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Social Sciences to the Rescue of Cultural Diplomacy

How to Evaluate the Significance and Impact of Cultural Diplomacy?

Océane Saily

Sorbonne Nouvelle University – Paris 3

Sociology of art

saily.oceane@gmail.com

+33 6 15 13 51 26

1 rue Hermann-Lachapelle, 75018 Paris

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How to Evaluate the Significance and Impact of Cultural Diplomacy?

A 2005 report of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy of the U.S. Department of State stated that cultural diplomacy is “*the linchpin of public diplomacy*”¹. Through artistic, cultural, intellectual and scientific cooperation and exchanges, cultural diplomacy has the ability to “*shape the preferences of others, to structure effectively through the seduction of its messages the world of diplomatic relations*”² and to increase the soft power of a nation. Coined by Harvard Professor Joseph Nye, the concept of 'soft power'³ refers to a “*nation's power of attraction, in contrast to the hard power of coercion inherent in military or economic strength*”⁴. In spite of these qualities, cultural diplomacy isn't seen as an essential component of foreign policy. The human and financial resources devoted to it by most governments is relatively small in comparison to the resources dedicated to formal diplomacy by industrial countries that have been leaders in the field. France, the United Kingdom and the United States have been part of this elite, with annually decreasing budget.

Cultural diplomacy has a great economic impact that is more and more justified in defending its utility. Yet, its return on investment goes far beyond the sole economical aspect. That return is typically unmeasurable, but rather, qualitative in reaching feelings of trust, attractiveness and good perception. How can social sciences be used to evaluate and measure cultural diplomacy? Social sciences applied to public policy give us several theoretical and practical tools to apply, such as the systematic study of public policy and the comparative method. One of the underlying questions is why shall cultural diplomacy be evaluated? The objectives of this external policy are crucial to understand its importance in a globalised world.

Cultural diplomacy has been studied through historical perspectives that give emphasis to the historical developments of this concept and its implementation. A typological approach had also been conceptualised by François Roche to compare the different models worldwide⁵. In the framework of an ongoing thesis on American, British and French cultural diplomacy in Gulf countries, we propose to present our current results regarding the definition and creation of indicators able to measure and compare the significance and impact of cultural diplomacy. The method is at the crossroad of sociology and political science and is based on two approaches. The first one is the systematic study of all government, institutional and organisational reports, linked to cultural diplomacy, to collect the indicators defined and used to analyse their cultural external policy. The second approach is empirical. By drawing on the analysis of other public policies and through research and professional experiences in the field, this thesis will define relevant indicators, thus aiming to propose a new analysis model of cultural diplomacy with the ability to measure and compare policies. As a result, it will enrich the sociology of the analysis of cultural diplomacy and reflect on its importance in the current game of international relations. Our ongoing research will support this paper by using practical examples in a defined spatial (Gulf countries) and temporal (1991-2017) marker.

¹ U.S. Department of State, “Cultural Diplomacy: The Linchpin of Public Diplomacy”, Report of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy, September 2005. Available online:

² François Chaubet, “Role and challenges of cultural influence in international relations” (« Rôle et enjeux de l'influence culturelle dans les relations internationales »), *La revue internationale et stratégique*, 2013/1 (n° 89), p.93.

³ Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to lead: the changing nature of American power*, New York, Basic Books, 1991.

⁴ William Rugh, “American soft power and public diplomacy in the Arab world”, *Palgrave Communications*, January 2010.

⁵ François Roche, “Cultural Diplomacy in Bilateral Relations, a Typological Approach Trials” (« La diplomatie culturelle dans les relations bilatérales, un essai d'approche typologique »), *Sens Public*, March 2006. Available online: <http://www.sens-public.org/spip.php?article235&lang=fr>