

International Cultural Relations

Soft power and cultural relations institutions in a time of crisis

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Research conducted by

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The interpretations offered in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the British Council, its officers, or those individuals who contributed to the research. Similarly, the authors take full responsibility for any errors.

Executive summary

Soft power and cultural relations are different things and should not be confused.

- The primary purpose of soft power is pursuit of influence in the national interest.
- The primary purpose of cultural relations is to create the conditions for collaboration between like-minded people and countries in pursuit of the common good (most often identified with the Sustainable Development Goals).

Countries which wish to enjoy reputational security need to be aware of the distinction especially where there are intersections between the two approaches. If confusion arises as to the purpose of activities, then a gap can open up between how a country wishes to be seen and how it is perceived, and this gap can be damaging to national reputation.

All countries researched in this study do both soft power and cultural relations and both are seen as legitimate. The concept of soft power means different things in different places but is always aligned to foreign policy. It is characterised by short-term, often promotional, activity that is related to specific goals. It tends to be closely linked both to policy and to strategic communications focused on the media cycle. Cultural relations tend to be long-term and aim to build strategic partnerships and co-operation.

Both modes of operation are directly related to foreign policy as countries try to influence how they are perceived by others in relation to specific agendas or narratives, build coalitions of support, or work with other countries to tackle global challenges.

Countries' arrangements differ, reflecting their histories and their past and current priorities. There is no one global understanding of either soft power or cultural relations, what activities are considered within scope, or one approach to creating effective and efficient agencies and institutions.

For example, the concept of cultural relations is used by the British Council. Germany has had cultural relations as the 'third pillar' of its foreign policy since the 1970s. The European Union's strategic approach to culture in external affairs is based on cultural relations. While other countries engage in 'cultural relations' activities, they tend to refer to them differently, most often as cultural diplomacy.

Countries' institutional arrangements also reflect their different histories and goals. The UK is unusual in having a portmanteau organisation (the British Council) which does work on education, culture, and society. In other countries, these activities are usually carried out by dedicated agencies, specialised in their areas of operation. It is worth noting that some countries' agencies do not play an explicit part in the promotion of foreign policy interests, they either support their cultural or educational sectors, or look after the interests of expatriates.

Countries perceived as successful, notwithstanding their other differences, manage their soft power and cultural relations activities through:

- effective co-ordination at national level, led by their ministries of foreign affairs and involving other departments (principally culture, education, trade) through a strategic framework of formal mechanisms which bring governmental and other stakeholders together
- effective consultation with, and committed involvement of, the civil society actors involved
- strategic communications which deliver evidence-based, data-driven, messaging in support of soft power, and emphasise commitment to collaboration through cultural relations as a key part of the strategic narrative
- a focus on the specific context of operation – tailoring the approach to the target audience or country, recognising that in today’s world, audiences will be transnational as well as local
- capability which matches 21st-century remits, business models and audiences
- willingness to innovate in response to the constraints on traditional practices required by the need to respond to Covid-19, and to changes in the operating environment.

Globally there is little overt competition between dedicated cultural relations agencies in specific countries, and there are some signs of collaboration. One explanation may be that countries are pursuing different audiences, although not enough is known about this. While one country may be targeting elites, another may be concentrating on its diaspora population. There were signs of countries looking to other countries’ models for inspiration to solve their reputational problems – see Appendix D on Hanban.

Higher education, however, is an exception. It is the area where there is most competition. It is seen as *the* key activity for institutions, as countries compete for international students, expertise, and to attract inflows to labour markets, particularly where there are demographic factors such as ageing populations or shortages of people with the skills and knowledge needed for the economy. This is the area of greatest investment and is seen as the main growth area for the next 30 years.

Of the other traditional activities of cultural relations agencies:

- language learning is evolving. The advent of AI and cost-effective machine translation is reducing the incentives to learn a language for business. On the other hand, there is continuing interest in language learning when it is focused on higher education, or when it is promoted as a gateway to culture. The status of English as a global language is challenged by changes to the world order – it is no longer a given that English is needed to succeed in education or life
- arts and culture operate at two levels:
 - when culture is defined traditionally as arts – as part of the toolkit for cultural diplomacy in support of national interests, aligned with foreign policy

- when culture is defined widely as the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts, it is the key element of cultural relations in support of long-term engagement.

Both are valid.

It is hard to make meaningful comparisons of the value for money of different countries' approaches. Some agencies (British Council, Campus France) generate a far higher proportion of their total income themselves than others, but the fact that they do so can be seen negatively and generate barriers to collaboration. Too much emphasis on income generation is as bad as too little. It is the case, however, that the UK model where the British Council earns a high share of its total income requires less taxpayer support while covering a wider range of activities than do the arrangements in other countries.

What seems to work best in terms of reputation, resilience and sustainability is a focused, agile, flexible, mixed model where public funds form the core support, but activities are supported through partnerships and income generation where that is seen as a means to an end, and not an end in itself.

The global footprints of countries' cultural relations agencies reflect their history and where their diaspora populations are, rather than policy priorities. Some countries, however, are taking innovative, strategic, approaches to location, detaching their physical presence from capital cities, focusing on target populations, and basing their activities on hybrid on/off-line models.

Research, evaluation and learning were seen as key to 21st-century success. The USA has had a data-driven approach to public diplomacy since 2014, and other countries are increasing their interest in data analytics, research, evaluation and building in organisational learning and knowledge management to operate more flexibly, with more agility, and be better informed about local contexts and networks, in order to optimise engagement.

Introduction

This report provides an overview of how the UK's cultural relations infrastructure compares with the arrangements and approaches of other countries. It was commissioned in recognition that the UK is in a time of transition as it pursues a future outside of the European Union and is pursuing new trading and political relationships globally. At the same time, the UK, like every other country, is having to contend with the impact of Covid-19.

These two themes, the quest for a new global role and the need to cope with a crisis which highlights the level of interdependence in today's world, run through this research. The first is a national event, the second is truly global.

Covid-19 has shown that interdependence does not necessarily result in co-operation. There has been an increase in competition for 'soft power' among the major powers as some of them project themselves as competent, generous, or scientifically innovative in finding common solutions. Others have taken an explicit 'me first' approach, competing for scarce resources in rather sharp ways.

At the same time, Covid-19 is impacting on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). From reversing progress on good health (SDG 3) to the negative impact on 1.25 billion students (SDG 4), the pandemic is affecting vulnerable societies the most. As Erna Solberg, the Prime Minister of Norway, and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, President and Co-chair, Republic of Ghana, the UN Secretary-General's SDG Advocates, write, Covid-19 should spur us to accelerate and deepen our efforts to 'recover better', and build a healthier, safer, fairer and a more prosperous world.¹ The alternative would be devastating and set back the gains of recent years.

The context of this report makes it more urgent than ever that as the UK looks to the world, it does so well equipped with information about what other countries are doing to connect and project their brand and influence. Only by understanding how UK efforts compare to those of other countries will the UK be able to assess what to do, how to do it, where to do it, and what it can expect to achieve by doing it – relative to others.

The report writing process consisted of two phases. In the first, we gathered data on 17 organisations that we identified as having broadly comparable remits to the British Council, in 12 countries. These data looked at how other countries expressed the missions of their cultural relations and soft power agencies in terms of structures (i.e. bodies), governance, accountability, level of public investment, effectiveness, presence and activities. The findings from this phase form the first element of the evidence base for the report.

1. Sourced from: www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-pandemic-effect-sdg-un-progress on 23 July 2020.

In the second phase, we interviewed 40 thought leaders, policymakers, senior practitioners, and expert researchers. Due to the nature of the subject, some asked that their contributions should be confidential. We respect that, and refrain from identifying them in this report. It would be churlish, however, not to mention that we were particularly pleased to interview Professor Joe Nye, who coined the term soft power in 1990. We are enormously grateful to him and to the other interviewees for their time and valuable input to shaping the analysis and findings presented in this report.

One question we had was whether the practices of soft power and cultural relations were, in fact, as common in the world of international relations as are often claimed. We were very pleased to see that in fact they are used everywhere, albeit with the caveats that they mean different things to different people, and that although they are often used interchangeably, they are, in fact, very distinct concepts.

This difference is one which our research helped to clarify and to note that it is actually well understood around the world. Soft power is aligned to foreign policy and is about the pursuit of national advantage. As such, it is a valuable part of the toolkit available to states and is established alongside diplomacy, strategic communications and hard power in all countries.

Cultural relations, by contrast, always seeks to establish people-to-people engagement based on trust, co-operation and mutual benefit – long-term – making it well-suited to tackling global challenges which require sustained effort and genuine collaboration. We were very surprised to find that although the term is used much less around the world than is ‘soft power’, every country (with one exception) said that they were increasingly focusing on cultural relations methods, given the need to address the SDGs. We were even more surprised that during the research project, both Russia and China made moves in the direction of cultural relations, indicating that countries at least want to be seen to be doing good.

Given the paradoxical condition of the world today that there is increased competition at a time when co-operation is what is needed, we looked for how that manifested itself and found that there was very little evidence of overt competition between countries through their cultural relations institutions. There was one key battleground, however and that was higher education. All countries seek to influence others through educating their best and brightest, and, of course, securing their tuition fees. The market for students is growing as is online education – accelerated by the response to Covid-19.

Finally, Covid-19 is requiring all countries to innovate. Traditional cultural relations and soft power activities depend on face-to-face interactions. There is therefore a short-term financial impact from the loss of traditional language learning and examinations work. There is also a long-term shift underway as countries think through their business models and turn to hybrid digital/traditional methods. Innovation is happening, and new thinking is needed. Reputations are on the line. Countries are more aware than ever that in today’s world,

making exaggerated claims that can easily be fact-checked by anyone with a broadband connection, is not a sustainable approach. Countries do seem to want to focus more on the areas where competition is needed, while recognising that their reputational security and ability to tackle global challenges require a twin-track approach where competition is balanced with co-operation – soft power with cultural relations. This is not a zero-sum game. Both approaches are valid, and both are needed.

The research – a comparative study of cultural relations practice

Our remit

Our remit was to carry out a ‘competitor analysis’ based on understanding the history, origins and motivations behind the establishment and evolution of cultural relations organisations in a range of countries that are active in the field. We would then be in a position to consider the implications of what we found for policymakers across the UK.

In the course of this study we found, to our surprise, that there were no similar studies of countries’ institutions and policies for what we are calling international cultural relations. There were numerous surveys, perceptions studies, and academic papers on a range of topics, but none that attempted to look systematically at the comparative practices of countries today. This report is, therefore, both timely as countries are all struggling to adapt their approaches to the ‘new normal’ of life during and after Covid-19, and to the new ‘hyper-global’ online world as both a response to Covid-19 and an acceleration of existing trends.

Definitions: cultural relations

A word is needed on definitions. ‘Cultural relations’ is the preferred term of the British Council and is therefore used throughout this report. We observed (as others who have written about this have done) that other terms are used, and this can generate confusion in the minds of policymakers, practitioners and even academics. As the British Council’s report *The Value of Cultural Relations*² notes:

The term ‘Cultural Relations’ refers to interventions in foreign cultural arenas with the aim of enhancing intercultural dialogue and bringing about mutual benefits connected to security, stability and prosperity. There is no universally agreed definition of Cultural Relations. The conceptual confusion can lead to differences in practice, though it can also enable flexibility.

We return to the question of terminology later in this report as we believe the time has come to double down on the idea of cultural relations as the best way to frame and make sense of discussions of how countries should approach co-operation across borders for the common good – specifically in relation to Sustainable Development Goals.

2. Sourced from: www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/insight-articles/value-cult-relations on 14 July 2020.

Everybody does a form of cultural relations and most reasons for doing so are similar

We looked at the 17 institutions in 12 countries we initially identified as having roles and remits most in common with the British Council, as well as at the British Council itself, and at the European Union. We deliberately looked at different organisational types from ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs) to arm's length bodies, and a range of countries with very different histories and approaches to international engagement and foreign policy.

Country	Institutions
Australia	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)
Brazil	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty)
China	Hanban (Confucius Institute)
European Union³	European Union National Institutes of Culture (EUNIC)
France	Agence pour l'enseignement français à l'étranger (AEFE)
	Alliance française
	Campus France
	Institut français
Germany	Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD)
	Goethe-Institut
	Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa)
India	Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)
Japan	Japan Foundation
	Japan Houses
Russia	Russkiy Mir Foundation
	Rosstrudnichestvo
South Korea	Korea Foundation
Sweden	Swedish Institute
Turkey	Yunus Emre Enstitüsü
UK	British Council
USA	State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)

Every country we looked at operates a range of public policy-driven activities that seek to influence and attract populations in other countries. While this is not surprising, given the sample, what did surprise us was that their stated reasons for engaging in cultural relations activities were similar. Regardless of country, cultural relations was supported in order to promote understanding, share knowledge, and encourage co-operation (or as the Chinese put it: 'the building of a harmonious world').

3. The EU is not of course a country, and EUNIC is an umbrella body, but it was included given its role in the EU's strategic approach to cultural relations in external affairs.

Cultural relations are delivered by arm's length bodies

The research found that the great majority of countries delivered their cultural relations activities through arm's length bodies of various sorts. This was because they wished to be seen as acting for the common good rather than for the national interest, because they were very aware of how they were seen by others, and they wished to maintain their good reputations.

That was certainly true for the group of countries which were the most obviously 'like-minded' to the UK, including Germany, France, Sweden, Japan, and South Korea. These were also the countries that were most interested in the idea of co-operation with other countries. The European Union, in its strategic approach to cultural relations in external affairs also falls into this category. While it is not clear how the EU's approach will evolve, the possibility of positive engagement exists.

