

A Proposal for a Ten Year Polish Soft Power Plan

Synopsis

This draft proposal for a Ten Year Polish Soft Power Plan highlights the vital role of soft power in bolstering national security and international stature, particularly following Ukraine's successful cultural diplomacy during the war.

Currently, relatively low ranked on the Global Soft Power Index, Poland needs a strategic, sustained effort to promote its culture globally, especially in English-speaking nations. The plan adopts both bottom-up and top-down approaches, focusing on diverse cultural activities and substantial financial investments.

Objectives include portraying Poland as a modern, dynamic, and safe nation, challenging negative stereotypes, and enhancing international appreciation of Polish culture. Key steps involve research, budgeting, forming a cultural mission, hiring PR firms, and establishing monitoring systems.

A practical, low cost competition is proposed as a starting point for promoting Poland and its culture internationally.

Expected benefits include increased commerce, improved self-worth among Polish citizens, and greater access to global political and economic influencers.

1.0 Executive summary

The war in Ukraine has demonstrated how important soft power is to national security, as never before.

Poland's GDP stands at approximately Euro 630 billion as of 2023, positioning it as the 21st largest economy globally in nominal terms and 20th in PPP terms. Despite this impressive relative position, the latest report on Global Soft Power Index 2023 shows that Poland is placed in 33rd place (out of 120 countries) behind several considerably smaller countries.

Increased Soft Power positively impacts a nation's brand performance in investment, trade, talent and tourism attraction, resulting in economic and nation brand value growth.

Soft Power takes years to build up, so it must be developed and projected in a sustained, co-ordinated and strategic manner. Most importantly it must be supported by non-party political governmental funding at a more significant level than in previous decades.

To achieve a significant improvement in its soft power ranking, an order of magnitude increase in investment on current spending is required in the promotion of Polish culture (very broadly defined) internationally. A public / private funding strategy should be considered with key stakeholders from the Polish corporate sector, co-funding state investments in selected areas of cultural activity.

The strategy should focus on influencing the "intelligentsia" (i.e. the media, politicians, public intellectuals, opinion formers etc), and aim to be attractive to the general public in western societies. These are two different but overlapping audiences.

Poland should be seen as a modern and vital nation, looking forward and not backwards over its painful past. Our people should be presented (and be allowed to present themselves) as being like any other modern European people, with diverse opinions, beliefs, and forms of self-expression.

Polish cultural promotion should be presented in ways which are relevant to local communities. This can be most effectively done by relating Polish stories, cultural events, histories or activities to similar British and American stories or achievements. This idea was brilliantly and successfully demonstrated by the recent Young Poland Exhibition, but also by the Abakanowicz and Copernicus Exhibitions in London.

Finally, the plan proposes a competition; a national contest for the best ideas for promoting Poland and its culture internationally - "internationally" being the main criteria.

Improved international public recognition and appreciation of Polish culture will help with:

- Commerce, exports, inward investment, security and defence.
- An improvement in the feelings of self-worth of Polish citizens and its diaspora.¹
- Polish youth's desire for more modern, but internationally recognised heroes in addition to the four well known "Cs":- Copernicus, Chopin, Curie and Conrad.

This draft proposal is a discussion document only. It is a proposal to create a plan for a soft power strategy. This document will be developed further through conversations with interested parties, including public institutions and private/commercial companies.

2.0 Why Poland needs a long term strategic plan for projecting Soft Power

2.1 The war in Ukraine has demonstrated how important soft power is to national security, as never before. The Ukrainians have demonstrated a brilliant soft power strategy and its execution. It has been instrumental in gaining and maintaining support from the Western Powers for its self defence against Russian aggression. Poland now faces an existential risk too, despite its membership of NATO.

2.2 Soft power, as projected internationally particularly in the English language through various form of media, has made the Western Allied democracies, their voting public and media, sympathetic towards Ukraine. Poland however, lags behind Ukraine, and indeed other relatively small countries like Korea, in its international recognition (or its brand awareness) amongst the peoples of Europe and the USA.

2.3 Poland needs to change its image internationally which, crudely stated, is a nation of plumbers, builders and in the USA - "Polaks". Worse still, it is often portrayed in the international media as a nation of anti EU, anti German, anti-semites, anti LGBTQ+, and xenophobes.

