BRITISH COUNCIL

Research

Soft power and cultural relations

A comparative analysis

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Acknowledgements

This report was commissioned by the British Council from ICR Research Ltd, London.

The ICR Research team was Stuart MacDonald, FRSA and Dr Andrew Murray. The literature review was written by Dr Erik Vlaeminck. The British Council team was Mona Lotten, Alistair MacDonald and Anna Duenbier. The research was carried out between January and March 2022

The research team thanks and gratefully acknowledges the input of interviewees who kindly consented to share their insights and expertise. As interviewees were assured that their responses would be treated in confidence, we cannot publish their names here, but we wish to extend our warmest thanks and appreciation to them for giving up their time to contribute to the research.

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.

Lead authors: Stuart MacDonald FRSA and Dr Andrew Murray

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ISBN: 978-1-915280-16-9

DOI: https://doi.org/10.57884/4RJ6-V008

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Executive summary

The aims of cultural relations, as drivers of international development, peacekeeping, and bridges of communication during difficult times in international relations, are more important than ever. Many of the challenges of today: climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of identity-based nationalism, populist politics directed against the 'other', fake news, increased authoritarianism, inequalities, would benefit from the long-term thinking characteristic of cultural relations. Soft power skills of influence and attraction are also needed, as has been evidenced during the crisis in Ukraine.

In today's world, given geopolitical and economic pressures on resources, there is a need to consider realistically what the UK can do independently, and where co-operation would be beneficial, particularly in working with like-minded countries to promote the values and interests of the UK.

The distinctions that previously seemed clear between soft power (the pursuit of influence through attraction in the national interest) and cultural relations (creating the conditions for collaboration between like-minded people and countries in pursuit of the common good) are blurring. Soft power is becoming more normative (virtue-signalling during the pandemic, more emphasis on climate change) and cultural relations is increasingly seen as another element in the foreign policy toolkit.[1]

Key trends identified in the research are:

- **digitalisation -** potentially the most significant trend as institutions respond to COVID-19 by accelerating their turn towards digital
- **new actors -** digitalisation enables a greater importance for informal actors (even individuals). Sub-national actors are also increasingly important
- **values -** countries, often those with illiberal regimes, are increasing their soft power activity[2]
- **audiences -** countries are engaging in soft power and cultural relations with their domestic populations, reflecting the need for public support for foreign policies, and a recognition that populations include foreign (inward) diasporas
- **activities -** sport plays a major role for most countries at the policy (national, regional, city) and identity politics.

The overwhelming policy priorities for countries' soft power and cultural relations activities are support for foreign policy and economic growth followed by the need to face global challenges, promote values such as human rights, democracy, or peace and harmony.

[1] See for example: https://www.culturepartnership.eu/en/publishing/cultural-diplomacy/lecture-18-3

[2] The 2022 Brand Finance Global Soft Power Index sees China ranked #4 (up 4 places) and Russia #9 in the world (up 5 places): https://brandirectory.com/softpower/2021/report

The countries in our sample worked in three main (overlapping) operating models. There is also a unique Chinese model:

- **public diplomacy model -** USA, Russia, Korea: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is the main body which delivers soft power/cultural relations activities through Embassies and Missions. There is a strong Government-led focus on seeking to manage the information environment through strategic communications, a high level of geographic coverage, and at least in the USA, a clear channel of accountability for results
- **cultural diplomacy model -** France, Brazil, Qatar, UAE, Turkey, India, Japan: the MFA has a well-developed policy and delivery framework for its activities which are directed mostly at national promotion through culture. Activities are delivered by specialist services based in embassies or by semi-independent bodies under close direction from the MFA
- **cultural relations model -** UK, EU, Germany: the focus is on the development of long-term relationships in order to provide reputational security and increase trust and mutual understanding. The MFA plays an important role, but activity is delivered by specialist arm's length bodies, either statutory bodies or NGOs in receipt of grant funding. These arm's length bodies have varying degrees of operational freedom
- **Chinese model -** Campus-based language and culture partnerships (Confucius Institutes) funded and managed as joint ventures between host country universities and the Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF), a nominally independent organisation registered with the Civil Affairs Ministry. The CIEF manages the Confucius Institute brand and programme and is responsible, working together with Chinese partner universities, for contractual and funding arrangements.