A formal and clear arm's length relationship: the Goethe-Institut

The Goethe-Institut (GI) is a non-profit German cultural association which acts as the cultural institute of the Federal Republic of Germany with a global reach. The relationship between the GI and the Federal Republic of Germany represented by the German Foreign Office, is governed by a published Basic Agreement. This makes clear that the GI is entrusted to carry out its 'contractual duties' and that it should work closely with the Foreign office in doing so.⁴

Coincidentally, and more surprisingly, during the course of the research phase of this study, both China and Russia announced that, having regard for how their soft power activities were perceived, they were taking steps to create arm's length agencies. On 4 July, the *South China Morning Post* reported that the Hanban (Headquarters of the Confucius Institutes) was to get a rebrand and be run as an 'NGO' formed of a group of universities and companies, as the Chinese government was concerned about the global backlash over Chinese soft power.⁵ On 13 July, RBC announced⁶ that various options for changes in Russia's approaches to 'soft power' were being discussed, including the possible reassignment of the Rossotrudnichestvo⁷ agency directly to the president (now accountable to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and the creation of a separate (partially arm's length) state corporation that would operate on projects and generate funds to promote them.

However these changes take effect in years to come, it was clear that countries that delivered their cultural relations activities through their MFAs, were in a small minority, that

4. The Basic Agreement can be found at: www.goethe.de/resources/files/pdf165/rahmenvertrag_engl_30okt18.pdf

5. Sourced from: tinyurl.com/yy6dpgc7 on 17 July 2020.

6. Sourced from: www.rbc.ru/politics/13/07/2020/5f05a8079a79477c4c39bfa5 (in Russian) on 16 July 2020.

7. Sourced from: rs.gov.ru/en on 16 July 2020.

those which did were reviewing their approach (Australia), or having to adapt to take account of government changes even including the abolition of key Departments (Brazil).⁸

An MFA whose role remains unclear: Australia's soft power review

The Australian government's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper committed it to conducting a review of the nation's soft power strengths and capabilities.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is leading the review, which is a whole-of-government effort to ensure Australia continues to build soft power and exercise influence effectively. The review will consider ways to better leverage Australia's soft power assets and build effective partnerships to advance Australia's security and prosperity.

The outcome of the review is still unknown.⁹

How countries describe what they do reflects a mix of their histories, the scope of their activities and reveals that terminological confusion is a global phenomenon

As noted above, definitions used by countries are often unclear and are not always useful in describing how they actually approach the development of policy or strategy. While the most common form of self-description is 'cultural diplomacy', the same country may say that it is operating at the same time under other labels. Australia, for example, claims to be simultaneously engaged in 'cultural diplomacy', 'soft power', 'public diplomacy', and 'economic diplomacy'. This is not necessarily inaccurate – it may be that Australia is being precise in its modes of operation, although given the overlap between these terms, it is not clear if this is the case. Other countries exhibit similar terminological confusion.

8. Sourced from: www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/brazils-new-government-has-dissolved-countrys-culture-ministry-180971236/ on 8 July 2020.

9. Sourced from: www.fpwhitepaper.gov.au/foreign-policy-white-paper/chapter-eight-partnerships-and-soft-power/soft-power on 8 July 2020

Policy alignment

A more fruitful way to understand what is going on is to look for patterns in policy alignment. Here too, although a number of policy agendas are often being pursued simultaneously, it is clear that foreign policy is in the lead. Fourteen of the institutions we looked at were clearly aligned with foreign policy although there are substantial overlaps both with other international policies such as trade, and with domestic policies, principally education and culture.

Mission

The missions of comparative organisations are broadly similar, reflecting countries' ideas of what they hope to achieve through cultural relations. There is a general belief that making connections, sharing and comparing cultures, studying and learning together, and (mostly young people) spending time in each other's countries, will lead to better understanding. This will thereby support a shared sense of the overlapping values and interests of the post-Second World War liberal international order. In order to turn these beliefs into programmes of action, organisations are tasked by governments to carry out a similar range of activities (see below).

Country	Mission
Australia	National promotion (DFAT)
Brazil	Promoting (Brazilian) language and culture (MFA)
China	Language, multiculturalism and harmony (new NGO)
France	Schools for French diaspora (AEFE)
	Language and cultural exchange (AF)
	Higher education (HE) mobility and promotion of French HE (CF)
	International cultural relations (IF)
Germany	Educational exchange (DAAD)
	Language, international co-operation, information provision (GI)
	Promote dialogue (ifa)
India	Cultural relations (ICCR)
Japan	Cultural exchange (JF)
	Cultural relations (JH)
Russia	Language, idea of Russian culture (RM)
	Popularisation of Russian culture in the world (RO)
	Development (RO)
South Korea	Cultural exchange programmes, promotion (KF)
Sweden	Promotion, trust building, development (SI)
USA	Increase mutual understanding, exchange programmes (ECA)

These models were already challenged, pre-pandemic. As Chatham House (and others) have noted:¹⁰

Challenges (to the rules based international order) are coming from rising or revanchist states; from unhappy and distrustful electorates; from rapid and widespread technological change; and indeed, from the economic and fiscal turmoil generated by the liberal international economic order itself.

Our research confirmed that these pressures are impacting on the missions of cultural relations bodies. Countries feel a need to react to other geo-political challenges, most notably the changing balance of influence between the USA and China.

The other major area of pressure on missions is the rise of digital communications technology as a response to Covid-19. The turn to the digital has been vastly accelerated, making the world both hyper-globalised as activity moves online, and hyper-localised at the same time, as countries struggle to adapt to social distancing and its impact on education and culture.

Existing missions still reflect a pre-Covid-19, pre-digital world. It is not yet clear how cultural relations activity will adapt to a new normal that so drastically disrupts traditional ways of doing things. How do you organise a language class? How do you share your culture with people in another country? How to cope with the loss of face-to-face interaction, so important for building trust?

Faced with these pressures, and with growing awareness of global challenges, especially the Climate crisis, the viral spread of the culture wars, and the prevalence and awareness among people of propaganda, fake news, and the downsides of the attention economy, countries are rethinking the fundamental missions of their cultural relations bodies and some are innovating in ways that challenge traditional practices. The lesson from this area of our research is that change is inevitable – it is not optional.

10. Sourced from: www.chathamhouse.org/london-conference-2015/background-papers/challenges-to-rules-based-international-order on 22 July 2020.

Functions, remits and activities

Despite these challenges, the remits of cultural relations bodies have not changed for the most part, though there are suggestive changes of emphasis, areas of operation, and signs of innovation.

Language

Every country engages in language promotion. However, the research indicates a number of issues.

- **Global English:** There is a growing questioning of the role of English as *the* language for global transactions, and a desire, for example, in Nigeria, for learning to be available in first languages. The USA in Nigeria, for example, does successful work in Hausa, and pointed to the availability of BBC News in Pidgin as an exemplary initiative.
- **Technology:** AI and machine translation are seen as increasingly much more efficient than the lengthy and costly process of language learning.
- **Identity:** Language is seen as a tool through which to maintain influence over diaspora populations who may be at risk of losing their sense of ‘Russianness’ or ‘Turkishness’.

Language, and the ability to learn the languages of others remain vitally important, but the reasons countries give for supporting it are changing. More and more, language learning is seen as valuable to enable access to higher education, or to support lifestyle and cultural choices, rather than always for business. Japanese language teaching is a success, worldwide, as a means to access Japanese culture rather than as a useful tool through which to do business in Japan.

Education

Every country supports educational activity. Indeed, it is the major area of activity, with the greatest amount of money and resource committed to it. Broadly, higher education including the attraction of foreign students, support for exchange programmes, scholarships and alumni programmes, with its focus on young people who are likely to become future leaders and influencers, scientists and innovators, artists and intellectuals, is the single most important focus of most countries’ cultural relations activities. Countries differ, however, in the nature and level of their commitment.

French educational diplomacy

Programme 185 of the French government 'Diplomacy of Influence' has education at its heart. For France, education 'remains a central player in promoting our culture, our language and our values'.

There are three main bodies involved in a very large-scale programme of educational diplomacy.

- AEFÉ serves the educational needs of French children outside France, contributes to the strengthening of co-operative relationships between French and foreign education systems, welcomes foreign students to the influence of the French language and culture, awards scholarships to children of French nationality enrolled in French schools and educational establishments abroad.
- The Alliance Française Foundation's mission is to:
 - develop the teaching and use of the French language around the world
 - contribute to increasing the intellectual and moral influence of France and the interest of all French-speaking cultures
 - encourage exchanges between cultures
 - contribute in general to the development of cultural diversity.
- Campus France is responsible for:
 - providing services to beneficiaries of international mobility programmes
 - organising seminars, symposia, conferences and training actions
 - hosting a 'Campus France' forum with French higher education establishments that makes recommendations for the international promotion of higher education in France
 - co-ordinating and helping develop the French response to international calls for tenders in the field of promotion of higher education
 - ensuring the best articulation between the needs expressed by diplomatic posts and those of French higher education establishments.

Arts and culture

Every country supports culture in some way. Typical activities include:

- major promotional 'showcase' events, bilateral cultural diplomacy initiatives such as large scale 'years of' programmes, support for the construction of major museums in key target countries, or management of pavilions at the Venice Biennale. The arts involved are 'official' and usually traditional – although this varies depending on how countries wish to be seen. Some, Germany is a good example, aim to exemplify

artistic freedom by involving challenging artists. Other countries take a more traditional approach

- attempts to influence (and grow) civil society in target countries by support for the creation of independent arts sectors
- cultural protection – work to save and preserve heritage from conflict
- building bridges between artists and cultural operators in different countries through mobility or exchange programmes
- maintaining connections with diaspora populations.

Every country believes in the importance of culture to their international relations. This belief is strongly held, though there is a general understanding that the work is long-term, and outcomes are hard to measure. There is also a general view that while it is appropriate for arts organisations such as orchestras or museums to be involved in explicitly policy-driven activity, that is not appropriate or effective when living creative artists are involved. They should not be instrumentalised to serve policy goals as that stifles genuine exchange and does not therefore bring the richest long-term results. There is a recognition that politics and policy can make the practice of arts and culture difficult and may require the creation of ‘safe spaces’. Cultural relations institutes can play a valuable role in providing the places where genuine cultural dialogue can take place. Indeed, the creation of such spaces is a very high priority for the cultural relations work of some of the UK’s closest allies.

Japan Houses – an innovative model that leverages cultural expertise, tradition and modernity

Japan Houses are part of the fourth strand of the Japanese MFAs' diplomatic focus: 'strengthen strategic communication in foreign policy'. Communication is defined as developing support for Japan – about tourism and Japan's role as a business operator and focal point for innovation.

Japan has three Japan Houses, in London, Los Angeles and São Paulo. Together they represent Japan's first serious cultural relations initiative. They are a new model of cultural institute which is city based but is not necessarily about being in a capital city. São Paulo is the centre of the Brazilian creative economy, and it also has the world's largest Japanese community outside Japan. LA is a global media hub, par excellence.

The houses are based on culture. Japan is, however, unique in its definition of culture, which embraces the everyday, so includes business, sports, arts, gastronomy, design, and fashion. Retail is a cultural experience.

Set up in 2017, in signature buildings (São Paulo, and prominent city centre locations, (all)), the houses have succeeded in attracting visitors and engaging with leading cultural commentators.

Having a physical facility is said to help a lot. The investment in quality architecture in a very limited number of locations (three) makes the necessary investment feasible. The houses also have a strong emphasis on the digital, reaching out to audiences in the millions through there is still a desire to expand.

The Japan Houses are innovative in all aspects of their operations. Independent (Japanese) businesses – shops, restaurants, cafés – are part of the mission showcasing high-quality, cutting-edge, fashionable examples of modern Japan. It is worth noting that the funding model supports cultural activities but not business. The Japanese government is sensitive to Japanese taxpayers' reluctance to subsidise commercial operations.

As a new initiative, the Japan Houses are on a learning curve, but they are moving very quickly. They are small, agile, structures, designed to be able to reinvent themselves and to move quickly – much faster than traditional cultural institutes. They are already building larger audiences of young people than they expected, and their digital offers are also ahead of target.

National promotion

Every country involves its cultural relations in national promotion – that, after all, is the original reason why these agencies were created. However, there is a recognition that effective promotion or branding, while necessary, is changing and requires a more

sophisticated approach than in the past. One-way messaging does not work long-term. In the goldfish bowl that is the Internet, messages have to be based on reality – deeds have to match words – you cannot credibly say you are good, for long, unless you are, in fact, good. You cannot influence debates on a topic that you are not seriously engaged with.

Other activities

The range of activities undertaken by cultural relations bodies worldwide does not always compare to the activities of the UK. Other countries are engaged in areas where the UK is not involved, and in ways which the UK does not employ. Significant work is done on:

- building long-term relationships with alumni of higher education programmes (France)
- making ease of engagement a priority and targeting non-elites, long-term (China)
- diaspora engagement and relations (Russia, China, India)
- educational support for expatriate communities (France)
- highly targeted activities focused on specific locations using high-profile sophisticated venues (Japan)
- explicit promotion of values, peace, human rights or democracy (Germany).

