

“BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY  
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## Partnerships between state and NGOs in the field of cultural diplomacy

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**Keywords:** cultural diplomacy, *soft power/smart power*, influencing the foreign policy decision-making process, non-state actors, Non-Governmental Organizations, Public-Private Partnerships.

## **General considerations**

The global context, marked by a great complexity and unpredictability, requires the necessity to find real solutions to the present hybrid threats on the international scene. Diplomacy was always an effective instrument in combating these threats or finding the best responses. But the impact of the new problems and technologies overlapped the transformation of the political and social framework in which diplomacy operates<sup>1</sup>. That is why it is generally accepted that diplomatic activity encompasses several dimensions, without being limited to the political one. Thus, we are talking about economic or cultural diplomacy, the latter experiencing a major development and being the subject of numerous researches in recent years. Building cultural bridges between international actors represents one of the most efficient ways in order to have a common approach to the common problems.

If the political dimension of diplomacy remains mainly a prerogative of governments, when it comes to cultural diplomacy, we must mention that it can involve a much more varied number of actors, coming from a varied number of sectors. In a context where the power of technologies and communications became increasingly high and the access to information was open to almost any individual, the role of non-state actors in foreign policy and diplomacy has become inherent and we are now facing a diffusion of power. That is why the field of cultural diplomacy is a very relevant example of what it means to interact, know each other and recognize the interests of your state or non-state partners on the international scene in order to promote and achieve your own foreign affairs objectives.

This paper is part of the research activity on the field of cultural diplomacy and, more precisely, on the role of non-state actors, such as NGOs, in the mentioned field. The main topic of the research, which was intended to be addressed from the beginning of my doctoral studies, aims to make an additional contribution to the specialty literature by developing an analysis of the partnerships between states and private actors, or non-state actors, in the field of cultural diplomacy, a topic less addressed by researchers. Of course one can identify numerous papers about redefining cultural diplomacy and its role in international relations, about the importance of the *soft power* concept or the increasing role of non-state actors in foreign policy, public

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<sup>1</sup> Shaun Riordan, „Noua diplomație: relații internaționale moderne”, București, 2004, p. 67.

diplomacy or cultural diplomacy (Lee and Ayhan<sup>2</sup>, Jora<sup>3</sup>, Isar and Triandafyllidou<sup>4</sup>, Green<sup>5</sup>, Chechi<sup>6</sup> etc.), but with regard to partnerships between states and non-state actors in this specific area, information is still limited.

The doctoral thesis is divided into several main chapters, as follows: “Introduction”, “Cultural diplomacy and its role in International Relations”, “New directions in cultural diplomacy. A theoretical study on the importance of non-state actors in the field”, “Aspects of Romanian cultural diplomacy”, “A comparative analysis of the partnerships between state and NGOs in the field of cultural diplomacy. The cases of the French Republic, the Czech Republic, the Kingdom of Sweden and the Italian Republic”, “Conclusions and future research directions”. With each of these chapters we try to advance towards what we aim at the end of the research, through our comparative analysis, and the whole process is based mainly on a qualitative research, along with some elements specific to the quantitative one, which can be identified in the final chapter.

## **Methodology of research**

Choosing a qualitative or a quantitative type of research generally depends on the research questions and on the researcher's preferences or competencies. In International Relations, such a complex field, the research methods can often be mixed. In this case, if we refer to the cultural diplomacy, it is obvious that it involves and is determined by many social and cultural factors. Cultural diplomacy means interactions, interdisciplinarity, influencing preferences, psychological factors etc. In order to reach your final objective, a description and understanding of the phenomenon is needed. Therefore, a research in this field requires first of all a qualitative approach.

Even the choice of developing some case studies is part of the qualitative research methodology. In this case, the comparative analysis presented at the end of the paper is based

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<sup>2</sup>Geun Lee and Kadir Ayhan, “Why Do We Need Non-state Actors in Public Diplomacy?: Theoretical Discussion of Relational, Networked and Collaborative Public Diplomacy”, in *Journal of International and Area Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2015.

<sup>3</sup>Lucian Jora, “New Practices and Trends in Cultural Diplomacy”, *culturaldiplomacy.org*, [http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/pdf/research/articles/cultural\\_diplomacy/New\\_Practices\\_And\\_Trends\\_In\\_Cultural\\_Diplomacy\\_-\\_Lucian\\_Jora.pdf](http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/pdf/research/articles/cultural_diplomacy/New_Practices_And_Trends_In_Cultural_Diplomacy_-_Lucian_Jora.pdf), accessed May 30, 2020.

<sup>4</sup>Yudhishtir Raj Isar and Anna Triandafyllidou, “Introduction to this Special Issue Cultural Diplomacy: What Role for Cities and Civil Society Actors?”, in *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, October 7, 2020.

<sup>5</sup>Steve Green, “New directions”, *Cultura y Proyección Exterior: Nuevos Valores y Estrategias de Acción*, Real Instituto Elcano, Madrid, 2010.

<sup>6</sup>Alessandro Chechi, “Non-state actors and cultural heritage: friends or foes?”, in *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2015.

on interpretability and creativity rather than numerical comparisons. As secondary sources of data collection we mention reports and other official documents, but also the main source of data collection will be the structured interview. Through the content analysis and also through the discourse or narrative analyzes we will try to interpret all these data. Given the pandemic context and the restrictive measures imposed by it on interpersonal relations, it was necessary to choose the structured interview, with pre-set questions, this method considerably reducing direct interactions between the researcher and the interviewees.