There is a range of institutional types involved, but Embassies and statutory arm's length bodies remain the preferred models, although they often work in partnership with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and (less often) with the private sector. A third institutional type is the Foundation, often established by the state and endowed with funds from Government.

Education is by far the commonest area of activity, and engagement through education operates at all levels from elementary through to academic exchange. Arts and culture are also universally seen as central. Language learning is less common and serves a variety of purposes including enabling access to study and the preservation of diasporas' cultural ties to their country of origin. The provision of information and diaspora engagement are central to the activities of many countries. Development is less common.

The geographical distribution of countries' overseas locations is global, and is dominated by historical patterns, with most locations in Europe and the Americas, though there are significant numbers of locations in Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and the Middle East and North Africa. The USA is by far the most popular country.

The UK has a significantly smaller global (and regional) footprint than its most direct comparators (France, Germany, Japan), and the gap between the UK's overseas presence and that of these other comparable countries is in some cases very wide indeed.

While countries’ soft power and cultural relations institutions have proved to be resilient during the pandemic, they depend on Government’s willingness to support them and the sectors (arts and culture, education) on which they depend, on having resilient business models, and on their ability to adapt to change.

Research, data analysis, and organisational learning are increasingly important.

Introduction

Aims of the report

The aim of this research report is to analyse the cultural relations and soft power organisations in a small number of focus countries with a view, if possible, to assess and compare what impact these countries are having. To do so, the report considers the policies, institutions and activities of countries that are active in international cultural relations, and who have invested in soft power in recent years.

The report aimed to be global in scope, including: Brazil, China, the European Union (the only multilateral body in the study), France, Germany, Japan, Qatar, Russia, South Korea, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the USA. In these countries, we aimed to include in the analysis the key organisations and institutions involved in international cultural relations and soft power, and to consider a selection that included the full range from Ministries through to private and third sector organisations.

In addition, we were asked to attempt to compare the inputs of different countries with their outputs, and if possible, assess the 'return of investment' secured by comparator countries. Finally, we were asked to cover the spectrum of fully state controlled to fully privately funded/directed models.

The report presents a high-level picture of cultural relations and soft power activity during a particularly challenging time. In practice, we succeeded in mapping structures and inputs, and in analysing who was doing what, where. That is useful information which contributes to an understanding of the policy environment, in broad terms. We are aware, however, that the complexities of bilateral and regional relationships, the pace of change and lack of data, meant that all of the aims of the brief could not be achieved in full, in particular in relation to our ability to assess comparative impact.

Building on previous work

This report builds on two major pieces of research we carried out for the British Council in 2021. The first, *Soft power and cultural relations in a time of crisis* (February 2021) analysed data on 17 organisations that we identified as having comparable remits to the British Council, in 12 countries. Our key finding was that soft power and cultural relations were 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 long-term collaboration between like-minded people and countries in pursuit of the common good (most often identified with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)).

All countries researched in the 2021 study did both soft power and cultural relations and both were seen as legitimate. Both modes of operation were directly related to foreign policy as countries tried to influence how they were 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 differed, reflecting their histories and their past and current priorities. There was no one global understanding of either soft power or cultural relations, what activities were considered within scope, or one approach to creating effective and efficient agencies and institutions.

Our analysis allowed us to suggest some criteria for 'success':

- effective co-ordination at national level
- effective consultation with, and committed involvement of, the civil society actors involved
- strategic communications which delivered evidence-based, data-driven, messaging in support of soft power, and also emphasised 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.

The second report: *Cultural relations, dialogue and co-operation in an age of competition* (June 2021), was relevant as it also suggested some criteria for 'success' albeit in the specific circumstances of the contribution of cultural relations in times of political tension. The report drew on twelve case studies which confirmed that cultural and educational activities can provide a shared platform for engagement and co-operation with Governments even when relations in all other areas remain challenging and can enable people-to-people and institutional dialogue and exchange to continue and thrive.

