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### **«IRISH PUBS» IN UKRAINE: COMMERCIALIZATION OF A CULTURAL STEREOTYPE**

The paper addresses the problem of interdependence between stereotyped notions about a cultural product and its commercialization. The case of «Irish pubs» created in Ukraine as a commercial enterprise is taken as an example. In the fake version of the Irish pub, the original meaning-form relationship of the pub concept is distorted. The transformation of «authentic pub» concept as a result of export is described as a case of global brand appropriation: in a new cultural and social context the original cultural meaning is devaluated, reduced to an exotic commodity or completely lost.

**Key words:** cultural stereotype, cultural values, commercialization, globalization, Irish pub, cultural export, brand appropriation.

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### **«ІРЛАНДСЬКІ ПАБИ» В УКРАЇНІ: КОМЕРЦІАЛІЗАЦІЯ ОДНОГО КУЛЬТУРНОГО СТЕРЕОТИПУ**

Досліджено взаємозалежність між стереотипними уявленнями про культурний продукт та його комерціалізацією. Проблему розглянуто на прикладі «ірландських пабів», що виникли в Україні як комерційні підприємства. У «фейковій» версії ірландського пабу початкове співвідношення форми й змісту виявляється перекрученим. Трансформацію концепції «автентичного пабу» внаслідок експорту представлено як випадок апропріації глобального бренду: в новому соціокультурному контексті вихідний культурний зміст знецінюється, зводиться до характеристик екзотичного товару або цілковито втрачається.

**Ключові слова:** культурний стереотип, культурні цінності, комерціалізація, глобалізація, ірландський паб, експорт культури, апропріація бренду.

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### **«ИРЛАНДСКИЕ ПАБЫ» В УКРАИНЕ: КОММЕРЦИАЛИЗАЦИЯ ОДНОГО КУЛЬТУРНОГО СТЕРЕОТИПА**

Исследуется взаимозависимость между стереотипными представлениями о культурном продукте и его коммерциализацией. Проблема рассматривается на примере «ирландских пабов», возникших в Украине как коммерческие предприятия. В «эрзац-версии» ирландского

паба первоначальное соотношение формы и содержания оказывается искаженным. Трансформация концепции «аутентичного паба» в результате экспорта представлена как случай апроприации глобального бренда: в новом социокультурном контексте исходное культурное содержание обесценивается, сводится к характеристикам экзотического товара или полностью утрачивается.

**Ключевые слова:** культурный стереотип, культурные ценности, коммерциализация, глобализация, ирландский паб, экспорт культуры, апроприация бренда.

**Problem statement.** Since the mid-1990s, a worldwide interest in Ireland and its unique cultural heritage has been steadily growing. The admiration for «things Irish» was considerably boosted by the rise of the so-called ‘Celtic Tiger’ (2003-2004). Celebrating St. Patrick’s Day and Halloween, studying Celtic ornament, visiting Ireland as tourists became fashion, especially in the USA and Canada — the countries with a high percentage of people of Irish descent. In line with the new positive image of Ireland, some business companies found it profitable to invest capital in the export of Irish cultural goods. In 1991, the newly-formed Irish Pub Company started an ambitious project with the aim of exporting Irish drinking culture across the globe. According to some sources, since its foundation the company has opened over 2,000 Irish pubs in 53 countries. The total number of similar establishments all over the world exceeds 7,000 [9; 7]. Local businessmen in ex-Soviet countries hastened to capitalize on the trend; as a result, dozens of ‘Irish pubs’ have appeared on the vast territory of the former Soviet Union, including Ukraine.

The original idea behind the export of Irish pubs was to build them in conformity with the wide-spread stereotyped notions about ‘pub authenticity’, i.e. preserving «...authentic design; authentic Irish food; authentic Irish beverages; Irish music and entertainment; and employees and management training...» [10]. Now the question arises to what extent Irish pubs worldwide preserve this ‘authenticity’ and whether they are really ‘Irish’. Cultural export/import in a globalized world inevitably affects both cultures in contact. Thus, it would be interesting to study the phenomenon of Irish pub export from a culturological point of view, tracing the fate of the original cultural stereotypes in a new social and cultural context.