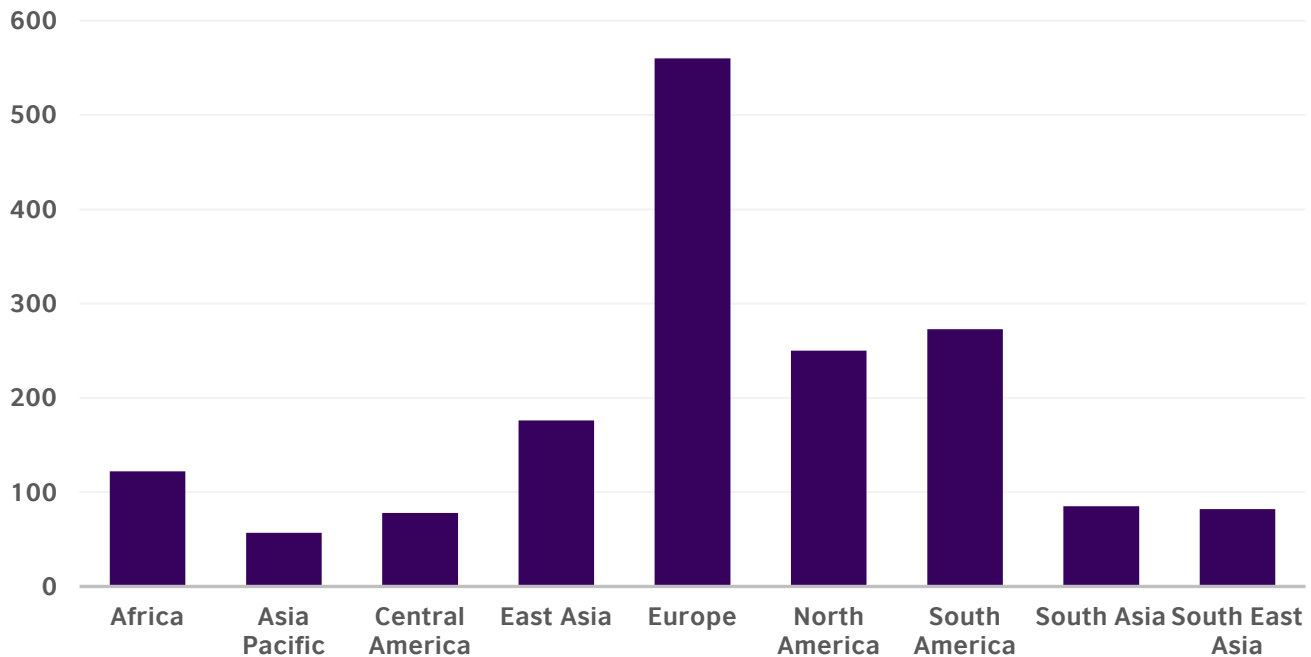
Geography

There are a few overall trends.

- The distribution of global cultural relations effort, as measured by numbers of institutes, does not clearly map onto contemporary assessments of geo-political and economic influence:

Top 30 countries by presence of cultural relations institutes from UK and comparator countries	Number of cultural relations institutes
USA	217
Brazil	109
Germany	85
India	85
Mexico	78
Italy	77
France	73
Argentina	72
UK	64
Russia	63
Spain	61
Australia	57
South Korea	52
Japan	51
China	47
Netherlands	47
Thailand	43
Indonesia	39
Colombia	36
South Africa	36
Madagascar	35
Poland	35
Canada	33
Portugal	30
Chile	28
Peru	28
Nigeria	26
Vietnam	26
Hungary	25
Morocco	25

- The pattern mostly reflects the distribution of power that existed in the 20th century, the greatest concentration of institutes (of the UK's main comparators) is in Europe, but is evolving to meet the challenges of the 21st.



- Countries tend to focus on their region or neighbourhood.
- Where cultural relations are led from within MFAs it is possible to achieve broader, but shallower, reach, drawing on global networks of Embassies (the same is true of operations sited in universities). MFAs, however, focus on cultural diplomacy, rather than on support for longer-term exchange.
- More innovative countries (Japan, Sweden) are focusing on very specific locations on the one hand, while stepping up their Internet-based activities on the other.
- There is pressure everywhere to reduce costs and to be more sustainable.

Audiences and reach

There are two main target groups.

- *Young people and elites.* They are either explicitly targeted, or programmes are directed at international students and cultural practitioners who can be assumed to belong to cosmopolitan elite groups.
- *Diaspora and expatriate populations.* While the UK does not have this as a priority, it is almost alone in doing so. Diasporas include both a country's own citizens abroad and diaspora populations from other countries that are still highly connected with, and influential on, their home countries.

Other groups that are less frequently targeted by cultural relations agencies include public intellectuals, business leaders and media.

Digital activities are growing (though less than expected). Some countries have been investing in digital for some time, but overall less has been achieved in this area than might have been expected, given that Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web in 1990, and the priority given by governments to the development of GovTech in recent years.

There are a few signs that countries are developing more strategic approaches to audience engagement, focusing their efforts where they would be most fruitful in reaching specific targeted populations, shaping perceptions, influencing preferences or hoping to change behaviours. However, with one or two exceptions (USA, Sweden), cultural relations institutes are only at the first stage of engaging with techniques of identifying, engaging with, or influencing populations using the data-driven techniques that are increasingly used in the private sector, or innovating, for example by leveraging private and cultural sector specialist expertise to engage more successfully with audiences through venues (Japan – see above).

Scale of activity

It is possible to identify the countries with the greatest levels of activity: China, the USA, France, Germany, the UK – though these are crude measures, based on high-level reporting and using numbers of institutes as proxy measures. There are no good qualitative or longitudinal data that would permit meaningful comparisons. How to compare the levels of activity in a French lycée with that in a Confucius Institute or a British IELTS examination?

There are some measures of the scale of digital reach, and this is a growing area of activity, but they do not go beyond very crude measures such as subscriber numbers. Similarly, there is a significant level of social media activity, but the impact is hard to assess as the methods used to assess it rarely go beyond simple analytics to make sense of what is going on behind the numbers in the digital space.

Confucius Institutes

Hanban has a long history of maintaining an elaborate web presence. Zaharna notes: 'In 2006, the headquarters began hosting its annual Confucius Institute Conference for current and prospective institutes. In 2009, Confucius Institute Online – a hub that provides detailed information on the CI initiative – was created. The site, originally in Chinese and English, has expanded to more than 45 language options. The original website (www.confuciusinstitute.net) was highly interactive, containing Chinese podcast lessons and a resource pool, as well as cultural features. A second-generation site (www.chinese.cn) incorporated social media and turned the site into an online forum for finding and connecting with others.

Governance, accountability, stakeholders and partners

As already noted, most institutions are arm's length bodies. The length of the arm varies, however, as does the vigour with which it keeps a grip on decision making and operations - bodies which are ostensibly arm's length often operate under the close control and direction of the MFA. A small minority of countries operate through their MFAs exclusively, but this poses problems and limits the scope and range of activity.

The consensus as to the most effective approach is where cultural relations operates within a strategic framework, but where operational freedom is maximised. The body has to be able to navigate independently of the twin sirens of state direction and commercial interest. Only in this way, can it credibly maintain that it is operating in the education, cultural, or social interests of people in often very different circumstances.

Governance boards tend to be representative, including a range of government departments, parliamentarians, auditors, stakeholder government agencies, and in a few cases, staff representatives.

Accountability is usually to ministers for external affairs, and through the MFA, to parliaments. A significant number of institutions have multiple accountabilities and stakeholder models which include devolved administrations, regional and local governments. This is an approach which both recognises the multi-stakeholder nature of cultural relations work, and is more inclusive, opening up a wider range of possibilities. It also recognises the reality that all institutions work closely with civil society partners, principally universities.

There are (a very few) interesting models of innovative ways in which the private sector can be directly involved in cultural relations, going beyond sponsorship or contracting, to sharing in the operation, bringing skills that are missing from the public sector. This is, however, a subject of interest to many countries, as they look to leverage funds and obtain financial support.

Funding and human resources

- The amounts of money committed by each country vary according to the priority given to influence and attraction activities, and the legacy systems of delivery bodies.
- The greatest amount is spent by France, the USA, the UK, and Germany.
- Most institutions earn a proportion of their income – the British Council appears to earn more income as a proportion of its turnover than any other institution except Campus France (though a lack of available data prevents this report from coming to firm conclusions). It is worth noting, however, that part of the motive of Russia and China contemplating moving to more arm’s length arrangements is their potential to generate their own income,
- There is very little data on human resources, but most institutions combine a lean domestic structure with a significant overseas workforce, employed on a variety of terms.

Country	Institutions	Total income (£)	State support (£)	Other (included earned income) (£)	Earned income as a % of total (£)
Australia	DFAT	5.5	5.5	0	0
Brazil	Itamaraty	1.3	1.3	0	0
China	Hanban	130.0	65.0	65.0	50
France	AEFE	953.3	441.8	493.2	53
	Alliance française	270.9	266.0	4.9	2
	Campus France	24.3	5.4	17.9	74
	Institut français	34.3	30.5	3.8	11
Germany	DAAD	684.0	342.0	179.0	26
	Goethe-Institut	343.0	208.0	135.0	39
	Ifa	20.0	20.0	0	0
India	ICCR	42.3	26.1	16.2	38
Japan	Japan Foundation	154.0	98.0	56.0	36
Russia	Russkiy Mir Foundation	5.1	No data	No data	N/K
	Rosstrudnichestvo	44.7	44.7	No data	N/K
South Korea	Korea Foundation	100.0	100.0	No data	N/K
Sweden	Swedish Institute	36.0	36.0	No data	N/K
UK	British Council	1460.0	184.0	1058.0	85
USA	ECA	562.0	562.0	0	0

Soft power and cultural relations: what are they, why they matter and why they are different

Definitions

Soft power and cultural relations are both parts of a vocabulary of the public aspects of diplomacy, but they do not relate to one another in a straightforward way. It would be incorrect to say that they are two sides of the same coin or that one is an element of the other:

Soft power is the advantage that comes to an international actor through being associated with admirable values and culture.

Cultural relations is an area of activity whereby individuals and institutions from different countries connect for mutual benefit.

An international actor might choose to facilitate cultural relations as a mechanism to build soft power. The problem in this intersection is that the desire to acquire an advantage in international relations tends to be repulsive rather than attractive, and cultural relations, when dominated by a unilateral rather than a mutual agenda, is necessarily limited in its impact. Indeed, it could be counterproductive to the typical person, alerting natural defences against the 'hard sell'.

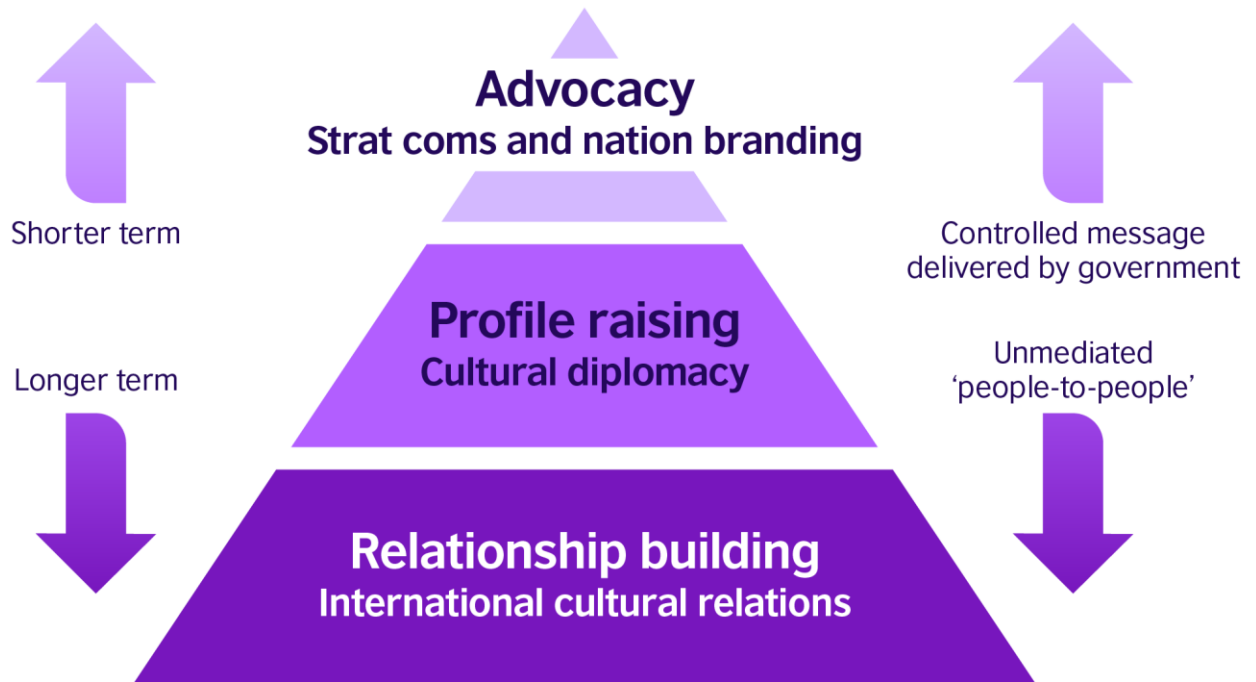
The umbrella: public diplomacy

The concept of public diplomacy provides a mechanism for bringing a certain order to the jumble of terms associated with soft power. Public diplomacy is the umbrella term for the ways in which an international actor attempts to manage the international environment through engaging with foreign publics. It seeks a policy end of some kind, but that can be general or mutual. Many actors conceive of their public diplomacy as a way to increase their soft power or, minimally, an increase in the degree of security that comes from a sound reputation (reputational security). Activities to this end differ in their policy horizon and the level of government input required. One choice is cultural relations.

Figure 1 shows the classic public diplomacy pyramid developed by Foreign Affairs Canada in 2005 overlaid with the terminology currently used in the UK. The apex of the pyramid may be seen as pointing towards soft power/reputational security. The distinctive features of cultural relations are its longer time scale and the degree to which it is unmediated by government input when compared to strategic communications or nation branding activities. The middle category in the diagram – cultural diplomacy – covers activities like arts diplomacy with a limited two-way function. At some points in its history the British Council's activities have included both cultural diplomacy and cultural relations.

Figure 1 Public diplomacy pyramid (after Foreign Affairs Canada)

Public diplomacy pyramid (after Foreign Affairs Canada, 2005)



It is important to note that while cultural relations may be funded with the objective of soft power in mind, expecting it to act in the short term, or under close control goes against its nature. The credibility of cultural relations comes from its perceived distance from the interests of a state or government as opposed to the general interests of a society, and an understanding of its value to both sides in the relationship. Cultural relations is a tool of influence but one which paradoxically works best when not treated as a tool and not associated with influence. Cultural relations work through a process of relationship building and therefore are necessarily focused on mutual goals and not oriented towards a unilateral win. The desire to 'win' in relationships is a symptom of psychosis in people and, by the same token, undermines the soft power of an international actor. Strategic communications and nation branding or promotional activities like the UK's GREAT Campaign have value but the converse is true for them, that they would not be helped by being conflated with cultural relations and expected to work long-term with little direct government input.