2.4 Poland spends about Euro 1 billion annually on supporting culture in Poland, but only about Euro 30 million on its promotion internationally, in other words, Soft Power (SP). By contrast, Poland is now spending well over Euro 25 billion annually on Hard Power (HP). As any wise general will admit, Soft Power is a material force in the exercise of Hard Power. We need to rebalance these forces urgently from the current poor ratio of HP25,000 to SP30 (833:1) by an order of magnitude, if not two orders of magnitude.

3.0 The objectives

3.1 Soft Power takes years to build, so it must be developed and projected in a sustained, co-ordinated and strategic manner, most importantly with non political government support and finance. The objective of such a strategy must be to support Polish popular and high culture internationally over at least a ten year period, in a manner which is, unlike the Chinese PRC's efforts for example, natural and nuanced. It must be honest and not face saving. It must be self-critical, amusing and sometimes possibly even offensive to certain Polish citizens and its diaspora who have an idealistic view of their history, culture, and values.

3.2 Poland is not the only country which has suffered traumatic injury from aggressors in the past. Poland has all the problems of a developed democratic nation so the objective of the proposed strategy must be to present its culture "warts and all", but obviously emphasising its special place in the European family of nations.

3.3 A good test of the success in meeting our objectives would be to regularly survey the opinions of the men and women "in the foreign street" about what they know of Poland and its culture. An English journalist reporting from Poland recently told me that when he wants to summarise Poland to the British he talks of the four "Ks or Cs" - namely Copernicus, Chopin, Conrad, Curie; maybe adding Karol Wojtyła, Wałęsa/Solidarnosc. Only this handful of names has international recognition. That is simply not good enough.

3.4 Poland should be seen as a modern and vital nation, looking forward and not back over its painful past. This an image which needs to be "created" principally for international media, opinion formers, politicians, and the intelligentsia in general.

3.5 Poland and its people should be seen as a prosperous, dynamic, creative, inventive, entertaining and "switched on" nation exploiting the most modern technologies.

3.6 Poland should be a "go to" country, a place to study, have fun, and enjoy the good things of life in the 21st century in perfect safety (including safety from all sorts of

prejudice). Encouraging foreign tourism to Poland is one of the most effective ways of achieving this desired effect. Yet Poland ranks behind the Czech Republic in the numbers of tourist it attracts each year.

3.7 Poland should be seen a land of opportunity, welcoming all people of all nations, creeds and beliefs, sexual persuasions, and material standards.

3.8 Poland should be seen as a land of the free where pluralism is encouraged across the board of human activities.

3.9 Poland should be seen as a safe nation where the rule of law is sacred and corruption of all sorts is at a minimum.

4.0 The macro and micro plans

4.1 The macro plan should be “bottom up” rather than top down or “dirigiste”. In other words, we need many diverse micro plans and efforts to build the macro strategy. This would allow numerous different Polish individuals and institutions who may not see eye to eye on all, or indeed any, important issues to engage in the proposed projection of soft power.

4.2 These micro plans could be simply a matter of supporting the creative efforts of individuals and organisations in their own projects. They do not need to be even aware of, or in agreement with, the idea of a macro strategy for the projection of Polish soft power. But what the macro strategy must be is universally accessible, which means in the English language first and foremost. Clearly the same efforts should be made in France and Germany in their respective languages.

4.3 The above “Micro plans” should be co-ordinated by an organisation whether public or private, or a mixture of the two, guided by a consultative body of “people in the arts” selected from Poland and its diaspora, as well as experts in soft power promotion internationally.

4.4 The most effective way to project cultural soft power is by relating or intertwining Polish stories, cultural events, histories or activities with similar matters in the UK or USA, or other English speaking countries. The recent exhibition, Young Poland which related the works of the British Arts and Craft movement and William Morris with the later works of the Young Poland artists was a great success with the British public.

4.5 Micro plans would cover the full range of artistic endeavours, both popular and “high brow”: Music of all types and genres; the visual arts including film and TV productions, painting and sculpture exhibitions, architecture, posters, comedy in English, performances of all sorts including dance and circuses, theatre; sports; food and cooking; literature and pop lit (translated obviously); podcasts and publications in English; cultural festivals; and last but not least, higher education for foreigners.

