gavrylenko, which illuminate the concept of cultural diplomacy and similar practices globally and about Ukraine (Nye, 2004; Cummings, 2009; Kalakura, 2010; Goff, 2013; Gavrylenko, 2014; Stelowska, 2015; Protsyuk, 2016; Mokhnyuk, 2021; Otrshko, 2021; Shostak, 2023). These publications and other researchers' works provide an understanding of the nuances of public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, cultural dialogue, “soft power,” and other critical definitions of the phenomena. Studies on international communications through the lens of creativity in general or in the context of a specific art form have helped to understand the transformative processes, reflections, and contemporary forms of creative achievements' representation (Gerchanivska, 2013; Musienko, 2016; Gerchanivska, 2017; Tormakhova, 2022; Sendetskyu, 2023; Sendetskyu, 2024). Examining these works has facilitated

a comparison of these processes, which are evident in exhibition practices, as the representation of Ukrainian art abroad remains a vital link in strengthening Ukraine's image globally.

Articles by culturologists, art critics, sociologists, and philosophers about the current situation in the art market have been the most informative for the proposed research. They reflect the reactions to negative influences of the COVID pandemic, the Russo-Ukrainian war, and other inspiring factors (Vovk & Lisina, 2019; Oliinyk, 2020; Bezuhla, 2021; Bolyuk, 2021; Lukovska, 2022; Rusakov, 2023).

However, despite the theoretical and theoretical-practical literature sources processed, the primary source of the research remains the field material obtained through direct study of the phenomenon in exhibition practices – the International Art Project without age restrictions, Art Axis, using observation methods, interviews, and processing information posted on the project's website.

Research Objective. The purpose of this study is to present the results of analyzing the International Project Art Axis as one of the unique cultural events that serve as a platform for representing the creativity of contemporary artists across various categories. The scientific tasks were defined as follows: to gather information about the specified project and determine the specifics of its implementation in the context of sociocultural processes; to focus on the originality of international collaboration forms that shaped the format of cultural dialogue. To achieve these objectives, researchers collected field material, particularly during exhibition openings. Observational methods at the annual cultural event – the Art Axis exhibition vernissage – and comparative analysis and the principle of historicism proved particularly useful in the multifaceted comparisons of these annual exhibitions. Researchers applied the phenomenological method to identify the distinctive features of the International Project Art Axis. The cultural studies approach played a crucial role throughout all stages of the scientific work, particularly in writing the conclusions.

Presentation of the Main Research Material. Key Features of the Art Axis Project: The idea of creating the International Project Art Axis originated from the Non-profit Organization “Center for Cultural & Arts Initiatives,” which, besides implementing this annual event since

2018, co-organizes several other original cultural and artistic events. The artistic director of the project is Andriy Sendetsky. The Lviv Regional Charitable Foundation “TORBA” became the co-founder and curator of the project. Later, the National Union of Artists of Ukraine, the Department of Culture, Nationalities, and Religions of the Lviv Regional State Administration, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine joined the collaboration.

The International Project Art Axis aims to engage artists of all social strata, statuses, and worldviews in a shared creative platform at an international level to represent their vision on a proposed theme. In addition to this goal, the project performs a vital mission – helping talented individuals with special needs discover their artistic flair, encouraging them to attend educational programs, and providing them professional artistic materials.

It is worth noting that the project's name implies a call to adhere to balance, harmony, and the right course of navigation. In Art Axis, we also see an allegory of a kind of compass, a necessary orientation amid the contemporary forms of creative industries, which we can interpret as an unbounded turbulent ocean of human creativity. The arrows of this allegorical navigator are traced in the pair of letters “A”, composed in the project's logo. They point in opposite directions, symbolizing the project's idea: presenting alternative visions, diverse approaches, and individual worldviews. In configuring these arrows, it is also appropriate to see representatives of different cultures who build an intercultural dialogue in real-time at the “touch point” – on the International Art Project Art Axis platform. This idea resonates with the creative themes of the project, which change annually. However, a cultural review of this landmark art event needs to be analyzed chronologically and with specific emphases on the particular features of international communicative activities.

