

Cultural Diplomacy: Art as a Tool for International Relations

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ABSTRACT

Cultural diplomacy plays a crucial role in international relations by fostering cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. Art, as a powerful medium of communication, transcends linguistic and political barriers, making it an essential tool for diplomacy. Historically, cultural diplomacy has been employed to ease tensions, rebuild post-conflict societies, and enhance international reputation through cultural exchange programs, exhibitions, and festivals. The digital era has further expanded cultural diplomacy's reach, allowing for global artistic engagement and collaboration. Despite challenges such as political hostilities, funding constraints, and globalization's impact on cultural authenticity, cultural diplomacy continues to shape international narratives. This paper examines the historical development, role of art, case studies, and prospects of cultural diplomacy, demonstrating how it enhances global cooperation, strengthens national identity, and promotes mutual respect among nations.

Keywords: Cultural diplomacy, international relations, soft power, globalization, intercultural dialogue, art and politics, cultural exchange.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural diplomacy is a pivotal tool in international relations. It is closely linked to the fields of cultural exchange and public diplomacy, existing as an intermediary between diplomatic relations and cultural expression. The realization of the importance of international cultural cooperation grew after World War II, when cultural diplomacy was widely used to ease the tension between East and West, specialized agencies were set up within the United Nations to promote cultural exchange, and the UN offered support to countries with vulnerable cultures. In a similar vein, since the end of the Cold War, cultural exchange has become a key tool in rebuilding after conflicts. Culture can be perceived as the backbone of a society, encompassing tradition, art, science, politics, and religion. In its broadest sense, cultural expression is how people choose to describe themselves. It is a means of communication and, therefore, a medium through which different cultures can come together. The field of cultural diplomacy is important because it meets a need for international relations. By working together, using culture both to create an international image and to enhance mutual understanding, countries can build trust and widen areas of cooperation. Cultural diplomacy creates a "circle of appreciation", an open dialogue of listening and understanding. This paper will first introduce the concept of cultural diplomacy, emphasizing in the second part how culture can be understood as a form of communication and expression. The third part will then demonstrate the linkage of culture and diplomacy, showing how cultural diplomacy can be seen as both public diplomacy and also as part of the wider PESTLE factors (political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental) of a government policy. The paper will finally examine in greater depth cultural cooperation by two case studies: the first one between the United States and Sweden, and the second examining "cultural perks" accruing to new UN member countries [1, 2].

Historical Overview of Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy has deep historical roots linking culture and politics, practiced by ancient civilizations like the Egyptians and Greeks. Ancient Egypt's diplomatic system featured beautifully inscribed letters

on papyrus, similar in significance to modern Ph.D. recognition. In 1938, the British Consul General in Lourenço Marques explained increased spending on the embassy to promote trade and enhance England's prestige. The Greeks and Persians employed tools such as letters of credence (proxenika gramata) to communicate ambassadors' powers and requests. The concept of cultural diplomacy predates the terminology itself, with foreign cultural aid emerging from North European states like Britain, France, and Germany in the mid-nineteenth century. By the early 1900s, Britain and France fostered educational networks in the Mediterranean, and during the early 20th century, Southern Europe engaged in cultural diplomacy to protect economic interests. Notably, the perceptions of Turkey shifted from a diplomatic adversary pre-WWI to a political ally post-WWI, becoming part of Southern European politics. Japan's cultural diplomacy with the U.S. and globally, post-WWII, once seemed improbable [3, 4].