Soft power

As already noted, soft power is about getting what you want, which implies an element of manipulation. It is not necessarily altruistic and may bring confusion to the field by asserting commonalities between a multilateral win-win like the Fulbright Program and a unilateral promotional activity like the Beijing Olympics.

Part of the significance of soft power comes from the fact that in an age of transparency the use of hard power is so hard to do without generating negative images or feelings that come from being subject to the presence or absence of an economic carrot or the wielding of a military stick. While it is conceivable that an actor could acquire soft power through work for mutual advantage, the internal logic of the concept is unilateral – which is why it has been embraced so widely by policy makers in a range of powerful countries. The appeal of the term operates against the stability of the structure. In terms of the pyramid, above, in the logic of soft power the actor tends to promote attention to the apex rather than the base – like a building with an elaborate roof and neglected foundations (Canada's public diplomacy under Stephen Harper is a good case of this).

Cultural relations

Cultural relations work best when they seek to build credible collaborations for mutual benefit. They are founded on the idea that collaboration in the cultural sphere¹¹ contributes not only to awareness of an international actor but trust in that actor, and that trust is essential to sustain relationships in difficult times. Martin Rose has argued that true mutuality goes beyond just the mutual benefit from a single project to become an open ended, unconditional regard in which a foreign citizen is prepared to maintain positive contact despite a bump in behaviour by the actor in the short to medium term, understanding the long-term value of trust and seeing a trust-based relationship as superior to a transactional one.

Part of the nature of cultural relations is that the process is as, or even more, important than the outcome. Participants in cultural relations activities are engaged in a powerful and enduring way but may not register as significant in the mind of the policymaker. One example involves the case of Alexander Yakovlev, a young Russian educated at Columbia University in New York under the terms of the first US–Soviet cultural exchange agreement of 1958. The insight into, and understanding of, the West which he obtained equipped him to be the key guru of glasnost as Gorbachev's aide in the 1980s. While this example has often been used by Nye to illustrate soft power and influence it is better understood in relational terms as a matter of trust, and an understanding that greater contact was not surrendering all values and distinctiveness to an unstoppable onrushing cultural force against which resistance was futile.

11. Culture being defined widely.

Terminology

It should also be said that the terminology associated with issues of soft power and public diplomacy varies greatly from one actor to another and can be seen as a window on the underlying institutional culture and expectation of the actor. Japan, for example, has always preferred to speak of cultural exchange, irrespective of whether or not a two-way flow is taking place, as a way to justify value to the recipient. The US has used the term cultural diplomacy (which seems to have German origins) because of its inherent connection to the activity of the state, which in their system has maintained a tight oversight of the activity via the State Department. Public diplomacy, in contrast, was a term created for the now defunct United States Information Agency which by its breadth argued for an expansion of its institutional remit. The UK's British Council has maintained cultural relations as its preferred term because of its inbuilt distance from the language of policy intervention.

Confusion

The confusion between cultural relations and soft power is not hard to explain. Both understand the value in two-way engagement; both look to work through cultural mechanisms which is to say the elements of lived experience including art, language, education and the material and intangible aspects of everyday life. Both claim a mutual benefit. Both exist in the realm of foreign policy. Simply taking an aspect of life, transposing it to an international context and hyphenating it with diplomacy does not make it necessarily rise to the level of cultural relations. Gastro-diplomacy can exist as a form of international display in which a foreigner simply tastes an international actor's delicacy at an Expo pavilion or as a profound form of cultural relations in which citizens from one country learn to understand and be nurtured by the cuisine of another.

The confusion between soft power and international cultural relations can cause problems on the ground. Throughout the British Council's history it has had to stress the distinction between its mode of work and the political advocacy needed for short term foreign policy. In the early days of the Second World War the British Council's protector Lord Lloyd warned off the Minister of Information, John Reith, with a formulation delivered with the authority of a law of physics that the effectiveness of cultural propaganda declines in proportion to its proximity to political propaganda.¹² Credibility was at stake. The answer was a firewall between policy/diplomacy and cultural work. It seems to be easier to build a firewall at the outset, as is the case with the Goethe-Institut, than to retrofit it as a result of experience, which was the practice with the British Council.

Recent examples of a clash include complaints in some posts where opportunities for cultural relations, like the centenary of women's suffrage, were met with short-term speaker events and the soft power approach rather than deeper engagement and dialogue, connecting communities of shared interest that would last in the long term. Other posts went so far as to see an embassy focus on Downton Abbey and the Premier League as

12. Charmley, J (1987) *Lord Lloyd and the decline of the British Empire*. London: Weidenfeld.

antithetical to a cultural relations approach and the principal adversary of British international cultural relations to be a glib stereotype.

An obvious point of tension is in the matter of evaluating the effectiveness of international cultural relations. The language of the key performance indicator tends to affirm the short-term soft power *output* rather than the longer term international cultural relations *outcome*. The actor best placed to succeed in cultural relations is the one with the confidence to allow its cultural agency the distance to speak on behalf of its society as a whole with the longest horizon. The actor set up to fail is that one expected to tow the party line and produce a demonstrable attitude shift according to an electoral or other political deadline.

Conclusion

Looking ahead to the 21st century it is clear that the challenges faced by the world require collaboration. They are what UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called the ‘problems without passports’ of climate, migration, inequality, instability and pandemic – and as such require solutions with many passports. In this world the long-term reputation of an actor depends not on its utility to promote itself or its distinctiveness in the abstract, but in its ability to be relevant to others, and most especially in facilitating collective solutions to shared problems. We know that partnership rests on trust, and that trust is nurtured by cultural contact, so the work does not have to be directly connected to the problems to be beneficial. The world is committed to the Sustainable Development Goals. Two of these are especially relevant to the future of the British Council: 4) Education and 17) Partnership for the goals. A country that collaborates to such worthy ends will be secure in its reputation beyond the fads of a particular moment. It will be stitched into the life of the world to mutual benefit. It is especially important to engage in cultural co-operation across the political fault lines of the world that prevent governments from partnering directly. To neglect such partnerships is to give in to the centrifugal forces that pull towards the worst outcomes.

Competition and co-operation

Influence

The number of actors exerting, or trying to exert, geopolitical influence is growing, and the areas in which geopolitical competition is taking place are expanding. Paradoxically, the fact that global competition is hotting up is leading to calls for increased co-operation and the areas in which co-operation is taking place are also expanding. This is partly due to the stakes getting higher – whether that is the need for a response to Covid-19, or to tackle climate change.

Co-operation matters in a fragmented world. As aspects of everyday life and especially our taken-for-granted views of the benefits of co-operation are increasingly challenged by geopolitical developments, it is not really surprising that the practice of co-operation itself is evolving into an area of geopolitical strategy. Examples of this are frequent in countries' responses to helping each other during the Covid-19 pandemic, where highly mediated offers of assistance are more often seen as being 'soft power' plays, than genuine efforts at co-operation.

The global health crisis has shone a light on our assumptions. All countries, however liberal or authoritarian, imposed restrictions on citizens, on travel and mobility. This made it clear that globalisation can trigger both hyper-connectivity mainly through digital communications, and outright dis-connectivity, through closed borders and restrictions on travel and association. Hence, what governments and organisations with potentially diverging agendas mean by international co-operation matters more than ever. Analysing those various meanings is crucial for making sense of countries' strategies that sustain and shape practices of competition and co-operation in the emerging new world order.

The Covid-19 shock has also triggered debates about how co-operation will work in a world dominated by very large countries and blocks – the USA, China, and possibly the EU. How will medium and small powers operate? It is clear that co-operation will continue, whatever the geo-politics, but how will this work, and how effective can it be? Within this context, Brende¹³ calls for a co-operative order:

The more powers compete and pursue strategic advantage at the expense of addressing shared technological, environmental and economic challenges, the more likely it will be that a broader sense of friction will develop across the global system. A rivalrous global system will in turn make it more unlikely that shared priorities are fulfilled.

13. Børge Brende, President of the World Economic Forum: Sourced from: www.weforum.org/agenda/authors/borge-brende on 7 July 2020.

It is clear that both effective competition and co-operation will be required and that the relationship between them will need to be rethought.

While the bad news is well-known, what is less well-known, but is equally important for the future, is the good news: there is an enormous focus on innovation, driven both by Covid-19 and by the need to respond to the difficult times we are in, that is leading countries to develop new ways of working that go beyond assumptions of the past that no longer apply. The time is right to focus on these and see what lessons can be learned from international experience, particularly in relation to where there is a need for competition, and where there is a need for effective and innovative approaches and models of co-operation to address different needs.

Attraction

The concept of attraction is central to the idea of soft power, which is based on ideas of getting what you want by inducing people to want what they think you've got. This idea can be honest in the sense that there is no doubt that if a country has a highly popular music or film culture (USA), a high cultural brand (France, Japan), university system (USA, UK), or a language that others value for its utility in negotiating the global marketplace (UK, USA), then that country can be said to be attractive. There are, however, three main problems with that idea.

- Big, already dominant countries which are rich in 'soft power assets' can be resented as well as admired. The spread of their culture can be seen as 'hegemonic', a constituent of unpopular globalisation, that is destructive of smaller, more local, traditional or indigenous cultures. Their very success can count against them. Smaller, or poorer, countries without these assets cannot hope to compete.
- Countries which are rich in assets but with policies that are considered less attractive by the compilers of soft power indices, are deemed to be less successful. Important developments with long-term consequences can therefore be missed. The indices may be reasonably well-founded, but they assume that all countries are competing in the same spaces for the same things and their relative success can therefore be compared. Examples would be China's successful, but low-key, efforts to engage with non-elite student populations in Africa, or the (again low-key) work that goes on with diaspora populations.
- Attractiveness can be based on a trick. A recent book¹⁴ introduces the idea of soft power by comparing it to the fence-painting story in *Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain, where Tom gets another boy to do what he does not want to do himself (paint a fence) by pretending that he is enjoying the task, so inducing the other boy to want to do it. Soft power in this sense can be said to be deceptive, and

14. Ohnesorge, H (2020) *Soft Power, The Forces of Attraction in International Relations*. Bonn, Springer.

probably unsustainable especially if the false pretences are exposed. This is a particular risk in a world where multiple sources of information about a country are only a few clicks away.

In other words, short-term marketing or communications-based strategies based on attractiveness may work in the short-term but are unlikely to be effective in the longer term. In a world where information flows everywhere, instantaneously, and rapid change impacts on policies, strategies, perceptions and behaviours, the gap between the promise and the reality is readily exposed.

Competition

Our research confirmed that competition in the national interest, driven by MFAs, is in reality what drives most cultural relations effort around the world. Despite this, we found very few areas of direct competition between cultural relations organisations, except in the area of higher education where competition for students is intense. It could be the case, however, that institutions and interviewees were reluctant to talk about competition, given their claims to want to work co-operatively. We also identified a limited number of territories where countries focus their efforts.

Governments and parliaments (to a lesser extent) take an interest in these areas of competition and apply resources to them. Every country we looked at operates a range of public policy-driven soft power and cultural relations activities that seek to influence and attract populations in other countries *as well as* activities that are truly based on supporting engagement and mutuality. This is not a zero-sum game. Both modes of engagement are practiced, but the *value* of soft power competition is seen to be enhanced (as noted earlier) when it is justified in terms of disinterestedness. Countries all say that they wish to promote understanding, share knowledge, and encourage co-operation because they recognise the reputational benefits of doing so. It is important for states to be seen to be cooperating for the common good.

Who competes successfully?

Indices such as the Portland Soft Power 30 are a reasonably effective way to track which countries are leading in soft power. The top five ranking since 2015¹⁵ are:

15. Source: softpower30.com

Country position	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1	UK	USA	France	UK	France
2	Germany	UK	UK	France	UK
3	USA	Germany	USA	Germany	Germany
4	France	Canada	Germany	USA	Sweden
5	Canada	France	Canada	Japan	USA

These rankings are true to the idea of soft power – those countries which have the most widely known cultures and educational systems dominate the rankings. This can be disrupted, however. Sweden’s entry into the top five in 2019 was attributed to its strong reputation for governance, civil rights and commitment to global causes as well as for technological innovation. The arrival of Greta Thunberg, however, ‘captured international attention, after publicly criticising global leaders at both Davos and the UN Climate Summit for lacking commitment to climate policies. Hailed the “Greta effect”, the #flygskam hashtag emerged, and her actions have inspired youth activists around the world.’¹⁶ This example illustrates the unpredictability of attempts to develop policies and structures for national reputation in the social media age, when individuals as well as institutions can shape perceptions.