Communicative Dynamics of the Cultural and Artistic Project: As previously mentioned, the International Project Art Axis launched recently in 2018, announcing an art event. The organizers announced the competition theme, “The Palette of Transformations or With a Fairy Tale–to Every Heart,” and opened submissions. They revealed the first results on May 30, 2019, during the exhibition's grand opening, which featured 34 works. Artists from Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Japan, Kosovo, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Serbia, South Africa, and Ukraine had their pieces displayed at the Lviv Palace of Arts. Yuko Adachi from Japan won the leading award of the Art Axis project for her watercolor “Mom with Children” (International Art Project Art Axis 2019, 2019). It was encouraging that the pilot edition of the project reflected a broad geography of participants and their diverse artistic practices. Such results confirmed that the project idea would be successful in the future, as representatives from Europe, Asia, and Africa immediately joined.

Despite the halt of many global processes due to the pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) starting in December 2019 and throughout 2020, the organizers successfully attracted many artists. The COVID-19 virus made people accustomed to isolation from society worldwide but opened new perspectives for philosophical reflections on self-awareness, internal cultural dialogue, and contemplation. Coincidentally, shortly before the pandemic began, the organizers of the Art Axis project announced the theme for the second edition of the competition: “The Way to Yourself” (International Art Project Art Axis 2020, 2020). The attempts to understand one’s ego, a topic philosophers have invited us to consider since antiquity, remains relevant. With this theme, the organizers received over one hundred fifty applications for the contest. Unlike the 2019 edition, Art Axis 2020 featured a slightly different geography of participants (ages 6–59): China, Hungary, Italy, Nigeria, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, and Ukraine. Thus, despite formidable obstacles due to the pandemic, we observe a positive dynamic in cultural dialogue regarding age and geography.

It is important to note that the project, according to its protocol and regulations, envisages two stages of reviewing the submitted works: first by a qualifying committee and then by an expert committee. The project organizers typically invite creative professionals from various countries who are part of the cultural elite rather than representatives of a distressed archetype who mimic “elitism” (Shostak, 2020, p. 52).

After reviewing the submissions, the organizers compiled the exhibition collection under “The Way to Yourself.” They displayed these works as part of the 2nd International Art Project Art Axis without age restrictions. The grand opening

occurred on December 11, 2020, at the Lviv Historical Museum Gallery. The event recognized artists with laureate diplomas, and some received special honors. Halyna Otchych (Ukraine) earned awards for her watercolors “Autumn Garden” and “My Icarus”; Anna Prydatko (Ukraine) for her acrylic paintings “St Showers (Homage to The Golden Age)” and “Couple”; and Philip Iroegbu (Nigeria) for his graphic works “Insomnia,” “Beyond the fear,” “Songs of Innocence.”

It is essential to mention that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine participated in the award ceremony for some foreign participants who could not attend the exhibition opening in person. For instance, diplomatic representatives of Ukraine in Abuja, the capital of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, presented the award to F. Iroegbu. This event demonstrates the combination of governmental and non-governmental international diplomatic cooperation thanks to the mission of the Art Axis project. Such landmark events for the project participants and the embassies of Ukraine underline the importance of cooperation between the non-governmental and governmental sectors in cultural diplomacy processes.

The exhibition and results (27 works selected) of the 2nd edition of the International Art Project without age restrictions took place on August 5, 2021, in the halls of the Lviv Palace of Arts. Artists worked on the theme “The Eighth Day of the Week,” trying to capture the fleeting nature of existence on canvas. The artists’ ages ranged from 6 to over 60 years, showcasing the project’s generational inclusivity. The organizers received applications from across Europe (Czech Republic, France, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Ukraine), the American continent (Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Haiti, Mexico, the United States), and South Africa (International Art Project Art Axis 2021, 2021). The international communication network confirms the cultural elites’ interest in the project and demonstrates its active promotion by the Art Axis organizing committee in a multicultural landscape.