Here too, our analysis suggested some criteria for 'success':

- maintaining people-to-people connections and affording platforms for positive bilateral engagement between Government officials, even during periods of escalated bilateral political tension
- advancing efforts to deepen bilateral engagement between home and operating country partners, including Government, by providing the expertise, reputations and relationships necessary to access and navigate the operating country environment
- building trust in and understanding of the home country among a wide cross-section of the operating country population, by working towards objectives support for which supersedes societal divisions and polarisation, such as education and cultural heritage.

This report updates and extends the previous research. It draws on the methodology used for *Soft power and cultural relations in a time of crisis*, as that had proved effective in comparing countries' approaches (see Appendix C). It also included some of the same countries in the

analysis: Brazil, China, the European Union, France, Germany, India, Japan, Russia, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the USA. That enabled a limited amount of trend analysis, to see what had changed in the last year.[3]

The current report also attempts, as far as possible, to draw on the criteria for 'success' identified in the 2021 report. Having done this, and situated policies and practice within recent academic research, the report comes to conclusions and presents suggested recommendations to the British Council on policy, strategy and practice, and on further research.

Trends

As described fully in the literature review (see Appendix B), a number of trends are emerging in the literature and commentary on cultural relations and soft power. There are essentially five of these:

- **digitalisation -** partly driven by the digital acceleration during the pandemic, the increased use of digital communications technologies has increased the reach of activities and enabled the participation of new actors (an effect of its low entry costs and a by-product of the increase in reach). Digital, particularly social media have also posed the challenge of how to conduct cultural relations and soft power in a post-truth culture. One effect has been to highlight the importance of communications as a practice, in particular the need for effective storytelling
- **new actors -** connected to the rise of digital media (as noted above), individuals play a greater role in creating and influencing cultural meanings and sharing them across borders. At other levels, cities, regions, International Organisations, Multilateral Organisations and NGOs are all increasingly active, in pursuit of their own agendas which may, or may not be, those of Governments
- **values -** on the one hand there is an increasingly normative dimension to the uses of soft power, particularly where it is deployed to secure common good goals, especially around global challenges. This blurs the line between cultural relations and soft power. A good case of this blurring is the incidence of vaccine diplomacy, where vaccines were used to promote benevolent outcomes *and* as ways to pursue geopolitical goals.[4] In addition, there is an increasing trend for illiberal actors to pursue their goals through cultural relations and soft power. As noted below even trust can be weaponised in the service of disinformation
- **audiences -** traditional audiences for cultural relations and soft power are in other countries. However, there is increasing interest in 'intermestic' (international and domestic) approaches due to increased population mobility
- **activities -** there were indications in the last year that sport and identity politics are playing a more important role in soft power, the former in relation to the attention

[3] The 2021 study included Australia and Sweden. They were replaced in the present report by Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.
[4] See: https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(21)00091-7/fulltext

given to it by countries in our sample (France, Japan, Qatar) and the latter often in relation to nationalist narratives and identity construction (China, Russia).

The global context

Geopolitics in early 2022

2021 was a year dominated by a sense of crisis mainly resulting from COVID-19, and the need to tackle climate change.

2022, however, has started with what some are calling the '*dawn of a new era forced upon the world by the Russian Federation's war in Ukraine'*.[5] United Nations Member States are being encouraged to take sides. On 2 March, Member States overwhelmingly adopted a resolution demanding the Russian Federation immediately end its invasion of Ukraine and unconditionally withdraw all its military forces from the country.

This geopolitical crisis adds a potentially existential challenge to the rules-based world order *in addition to* what was already a time of crisis at the time of our 2021 report on the UK's soft power and cultural relations comparators.[6]

We cannot let recent events make us forget the wider geopolitical context of great power tension, including that between the USA and China, and other events such as the military coup in Myanmar (February 2021), the US withdrawal from Afghanistan (August 2021), the ongoing challenge of climate change discussed at COP26 (October-November 2021).

The conflict has demonstrated the growing importance of soft power in war. Firstly, it has been used very effectively to mobilise international support for Ukraine. Secondly, it has been used by Russia to divide opponents, and to define the enemy (whether it is as 'Nazis' or 'Satanists', or NATO and the decadent West) and shape the image of Russia as a protector, for both domestic and international audiences.