At the same time, the structured interview, with 10 questions simultaneously addressed to 20 cultural diplomats, representatives of the state level in the four EU member states, also involves a quantitative analysis of the collected data. Designing a top of the analyzed states in terms of the use of cultural diplomacy, establishing the categories of partnerships between state and non-state actors in the field of cultural diplomacy, establishing the stages of such a partnership, or evaluating the effectiveness of a cultural diplomacy action or strategy, may be important elements of a quantitative approach and they will also be considered during the present research.

### **Research questions**

The two main research questions that stayed at the basis of the doctoral thesis are the following:

- 1. How can an NGO practically engage in cultural diplomacy actions?*
- 2. What are the main types of partnerships between state and NGOs in the field of cultural diplomacy?*

### **Conclusions and future research directions**

Partnerships in the field of cultural diplomacy are essential, as we could see during this paper. Both if we talk about public partnerships and public-private partnerships, they provide more notoriety to the projects developed in this area. The change in the nature of diplomacy, however, determines the focus on partnerships between state and non-state level, as we can observe an increasing interdependence between the two levels, in most areas of action and, implicitly, in the one that was the subject of the present study.

Studying these types of collaboration, the concrete partnerships developed between the two actors within the various forms of the cultural diplomacy of a state, is important in order to evaluate and appreciate the role of all the actors involved in the development of this field.

In turn, studying cultural diplomacy in general is important in order to identify the most effective tools and alternatives in solving or preventing the very diverse and complex global threats. As we could see, in the recent decades state actors have understood this aspect and its importance on the international scene, while non-state actors are also more concerned with issues of intercultural dialogue, multiculturalism, multilateralism etc., as essential elements in the development of the international relations. This is why it is also necessary to encourage this kind of collaborations and the present paper aimed to enhance this dimension, to bring it to the forefront of public debates and encourage the development of such partnerships for a more efficient cultural diplomacy, whether we are talking about the particular case of Romania or other states.

From this point of view, through the analysis of the partnerships between states and NGOs, we think this research brings an innovative element to the study of cultural diplomacy as part of the foreign policies developed by international actors. From identifying the presence of these partnerships in the various cultural diplomacy projects, to evaluating the opportunity of such a partnership, identifying the main stages of a partnership, or its contribution to the final results evaluated in a cultural diplomacy project, all these elements contributed to finding the answers to the two major research questions.

Thus, as a result of the qualitative research, of the interviews and their content analysis, as well as following the narrative or discourse analyzes we carried out and also taking into account the elements of the quantitative approach, we observed and defined the following conclusions:

- The study of the specialty literature and a series of relevant documents in our field of interest have certainly **confirmed the importance of the cultural diplomacy in the general framework of international relations.**
- It provides a **clearer view both on the field of cultural diplomacy as a whole and on the importance of the collaboration between the state and non-state actors**, in this case non-governmental organizations, in cultural diplomacy.
- We also think the study highlights the **added value the collaborations between state and non-state actors bring at the beneficiary communities level, at the governmental level** and, last but not least, **at the international community level.**
- The study also tried to analyze **Romania's position in this context of the development of cultural diplomacy**, and to what extent this cultural dimension is present in our foreign policy since the second half of the nineteenth century until today.

- At the end of this research report, we find it relevant to emphasize once again that the **identification of the most effective ways of cooperation between international actors, in order to become as predictable as possible, is of particular importance.** A complex and changing international environment requires enhanced cooperation between a complex range of actors which act towards their common goals.
- By using the interview as a research tool, we were able to observe the concrete ways of collaboration between the two types of actors. **We thus answered the main research questions: first of all by emphasizing the involvement of NGOs in cultural diplomacy actions, from the expertise they can provide in a specific field of the cultural sector, to their advocacy for putting a relevant topic on the agenda (such as issues related to the protection of cultural heritage), to the actual organizational process of a cultural event, the provision of specialized human resources in the field or even to the necessary funds to develop a cultural diplomacy project, the participation in international conferences or congresses (as is the case of the International Organization of La Francophonie), or simply to the ensurement of the right framework for developing intercultural dialogue between communities. Secondly, the present study helped us to identify the main forms a state – NGO partnership can take in the field of cultural diplomacy, as follows: institutional partnerships, informal partnerships, long-term partnerships or official partnerships, ad-hoc partnerships, bilateral partnerships and multilateral partnerships.**

Clearly, the present research, with all its questions and answers, is an improvable one. What we could not emphasize enough in this paper is probably a more concrete position on the part of the non-state actors on what the concept of cultural diplomacy represents for them and on the way in which collaborations and partnerships with state authorities are seen at this level. Also caused by the pandemic context and the restrictive measures that significantly affected the activity of the cultural sector, the present research was deprived of a feedback from this non-state level. Thus, we consider necessary and of a priority interest to develop this research activity after the end of the doctoral studies.

But why was it relevant to identify the answers to the above research questions? Because it emphasizes and reconfirms that multilateralism is one of the central elements of the current international relations. From this perspective, cultural diplomacy is also a very important dimension of the international actors' *smart power*, which can often provide solutions to global threats and risks, even in the long run. Cultural diplomacy has the capacity

to contribute at ensuring a predictable and stable environment on the international scene and non-state actors, in this case, have the capacity to contribute to the development and promotion of an effective cultural diplomacy.