In the same year, the project introduced an innovation: participants, like the committee members, gained the ability to evaluate the presented works if they wished. This change allows artists to engage more actively in the project and avoids the feeling of being under examination (International Art Project Art Axis 2021, 2021).

From October 29 to November 5, 2023, the Center for Architecture, Design, and Urbanism, “Powder TOWER,” hosted the 4th edition of the International Art Project Art Axis exhibition. The slogan of that year’s competition was “My Reality.” Participants from Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Hungary, India, Kenya, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Uganda, Ukraine, United States, Uruguay, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe represented their countries (International Art Project Art Axis 2023, 2023).

Thus, in the short term, and despite the global challenge of the pandemic and the severe, prolonged Russo-Ukrainian war, the International Project Art Axis has expanded the geography of art event participants. The project’s international communicative activity has been established thanks to the persistent work of the organizing committee, which is undoubtedly considered the cultural elite (Kopiyevska, 2015). The permanence of conducting the art event depends on the established friendly relations.

Project Fund “Art Treasure of the Project”: A significant feature of Art Axis is its collection fund, which participants whose works were highly appreciated by the juries, visitors, and organizers enrich annually with new donations. The “Art Treasure of the Project” is essential for its development and the representation of the collection in partner galleries beyond the annual exhibition tours in Ukraine and for commodifying each piece as an object of artistic value (Oliinyk, 2020, p. 162). Besides popularizing the state’s cultural heritage, which is undoubtedly vital in establishing international cultural dialogue, this also serves a mnemonic function necessary for constructing a culture of memory (Nahorna, 2013, pp. 13–14). Retrospective exhibitions, which permanently remind us of cultural heritage, thus preserving traditions and a culture of honoring the past, are crucial in defining the identity of each ethnicity. Initially, the “Art Treasure of the Project” Art Axis included works by Victoria Kovalchuk (Ukraine), Agnieszka Daca (Poland), Misia Konopka (Poland), and Yuko Adachi (Japan), marking the beginning of forming a representative fund from past editions of this international art event.

Cultural Elites of the Project: This category includes representatives from various professions and social groups who have a significant impact on politics, education, science, creativity, and business and who nurture spiritual values distinguished by ethical, aesthetic, and intellectual qualities. The cultural elite is a concept that universalizes the definition of the creative elite as the bearer of a particular set of social, ethical, psychological, and spiritual connections and relations (Stoyanova, 2017, p. 88).

The International Art Project Art Axis is a public initiative without regular funding from state or city budget sources. Cultural elites from Ukraine and abroad supported the project’s founding and development. Thanks to the unpaid active work of organizers, coordinators, and volunteers, the art event continues to be successful. Patrons and sponsors made the high quality of Art Axis possible, showcasing a vibrant example of philanthropy.

As mentioned, the cultural elites of Art Axis, in addition to festival benefactors, include representatives from the scientific and educational professions, ambassadors, and heads of various institutions. These primarily consist of artists directly involved in Ukrainian creative brands or promote them through art management (Havrylovyh, 2023b). The festival’s organizing committee invites these elites to participate in the qualification and expert juries, demonstrating international cultural dialogue practices among participants and experts. As a result, Art Axis embodies non-governmental cultural diplomacy, effectively engaging in international communicative activities that enhance the global reputation of Ukraine and its people.

For example, in 2020, this prestigious mission was carried out by Oksana Poltavets-Huyda, a distinguished artist of Ukraine and rector of the Mykhailo Boichuk Kyiv State Academy of Decorative and Applied Arts and Design (Kyiv, Ukraine); painter Robert Boersma (Noorbeek, Netherlands); professor at the Klaipeda Department of Visual Design of Vilnius Academy of Arts, Vakariss Bernotas (Klaipeda, Lithuania); artist, art director of the French-Canadian association “Peintures de France,” Magdalena Gotovska (Warsaw, Poland). The duties of the formed qualification committee include reviewing the submitted artistic works according to the criteria set out in the project’s regulations.