This use of soft power to build trust and mutual understanding is central to soft power and cultural relations narratives, and a core element of the value proposition of institutions involved in these activities the world over. The assumption that trust and mutuality are desirable ends in themselves is, however, challenged in the most direct way by the current conflict. Narratives of trust and understanding, and practices designed to encourage them, cannot be separated from countries' goals expressed through policies and institutions as well as their strategic communications. A good example is the words of Sergey Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund (one of the organisations covered in this report) who is quoted on its website using words that could have come from any Western nation, including the UK:

> *'Now, it is important to focus on supporting public diplomacy, relations among NGOs, academic and expert communities and, of course, the effort taken in that direction plays an important role in maintaining trust and mutual understanding*

[5] https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/ga12406.doc.htm

[6] https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/policy-reports/soft-power-cultural-relations-crisis

between the nations, the civil societies. It is especially important when international tension is not decreasing but continues to grow.' [7]

The events of the last few months do not devalue the practice of soft power and cultural relations, on the contrary, they suggest that what the world needs now is more of both – provided they are, and are seen to be, at the service of a purpose that is consistent with values of human rights, self-determination, democracy, and the common good. If cultural relations narratives and practices are to be trusted, and to build trust as an outcome, the language and practice of trust-building need to be consistent with policies and strategies. It may also be necessary to be able to counter disingenuous or false narratives that undermine the concept of trust-building by using it in support of aggressive or illegal goals.

It is beyond the scope of this report to consider the implications of such fundamental developments, but we note them as they raise so many questions for the future, including:

- what role do soft power / cultural relations play in times of conflict?
- what part do / should they play in foreign policy (particularly in times of competition with very large states that rely on hard power)?
- what do 'trust' and 'mutual understanding' mean in this new era?
- how can states ensure that necessary long-term co-operation and partnerships are secured?
- how might they retain confidence in the policies, institutions, and channels through which people-to-people (P2P) contacts and networks function?
- how should the impact of soft power and cultural relations on others be measured?
- what future policies, institutions and frameworks should countries like the UK be considering?

The pandemic and climate change

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly deeply impacted the context in which cultural relations take place, and on the institutions charged with delivery. Economies, societies and political systems worldwide have been affected. The impacts on the 'sectors' on which cultural relations depends and through which it acts, have been hard hit. For example, the social, political and economic characteristics of the pandemic have had deep implications for culture and its role in international relations. This is partly because cultural actors are among the most vulnerable groups in the economy, and as the COVID-19 crisis affected the core activities of

[7] https://gorchakovfund.ru/en/about/structure/

many cultural organisations, their ability to participate in cultural relations have been impaired.[8] [9] Other cultural relations 'sectors' have been similarly affected.

However, while it appeared to be the case in 2020 that the impact of the pandemic on cultural relations would be 'crushing',[10] this report suggests that early anxiety was wholly justified but that the position today may be less severe than expected. While it is true that many activities have had to be suspended, and many institutes have had budgets reduced, it is also true that countries (at least in our sample) have generally maintained their institutional structures, and where possible, their activities, though there have been reductions in some countries. Partly the impact has been offset by what appears to have been financial support from Governments to their culture sectors and the resilience of education as it moved to online learning.

It has been suggested that '*the global climate emergency is a crisis of culture. While the impacts of climate change can be destructive of cultural heritage in both its material and non-material forms, they also illustrate a failure in cultural relations, highlighting our chronic inability to work together to address the emergency at a global level*.'[11] As noted by the British Council in its essays produced to coincide with COP26, a cultural relations approach, guided by principles of trust, reciprocity, and equity (an approach embodied by climate justice), can act as a vehicle for sharing knowledge and experiences of climate impacts and injustices. This report notes that this is likely to be a vital component of cultural relations and normative soft power efforts going forward. It is clear, however, that much remains to be done. The need to tackle climate change was not a prominent feature of the activities of most countries in our sample.