**Previous research and the aim of the paper.** Characteristic features of the traditional Irish pub as a unique cultural and social institution are described in detail for example, in [4]. In his book, Barich [1] investigates the destructive effect of commercialization on the original pub culture in modern Ireland. Kelley [6] attributes the gradual loss of pub ‘authenticity’ in Ireland to the existence of ‘fake Irish pubs’ outside the country. The transformation of Irish pubs in North America has been the subject of

some recent Internet publications [e.g. 3]. However, the culturological aspects of Irish pub export to the countries of the former Soviet Union, and to Ukraine in particular, seem to be underexplored. Accordingly, the **purpose of this article** is to analyze the interrelation between outer attributes and the cultural meaning of the Irish pub recreated in Ukraine as a commercial enterprise.

**The main material.** A cultural stereotype is a standard set of simplified beliefs about typical characteristics of a particular cultural phenomenon, usually belonging to another ethnic group. There are positive, negative, and neutral stereotypes. The idealized image of the Irish pub and the cultural values ascribed to it are an example of a positive stereotype. As a rule, cultural stereotypes exist parallel with ethnic stereotypes and are associated with representatives of the ethnic group in question. The following ironic citation demonstrates how friendly attitude towards Irishmen is transferred to the cultural product of their country (the remark concerns an 'Irish pub' outside Ireland): «As you gaze around, you might think of the Irish — O, that friendly, hard-drinking, sweater-wearing people! — and smile.» [6]. Such associations are cleverly used by shrewd businessmen in their effort to bring this product to market.

In the opinion of some authors, the 'authentic pub' stereotype can be traced back to the 19th century. It was formed under the influence of an English Victorian representation of the Irish as a romantic, «pre-modern» people with an "alcohol-centred identity" [7]. The traditional ('authentic') Irish pub is commonly viewed not just as a drinking place but as the heart of the local community, an important meeting place with its warm, casual, friendly atmosphere where strong interpersonal ties are established. As The New York Times put it, «A good pub is a place devoted to conversation, with drink as the lubricant.» [8]. Thus, the 'authentic' pub performs the functions of community integration and social leveling. The architecture, the pub name, the pub sign, the décor, the traditional games and folk music are symbolic values that foster national identity and local patriotism. Another outstanding feature of the traditional pub is its special etiquette (e.g. the ritual of round-buying and informal relationship between the customer and the staff). These qualities are believed to be largely responsible for the mass proliferation of 'Irish pubs' on a global scale [e.g. 6].

At present, however, some authors are skeptical about the 'authenticity' of Irish pubs even in Ireland. Searching for a «good old pub» in the Republic of Ireland, Barich could not conceal his disappointment. During his tour of Irish pubs this American writer discovered that «... the authentic isn't always easy to find and at some level may even be an illusion.» [7]. The pubs he finds are either lifeless «museum pieces», «seating facilities for the consumption of food» with TV screens or fakes exploiting nostalgic

feelings [1]. Moreover, in recent years many community pubs throughout Ireland have closed down. Under these circumstances Ireland can lose one of her unique cultural traditions; today the warm, cosy 'authentic' pub is nothing less than a stereotype which is great for tourism worldwide but is killing off pubs in Ireland itself; even her national identity is at stake [7].

Other authors doubt the very idea of an 'authentic' pub: «Barich is searching for a myth. ... The notion that there's one authentic pub experience, or any inauthentic experience is basically ridiculous. Barich wants a pub that is suspended in time ... Who's to judge what's authentic? ... He's seeking an ideal that he's been told is "authentic" ... [8].

One cannot but admit that Ireland and Irish pubs are changing. There are several explanations for the decline and closures of traditional pubs in Ireland which can be roughly classified as follows.

Economic recession and the erosion of old communities. Because of the economic crisis of 2008 pub owners had to charge higher prices. As a result, people who could not afford frequenting the pub began buying alcohol at grocery shops and drink at home. The economic recession forced many people to leave their permanent residences in search of a job or become commuters.