4.6 Most of the above are already being done (extremely well in Poland for Polish people). However, very few of these activities or events are created with a vision of international promotion. They certainly lack significant financial support and professional marketing expertise for international promotion. This means employing foreign organisations with proven track records in promotion and marketing. IConsequently, significant budgets have to be allocated for this to happen effectively.

4.7 Once research is concluded on which Polish cultural offerings have the best chance of making the most impact, more resources could be focused over a 10 year period on those activities.

4.8 The plan should be developed in partnership with key Polish commercial stakeholders who would recognise the benefit of sponsoring internationally certain cultural activities, events, festivals, cultural organisations and individual artists.

4.9 The plan should include initiatives to foster global partnerships with cultural institutions in selected countries. This would enhance global media presence and digital outreach.

4.10 Partnerships with global influencers who could share their experiences of Poland should be considered.

5.0 Research, and the development and execution of the plan

5.1 In the first instance, research should be conducted to determine which Polish cultural (and indeed, non cultural) activities have the best chance of making a significant impact outside of Poland, particularly in the English speaking world.

5.2 The research should identify the strengths and weaknesses of Poland's "brand" in specific (and significant) markets and countries. The longer term aspect of the research would permit benchmarking of the country's brand with competitors year-on-year. This would, in turn, allow for adjustments in the strategy and tactics of Poland's soft power promotion.

5.3 Since significant state expenditure would be involved in the execution of the soft power plan, the research programme would have to include accountability to key stakeholders such as politicians, civil servants, business leaders, the media, the arts community and, of course, Polish citizens.

5.4 Once the initial research phase is completed, experts in the field of soft power promotion should be employed to develop a plan and appropriate budget to support the plan.

5.5 The budget for this plan, no doubt, would have to be in many hundreds of millions of Euros. Perhaps we could start with 1% of what Poland is currently spending on defence annually - on Hard Power. This 1% is estimated at Euros 300 million annually which is about 10 times the current spend on promoting Polish culture internationally.

5.6 To ensure success, we would need to secure the first five year's finance/budget to allow the project to start and become self-sustaining.

5.7 The implementation and execution of a long term and politically independent Polish Soft Power Plan would be best achieved through a public-private partnership, with key stakeholders from the Polish corporate sector co-funding state investment in selected areas of cultural activity (broadly defined). Research may show that the suggested 5% is not sufficient to make an impact over and above what the State already spends on supporting culture internationally.

5.8 Set up an audit, polling/canvassing and reporting system to stakeholders.

6.0 A relatively low cost starting point (investment) for the ten year plan.

6.1 This 10 year plan is ambitious and its vision is possibly too grand to seem achievable. So breaking it down into smaller, practical ideas might be a good way to launch it.

6.2 One suggestion under the heading of “micro plans” would be for the Ministry of Culture and/or Ministry of Foreign Affairs perhaps, to run a competition; a national contest for the best ideas for promoting Poland and its culture internationally - “internationally” being the main criteria. Open to all potential participants, including individuals, groups (such as music bands, theatre ensembles or design clubs, cultural and art festivals, commercial companies of all kinds, and public bodies, including schools, universities, museums, and regional and local authorities (with suitable qualifying conditions).

6.3 The prizes would consist of grants of money and/or access to public resources to help the winners develop their projects with a view to implementing the best, with government support.

6.4 As an example, in round one, the competition organiser could give a number of prizes of, say, Euro 10,000-100,000 each for the winners to develop their ideas in detail by, for example, hiring expert support, such as a designer, artist, writer, project planner or electronic media specialist.

6.5 These initial winners would then compete in a second round for a small number of larger prizes - say up to Euro 1m - to further develop the project and bring it closer to implementation. At this stage, the contestants could be required to raise pledges of funds (or even matching funds) from other sources - such as commercial companies - as part of their bid for more public support.

6.6 At this point too, they could be encouraged to consider potential foreign partners, for example, a foreign museum for a Polish-themed exhibition. Clearly such international engagement would need to evolve strictly in line with existing government policies on such contacts, and in cooperation with existing institutions, such as the Polish Cultural Institutes.

6.7 In a final round of support, the selected winning projects would go ahead with the approval of the authorities and a range of financial and non-financial backers and partners.

6.8 Clearly, running the contest would not in itself commit the authorities to any open-ended financial commitments. The costs, timing and circumstances would all have to be approved by the stakeholders.