Why soft power and cultural relations matter today

There is a case to be made that the aims of cultural relations, as drivers of international development, peacekeeping, and bridges of communication during difficult times in international relations, are more important than ever. Many of the challenges have been identified above, including the rise of identity-based nationalism, populist politics directed against the 'other', global challenges, fake news, increased authoritarianism, inequalities, would benefit from the long-term thinking characteristic of cultural relations. Soft power skills of influence and attraction are also needed, as has been evidenced during the crisis in Ukraine. It is also the case that the previously well-defended defining lines between cultural relations and soft power are breaking down – soft power can be normative, cultural relations can be hard-headed and realistic.

[8] See: https://www.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/2021/02/10/study-is-out-impact-of-covid-19-on-ccs-in-partners-countries/

[9] See also: https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/culture-shock-covid-19-and-the-cultural-and-creative-sectors-08da9e0e/

[10] See EUNIC's 2020 assessment: https://www.eunicglobal.eu/news/impact-of-covid-19

[11] See: https://climate.leeds.ac.uk/cop26-and-the-cultural-relations-of-climate-change/

Data analysis

Introduction to the data

The data we present below are drawn from web research on publicly available official websites undertaken between January and March 2022. They are therefore based on sources whose reliability and validity have had to be assumed for the purposes of this study. The data are the best of what was available. There is a full set of data tables at Appendix D, and a full list of data sources at Appendix E.

The data are also incomplete as Governments and institutions operate very differently from each other in their data collection, policies on open access to data, and in how they present data. There were some very obvious gaps, especially in Russian websites which ceased to operate during the course of the study. While for some countries, particularly those which operate in systems of parliamentary accountability (requiring reports) there were good data, others simply do not make data available, or they do so only in their own language, or they actively block search.[12]

We also found that even in countries where good data were available, and there were even analyses of performance, there were no good data which would allow for a meaningful comparative analysis of impact. This limitation could have been overcome had we had been able to carry out work to assess how the efforts of cultural relations and soft power institutions were received in a range of countries, but that would have been beyond the scope of this study.

However, we believe that countries (at least those which published analyses and debated performance), have confidence that cultural relations and soft power bring results, even if they are not described in hard measures of impact, or return on investment. We relied on their self-reporting as the best evidence available for the value of their activities.

Diversity in the sample group

The sample of comparators described in this report (see Figures 9 and 10, Appendix D) is diverse. They vary in their legal status, their missions, their approaches, their institutional types and the scale and focus of their operations.

This posed challenges in doing a comparative analysis, but despite the diversity they illustrate through their sheer number the importance that countries give to the conduct of transnational relationships, exchange and co-operation. The commitment of resources to culture and education in international relations seems to be a constant across the world, even if their differences confirm that there is no one way of doing things – each country finds its own way forward.

[12] Google is partially blocked in China: https://www.comparitech.com/privacy-security-tools/blockedinchina/google/

Scale of operations

The scale of operations varies enormously between countries (see Figure 9, Appendix D). At one extreme is France, which has a clear policy framework that is delivered through a great number of instances of institutional activity overseas (almost 1,800). At the other extreme are Qatar and the UAE, both of whom operate through highly focused single organisations that are based at home. Other countries, including the UK, operate at a scale which is between the two.

The scale of operations reflects each country's historical development, the scale of their ambitions, their relationship to their overseas populations and the resources they are prepared to commit. This last reflects the degree of domestic support for their policies and activities, a factor which is increasingly important in determining the scope and scale of their operations.