The Role of Art in Cultural Diplomacy

Art transcends cultural boundaries, serving as a powerful medium for cultural diplomacy. It facilitates sharing emotions and ideas that surpass mere words, fostering dialogue and understanding among those with no common language. Understanding a culture's art is essential for tolerance and appreciation of its history and lifestyle. Various forms of art—visual, performing, and literary—are crucial for cross-cultural communication, offering diverse representations of human creativity that shape perceptions of communities. Engaging with another culture through films, exhibitions, or concerts provides pathways to empathy and understanding, especially when complex cultural differences arise. The arts have demonstrated the ability to bridge divides and foster communication among former adversaries. Cultural diplomacy through art, such as architecture, painting, and photography, has succeeded where traditional diplomacy may struggle. Cultural exhibitions can reveal new perspectives on history and identity, fostering awareness of foreign communities and their roots. It's important to note that artists and cultural entities also play a vital role in public diplomacy. Addressing conflicts isn't solely a diplomatic task; art can tackle challenging issues effectively, evoking emotions and reinforcing the psychological impact on audiences in ways that traditional measures cannot [5, 6].

Case Studies of Successful Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy serves as a crucial means to bridge international differences by facilitating cultural exchange, a practice dating back to the third century BC. Although terms like "cultural diplomacy" and "soft power" have emerged later, culture has long acted as a conduit for symbolic power, avoiding direct force. Culture supports peace-making and can foster cooperation between countries if managed effectively. Nations with negative international images can restore their reputations through cultural diplomacy, while those wishing to extend their influence find success via soft power over military or economic measures. This paper investigates art as a vehicle for cultural diplomacy, focusing on the international festivals and biennales in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. Interestingly, war can sometimes enhance the conditions favorable for cultural diplomacy. After ratifying the Dayton Peace Agreement, Bosnia opened its borders, facilitating international cultural exchanges. Following the war, Bosnia and Herzegovina worked with UNESCO to form a committee to establish a local UNESCO office. Cultural diplomacy encompasses the sharing of cultural information and ideas, promoting a better understanding of issues and fostering mutual trust. It influences political decisions by shaping a country's international image and enhancing its power. Attendees benefit by learning about various cultures, political views, and artistic expressions, along with opportunities for joint ventures and trade. Many respondents believe cultural events offer a forum for Americans to gain insight into the nation's people. With the growth of an open society and increased participation, such events have the potential to support future cooperation. Event development can drive local educational and professional advancements, improve local traditions and investments, and elevate the lifestyle of the host community by attracting world-class performers, art, and technology [7, 8].

Challenges In Cultural Diplomacy

Contemporary cultural diplomacy faces significant challenges, primarily due to deep political hostilities that hinder cultural exchanges and foster misunderstandings regarding the objectives of such programs. Often criticized as wasteful, these programs yield delayed results. Funding opportunities can lead to the reproduction of stereotypes, adversely affecting cultural outreach initiatives because of misjudged perceptions. Stereotypes diminish the significance of counterparts' perspectives, preventing their legitimate claims from being recognized or respected. Globalization fosters tangible cultural connections but complicates interactions. Diverse global cultural products are accessible in local markets; however, governmental censorship can skew availability. Audiences in one country may prefer the cultural exports of another, resulting in significant importation of favored products. Conversely, practical obstacles like time constraints and cultural biases pose challenges for smaller nations in penetrating global film and

television markets. Additionally, English, as a global lingua franca, creates further entry barriers. Many nations, shaped by globalized practices, navigate cultural flows dominated by a limited number of major exporters. This dynamic often translates not only into cultural products but also into the exportation of norms, values, and lifestyles, conditioning the nature of international cultural flows. This expanding cultural power gap hinders balanced multicultural exchanges, with import-dependent countries assimilating globalized practices at the expense of their unique cultural identities. Quantitative studies highlight the need for sensitive characteristics in international dialogue, such as cultural adaptation and innovative strategies to facilitate participation in cultural diplomacy. Enhancing cultural dialogue with transnational partners and recognizing their nuances can foster dedication and expertise in addressing cultural diplomacy issues. By improving the absorptive capacity of cultural initiatives and focusing on emerging areas of importance, practitioners can mitigate frustrations. Raising awareness of effective strategies to overcome traditional obstacles could promote legislative improvements in media and cultural exchanges, ensuring a more balanced representation of global cultures [9, 10].