Rather by contrast, there is one outstanding example of the success of a long-term strategic approach which brings together foreign policy, soft power and cultural relations. In the last 50 years, Germany, which has had cultural relations as the third pillar of its foreign policy since the 1970s and has the most rigorous approach to strategy, is outstandingly successful in terms of improving and managing its international reputation. The key ingredients are all there: leadership that is seen as competent and consistent, a strategic approach, co-ordination of strategy development at Federal level which consults with and involves civil society organisations and sub-national structures, a range of specialist delivery agencies, a strong domestic cultural sector, and an increasingly strong higher education sector. It is no coincidence that Germany was the top-rated global power in Gallup’s 2020 Rating World Leaders poll.¹⁷

It is also important to understand that there is no one model of success, and there is certainly no one theory of change. Measuring the impact of soft power and cultural relations activities and institutions is very difficult. As a recent study says:

*While the need for evaluation has become increasingly emphasized within the global public diplomacy community, recent research suggests the state of the practice is grim.*¹⁸

16. Sourced from: softpower30.com/country/sweden/ on 27 July 2020.

17. Sourced from: www.gallup.com/analytics/315824/gallup-global-leadership-center.aspx on 29 July 2020.

18. Sourced from: journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1748048519887295 on 29 July 2020.

In the absence of an agreed approach to measuring success, we asked study participants to rate their own success. The range of answers we received revealed the different views of success of different countries. They included:

- ‘Brand is very successful. Clear physical, philosophical and material manifestation of contemporary Japan.’
- ‘10 (out of 10) in the sphere of culture, the Russian Federation does not have to give in to any of its partners.’
- ‘Hard to assess as the approach is different – it is about being seen to be present. If you’re in a competition or collaboration you can assess. In the middle, it is harder. Don’t have anyone to compare to. Presence is not a clear concept. Want to be at same level as other cultures, have something to offer. Brazil to be perceived abroad as a land of culture.’
- ‘Language teaching. Knowing how to teach Turkish as a foreign language.’
- ‘Our work in Civil Society dialogue is our focus now (Germany).’

This report also identified a number of initiatives that are good examples of successful competition for influence and attraction. At the global level, it can be said that the country which seems to have made the most significant impact from the least investment is China. In return for its estimated annual spend from public funds of between £40 million and £65 million, matched by the same amount of earned income, China has a global network of 541 Confucius Institutes (CIs), based in universities around the world. This has stimulated demand for Chinese language learning and for Chinese culture. The CIs’ model of partnership with local universities allows for rapid expansion overseas, while their partnerships with Chinese universities plays an important role in domestic politics as part of the narrative of the restoration of China’s image in the world. The CIs’ overt role as a key element of China’s soft power has attracted criticism and controversy, particularly in the USA and recently in Sweden. This has led the Chinese government to re-brand the CIs as an arm’s length body (see Appendix D). Features of their work which are often overlooked are their focus on the Chinese diaspora, providing language teaching, cultural rediscovery and consolidation, and their links to Chinese provinces.

There are many examples of individual success from all of the institutes studied in this report. In arts and culture, the Goethe-Institut in India cited *Five Million Incidents*. This was a year-long project by the Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi and Kolkata to mark the centenary of the *Declaration of the Independence of the Mind*, signed by an international consortium of artists, intellectuals and philosophers that included Albert Einstein and Rabindranath Tagore. The project gave money to 90 artists over nine months to animate spaces. It brought in new audiences, and was based on consciously idealistic principles of credibility, generosity, and learning. It stood out from the activities of other countries through its idealism which was very attractive to Indian partners. A similar approach – using arts and culture to achieve a distinctive presence, is taken by the USA in Nigeria. As other countries do not tend to engage culturally, the USA has maintained a good

reputation by supporting local events and providing scholarships for Nigerian musicians and filmmakers to spend time with global streaming platforms based in the USA.

Most competition is in higher education

In terms of areas of competition, it was clear that it was more revealing to look at topics rather than at geography, and that the area of most urgent competition was higher education. Countries compete for talent in the form of faculty and students. They also compete for the knowledge and innovation needed for economic exploitation and to tackle global challenges. It is clear from our research, and from recent events, that all countries see higher education as an increasingly important area of activity, vital for international reputation as well as for economic development and an opportunity to access the talented young people who will be the opinion formers of the future. The way in which countries go about targeting higher education varies considerably, and there are detailed lessons to be learned, but the takeaway is the need to have a strategic approach.

This does impact on the geography of competition. According to Universities UK, the geographical origins of foreign students in the UK in 2019 was as shown below.¹⁹

This geography is that of the status quo. There were some 224 million global educational enrolments in 2018, and there are predicted to be 594 million global enrolments by 2040.²⁰ Meanwhile, a market for online and flexible and distance education (ODFL) outpaces conventional on-campus delivery. Given these figures, it is not surprising that higher education is a competitive focus.

19. Sourced from:

www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/International/Documents/2019/International%20facts%20and%20figures%20slides.pdf on 22 July 2020.

20. For UNESCO data on historical global enrolments see Calderon, AJ (2018) *Massification of higher education revisited*. Melbourne: RMIT University. Sourced from:

www.academia.edu/36975860/Massification_of_higher_education_revisited on 24 July 2020.

Figure 2 Top 20 domiciles of international students in the UK in 2017–18 and percentage change since 2016–17

Country position	Country of origin	Number of students	Percentage change
1	China	106,530	+12.0
2	India	19,750	+19.3
3	USA	18,885	+7.4
4	Hong Kong	16,350	-2.0
5	Malaysia	14,970	-8.6
6	Italy	13,985	+3.9
7	France	13,660	-0.7
8	Germany	13,545	-1.4
9	Nigeria	10,540	-16.8
10	Greece	10,135	+0.9
11	Spain	9630	+9.2
12	Ireland	9600	-4.7
13	Cyprus	9160	+2.3
14	Romania	8665	+6.7
15	Saudi Arabia	7950	-16.8
16	Poland	7540	+14.5
17	Singapore	7020	-3.8
18	Thailand	6270	+1.5
19	Canada	6180	+4.5
20	Bulgaria	8665	-4.0

Other areas of competition

Other areas of traditional soft power and cultural relations activity are less clearly linked to agendas of national competition.

- Generally, language learning is seen as of declining importance, as developments in AI are encroaching into traditional language learning methods, although language learning is closely linked to young peoples' ability to access higher education, a connection that will continue.
- Arts and culture work straddles both soft power and cultural relations activities. It is important in promoting and sustaining ideas of national identity, particularly among diaspora populations. It is seen as worthwhile activity when there was a gap in arts and cultural provision from other countries – there is an advantage to being the only arts offer around. Arts and culture are also a good channel for raising profile and engaging with audiences in countries where other relations are difficult.

- So-called ‘society’ work, hitherto a relatively minor part of the UK’s activities is, however, increasing in importance as countries step up their engagement and collaboration around climate change and other SDGs. It is not, however, a space of direct competition. Rather it is an increasing area for co-operation, and some major countries – particularly countries that the UK would regard as ‘like-minded’ – are seeking to boost their reputations by cooperating, and being seen to co-operate, for the common good. The evidence suggests that this is an increasingly important area for the future.

Co-operation

Co-operation matters to countries and to operate successfully, it needs to operate at two main levels.

- *Domestically*: across governments; between governments and domestic stakeholders, especially with the wide range of civil society actors (universities, NGOs, cultural organisations, research centres, etc.).
- *Internationally*: between governments, whether bilaterally or multilaterally, and crucially between peoples – by which is really meant co-operation through civil society.

Arrangements vary across the world in relation to the degree of both domestic and international co-operation – there is no one pattern. It is clear, however, that cultural relations requires a close alignment between the various domestic actors involved, whether these are government departments, sub-national public authorities or independent civil society actors. It is also clear that co-operation has to operate across the domestic and international divide, and that managing it can be a complex exercise in multi-level diplomacy.

As noted above, there are encouraging examples of successful collaboration and indications that countries are increasingly working together on global challenges where people to people collaboration is needed and cultural relations approaches based on civil societies can be valuable. There are signs of countries beginning to take genuinely strategic approaches to co-operation, and the timing is right for a country – the UK? – really to grasp the nettle and take the lead by baking its commitment to co-operation into its overall strategy for global engagement, its strategic communications and making the promotion of co-operation for the common good the focus of its approach to cultural relations.

There are, of course, barriers to doing this successfully, but the conditions are there. There would be a welcome for such an initiative, provided a cultural relations approach is taken. Even with countries such as Russia, our research indicates that there is potential, provided co-operation is not seen either as serving foreign policy goals, or as too commercially driven. Income generation is not seen as a cultural relations goal, more a necessary enabling activity.

Conclusion

Both competition and co-operation are needed in today's world. Competition in cultural relations is inevitable. It can support innovation and address national interests which also serve the common good. The main area where these conditions apply is higher education (including both knowledge and skills). This is an area where the UK currently has an existing advantage, but the competition is increasing.

Co-operation between civil societies is needed to face global challenges, regardless of the positions of individual national governments. Opportunities for co-operation are growing. The global response to Covid-19 has thrown the need for co-operation and the problems of competition into sharp relief.

The time is right therefore to focus hard on what can be done. The signs are that any country which commits publicly to promoting co-operation and makes that a central plank of its foreign policy is likely to succeed in enhancing its reputation. To fail to do so when the opportunity is there risks having the opposite effect.

Recommendations: questions raised by the research

Our research provides a snapshot of global practice in international cultural relations and soft power. We have collected and analysed quantitative data and conducted qualitative in-depth investigations of key institutions and topics. This paper draws on the research findings to date to identify a set of questions which we believe are highly relevant to the future of 21st-century cultural relations. These questions all derive from our research and are suggested by the most compelling international comparisons identified in our current study. They therefore have a general relevance, and we hope that they will be seen as a constructive contribution to thinking about the future of soft power and cultural relations.

Question 1: Should a clear distinction be drawn between soft power and cultural relations?

Our research found that there was a lot of confusion around what countries mean by the terms soft power and cultural relations and that ultimately these impact on perceptions of countries' motives and reputations.

Soft power is undoubtedly important for countries and is well understood to be a means of pursuing national interest rather than supporting co-operation for the common good. Cultural relations in the form of co-operation between civil societies and peoples is seen almost everywhere as the only credible way forward in terms of addressing global challenges.

The ability to distinguish institutionally and in terms of governance between the legitimate pursuit of national interest through soft power and support for co-operation through cultural relations, and the ability to make that distinction explicit would be welcomed around the world and would offer practical advantages.

- Reputational gain – if cultural relations are the means, while the end is national interest, legitimacy and credibility are lost, undermining the possibilities of successful co-operation. On the other hand, if the means and the ends are aligned, and seen to be aligned, then legitimacy, credibility, and reputation will be enhanced. Countries are highly concerned with their reputations and sensitive to allegations of bad faith and they are prepared to act in order to correct what they see as misrepresentation of their intentions.
- Effective specialisation – a clear strategy for soft power would support foreign policy, and would require a sharp focus on specific, often short-term goals, based on effective communications, market awareness and the skills and competences to succeed in the global attention economy. Cultural relations aligns more closely (though not exclusively) to international development with its focus on the common good (by which countries mean the SDGs), its need for longer timescales, a greater

degree of operational independence, and specialist expertise in cultural and social questions. These distinctions suggest that it is hard for these two radically different approaches to be combined in a single institution and there is potentially much to be gained from separating them.

Question 2: Should the primary purpose of cultural relations be to create the conditions for collaboration between like-minded democratic countries in pursuit of the common good?

Our research found that all governments,²¹ all comparator institutions, and all experts agree that there is an urgent and increasing need for credible international collaboration for the common good. This is based on a sense of idealism combined with realism that might be called enlightened self-interest. The strongest support comes from like-minded democratic countries. There is a generally expressed wish to address global challenges through innovation, education and culture. Even governments that would normally be considered competitors, or with whom the UK often does not agree, support the idea of international co-operation, though what they mean by that varies in practice.

The evidence suggests that there is a major opportunity for any country that is willing and able to take a global lead in creating the conditions for collaboration between like-minded democratic countries committed to upholding key values of democracy, human rights, and others enshrined in the SDGs, for the common good, and to be seen to do so. This collaboration would strengthen these values in the world.

Education and culture are seen as credible and effective ways to do this as they embody these values, *provided* they are seen to be addressing shared issues rather than promoting national interests or pursuing commercial gain.

Such a focus would generate a strategic narrative that clearly articulates commitment to credible international co-operation. That narrative would enhance reputation, build trust, and of course, in the long run, influence perceptions and preferences – but that should not be the main purpose. Working with like-minded countries with similar structures would increase reputation as a valued and leading partner.

Question 3: What is the most effective strategic approach? Would more formal arrangements help?

The countries which are recognised as exemplifying best practice, all have formal policies and arrangements for the delivery of their soft power and cultural relations activities. These arrangements include arm's length bodies with clearly defined roles, sponsored by their MFAs, cross-government co-ordination, accountability to the legislature, and the

21. With the single exception of Brazil.

development of strategies through multi-stakeholder engagement. Precise arrangements vary.

The UK policy context is complex, but not uniquely so. Other countries operate with multiple stakeholders across government, sub-nationally (regions, cities), and with civil society (including universities, cultural organisations and business). Where these arrangements work best (Germany), policy is formalised in the Foreign Cultural and Educational Policy (AKBP²²) which is developed by the MFA, in full consultation with the various arm's length delivery agencies, the regional governments (Länder) and civil society. The arrangements are set out in a 'Basic Agreement' between the MFA and the agencies. In Japan, the Cabinet Office ensures cross-government co-ordination, and there are legal guarantees of the operational independence of the Japan Foundation. In France, there are two budget programmes for all of France's 'cultural diplomacy' and for development, which enable the National Assembly to understand, debate, and monitor policy, strategies and budgets. South Korea sets out its strategy in a published five-year plan.

The principal argument for formality is to ensure that cultural relations agencies can operate within a policy and planning framework that is both stable and transparent enough to deliver long-term collaboration through engagement, while remaining accountable for results.

Question 4: What is the most effective range and balance of activities to address key priorities?

In the short to medium term, all cultural relations activities are severely impacted by Covid-19. This is driving innovation in higher education, culture, and language learning, forcing countries to think about how traditional cultural relations activities are run and is requiring them dramatically to increase the pace of the adoption of digital technologies.

Higher education – our research confirms that higher education including innovation, science and skills - is *the* key priority for cultural relations bodies, internationally. This implies the existence of a great global competition for people with the skills, knowledge and networks needed for the 21st-century economy, and therefore for the young people who can afford to access an international education. Other countries offer a more extensive and strategic approach to education than the UK, including greater focus on alumni, providing services to foreign students, exchange programmes, scholarships, support for the education of their diaspora populations, and providing services to higher education, rather than charging it for services. They also have specialist agencies that focus on higher education (Germany: DAAD, France: AEFÉ, Campus France, China, Confucius Institutes). Jo Johnson has suggested that a refocused British Council should concentrate on higher education, including taking on additional functions performed by agencies in other countries, funded from an overseas student levy.