Policy drivers

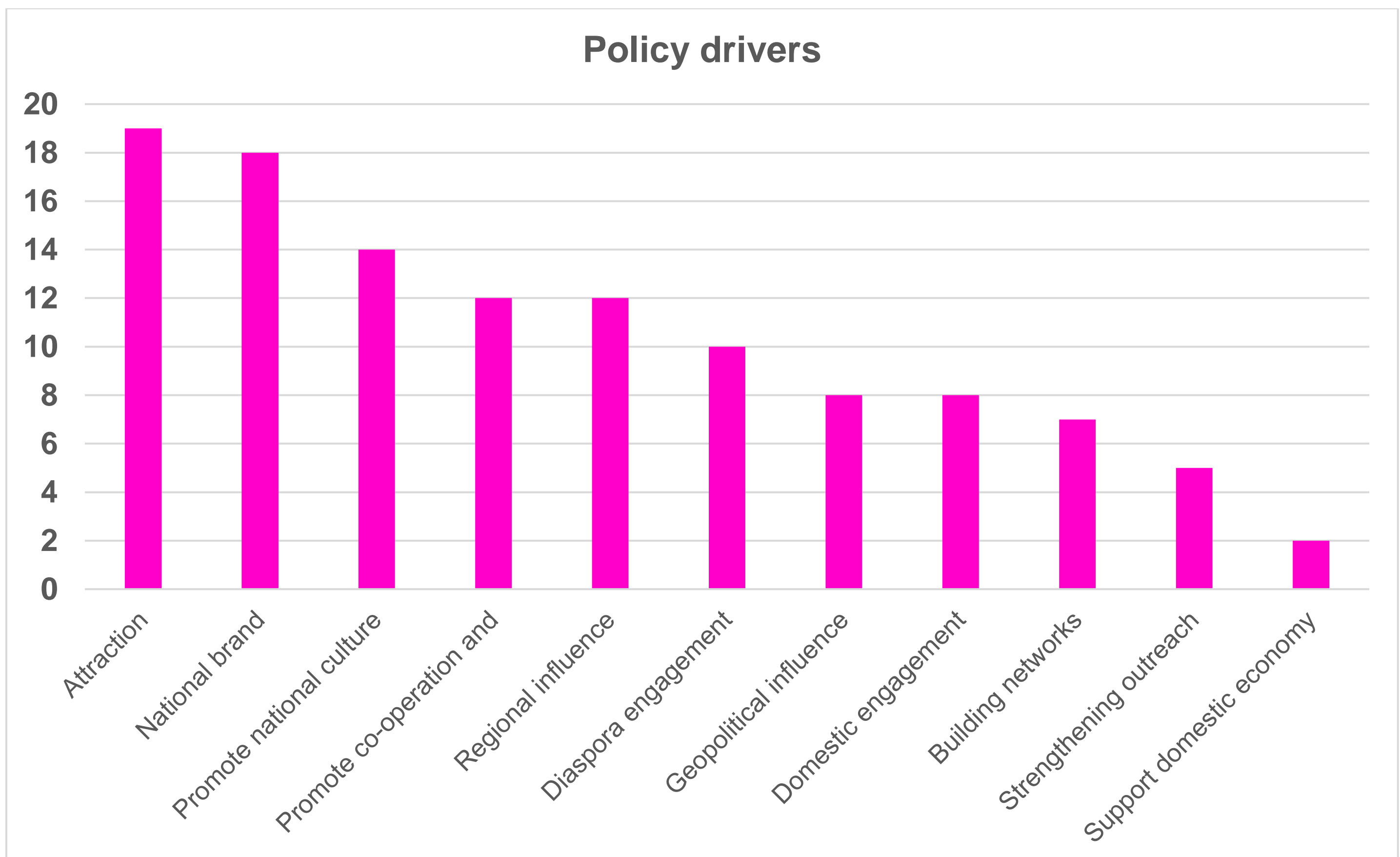

Figure 1 policy drivers for soft power and cultural relations activities across the sample – number of countries which refer to these concepts in their policies

The overwhelming priorities for countries' soft power and cultural relations activities are support for foreign policy and economic growth. This is shown in Figure 1 in the priority given to 'attraction' and national brand promotion. In foreign policy terms, they are seen everywhere as important to the development of bilateral and regional relationships. In the context of the EU, they are an externally facing focal point for demonstrating collaboration at the European level.

The rationale for engagement and co-operation is primarily the economy, trade and investments, followed by the need to face global challenges, and in some cases, to promote values such as human rights, democracy, or peace and harmony.

The promotion of national culture, a desire for recognition and reputation, is a traditional driver of policy, and remains important, along with the promotion of co-operation.

However, it was also clear from our sample, that Governments see soft power and cultural relations as key supporters of their wish to achieve geopolitical influence. A clear example of this at global level is offered by China, where the Confucius Institute network contributes directly to the Belt and Road Initiative. There was also a high level of importance given to regional goals. Countries such as Brazil and Russia attach great importance to these (in Russia's case to relations with countries it considers in its sphere of influence), as does the EU through its priority actions in its Southern and Eastern Neighbourhoods. Other countries can direct their efforts to taking advantage of that – for example, South Korea sees its presence in Brazil as contributing positively to its engagement with MERCOSUR.