The Impact of Globalization on Cultural Diplomacy

In the age of globalization, cultural diplomacy has become a buzzword in the international relations discourse as cultures become more interconnected. As the impact of globalization is expected to create common shared cultural traits or values, the opportunity for global partnerships and collaborations in cultural diplomacy becomes increasingly possible³. This paper will explain globalization, how it transforms cultural diplomacy, and what opportunities it offers for more global partnerships in cultural diplomacy. A discussion of the concern also touches on the impact of globalization in challenging the preservation of authentic identity and cultural fragmentation, as well as homogenization issues. In an era of globalization, culture is acknowledged to provide nation-states with a unique language to narrate their national narrative stories, as culture has the power to connect the past, present, and future. Globalization may also open space for competition and negotiation on world stages among national territorial cultures. In this framework, transnational organizations and networks might expand their mandate and authority to regulate cultural dialogue on a global scale. Meanwhile, the critical role of migration and diaspora is also to encourage debates from a broader perspective. Nevertheless, various NGOs, governments, and international bodies should be more culturally adaptable and attentive to ensure that cultural expressions are considered and the institutional design of cultural diplomacy is responsive to the different needs of partners so that the marginalized group can use culture and cultural tools for mediation, conflict prevention and enhancing their international visibility. Consequently, the call for greater understanding of the prevalent ways of globalization that shape cultural diplomacy and how local culture might affect global strategic implementation [11, 12].

Digital Age and Cultural Diplomacy

In the digital age in which we live, technology transforms how cultures interact, share, and communicate their art with the world. With the rise of the internet and later the invention of social media, it has become significantly easier to find and promote cultures around the globe. The digital age benefits people from all walks of life, from rural areas to downtown, to find, discuss, and enjoy art. Digital cultural exchanges are welcome tools in promoting better understanding between cultures. Virtual cultural engagement has significant benefits and challenges over traditional cultural engagement avenues. Social media and the internet surely enhanced the culture, getting to more corners of the world and promoting better understanding in theory. The benefits that come with virtual cultural interactions are hard to define in a dollar amount, most people would agree that a better understanding between nations and other groups of people is invaluable. Moving beyond the potential protectionist pitfalls that virtual cultural exchanges may run into, technology is a very powerful tool with a real potential to bring cultural exchanges to parts of the world that may normally be excluded from the global art community. With the right digital tools, people everywhere have the opportunity to discover a nearly unlimited amount of art, music, and literature. With no doubt, virtual cultural exchanges are an effective tool to promote cultural understanding; those interested in cultural diplomacy must find innovative ways to effectively use digital tools to reach as broad an audience as possible. Given that the advent of new digital tools is ever swift, it is advised to approach the constantly changing digital landscape with adaptability [13, 14].

The Future of Cultural Diplomacy

Farida Shaheed, a diplomat from Pakistan, says, "If you make the right connections, art and music can supersede political divides almost instantly". Some countries have a very strong national identity displayed through national dress, but Pakistan's is displayed through art. While each Western country has its symphony orchestra, ballet, or gallery, older Eastern civilizations' scope is limited to traditional

performance. Art as we know it today is a fairly recent Western construct and does not exist in many traditional Eastern civilizations. With film, Pakistan has a kind of art that is globally acknowledged. Similarly, India puts art in line with history. Since the mid-20th century, both agreed that through art, you can help build an image outside. The idea was to refocus this art outward instead of inward. For India, the Maharishi effect describes the knowledge of collective participation, such as watching a cricket match, and any positive thoughts can have an impact. The Jaipur Literature Festival has become India's major diplomatic tool. Another tool is the 'Incredible India' campaign, with Bollywood films made in Switzerland. Just like in the Eurozone, Indian region-to-region contracts are encouraged. Hence, as the EU has wanted the European song contest to belong to everybody in Europe, other countries have wanted this or to establish it. The EU is the model for all other regional organizations. Songs are performed in as many regional languages as possible. There is the simple elimination of the language rule here, and every country sends in their language. There was also a desire to showcase the fact that music is a universal language spoken by all. Internally, every regional government is given money to participate, and the winning one has a lot of money to put on a music event such as always wanted using the Eiffel Tower, for instance. A famous singer was used them to say that 'Europe is united'. Over 80% of the global population voted for the European song contest. However, it was postulated that the larger world was dependent on the votes of this larger world [15, 16].