22. Auswärtige Kultur- und Bildungspolitik.

This question of how to ensure that the UK has the institutional clout to compete in global higher education while maintaining the UK's existing high reputation, demands consideration of what can be learned from other countries. A key question is whether the UK would benefit from a specialised agency as in Germany.

Language learning is seen as declining in importance, given the rise of AI and machine translation, but is still the largest area of activity, globally. The need for language learning is likely to remain but decline over time and be pursued more for cultural reasons.

There may need to be an exit strategy from areas of language teaching that do not support either soft power or cultural relations activities. Language learning is obviously a significant income generator, and the evidence suggests that works best when the income is retained in-country to support cultural relations activity (as Germany does very successfully in India), or when it directly and explicitly supports more strategic goals such as supporting access to UK higher education.

Arts and culture are increasingly defined more broadly to include 'social' areas of activity related to SDGs, driving a greater emphasis on working with civil society. Other countries are innovating in how they work with arts whether it is through increased engagement with civil society or developing platforms (physical and digital) that connect with large audiences, over time, in strategic locations.

This implies that arts and culture need to operate at two levels. First, they continue to have a legitimate role in public/cultural diplomacy. There is a genuine and valuable place for promotional activities where a country wishes to showcase its cultural offer. This does not obviously require a specialist agency. Countries achieve a very broad global reach and ensure alignment with foreign policy, strategy and communications by locating responsibility in embassies through cultural attachés. Second, culture can have a very valuable role to play in creating the conditions for long-term collaboration, development, supporting the communication of core values such as freedom of expression or cultural rights, or in conflict reduction. These are very different skills, which put a premium on being able to work *with* arts and culture bodies, rather than to instrumentalise them in the service of policy goals. This expertise probably would benefit from being located in an agency with an explicitly cultural relations remit.

Diaspora populations: The UK does not focus on UK-origin diaspora populations. This is, however, a priority for many other countries (France, India, Russia, China, Turkey), supporting them to retain their cultural identity and links to the origin-country through educational and cultural initiatives. In this sense their activities could be seen as an extension of domestic policies, blurring the lines between home and foreign policy.

This is a question which would benefit from further investigation.

Question 5: What is the optimum approach to financing and income generation?

Covid-19 has led to loss of income and jeopardised the financial sustainability of cultural relations agencies everywhere. That is due to the closure of the income-generating activities that sustain other activities.

Financial sustainability is vital if cultural relations activities are to continue and develop. Partly this requires an active approach to risk management. It also requires urgent exploration of new business models and risk-mitigation strategies.

The income strategies of cultural relations agencies affect the way they are perceived as credible and committed to the common good. Too great a focus on income generation is as harmful to reputation as is too close an alignment with foreign policy.

There is no one answer to this question.

- Other comparable countries invest more public funds than the UK in their cultural relations activities. They do have other sources of funding and finance, but the proportion is less. This helps to secure their resilience if external income is reduced (e.g., from Covid-19).
- Some have different models, for example, income earned in-country, can be retained in-country and invested in cultural relations activity there, ensuring a level of return to the host country.
- Encouragingly, the research found a strong desire from like-minded countries for more collaboration with the UK in seeking and exploring opportunities for income generation to support common priorities.

Question 6: How can the UK optimise its global footprint to maximise medium to long term effectiveness and efficiency?

Again, there is no one right answer to this question. Judgements as to effectiveness will be made in relation to prevailing policies and strategies, while efficiency should balance the need for long-term co-operation with the need for short-term cost-reduction. Given the rate of change in the world, it is inevitable that specific geographies will change over time. It is also likely that resources will need to be switched around global networks in response to crisis or opportunity.

There are two extremes in how countries address the setting of geographical priorities. If they work through their Embassy networks (Australia, Brazil, the USA), through HE institutions (China) or very small-scale presences (Russia), they can impact efficiently, but with breadth rather than depth, in a very wide range of countries. The other extreme is to have physical locations in a very limited range of priority countries (Sweden, Japan), combined with a strong digital presence. Most comparator countries to the UK have geographical footprints which reflect a mix of history and policy. The presence of an educational or cultural centre of one country in another is valued for what it represents as much as for what it does. Countries are increasingly aware of the environmental as much as the financial costs of international networks.

The research therefore suggests that there is a need for the UK to be visible and actively present in:

- the key mature markets for HE and the creative economy
- the main developing and emerging markets for higher education and the creative economy
- its main partners (to support long-term collaboration)
- where cultural relations can best contribute to development
- where there is a need for a 'safe (physical) space' for people to engage and cultural relations can help prevent conflict, or where there is a need for post-conflict settlements.

What the UK does in each location, and how it does it, should depend on the context, and should take its part in the overall UK approach to that territory.

The experience of other countries suggests that the British Council needs to transform itself into a hybrid organisation, combining physical and digital reach, everywhere that it operates.

Question 7: What role do data, research, evaluation and learning play in ensuring that cultural relations bodies are fit for purpose in the 21st century?

This is an age of information where attention and preferences are increasingly shaped by 24/7 news cycles and unprecedentedly instant, and cheap, global communications. It is also the age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution which holds out the promise of truly radical change, driven by digital technology. Other countries (USA) are ahead of the UK in transforming their cultural relations activities into data-driven operations where decisions and accountabilities are informed by evidence that can be evaluated in close to real time, where knowledge management and exploitation are integral to operations, and they see themselves as learning organisations.

Given that the knowledge economy is *the* key battleground for influence, the pace of change, the need for evidence-based policy and decision making, effective knowledge sharing, evaluation, organisational learning, and data-driven approaches are inevitable requirements for success. The only question is whether countries are taking the steps they need to transform their cultural relations practice to remain relevant.

Question 8: Does the UK have the capacity and capability it needs to address the need for global collaboration given the challenges?

Cultural relations organisations around the world are all facing the same macro-level trends at multiple levels: economic, social, scientific, technological, geo-political, cultural... at a time of pandemic. They are having to adapt their visions, rethink their roles, and innovate. This innovation requires new skills and new ways of working. How can cultural relations organisations co-operate across borders when inter-governmental relationships are bad? How can mutuality work when the question is how to address historical injustice? How does trust work in a world of digital networks, precarity, and inequality? How can the UK's education and culture retain its attractiveness in the face of increasing competition? Do organisations have the people, processes and technologies they need for the 21st century?

The UK is one of the world's leaders in cultural relations. Its reputation is strong. This status is not, however, guaranteed to continue and the UK cannot rely on past achievements in a more competitive world. Some countries are innovating faster with digital technology, developing new business and operating models, identifying new business areas, working more collaboratively. Others (China, the USA) are operating in areas of competition, and in ways, that the UK cannot currently match.

If the UK wants to retain its position, it will need to run faster to stand still. The first challenge is to agree the strategic transformation that the UK and its cultural relations agencies need, then to plan how to achieve it, based on a genuinely radical vision for change.

Appendix A: Country profiles

Australia

The soft power strategy is under review. It is operated by DFAT (Australia's MFA), through embassies, under a 'whole-team' approach. There are no dedicated agencies with specialist expertise involved in delivery, though some civil society partners are active. The activity is very under-funded given the challenge from Australia's competitors (mainly China) for influence in the Asia-Pacific region (its priority), let alone the wider world. There are areas of innovation: for example, Australia is the only country surveyed to have a separate Sports Diplomacy Strategy. Overall, however, it appears that the Australian government is aware of the shortcomings of the current situation and is considering how to address them.

Brazil

Brazil also operates via its embassy network, but it has a distinctive and interesting approach. The MFA (Itamaraty) has a Cultural Department, which works with the Ministry of Culture to jointly organise the network of Brazilian cultural centres. In addition, there is a range of other umbrella cultural organisations, all of which are accountable to the MFA and act as instruments to deliver specific activities abroad. Brazil puts the Portuguese language at the centre of its activities (wherever they take place) with cultural activities organised around it. Education, science and innovation also play major roles. Despite their central place in the MFA, the centres and other organisations have a degree of operational independence. The level of central co-ordination is notable, for example with the Rio Branco Institute which specialises in training in diplomacy and international relations, or the ABC, the Brazilian Agency for Cooperation and Development. There are also extensive networks with the private sector. Geographically, Brazil prioritises the MERCOSUR countries, the USA and the EU. It is unclear what the level of investment is. As a model for how an MFA can mobilise government, educational, cultural and private sector interests behind its strategy, however, Brazil deserves further attention.

China

The Hanban is a major part of China's 'foreign propaganda strategy' although it is currently being rebranded as an NGO. It has made a very significant impact for a relatively small investment, in a relatively short space of time. It is simultaneously low-key in its operations and high profile thanks to the various controversies which it generates. It is ubiquitous, having a presence in a very large number of universities (and, through Confucius Classrooms, in schools) worldwide, and focused, concentrating on Chinese language learning and to some extent cultural relations. It does not operate large centres, each Confucius Institute being based in an overseas university, and having a very small staff. It unambiguously targets students, as they are future leaders. It is not an institution which is

directly comparable to the British Council, but it is undoubtedly important. It is often cited by leaders as an indicator of China's growing soft power. As such there is a domestic, as well as a foreign, audience for its activities.

European Union

The European External Action Service (EEAS), the Foreign Service of the European Union, has a conventional public diplomacy/soft power function which is delivered by the press and strategic communications teams of the EU delegations. Culture and education are not within the competence of the EEAS which can only support and complement the actions of member states' national cultural institutes. Since 2006 a cultural relations approach to culture and EU external relations has been developed by the national cultural institutes working together as EUNIC (the European Union National Institutes for Culture) with the European Commission and the EEAS. In 2019 this approach, one which fits within and to a certain extent has helped frame the definition of cultural relations outlined in the main text, and the demarcation of the roles and functions of EU Delegations, primarily responsible for EU public diplomacy, and EUNIC, primarily responsible for EU cultural relations, was formally approved in Council Conclusions as the EU policy framework for culture and EU external relations.

EUNIC operates in 90 countries via 120 'clusters' of national cultural institutes which jointly fund and implement cultural relations projects and programmes. The EUNIC cluster network, working in partnership with local stakeholders and the EU delegations, the world's largest diplomatic network, has the potential to be the 21st-century model for cultural relations. However, even before the Covid-19 pandemic, there was insufficient 'buy-in' from member states and EU institutions to provide the funding and leadership required to implement the new strategy. To what extent the EU emerges out of the crisis determined to promote global co-operation and collaboration, the hallmarks of the cultural relations approach, will ultimately determine whether the strategy will ever be implemented.

France

France is a big spender in international cultural relations. Programme 185 of the French State (Diplomacy of Influence) and Programme 209 (International Development) together contribute very large sums, principally channelled through a range of bodies with specific functions. While the nearest equivalent to the British Council is the Institut français (IF), much larger sums are spent on teaching the French language, maintaining a global network of French lycées overseas, and on attracting international students and researchers to France. President Macron takes a close personal interest in these programmes and has set targets for expansion, though without committing additional resources. The IF, however, plays a central role in France's cultural relations. Governmental dissatisfaction with the governance and management of the Alliance française (the older global network responsible for language teaching) has led to a shotgun semi-marriage between the two institutions – the

consequences of which remain to be determined. Presidential favour, by contrast, is being shown to the AEFÉ (which has received additional resources) and, to some extent, Campus France. The French approach puts a great deal of emphasis on serving expatriate French communities, retaining influence in Francophone countries in Africa and MENA, and on maintaining networks of alumni. Despite the relatively large resources going into these institutions, they all have lean domestic staffing complements. They are also giving a high priority to digitalisation and to ensuring and raising educational standards in their overseas networks.

Germany

Cultural relations have been the ‘third pillar’ of German foreign policy since the 1970s. The origin of this was the development of the *Ostpolitik* and Germany’s need for security within its borders following the disturbances of the 1960s, the controversies over the continuing role of NATO in Germany and moves towards détente with the Soviet Union. Cultural relations were seen, and still are, as a way of stabilising external relationships in a turbulent part of Europe through the development of extensive layers of civil society connections. The idea of ‘civilian power’ was very influential on the evolution of the German institutions and later on the whole EU’s approach to its external relations. As a result of this history, the German government has always given more priority to cultural relations than have other countries and it is a more developed field of policy and thought. The aims and objectives of the German institutes are clearly defined and agreed with their Foreign Ministry as part of the ongoing evolution of the AKBP (Foreign Cultural and Educational Policy). There is no confusion over roles and responsibilities which are clearly defined and published. The German government sets out the strategic framework for cultural relations and education policy. Projects are then realised with the help of partner organisations. The German government’s most important partners include the Goethe-Institut, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa), the Federal Office of Administration – Central Agency for Schools Abroad, the Educational Exchange Service, the German Commission for UNESCO, the German Archaeological Institute, the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training and the Haus der Kulturen der Welt. This approach means that everyone is on the same page, strategically and operationally, thus assuring there is strategic focus aligned with foreign policy yet providing sufficient operational independence to deliver the cultural relations approach. The German institutes have contractual agreements with the Federal Foreign Office setting out roles and responsibilities: ifa has the Framework Agreement; the GI has the Basic Agreement. The GI and ifa are both independent associations governed by a transparent General Assembly process involving stakeholders and partners thus assuring domestic support, both politically and financially.

India

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) is notionally an arm's length body, but as it admits itself, over the years it has become the 'cultural arm' of the Ministry of External Affairs. It has a traditional cultural remit and very heavy governance arrangements which ensure that it is tied closely to the MFA. It is somewhat obscure, there being very little published information on its strategy or plans. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the ICCR is its significant domestic role – it has MOUs with 17 'state entities' and 19 regional offices. It is also unusual in that it collaborates with the cultural relations institutions of other countries in India. The lack of published information makes it hard to gauge the extent of the ICCR's activities, their audiences, partners or stakeholders, but they do work closely with universities and cultural organisations. Language teaching (Sanskrit and Hindi) is their main activity, along with arts and culture. They have a weak web presence.