Legislation changes. Stricter laws on drunks and the smoking ban also contributed to the change of drinking habits; members of the community who had previously convened in pubs preferred now drinking at home.

Changes in drinking habits and lifestyle. A growing trend in the late 20th century was for the Irish to consume more wine and less beer (probably under the influence of continental tastes). As people could not get good wine at most pubs at that time, they bought it elsewhere and drank it at home. Besides, one should not underestimate the effect of Irish health programmes and public campaigns against excessive drinking. Many young people in Ireland do not have much time for pubs today; they pay more attention to education, sports and professional career. A new, more critical attitude towards alcohol is being formed in Ireland.

Competition from the leisure industry. Offering various forms of public and home entertainment such as television, DVD, video games, new cafes and restaurants, the leisure industry proved to be a serious competitor to the traditional pub. In an effort to attract customers and survive, pub owners had to commercialize their establishments introducing quizzes with cash prizes, karaoke, etc.

All these developments could not but ruin the 'authenticity', or traditional cultural values characteristic of old-fashioned pubs. Barich, for instance, is convinced that «...Ireland's culture is being exported while concurrently being diluted at home» [1]. Kelley goes even further, saying that «...Ireland is exporting a kind of quaintness that never quite existed

in Ireland itself.» [3]. The same authors, however, consider global pub export to be mainly responsible for the current decline of the traditional pub culture in Ireland. It was the Irish Pub Company (IPCo) that started building pre-packaged 'Irish pubs' overseas which «... are now being built in Ireland itself, alongside (and often crowding out) the real, authentic Irish pubs. The fake replaces the real.» [3]. Describing Irish pub imitations built outside Ireland by IPCo and later by local firms, numerous Internet publications use various derogatory designations such as 'fake', 'hoax', 'ersatz'. Reproduction of the 'Gaelic' architecture, pub signs, interior design and other material elements of the pub without its traditional cultural and social values is called 'ersatz irishness', 'ersatz authenticity' and 'mass-manufactured faux-heritage' [7]. Even in North America with millions of people of Irish origin most of the so-called «Irish pubs' are 'in name only'.

While in modern Ireland the traditional 'good old pub' is endangered, the virtual image of it seems to be very popular with the Irish diaspora in the USA and Canada. It is quite natural for the descendants of emigrants to experience nostalgic feelings for the 'old country'. Consequently, the idealized version of the Irish pub came to represent the lost far-away home and the 'golden days of one's youth'. Smart businessmen succeeded in turning this fascination with the 'lost Irish paradise' into a product which critics call 'inauthentic Irish pubs'. As far as Irish-American pubs are concerned, some authors disagree with the epithet 'inauthentic': «This isn't inauthenticity... Irish-Americans are not Irish ... they have forged a new identity, and part of that identity is the sort of mythologizing of their ancestral home ... We're not creating pubs to reflect the modern experience of the Irish, but to reflect the myth of Ireland that Irish-Americans have created. So, ... it is authentically Irish-American.» [2]. Thus, the attempts to reproduce the idealized pub of the 19th century with its emotional and psychological connotations in a different age and under different social conditions were inevitably doomed to failure. An old myth can only be revived as an imitation.

No wonder that further export of 'Irish pubs' from America to other parts of the world ended up in the emergence of bars «... where the only Irish thing about the place is the name above the door». [9]. Having heard stories of the warm atmosphere in Irish pubs, potential customers in Ukraine had probably expected that similar establishments in their country would provide friendly service, comfort, and a sort of a civilized escape from the hardships of everyday city life. However, by the time 'Irish pubs' appeared in Ukraine, this name and the stereotypes around it had become an international brand used (or, rather, misused) for commercial purposes. Therefore, what was accepted in Ukraine was not an Irish, or even American import, but a global product, a mere commercial brand.

A strong brand is supposed to be a guarantee of quality and reliability. In the case of Ukraine it seems rather dubious. Citations from some Internet publications posted by the angry customers of 'Irish pubs' in Kharkiv and Kyiv speak for themselves:

«April 30, 2016. The establishment is in the centre of Kharkiv. Poor choice of Irish beer, the service is rude...»

