

“Babeş-Bolyai” University
Faculty of European Studies
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Cultural diplomacy and its current prospects:

Actors and Models

-Abstract

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ABSTRACT

Key words: cultural diplomacy, soft power, complex interdependencies, international cultural relations, globalization, assessment models, transnational actors, international organizations, corporate cultural diplomacy, internal and external cultural diplomacy in the EU

In an increasingly interconnected world where information is shared in real time and long-distance communication is not only instantaneous but also accessible to anyone with an Internet connection, a constant reassessment of the conventional definitions of power is paramount. The transition from hard power and *realpolitik* to soft power and, according to a newer theory, *smart power*, is the perfect representation of the numerous transformations taking place in the conceptual spectrum of “power”.

This dissertation focuses on „cultural diplomacy” as a part of *soft power* and it examines the different shapes that it can take today as well as the methods of assessing its use by various actors on the international arena.

One of the most widely quoted definitions of cultural diplomacy belongs to Milton C. Cummings who describes it as “the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding”¹

Culture, defined as “the sum of all material and spiritual values created by mankind throughout history”² is propagated through extremely diverse channels which include: literature, art, music, the fundamental rights of human beings, religious beliefs, sports, economy, etc. As a rule, the aim of cultural diplomacy is to *discreetly* link in the mind of international audiences the positive impression created by the various incarnations of culture with more than the people who *directly* produce them (artists, musicians...), extending it to their *indirect* “owners” who usually fund and support them (states, cities, regions, etc.). For instance, in the case of countries - the conventional actors of cultural diplomacy, the aim is to transform any admiration prompted by artists, writers, architects, cultural heritage and so on, into goodwill and receptivity towards the

¹M. C. Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey*, Center for Arts and Culture, Washington, D.C.; 2003, p. 1.

²DEX: www.dexonline.ro.

state itself. Attitudes thus encouraged are fertile ground for the development of economic and/or political relations between the state and its counterparts on the international arena.

However, the positive outcomes of a successful cultural diplomacy reach far beyond the realm of economy and politics. Intercultural relations promoted through cultural diplomacy can foster healthy values, reducing racial and ethnic tensions and facilitating social harmony, based on mutual knowledge and acceptance.

The body of research dedicated to cultural diplomacy has grown exponentially in the last years, mostly due to an increased interest in the subject matter demonstrated by various stakeholders who understood the importance of “the velvet glove”, including countries, international and non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

Nevertheless, current research in the field of cultural diplomacy is deeply fragmented, most studies focusing on isolated situations (the cultural diplomacy of the US during the Cold War being one of the most widely researched topics) or on various subcategories of culture (music, cinematography, photography, etc.). In fact, most books dedicated to cultural diplomacy are collections of individual case studies that project a very interesting albeit highly kaleidoscopic image of the subject matter.

The field of culture is of course extremely broad and cultural diplomacy fully reflects this. However, when researching our topic, we felt a permanent urge to find a red thread among the multitude of separate stories depicted in the literature. We therefore tried to analyze the subject matter through the lens of what seemed to be a permanent apple of discord between experts: the concept of “agent”. “Who” can legitimately claim to be practicing cultural diplomacy today?

The conservative view is that the only actor that can truly engage in cultural diplomacy is **the state**. And in fact, most states do engage in international cultural relations and conceive cultural policies aimed at various foreign audiences which they implement via the traditional diplomatic apparatus: ministries of foreign affairs, embassies as well as the network of a country’s cultural centers/institutes abroad.

However, in recent times, “purists” who still claim that the state is the only reasonable agent of cultural diplomacy³, are countered by those who believe, much like the author of this dissertation, that countries are no longer alone on the arena of international cultural relations as they have now been joined by a whole array of highly influential transnational (multinational corporations, NGOs) and intergovernmental actors (international organizations) and even supranational and subnational entities.

The idea of multiple agents in cultural diplomacy is justified by the profound transformations that took place on the international arena as a consequence of globalization and the emergence and broadening of *complex interdependencies*. As demonstrated by Keohane and Nye,⁴ international relations are no longer mere state-to-state relations and the “power” to shape global affairs is now shared between a much wider array of actors, such as the ones presented above. Given these demonstrated realities, we believe it only natural for similar tendencies to emerge in the field of cultural diplomacy as well: if the state is no longer the sole actor of international relations, it no longer holds an exclusive grip on international diplomatic representations (cultural but not only).

Identifying and analyzing the newer actors of cultural diplomacy therefore became the much sought-after red thread in our research and a way to put some order into an otherwise immensely diverse and heterogenous field of research.

Inquiries of the dissertation and contributions of the research

We focused our research on three main inquiries: “Who?”, “Why?” and “How?”. And more precisely:

- **Who** can be said to legitimately practice cultural diplomacy nowadays?
- **Why** do these actors engage in cultural diplomacy?
- **How** are their cultural diplomacy approaches organized?