Japan

The Japan Foundation (JF) is Japan's only institution dedicated to carrying out comprehensive international cultural exchange programmes throughout the world. The other major initiative, Japan Houses are high-profile, innovative and sophisticated physical institutions sited in three key target geographies (São Paulo, London and Los Angeles). The JF's mission is described as 'cultural exchange'. The MFA states that 'culture, alongside politics and the economy, is an important field within the diplomacy of Japan, and its role has become more and more important in recent years'. It goes on to say:

The impact of public opinion on diplomatic policy has been increasing due to the dramatic development of the Internet and mass media. For this reason, in order to promote diplomatic policy successfully it is critical to attain the understanding of not only foreign governments but also foreign nationals.

Japan has been conscious of the importance of 'cultural exchange' as spaces where people can come together for many years. Since the early 2000s, the government has consolidated its alignment with other policies such as culture and education, Visit Japan, Cool Japan, etc. The JF is technically an arm's length body, but in reality, informal 'co-ordination and reporting' contacts at operational level are indispensable before decisions are made on politically sensitive issues. Political pressure is said to be increasing under Abe.

Russia

Although Russia's efforts in the realm of soft power originate around 2008, a period of intensified geopolitical upheaval for the country, the first mention of soft power only appeared in its 2013 foreign policy concept, elaborated in 2016 when the concept was clearly defined: 'Soft Power has become an integral part of efforts to achieve foreign policy objectives. This includes various methods and technologies – from information and

communication to humanitarian and other types'.²³ Soviet history, tradition, and terminology are important for understanding the Russian approach. For instance, regardless of the tendency to speak about public diplomacy in policy circles, in practice there is a distinction between citizen diplomacy and humanitarian co-operation on the one hand, and public diplomacy (*obshestvennaya diplomatiya*) on the other. Whereas the latter deals with cultural exchange, twin cities and scientific collaboration, the former stands closer to the pursuit of official diplomatic goals through the use of track-II diplomacy. Major investments have been made in the development of institutions and tools engaging with public and cultural diplomacy as well as cultural relations. Rossotrudnichestvo can be considered as Russia's primary institution of soft power. Founded in 2008, its primary goal is to foster ties with Russian-speaking audiences abroad. The role of language and identity has grown increasingly important in Russia's communication strategy and nation branding and has also impacted its soft power policy, resulting in the foundation of the Russkiy Mir Foundation whose major aim is the support and popularisation of the Russian language. In addition to these two institutions, semi-non-governmental organisations (such as the Gorchakov Foundation), research centres (RIAC) and cultural associations, as well as (Orthodox) charities and parishes have been playing a role in the spreading of influence abroad and the fostering of global networks. These initiatives go hand-in-hand with a solidly state-sponsored media machine of which RT, Sputnik News Agency, and Russia Direct have become infamous in the West and which all have different regional priorities as well as target audiences. Cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy and soft power are central to the activities of Russkiy Mir and Rossotrudnichestvo which both instrumentalise Russian language and culture to reach out and connect to foreign audiences with the primary aim of popularising the concept of the Russian world (*Russkiy Mir* translates as 'Russian World'). The level of state support appears to be very low, but it is possible that the full financial position of the agencies is not published. More work is needed to gain a good understanding of the Russian institutions.

South Korea

The terminology of the Korea Foundation (KF) reflects a Japanese model, as does the organisation's name. It aims to make Korea, its people, and its culture known to the world through a variety of academic, people-to-people, and cultural exchange activities, thereby promoting a 'proper' understanding of the Republic of Korea in the international community. As a public diplomacy organisation, the KF aims to enhance the value of 'global Korea' and help people all around the world to become friends of Korea. South Korea has a new system of integrated planning of its public diplomacy activities put in place by the Public Diplomacy Act of 2016. The system is led by the foreign minister in consultation with other relevant ministries and local governments. There is a five-year master plan and annual plans down

23. Sourced from: www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/2542248 on 2 July 2020.

to the level of overseas diplomatic missions in conformity with the master plan. The first plan was published in 2016 to cover 2017–22. Internal objectives reflect brand thinking. The aim, according to the KF's president is:

In 2020, the KF intends to promote Korea's image of an advanced, future-oriented country in the international community by implementing forward-looking public diplomacy activities based on creativity, innovation, and technology — pivotal capabilities for the future — and by building a hub for the next generation of talented people at home and abroad.

The KF also works with a wide range of civil society and private sector partners – the breadth and depth in Korea, and internationally, of the Korea Foundation's partnerships is extensive, cross-sectoral, and impressive. Most of the KF's activities are education led, reaching out to young people, including leaders. The KF has a limited global footprint (eight centres), but the distribution of KF offices is misleading. Fellowships for Korean language studies are available globally but skew heavily to European and Asian recipients. Fellowships for graduate study skew towards Asian recipients. The reach of K-pop and Korean popular culture in general are global (especially cinema). The annual budget of the KF is around £100 million.

Sweden

The Swedish Institute (SI) describes itself as an 'expert organisation for public diplomacy' and very helpfully they also provide their own definition of public diplomacy: 'Understanding, informing, influencing and developing relations with people in other countries in order to create influence, closer relationships or change'. This definition, and the language they use to describe how they work (to ensure reciprocity and mutual benefit via a long-term approach) is also typical of 'cultural relations'. This is reflected in their mission statement: 'The Swedish Institute is a public agency that promotes interest and trust in Sweden around the world. We work in the fields of culture, education, science and business to strengthen international relations and development.' They are focused on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially SDG 17 (co-operation) and their vision is 'a world in which individuals and nation-states join together in seeking solutions to the global challenges of the future'. This focus on SDGs means that they engage with a wide range of topics in addition to Swedish influence, including prosperity and democratic, equitable and sustainable development, in developing countries. Although the strategic direction is set by parliament and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the SI must report to both annually, it has a measure of operational independence in its major programmes. Geographically, it has one office in Stockholm and one centre in Paris. SI aims to facilitate, on a long-term basis, Swedish actors' exchange and co-operation both globally and in important partner countries where Sweden needs to develop new relations. This applies in particular to countries experiencing economic growth and other forms of societal transition and reform but where low awareness or major differences in values are limiting or preventing more extensive interaction with Sweden. Its top geographical priority for activity is the Baltic

Region. The SI works with a range of government departments and agencies and with the City of Stockholm. It has close relationships with Swedish universities and most of Sweden's major companies including Bonnier Carlsen, Volvo, and IKEA. The SI is perhaps most interesting for three things: its innovative (best in class) digital agenda, its monitoring of perceptions of Sweden that allows it to focus very clearly on target groups, and its long-term approach. All of these would be worth exploring in more depth.

USA

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' (ECA) mission is to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange that assist in the development of peaceful relations – hence its motto: 'Promoting Mutual Understanding'. ECA is a division of the Department of State. From 1977 to 1999 it was an integrated bureau of the United States Information Agency. Prior to that cultural work was shared between USIA and the State Department. While ECA is a division of the Department of State under an assistant secretary of its own, the Fulbright programme specifically has some arm's-length protections including academic board oversight. Some country programmes have shared boards and even shared funding or are funded by the partner and not by the USG. ECA is therefore for all practical purposes fully integrated into the executive branch. The system of boards in Fulbright keep petty politics out but grand politics still decides which regions get the big budgets, etc. The ECA does not receive much media attention, which probably explains its continuance under the Trump presidency, despite the fact that key strategic decisions come from the National Security Council located within the White House and funding is via the House of Representatives. Senior appointments are confirmed by the Senate. The ECA works with cities and with universities. There is also a national civil society network. The US system has developed in an ad hoc way and this is reflected in the domestic component of the ECA's work. Fulbright is probably the only element of the work to have a domestic constituency which can be activated as a lobby. However, nearly one-third of ECA-funded participants are US citizens. Beyond Fulbright they have Critical Language Scholars, Gilman Fellows, English Language Fellows, etc. In the past five years, ECA has made a concerted effort to engage more actively with the 450,000 US citizen alumni of ECA exchange programmes for whom they have current contact information – creating a series of professional development seminars and a new grant programme called the Citizens Diplomacy Action Fund. Programmes have historically looked for multipliers and paid a lot of attention to youth or in their jargon the 'successor generation'. Recent examples of this include the Obama-era YALI (Young African Leaders Initiative). Since the end of the Cold War target groups have got younger. Engagement of woman is a priority, with excellent programmes focused on women in Africa and MENA such as TechGirls. The ECA's global presence is extensive. The ECA has 659 overseas instances: of these 105 are American Centers, 111 are Binational Centers and 443 are American Corners. Fulbright is well connected with university networks around the world and their Binational Centers are run by the local community with help from embassies, especially in Latin America. American

Corners are typically housed in universities. The State Department reports that 84 per cent of its network of American Spaces around the world is co-funded via local partnership and are either rent free or zero staff cost. In FY17 44 million people took part in 2.5 million events at American Spaces. Attendance is growing and the programme is now budgeted at \$15 million. ECA's FY19 enacted budget was \$701 million (£560 million). FY20 is about \$736 million (£588 million). The reach of the programme is increased beyond the budget by cost sharing in American Spaces and foreign contributions to bilateral exchange programmes as with Germany, Japan, Canada, etc. The ECA's programmes could therefore be said to represent good value for money.

Appendix B: Literature review

The growing body of literature on (international) cultural relations consists of academic papers, mainly (historic) case studies, as well as policy papers and opinion pieces produced by experts and practitioners in the field. In this brief literature review, we aim to capture the major trends and issues with respect to international cultural relations (hereafter ICR). In the following four sections, we respectively deal with the theoretical discussion on ICR, its practicalities and materialisation in ‘real life,’ as well some of the major trends and challenges in the current global order before, and following, the Covid-19 global health crisis.

Towards a definition of cultural relations

Although there is no agreed definition of cultural relations,²⁴ it is possible to work towards a general understanding of what cultural relations are. The term and practices of cultural relations are most often situated in the realm of international relations and foreign policy where they tend to refer ‘to interventions in foreign cultural arenas with the aim of enhancing intercultural dialogue and bringing about mutual benefits connected to security, stability and prosperity’.²⁵ As both a process and practice marked by characteristics such as long-term orientation and relationship building, cultural relations are generally placed within the broader discussion on soft power, which, opposed to hard power, refers to non-coercive forms of power such as ‘the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies’.²⁶ Cultural relations are then aligned with other (similar) concepts such as public diplomacy, and most particularly cultural diplomacy, which has been defined as ‘an actor’s engagement of a foreign public through intervention in the cultural field which may include facilitating the export of an aspect of the actor’s cultural life’.²⁷ Others, however, have drawn parallels with concepts such as nation branding, cultural propaganda and citizens’ diplomacy.²⁸ The role of terminology and semantics presents an important element in this complex discussion, as agencies, across time, cultures and politics, ‘tend to pick the vocabulary which most closely fits their needs and interests irrespective of whether it applies more broadly or is understood externally’.²⁹

Regardless of the (sometimes) obvious overlap with the above-mentioned concepts, ICR can be understood as a distinct phenomenon with a set of (at least two) particular characteristics. First, cultural relations tend to go along with a limited presence of

24. The French introduced the term cultural relations in 1923 through the creation of a (separate) cultural office in the Foreign Affairs Ministry.

25. *Cultural Value* (2018), p. 5.

26. Nye (2004), p. 256.

27. Cull (2019), p. 91.

28. See for instance: Jora (2013); Hurn (2016).

29. Nick Cull (personal communication, 13 July 2020).

government which differentiates it from 'traditional' diplomatic practices.³⁰ Although such limited political influence does not necessarily exclude financial support from governmental institutions, it positions cultural relations as independent from foreign policy activities, as Rivera argues: 'Cultural Relations can support the 'national interest,' but any such support would only be an indirect by-product of the trust, understanding, and relationships developed through Cultural Relations.'³¹ Second, cultural relations are built upon core principles which prioritise two-way communication over one-way communication, hence, its association with mutuality, international co-operation and relationship building.³²

Reminiscent of the discussion on the nature of cultural relations, three major understandings of cultural relations can be distinguished. One view considers cultural relations as a distinct and organic process of which the purpose is 'to achieve understanding and co-operation between national societies for their mutual benefit'³³ centring on 'the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations'.³⁴ As its advocates consider 'the idea of mutuality and listening among the different participants' at the core of cultural relations, they differentiate cultural relations from cultural diplomacy, which is then equated with 'a top-down, one-way communication based on projection and targeted messaging'.³⁵ A second view considers cultural relations as part of the state's foreign policy toolkit, and often, as a (mere) sub-practice of cultural and public diplomacy.³⁶ While some have pointed at the ambiguities between the (two) concepts,³⁷ others have stated that there is no factual distinction, or that cultural relations represent a 'cultural turn' towards collaboration within cultural diplomacy.³⁸ The latter aligns with Villanueva's³⁹ distinction between nation branding, soft power and 'culturalist or reflexive cultural diplomacy'⁴⁰ with the latter denoting 'the cultural value of heritage, arts, and identities themselves [...] assuming at the same time the relative absence of governmental control over the creative process linked to artistic diffusion'.⁴¹ A third view positions cultural relations completely outside the realm of the state and aligns it with citizens' or track-II diplomacy. Herbert Myron's definition provides an example of such understanding, as he explained cultural relations as the result of a 'mutual understanding of peoples by one another. That understanding relies on a genuine knowledge of the other fellow's "character, qualities and beliefs"'.⁴²

30. Rivera (2015); Cull (2019), p. 91.

31. Rivera (2015), p. 11.

32. Wright & Higginbotham (2019), p. 1,490.

33. Mitchell (1986), p. 5.

34. Cummings (2003), 1 (part of his definition of cultural diplomacy).

35. Wright and Higginbotham (2019), p. 1,491.

36. Wyszomirski et al. (2013), p. 16.

30. Melissen (2005), p. 16.

38. Holden (2013).

39. Villanueva (2007).

40. Term used by Zamorano (2016), p. 178.

41. Quote by Zamorano, p. 179.

42. Myron (1946), p. 124.

Cultural relations in practice

In order to understand how ICR function, it is of importance to look in what ways they materialise. While (historic) case studies offer valuable insights and perspectives, multiple reports and evaluation documents from cultural relations institutes and practitioners equally shed a light on this question.