Art As a Soft Power Tool

Art serves as a form of soft power in international relations, appealing to emotions and mentalities. Cultural diplomacy, which shapes perceptions through culture, is increasingly recognized as a complement to economic and military strategies globally. As cultural consumption rises, so does the importance of this diplomacy. Soft power involves attracting and co-opting rather than coercing, with cultural allure being pivotal. Art, integral to culture, shares these soft power properties, functioning as a diplomatic tool. Its diverse values can shift audience perceptions, fostering positive images and congenial relations between countries. Promoting art on the international stage can enhance mutual understanding, particularly among nations in conflict. Countries recognize the economic benefits of cultural investment, yet overemphasis on profit can lead to negative perceptions. The sharing and promotion of cultural initiatives enhance a nation's influence and reputation. Smaller cultural initiatives have proven more effective than large campaigns, encouraging greater investment. Cultural diplomacy evolves, aiming to reshape or affirm national identities in a global context. Nations project images to support or counter existing perceptions, with varied motivations for cultural diplomacy investments. Since the 19th century, cultural diplomacy has been linked to public diplomacy and strategic choices in promoting national identity within global dynamics. Thus, the strategic use of art and cultural initiatives is essential for fostering understanding and coexistence among diverse nations [17, 18].

Intercultural Dialogue Through Art

#ArtNoFrontiers. Forever. A vision on cultural diplomacy through art. Art is central to culture and is a reflection of the society in which it is created and disseminated. In all its fields and among all its forms, art has the power to cross frontiers and nations, emotional and ideological barriers, empowering the birth of dialog and the adoption of shared points of view and similarly shared emotions. Intercultural dialogue is a new and effective means of international relations because it implies spontaneous cultural mixing. Perhaps cultural exchange enhances intercultural dialogue. The point is that intercultural dialogue fosters relationships and fosters the understanding of different traditions, developing respect and coherence towards different cultural models. Respect and understanding make it easier to cooperate and share interests. Moreover, intercultural dialogue made of arts is a means of peaceful demonstration, suggesting that the "other" does not mean "enemy" (or at least not necessarily). As shown in the history of this event, the role of art in international relationships has been relevant throughout the centuries. As well as it has something to do with the magnificence of monuments that great emperors dedicated to themselves, it has been a constant pledge of alliance among royals and nations, not many times forgotten. Coming a couple of centuries very forward, during the Cold War, the United States encouraged many exhibitions of contemporary artists and avant-garde architects to display American art in Moscow, believing that it would have opened a secret portal into the heart of the Communist world. Surprisingly, many of these intellectuals and artists have not shown an anti-American attitude, but on the contrary warned against the baleful apparent democracy shown by the most powerful Capitalist country [19, 20].

Art Festivals and International Relations

Art festivals have always been an indispensable part of the process of fostering cross-cultural exchanges. For local communities and cities, they are vital platforms and celebration events that bring people from various backgrounds and interests together. Nowadays, art festivals have even greater roles, as they could