From Ukraine, the committee's experts included a Doctor of Arts, an Academician of the National Academy of Arts of Ukraine, a leading researcher at Maksym Rylskyi Institute of Art History, Folklore, and Ethnology of the National Academy of Science of Ukraine, Tetyana Kara-Vasyliieva; Honored Worker of Culture of Ukraine, member of the Union of Artists "Club of Ukrainian Artists," Candidate of Art History, Professor, Vice-Rector for Research of Lviv National Academy of Arts, Roman Yatsiv; and from abroad—set designer, professor at Jan Matejko Academy of Arts and she has a position of a Head of Stage Design Department, Malgorzata Komorowska (Poland).

In the Third Edition of the international project in 2021, participants' works were qualified by painter, photographer, and cultural animator, PhD in Fine Arts, Adjunct Professor at the Institute of Painting and Artistic Education at the Pedagogical University of Krakow, Krzysztof Marchlak (Krakow, Poland); painter, Honored Artist of Ukraine, Associate Professor of the M. Boychuk Kyiv State Academy of Decorative Arts and Design, Roman Petruk (Kyiv, Ukraine), and previously mentioned Vakariss Bernotas (Klaipeda, Lithuania) and Magdalena Gotowska (Warsaw, Poland).

In 2021, the experts included a Doctor of Art Studies, Professor, Dean of the Faculty of History and Theory of Art of Lviv National Academy of Arts, Honored Worker of Arts of Ukraine, Board Member, and Head of the Division of Arts and Art Management of Lviv Regional Organization of the National Union of Artists of Ukraine, Member of Union of Art Critics and Historians, Rostyslav Shmahalo (Lviv, Ukraine); Candidate of Art History, Distinguished Artist of Ukraine, Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Restoration of the National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture, head of the National Union of Artists of Ukraine, Konstantin Chernyavsky (Kyiv, Ukraine). They were also serving as experts and were previously named member-correspondents of the National Academy of Arts of Ukraine Oksana Poltavets-Huyda (Kyiv, Ukraine) and professor Malgorzata Komorowska (Krakow, Poland).

The distinguished names of cultural figures, artists, and educators from art institutions confirm their status level in creative practices and the specificity of the cultural elite representatives invited by the Art Axis project committee.

Scientific Novelty: The research contributes to the sociocultural analysis of a new and successful art event—the International Art Project Art Axis, particularly examining its development dynamics, participants, and operational features. Art Axis exemplifies a successful creative case among non-governmental projects, showcasing the active involvement of cultural elites in its editions. The International Art Project Art Axis highlights the breadth of inclusion, especially concerning age categories, educational-professional criteria, and ethnic origins. Such features can be implemented in other creative projects, thereby underscoring the practical significance of this study.

Conclusions and Prospects for Further Research. This study examines the features and development dynamics of the International Art Project Art Axis, demonstrating effective international communicative activity. Since its founding in 2018, despite the challenging circumstances of the Russo-Ukrainian war, the project has established itself as a stable annual international art event and contributed to strengthening Ukraine's image in the global community.

A valuable characteristic of the Art Axis project is the inclusion of its participants, particularly regarding age categories and their acquired experience, whether professional or amateur skills. Based on these qualitative attributes, the art event occupies its unique niche among other global exhibition practices.

The empirical research presented, based on the author's field material, reaffirms that cultural elites serve as a potent communicative bridge in the realization of creative ideas, the representation of a state's artistic achievements, and as effective ambassadors in the field of art, ultimately acting as prominent patrons of charitable initiatives. Many believe that non-governmental cultural elites are a primary communicative resource in international relations, given that official cultural representations of the state have not yet achieved the steady rhythm necessary for dynamically promoting the country's creative brands.

The author intends to develop these considerations further. Verification will involve examples from other art events, with particular attention given to international exhibition practices involving Ukrainian artists. Therefore, the issues discussed in this scholarly exploration remain relevant for future studies.

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