First, cultural relations are difficult to disentangle from foreign policy objectives and state interests. A historic perspective demonstrates that well-known cultural relations institutes such as the Alliance française (1883) or the Dante Alighieri Society (1889) were established with the aim of spreading cultural influence overseas and were often utilised in propagandist activities on the one hand, and to counter emerging threats and mitigate crises on the other. For instance, the establishment of the British Council (1934) was partially a response to propagandist cultural activities of Nazi Germany. The view that cultural relations can provide a shield against crisis is still alive among practitioners. In the report *Cultures in an Age of Uncertainty*, and against the context of the global rise of populism and the then emerging Brexit, the authors write: ‘As global challenges become increasingly transnational, and other forms of international relations appear less effective at meeting them, cultural relations could make an increasingly important contribution.’⁴³ The belief that cultural relations can contribute positively with respect to conflict resolution and prevention as well as in social, economic and environmental development is further argued by other practitioners who have argued ‘potential benefits have been identified such as the ability of culture to foster community engagement, skills for employment, inclusive development, social cohesion, voice and agency’.⁴⁴ Finally, research has demonstrated that in ‘societies in transition’, cultural relations might result in the improvement of dialogue, the strengthening of civil society, the creation of cultural safe spaces and even the organisation of independent cultural sectors.⁴⁵

Second, cultural relations are associated with a set of practices which tend to appear in similar ways across the world. The following activities can be singled out: the exchange of people in the context of educational or cultural activities, the organisation of travelling art and performances, sponsoring and organising conferences targeting international audiences, promotion of language study, the establishment of cultural institutes abroad, support for country and area studies programmes, international cultural co-operation, and trade activities in cultural products and services.⁴⁶ The wide range of activities points at the possibility of different models of cultural relations, a tendency which has been identified in *Societies in Transition* where the authors singled out various models of cultural relations.⁴⁷

43. *Culture in an Age of Uncertainty* (2018).

44. EUNIC Knowledge Sharing Workshop. *Working in Fragile Contexts Report*.

45. *Culture in an Age of Uncertainty* (2018), p. 3.

46. Wyszomirski et al. (2003), p. 12.

47. *Culture in an Age of Uncertainty* (2018), p. 24.

Third, cultural relations suffer from a measurement problem. Reminiscent of observations on the measurement and impact of soft power and public diplomacy, this relates primarily to the question on how can one measure levels of trust and how one can assess relationship building? The issue of time was identified as a critical factor in the measurement of cultural relations: ‘When seeking to develop trust, strengthen partnerships and influence perceptions, more than a mere snapshot in time is required.’⁴⁸ While literature has pointed to the necessity of taking into account both quantitative and qualitative criteria,⁴⁹ some authors have identified characteristics of ‘success’. Schneider, for instance, has proposed that two-way engagement, contextualisation, enjoyment, as well as flexibility, creativity and adaptability are crucial to successful cultural relations.⁵⁰ Other research has pointed to the importance of democratic values and institutions as well as economic prosperity in assessing the success of countries’ soft power, public diplomacy and cultural relations.⁵¹

Cultural relations in a changing world

Since the turn of the century, major geopolitical events as well as unstoppable developments such as the globalisation and digitalisation of societies across the world have not only shaken the post-Cold War order, but also reconceptualised the practice and understanding of ICR. First, ICR can no longer be considered the sole business of governmental and supranational actors. A range of new actors have emerged from within NGOs, the commercial sector as well as academia, a tendency which cannot be disconnected from practices such as branding and public relations. As Cull argues: ‘Some brands have gone so far as to actually sponsor the creation of cultural material as an extension of their corporate social responsibility or elaborate exercises in advertising.’⁵² Second, is the continuous development of ICR initiatives beyond the West. While most studies engage with Western ICR institutes such as the Goethe-Institut and the British Council, many other countries, including emerging powers such as India and China, have increasingly invested in strategies of ICR, in this way reflecting the multipolar world, the increasingly “global” character of cultural policy⁵³ as well as the growing competition within the realm of ICR. Third, the digitalisation of our societies has impacted the scope, practice and conceptualisation of ICR. With the rise of new technologies, governments have been forced to embrace non-governmental actors and citizens as active players in the area of nation branding, public diplomacy and indeed cultural relations.⁵⁴ While digitalisation has offered more ways than ever to engage in ICR, it has similarly enhanced its challenges as well as the risk of propagandistic instrumentalisation in the form of

48. *Arts, Cultural Relations and Soft Power: Developing an Evidence Base* (2017), p. 17.

49. *Culture in an Age of Uncertainty* (2018).

50. Schneider (2009), p. 265.

51. *Soft Power Today. Measuring the Influences and Effects* (2017).

52. Cull (2019), p. 105.

53. Zamorano (2016), p. 174.

54. Cull (2013).

strategic communications and even hybrid warfare.⁵⁵ Contrary to malicious actors' attempts to utilise culture and cultural co-operation as a means through which to destabilise, the instrumentalisation of cultural relations tends to result in a zero-sum game as it compromises trust and mutual understanding as well as reduces the credibility of its actors.⁵⁶

In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the spreading of the Covid-19 virus a pandemic, triggering governments around the world to instigate confinement measures. With, at the time of writing, over 15,000,000 cases confirmed and hundreds of thousands of deaths,⁵⁷ Covid-19 presents a major global health crisis which has equally impacted the state of ICR following the standstill of global cultural life and cuts in states' cultural budgets. EUNIC estimated, for instance, 34.6 million euros of income loss by its members due to closing of branch offices.⁵⁸ Cultural ministries have actively taken measures to mitigate the impact of the crisis on social and cultural life.⁵⁹ While the literature on the impact of the pandemic still needs to be published, it will probably engage with the many activities of cultural relations institutes and actors who continue their work through the Internet, podcasts, etc. Examples of this tendency are the Goethe-Institut's digital culture forum named Kulturama⁶⁰ as well as UNESCO's #SHARECULTURE and the movement RESILIART. In a similar vein, the EU has created a CreativesUnite platform in order to assess and mitigate to the impact of the crisis on cultural life. Future literature will equally point at other, not necessarily negative developments in this sphere, for instance, a rise in the consumption of foreign media products.⁶¹

Conclusion

In conclusion, this literature review proposes the following take-aways in relation to contemporary (international) cultural relations. Cultural relations, both as a term and practice, divides academic and practitioner milieus given the overlap and similarities with other concepts. From a historic perspective, it is possible to disentangle the changing nature of cultural relations and its inherent relation to foreign policy objectives. The 21st century with its rapidly changing geopolitical outlook, ongoing globalisation and digitalisation demonstrates the flexibility of the concept and has brought its practice closer than ever to the people. Regardless of the positive aspects of such an evolution, numerous challenges are threatening the core of ICR whether in the form of malicious informational practices or in the light of the ongoing Covid-19 global health crisis.

55. Zamorano (2016); *The Art of Soft Power* (2017).

56. Rivera (2015), 35; Riordan (2005), p. 182.

57. coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html (last update 22 July 2020).

58. EUNIC (2020) *Global Impact of COVID-19 on EU National Institutes for Culture*.

59. For an overview of measures taken per country, see www.eunicglobal.eu/news/how-is-the-european-cultural-sector-responding-to-the-current-corona-crisis; www.culturalpolicies.net/statistics-comparisons/; www.agenda21culture.net/culturecovid19

60. kulturama.goethe.de/

61. HSE (2020).

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Appendix C: Methodology

Overall, our methodological approach was a classical approach based on institutional analysis in order to produce a description (taxonomy) of cultural relations/soft power organisations in different countries based on the available data and source material. We used a mix of methods for data collection and analysis.

We carried out the study in four phases.

1. **Web research** to gather as much publicly available data as possible. For each country, we identified the principal actors in international cultural relations, and also the constellation of actors with whom they collaborate in order to deliver their remit. This recognised that in some countries there are multiple agencies which are co-ordinated to a greater or lesser extent. We also researched these mechanisms of co-ordination.

The data collected was analysed by ICR Ltd and collated into an **interim report** which was made available to the British Council.

2. A **literature review** to identify as much material as possible from published sources: annual reports; evidence submitted to inquiries; reports published by the institutions; corporate plans; grey material and where relevant, academic research.

The focus in these first two stages was on the collection of quantitative data and the identification of gaps in the data which were addressed in interviews.

3. Forty **semi-structured interviews** with:
 - a. staff in the British Council
 - b. staff in comparator organisations (including MFAs)
 - c. policymakers in the UK and foreign governments
 - d. academic researchers and leading authorities.

Interviews were structured using a questionnaire which contained both a set of standard questions to elicit information needed to make meaningful comparisons, and opportunities for interviewers to elicit more qualitative information in discussion with interviewees.

4. **Analysis:** The material was analysed to provide the British Council with a snapshot of cultural relations activity across all of the countries involved.

The study included:

Country	Institutions
Australia	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)
Brazil	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty)
China	Hanban (Confucius Institute)
France	Agence pour l'enseignement français à l'étranger (AEFE)
	Alliance Française
	Campus France
	Institut français

Germany	Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD)
	Goethe-Institut
	Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa)
India	Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)
Japan	Japan Foundation
	Japan Houses
Russia	Russkiy Mir Foundation
	Rosotrudnichestvo
South Korea	Korea Foundation
Sweden	Swedish Institute
UK	British Council
USA	State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)

Appendix D: Changes to the Confucius Institutes in the summer of 2020

In early July 2020, the Chinese Ministry of Education announced a change to the administration of the Confucius Institutes (CIs). Responsibility will shift from the ministry-run department known as Hanban to a non-governmental organisation called the Chinese International Education Foundation. The foundation was the creation of a consortium of companies and universities, established in June 2020. Speaking on behalf of the new Foundation, Professor Zhang Yiwu, of the Department of Chinese Language and Literature in Beijing University, explained the change as a way to ‘help disperse misinterpretation of the network, which is merely for language teaching and cultural exchanges.’ It was intended to promote flexibility in both fund raising and administration, and to make it easier for foreign institutions to partner with Confucius Institutes.⁶²

The development came as a surprise to China watchers, but it was not wholly unexpected. In recent years, despite expansion in the global south the Institutes had lost ground in Europe (institutes closed in Belgium, Denmark, France, Sweden and the Netherlands) and more especially in the United States. In the US some politicians had sought to make Confucius Institutes a political football. Probably the best-known was Marco Rubio (Rep) of Florida, who looks to an anti-Communist stance as a way to please the Cuban-American portion of the electorate. There is no longer any Confucius Institute in Florida. There has also been a ‘scare’ over issues of intellectual property theft. While it is unlikely that anyone actually connected to a Confucius Institute would have access to intellectual property of the kind sought by Chinese manufacturers, official sanctions against a Chinese government outlet – as with the Pentagon’s insistence that a campus can’t both have a CI and be part of the Defense Language Program – are a blunt instrument whose use had plainly attracted the attention of Beijing.

Does the change matter?

The view of US scholars of Chinese propaganda is that the new body is purely cosmetic and that the party will still be pulling the strings.⁶³ Yet the fact of the change suggests that Beijing is worried by the erosion of its network, whether because of the kudos that comes to the government at home through the network or the actual diminution of effectiveness associated with the loss of particular institutes. The change also shows Chinese authorities looking at the soft power/cultural relations apparatus of others and paying particular attention to the Goethe-Institut and Alliance Française as models.

62. Sourced from: www.globaltimes.cn/content/1193584.shtml on 29 July 2020.

63. This is the view of both Professor David Shamburgh and Professor Anne-Marie Brady.

Why did the change happen?

The change did not happen overnight. It was discussed at the annual Confucius Institute conference in 2019. Chinese academics explain the change first as being a function of the network's success. Hanban – with its domestic responsibilities for language standards and teacher training – made sense in the early days when the aim was simply for 50 or so institutes, but the rapid expansion had stretched that unit to its fullest, it was expected to outgrow these beginnings at some point. Second, attempts to explain the operation to publics around the world has plainly not gone well. A ministerial office was seen as too close to central government by foreigners and counterproductive. Third, and in a dynamic which has mostly escaped foreign comment, Chinese official expenditure on the network was widely resented at home in China. Language education is seen as a luxury and the idea of foreigners learning for free when Chinese have to pay at home angered some. Fourth, the drift of the Confucius Institutes into aspects of culture beyond language such as film and theatre or even programmes around traditional medicine strayed onto the turf of other agencies such as the Ministry of Culture.

What the does the change mean for the British Council and HMG as they contemplate the future of the UK's soft power and cultural relations?

First it reaffirms the logic of an arms-length structure of the Goethe-Institut variety: even if China doesn't actually have that, it wants people to think that it does. Second, it shows that cultural relations matter and that erosion of that aspect of the state's activity requires a response. Third, it seems likely that the increased emphasis on language work within the new structure will strengthen the CI network and make it a more effective element in the long-term growth of China's cultural influence. It is of particular interest that institutes are not only serving the language needs of foreigners with no family connection to China, but also are also part of the way in which China develops links with its diaspora. While ethnically Chinese students are a small percentage of those enrolled in institutes, CIs are involved in supporting the teachers who teach Chinese language in Chinese diaspora populations. Some Confucius Institutes have outreach aimed at families who have adopted Chinese children and are looking to help those children better understand their culture of origin. Such work will be helped by the clarification of roles implicit in the new structure.