«July 11, 2015. ...shocked. The toilet (in a pub! where people drink beer!) always closed... The pizza ... smells and tastes like slops... The music is awful. The only merit of this establishment is its interior design.»

«August 31, 2014. The interior design is excellent, everything is new and beautiful. ... As for the cuisine, it's lousy... The same with the choice of beer... only two sorts. ... I don't recommend.»

«August 15, 2014. ... That establishment must die. Those people have no right to work in the service sector. I was insulted four times.»

«...they charged extra 300 ml of vodka which we hadn't drunk!»

« And then they started playing live music... their repertoire included [Russian] chançon ...in a Irish pub! ...very strange... The prices are like in Europe, but the service is like in a cheap boozier.»

«Is there anything Irish [in that pub] except Guinness?»

«March 8, 2016. ... A typical boozier with Irish-style pictures on the walls. ... no [authentic] atmosphere... No customers at all, small wonder. ... don't recommend!»

«November 11, 2015. People, think twice before [entering]... The interior is cheap and uninviting. The food is ghastly!»

As we can see, 'Irish pubs' in Ukraine imitate the outward appearance of such establishments, totally ignoring the deep cultural meaning ascribed to their 'authentic' counterparts. The well-known phrase 'Don't let names fool you' seems to be very much to the point here. Thus, the discrepancy between form and content in this case could be attributed to the following factors.

1. Positive cultural stereotypes of 'things Irish' combined with the customers' wish to experience something new and exotic. «The branding of Irish bars owes more to cultural stereotypes and modern global economics than to Celtic tradition.» [6].

2. Chance for businessmen to make quick money with the least effort and investments possible ignoring cultural 'details' like proper choice of drinks, music, food, etc. It is worthwhile to quote here some apt remarks by a Russian blogger: «Want easy profit? Open an Irish pub... The owner of such an establishment is always going to have visitors. But he hasn't done anything to ensure his success. And it is not to the owner's credit. The image of 'Irishness' was being created over the centuries by the peace-loving, merry and positive people of Ireland.» [5].

3. Absence of traditions of hospitality, customer-friendly service in the former Soviet Union. The service in many 'Irish pubs' is a direct continuation of the worst traditions of Soviet 'obschepit' (public catering) with its cheating and rudeness.

4. Absence of a powerful Irish diaspora in Ukraine which could need pubs with an 'authentic' nostalgic atmosphere.

5. Absence of a permanent pub clientele; in big Ukrainian cities with weak communal ties and no tradition of community gatherings most 'Irish pub' customers are occasional visitors.

Thus, the sequence of cultural transformations in the case of Irish pub export to Ukraine can be described as follows:

- a) a cultural stereotype generates market demand;
- b) as a result of demand a commercial model is created;
- c) the original meaning of the cultural stereotype is lost in the newly created commercial model.

We can now summarize the evolution of the Irish pub stereotype on a global scale under the influence of globalization and commercialization in the following way:

1. 19th century 'authentic' Irish community pub.
2. Late 20th century Irish pub. Partial loss of authenticity.
3. Irish-American 'inauthentic' pubs. Blend of American cultural values and nostalgia for 'good old pubs'.
4. Irish pub exported from America worldwide as a global brand. Ersatz Irish pubs as commercial enterprises preserving outer attributes.
5. Export to Ukraine. Appropriation (or, rather, misappropriation) of the global brand. Fake Irish pubs blended with worst Soviet-style 'public catering' traditions. Partial loss of outer form with total loss of Irish cultural authenticity: the 'Irish pub' in Ukraine is partially Irish in form while 'Soviet' in content.

**Conclusion.** The idea of exporting Irish pubs globally was originally prompted by the positive image of this cultural institution. In the process of its commercialization this stereotype was accompanied by the idea that it was possible to recreate an authentic Irish pub by just imitating its outer form. Both stereotypes proved to be erroneous. The first one belongs to history, the second one proceeds from the wrong notion of a homogeneous cultural space, ignores local traditions and underestimates the destructive effects of commercialization on the deep cultural meaning of the exported product. In the case of Ukraine it is particularly obvious.

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