Domestic engagement emerged as having the same importance for countries as geopolitical influence. There are two main dimensions to this. Firstly, political in that countries engage to gain the support of their populations for their foreign policies. Secondly, economic: a good example being the close co-operation between Cultural Institutes and Higher Education – there is a direct connection between the Cultural Institutes overseas activities to engage with potential students and support the building of networks to facilitate knowledge exchange, and the success of Higher Education institutions at home. Similarly, Cultural Institutes can work to bring benefit to domestic cultural and creative industries through enhanced international exchange and co-operation.

Finally, a major driver of policy is the desire to engage with diaspora populations. There is no one aim in doing this, but there are three main reasons why diaspora engagement is given importance. The citizens of some countries such as France or Turkey who live overseas retain the same rights to participate in domestic life as do citizens who remain at home. This entitles them to consideration and support from their states. These citizens often live in settled overseas communities which have needs for education and wish to retain a cultural connection to the home country. These communities engage locally and create institutions (mostly schools and voluntary associations (e.g., the Alliance Française) which create sustainable platforms for engagement and exchange between French and local populations.

Institutional approaches

Firstly, we considered the overall approach to the role of cultural relations and soft power in the foreign policy of the countries in our sample (see Figure 2, below). When we analysed their stated aims and descriptions of what they wanted to achieve, and how they wanted to meet their goals, we found that all countries aimed for influence and attraction through soft power *and* to build and support long-term relationships, exchange, and understanding through cultural relations. The question, as noted in the introduction, was which of these approaches they give priority to.

To attempt to answer this question, we found that an analysis of institutions was more fruitful than looking at the goals of the countries, as institutions are charged with missions that are more specific, hence more revealing.

Institutions from the same country can have different approaches which relate to their function. This makes it hard to say what the overall approach of the country is – policy dictates which approach is appropriate for which institutional mission and how it is described. Even at the institutional level, different approaches can be taken by different parts of the same organisation – so soft power activities can be combined with cultural relations approaches. That is why the term 'public diplomacy' is useful. For the countries which use it, it encapsulates a range of approaches, practices and activities rather than having to come down on the foreign policy-flavoured 'soft power' or the normative-flavour of 'cultural relations'.

That variety perhaps explains the difficulty of coming up with a single clear definition or terminology to describe countries' approaches. Missions can be described as 'public diplomacy' when the activities suggest that the approach to delivery is actually based on trust-building and mutuality. A good example of this is the relational focus of exchange programmes, such as those run by the USA. Missions can be described as 'cultural relations (or exchange)' when the aim clearly supports foreign policy influencing goals. A good example is the activities of the Confucius Institutes. In this study, we have, therefore, taken institutions' self-descriptions at face value, which reveals that institutions express their missions in a number of ways. It is worth noting that 'cultural diplomacy' remains the most popular self-description of institutional mission.