Concerning the first question, we reached the conclusion that aside from **states**, the other actors that can engage in cultural diplomacy are:

³For ex. R. Arndt, M. Aguilar, Y. Raj Isar – v. chapter 3.

⁴v. R. Keohane and J. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, Longman, New York, 1977.

Transnational actors:

- **International** corporations, in their constant endeavors to conquer new markets and win the goodwill and loyalty of new types of public,
- **Non-governmental organizations**, especially NGOs active in the field of culture, in their efforts to promote peace and mutual understanding between the peoples of the world,

Intergovernmental actors:

- **Intergovernmental organizations** with attributions in the field of cultural policy, meaning to promote education, access to culture, cultural diversity and the protection of cultural heritage in the name of their members,

Supranational and subnational actors:

- Supranational actors refer to entities such as the **European Union**, treated in chapter six, as well as to federal multinational states (not discussed).
- Subnational actors mainly refer to big global cities (or regions) which, in the light of certain decentralization policies are now able to conduct international diplomatic relations (including cultural representation) in their own name.

The answer to the other two questions: „why?” and „how?” is closely linked to the first one. The nature of the actors is the first clue regarding the reason behind their involvement in cultural diplomacy and informs their preference of certain approaches and instruments.

In order to systematize these three variables, we proposed a cultural diplomacy **model**, comprising five categories (with suggestive names), each of them linked to one or more of the actors presented above: **The Emissary** (linked to conventional behaviors of cultural diplomacy typical to state actors but observed in *sub-* and supranational entities as well), the **Impresario** (linked to private sector actors), **the Platform** (linked to NGOs specialized in music/theatre/crafts etc. diplomacy), **the Teacher** (linked to international organizations involved in international cultural policy-making) and **the Synapsis** (linked to cultural diplomacy behaviors that are meant to create „connections” or synapses between the members of a certain heterogenous cultural group).

Therefore, perhaps the main contribution of our research lies in the theoretical approach of the subject matter, which implied a clear identification of the „newer” actors of cultural diplomacy, and a theoretical structuring of their behaviors and rationale.

Our dissertation is structured in two parts. **The first part** comprises two chapters: **chapter one** looks at the more general side of cultural diplomacy, such as the various definitions and coining of the term and offers a series of theme-based representations of the subject matter (music as cultural diplomacy, photography as cultural diplomacy etc.).

Chapter two is a theoretical examination of the concept of *culture* in the context of international relations and focuses on the notion of *soft power* and on the link between **soft power** and cultural diplomacy. We also look at the three main international soft power assessment methodologies: the *IfG Monocle Index*, the *Soft Power 30* report and the *Elcano Global Presence Index*. Chapter two also brings certain conceptual clarifications between three twinned notions: cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy and propaganda.

The second part of our dissertation comprises four chapters and explores the main actors of cultural diplomacy as identified above.

Chapter three is an argument in favor of multiple-actors in cultural diplomacy, in the context of globalization and complex interdependencies and explains the five categories of the above model. All categories are further examined and illustrated in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter four explores the conventional understanding of cultural diplomacy, as practiced by state-actors. The chapter begins by discussing cultural diplomacy from a state’s perspective and then takes a closer look at one of the best performing countries in the field of cultural diplomacy: France. The Emissary Model is further examined in light of this case study.

Chapter five focuses on non-state protagonists and comprises two sub-chapters. **The first sub-chapter** is dedicated to transnational actors: multinational corporations and non-governmental organizations. Each type of actor is examined from a general perspective first and is then exemplified through cases studies: Rolex (for multinational corporations) and the *Institute*

for Cultural Diplomacy and *EMMA for Peace* (for NGOs). The Model of the Impresario and that of the Platform are revisited in light of these case studies.

The second subchapter looks at intergovernmental organizations as actors of cultural diplomacy. Two case studies present IOGs with important roles in cultural policy-making and cultural diplomacy: UNESCO and the Council of Europe. The last part of this sub-chapter revisits the Model of the Teacher.

Chapter six, the last one, looks at cultural diplomacy as practiced by the European Union. This chapter argues that the EU makes use of two types of cultural diplomacy: one is “external”, as it is aimed at foreign audiences (much like the cultural diplomacy practiced by individual countries), the other one can be seen as “internal” as it focuses on the EU’s member states. The chapter’s case study discusses the European Capital of Culture and it pinpoints the importance of this initiative in forging European identity and supporting the promotion and regeneration of European cities (showcased by a comparative analysis between *Liverpool 2008* and *Marseille 2013*). The Synapsis model is revisited at the end of this chapter.

This last part is followed by a few general conclusions and by a detailed list of references.

Research methodology

Our research is a transversal exploration of the field of cultural diplomacy and is based on a theoretical in-depth study of the existing literature. The approach used in selecting and exploiting the material was purely qualitative.

The theoretical model that we created in order to illustrate the behaviors and rationales of the current actors of cultural diplomacy are illustrated by case studies, each of the five models being showcased by at least one practical example.

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