contribute to a larger picture concerning international relations and cultural ties between nations. The practices, theories, methodologies, and concepts from the field of International Relations have potential contributions to art festivals as well. Just like a tree cannot stand without roots, any knowledge gap, analysis, and discussion need to be rooted in theories and methodologies. This closing section of the conference introduces the concept of 'cultural diplomacy' and attempts to answer how and why art festivals should stand in the perspective of international relations. Rapidly growing development and increasing democratization of international relations can be seen as a 'return to the normality' of the pre-colonial era or medieval world order. Since cultural codes, art, and language form a critically cross-cutting dimension in shaping specific societies and their understandings, 'Cultural Diplomacy' itself, as a concept, could be more historical and broader than International Relations (IR) itself. Artistic approaches and performers have the talent of expressing and touching people from all around the world without even uttering a word or spending time in the target country. In international relations literature, the concept is an interactive cultural exchange among societies and governments to create an acceptance of foreign countries' political and societal biases and values. Art festivals, by fostering cultural interaction, socialization, and international understanding, provide opportunities for more close relations in terms of international public support, international understanding, and friendship on a sociocultural level. Art and artists have always created an immaterial bond that has allowed them to speak 'alien' languages from the perspective of diplomacy, international relations, security, or economy [21, 22].

The Role of Museums in Cultural Diplomacy

Museums play an essential role in cultural diplomacy by collectively curating and presenting artistic and historical narratives that reflect a nation's cultural heritage. These can be both domestic and international narratives, and the forms of displays can range from curated exhibitions to permanent collections. As one of the most enduring institutions throughout history, museums have been central to the preservation and representation of cultural and artistic treasures across cultures. Their protection and showcasing of the past is vital to sustaining present cultures and facilitating cultural understanding among nations. Museums display artifacts, artworks, scientific specimens, as well as more ephemeral materials such as documents relating to cultural history, all for visitors to absorb, learn from, and often be entertained. With their broad array of objects and narratives, museums are ideal spaces for fostering dialogue and understanding between peoples. Through diverse exhibitions, collections, and educational programs, museums can become focal points for the constructive exchange and discussion of culture, arts, heritage, and history to simultaneously reflect on their cultural milieu and engage in dialogue with others. In recent decades, there has been an upsurge in the number of collaborative exhibitions between museums in different countries. These, indeed, serve to promote greater understanding and exchanges between nations. While many such exhibitions focus on sharing the arts or heritage of a region or country, they do not avoid difficult issues or controversial history. On the contrary, museums have dedicated resources and programs specifically to deal with such contentious elements. Just as cultural diplomacy can be a tool to resolve disputes or cool down nationalistic fervor, museums can be equally utilized to frame such dialogue. Actions can include exhibitions that engage with difficult history or contested narratives or even programs that invite historians and representatives to sit together and discuss these issues. Nonetheless, the focus on museums as important facilitators and platforms for dialogue may be curious, given the reserved nature of many such institutions. The study of museums, however, unveils a side often overlooked by tourists: the broad array of initiatives designed to make a museum more accessible and actively engage the community on issues of historical and cultural import. As the digital revolution is fundamentally changing the curation and practices of museums, perhaps the most important role that these non-profit institutions can play is in providing free and immersive windows into other cultures, past and present, that so often shape and form the conduct of foreign policy [23, 24].

Cultural Exchange Programs

Cultural diplomacy plays a significant role in international relations, defined as the exchange of cultural elements like music and arts to foster understanding among nations. Its strength lies in showcasing national values and identities and engaging influential audiences. Various methods are employed, including artist representations, cultural institutions, exhibitions, and educational programs. Cultural diplomacy effectively manages disputes by promoting mutual respect and lasting relationships. Cultural exchange initiatives help spread values and facilitate interaction through multicultural events that demonstrate appreciation for distinct traditions. Learning about culture starts with individual interactions and grows through deeper engagements. Cultural exchange programs involve various stakeholders, including government, civil society, and individuals, offering artist residencies, language studies abroad, and cultural promotion activities. The success of these exchanges is attributed to

reciprocity, sustained engagement, and community benefits. Challenges faced include unstable funding, national differences inhibiting long-term partnerships, and bureaucratic delays. Governments often work with organizations to enhance these programs, providing funding and legal frameworks, while the private sector contributes through sponsorships. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) support by aiding coordination and information sharing. Participants' experiences in these exchanges can demonstrate the program's value, prompting others to recognize its significance. Systematic interviews of participants can reveal how their narratives change through cultural encounters. Scholars emphasize that diversified, long-term cultural activities, including community engagement and empowerment, yield the most successful outcomes by promoting broader access to reciprocal cultural relations [25, 26].