7.0 Below is a first draft list of projects which could be included in any ‘Micro’ part of this long term plan. It is by no means exhaustive or detailed.

At the micro level: We (by which we mean Polish institutions and/or the Polish private sector and private individuals) should invest funds in supporting:

- Norman Davies’ initiative to create departments of Polish Studies in top British Universities.
- Potoroczyn’s efforts to secure endowments for professorships in Polish Studies at top American Universities.

We should lobby for an increased share of the Polish State budget to:

- Support PCI/IAM operations around the world to finance or co-finance major exhibitions such as the recent Abakanowicz, Young Poland, and Copernicus exhibitions in London.
- Support the handful of (usually poorly paid but dedicated female staff) in PCI/IAM offices in a handful of countries around the world to promote Polish culture in all its popular and classical forms: music, art, literature, architecture, history, sport, contemporary events, and festivals etc.

- **We should support:**

- More investment in young people engaged in competitive sports. Poland won an embarrassingly small number of medals at the last Olympics.
- Additional investment in the promotion of successful and/or recognised Polish artists (painters, sculptors, musicians, performers) abroad. The Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw is hoping to rival the MOMAs in NY, LA, Paris, London, Bilbao etc.
- Support a major exhibition of Felix Topolski's works at the Tate or in a new gallery; or indeed any other great but living Polish artists

We should support more:

- Scholarships for foreigners to study in Poland's top universities. Poland is not doing enough to rival smaller countries such as Holland.
- Tourism and the Polish tourist industry which is achieving lesser results than the Czech Republic.

We should support or promote:

- Polish architects and their efforts to win competitions abroad. Polish architects are not as well known around the world as Norwegian, Swedish, Danish and Finnish architects
- Poland's great scientists and inventions or discoveries internationally. Marie Curie became famous for her genius and achievements abroad, as indeed did Chopin, Conrad. and Paderewski .
- Translations and translators of Polish literary or popular works of fiction and non-fiction because the "market" does not take care of such things, even when the works are considered brilliant. Olga Tokarczuk won the Nobel prize because of the genius of her creative writing, but ALSO because someone took a risk investing in the translations of her works, as well as the efforts of her British translator.

We should spend public funds supporting projects like:

- Chodakowski's idea for a Memorial Garden of Gratitude to Foreigners who have helped Poland or Poles in significant ways.
- English language Podcasts on Polish topics of interest to world audiences. Podcasts by Ukrainians, British and American journalists have done much to promote Ukrainian culture, Ukraine as a country, as an important nation and a People. Run by a handful of journalists, The Kiev Independent .has had a big impact on what influential people decide about Ukraine's future and its independence. The same applies to The Telegraph's podcast, "Ukraine The Latest", amongst many other similar podcasts.

We should create:

- An institution like CREATIVE UK which promotes British culture in the UK and abroad to politicians, decision makers and influencers - producing credible statistics on the Creative Arts's economic contributions to the UK's GDP; helping it to attract investment, talent and good will from outside the UK.
- A Polish initiative like the British GREAT campaign which could co-ordinate (but not control or dominate) all the various institutions or organisations which promote art and culture abroad.

We should action:

- Stefan Wagstyl's plan for a nation wide competition to select the best and most appropriate projects which could promote Polish Soft Power.
- Grants of financial support for the initiation and subsequent development of selected projects to be implemented by successful individuals and institutions

We should spend money on:

- Research and consultancy to determine which initiatives, projects or specific areas of Polish Cultural (SP) promotion (and in which countries) would generate the most optimal cost-benefits over say, ten years.
- Brand Finance's research and suggestions on how to increase Poland's rating on the Global Soft Power Index.

We should improve our communications with foreign journalists:

- To inform the people who should know about Poland's economic success story over the past twenty years
- To "ask" why Poland's economic performance far exceeds its Soft Power performance relative to other countries, for example.

8.0 The following people have contributed, commented on, or approved of this draft plan and support its further circulation to interested parties for comment and support. *Names in green or italics have still to grant permission for their names to be added.* We will be adding more people over the coming months to support and contribute to this plan.

- Wagstyl Stefan
- Fudakowski Piotr
- Adamczyk Franciszek
- Chodakowski Jan
- Donimirska Alicja
- Dangel Paweł
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