Art And Identity in Diplomatic Contexts

Art and Culture play a highly significant role in the representation of national or cultural identities. Artworks created in various national traditions have constructed and still construct an image of the depicted peoples. Yet, these images can also be the objects of negotiation and challenge. Both in international encounters and internal discussion and expression, art has performed and still performs an important role in the shaping of identities and the image of nations and national cultures. They became foundational myths, at the same time unifying and exceptionalizing the people at large, reaffirmed by arts and literature 'describing' its ancientness and the sufferings from outside. Though a unified national entity did not exist, the 'German' and 'German arts' in painting and literature reached high levels of popularity and pride. But parallel to that unification of the multi-ethnic German territories, the national cultures of other *Niedere-Länder* - were left out of the step of appreciation or were somehow despised since they were thought to reflect a very different cultural past and brought along images of the lower classes of the time of feudalism. Art representation became a symbolic channel amplifying the impression of the Other - individual or collective, the more so if traditional visual imagery or stylized forms of folk arts are considered, which tend to manifest particular 'otherness' and 'authenticity.' The 'others' are picturesquely embodied according to preconfigured clichés since they say nothing about the economic, social, and political context of the nations they represent. The ethnic and national self-consciousness and identity construction of the 'Bulgarian State' and nation found representation in iconography, painting, and national costume; the process of nation-building quickly exploited traditional folk art by employing specific iconographical attributes to represent ideas of 'Bulgarianess.' Refugees, seamen, or workers and tourists became 'national icons and a brand, embodying perceived national qualities and as such being the appropriate imagery to be exhibited in this context [27, 28].

Evaluation of Cultural Diplomacy Initiatives

"More systematic assessment is needed" has been a common judgment in the scarce existing scientific literature on the subject. Still, the assessment of cultural diplomacy initiatives is seldom carried out and, when done, it often assumes an excessively narrow perspective. Several analytical approaches, methodological devices, and sets of indicators may indeed be likely to offer a more insightful view on this dimension of public activity. Initiatives at the interface between the worlds of culture and international relations, which are purposefully designed to enhance interactions between states and societies, can potentially be gauged in terms of a variety of analytical trends. Moreover, given the broad array of actions comprised by cultural diplomacy, art and museums being only one of them, any thorough discussion of the subject would require specific contributions focusing on public diplomacy through education, media, religion, language, science, sports, etc., to name but a few. After the summary introduction of the notions of artistic/heritage diplomacy and diplomacy of display, however, comparison of their respective content; the ensuing discussion of the rationale for their emergence; and the presentation of specific evaluation tools for the analysis of art and museum activities may all be deemed useful steps to underline the importance and timeliness of a broader assessment of the impact and long-term effects of cultural diplomacy initiatives. Answers to some of the most recurrent doubts and objections surrounding convergence point the criteria to judge the effectiveness of such actions, i.e., around the choice of 'hard' or 'soft' variables. What is to come briefly postulates that a combined approach is likely to give a fairer picture of the phenomenon and proceeds to suggest several benchmarks for the evaluation of art and museum actions [29, 30].

CONCLUSION

Cultural diplomacy, with art as its driving force, has consistently demonstrated its ability to bridge cultural divides, foster understanding, and strengthen international relations. By leveraging artistic expression in various forms—museums, festivals, digital platforms, and exhibitions—countries can promote their cultural heritage and engage in meaningful dialogue with global audiences. While challenges such as stereotypes, funding limitations, and globalization-induced homogenization persist,

cultural diplomacy remains a vital instrument of soft power. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the role of cultural diplomacy will continue to expand, influencing global policy, enhancing cross-cultural appreciation, and fostering peaceful international cooperation.

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