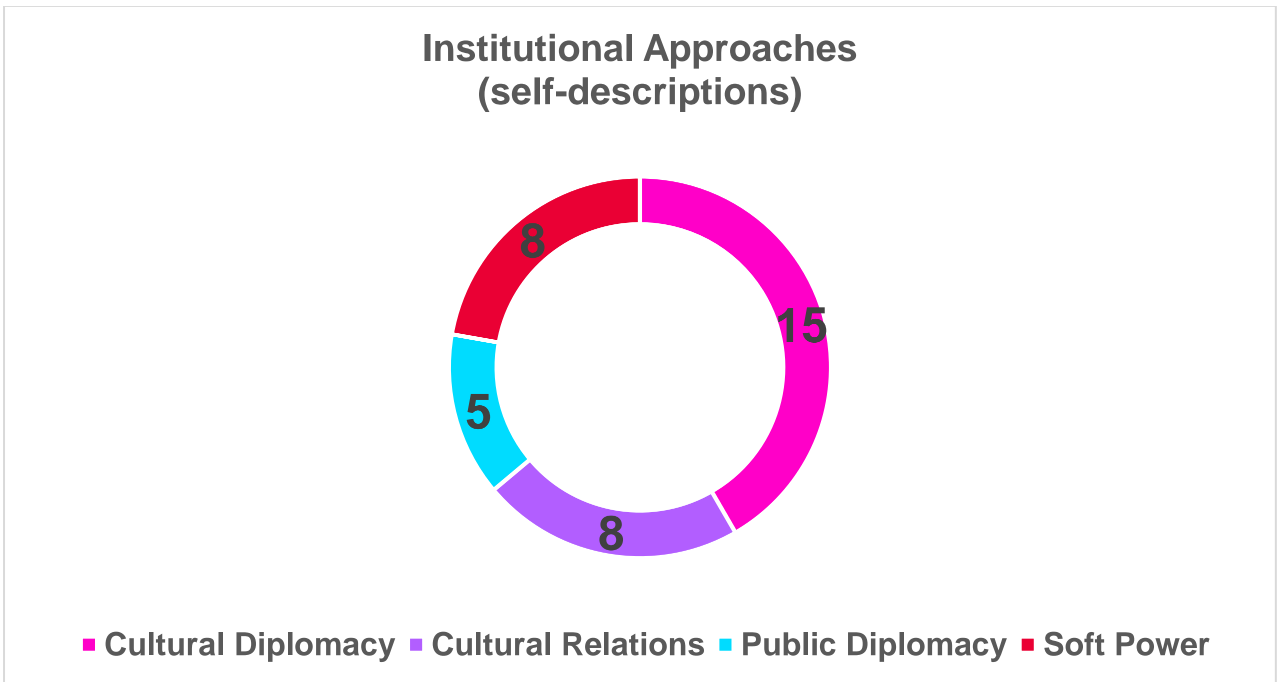

Figure 2 - how countries in the sample present and describe their activities

Based on how countries present their relevant activities, and on the nature of these activities, countries in our sample could all be said to engage in public diplomacy which includes both influencing through attraction (soft power) and pursuing an idea of connection or exchange in pursuit of mutual benefit, or as a contribution to the common good (cultural relations). The cultural relations approach is explicitly prioritised only by Germany, the United Kingdom,

(perhaps) Japan and the European Union. When other countries engage in cultural relations, they tend do so in support of geopolitical or economic goals.

This is, of course, an over-simplification. Even where a country clearly pursues its own interests, these activities exist within a historic pattern of engagement which contains elements that have mutual benefit and long-term relationship building at their core – often through exchange programmes. A good example is the USA's public diplomacy which both aims clearly to *'…assist in the development of peaceful relations'* (foreign policy goal) and to *'…increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange'* (long-term relations). [13] Another example is the work of the AEFE (Agence pour l'enseignement français à l'étranger) which operates the network of French schools abroad. This extensive network (552 schools in 138 countries) both provides a service to French expats, but also *'… represents an asset and a lever for the influence of France'*[14] (soft power goal). The schools offer a unique opportunity to both form long-term relationships and promote the influence of the French language and culture by educating foreign pupils. More than half of the students in the AEFE network decide to study in France after graduating.[15] It should be noted that schools are used in this way by several countries in our sample, and by multilateral bodies such as UNESCO.[16]

Operating models

Most countries work through a mixed model of delivery that reflects the variety of approaches. In all cases there is clear evidence that the MFA plays a determining role. There are three main (overlapping) operating models and a unique Chinese model:

- **public diplomacy model -** USA, Russia, Korea: the MFA is the main body which delivers soft power / cultural relations activities through Embassies and Missions. This model is well established from the time of the Cold War. Its strength is that it enables a strong Government-led strategic focus, strategic communications, a joined-up approach, a high level of geographic coverage, and accountability for results. It can bring together centrally produced resources and support (including on human and technical resources), and a large network. There is a strong focus on seeking to manage the information environment
- **cultural diplomacy model -** France, Brazil, Qatar, UAE, Turkey, India, Japan: the MFA has a well-developed policy and delivery framework for its activities which are directed mostly at national promotion through culture. Activities are delivered by

[13] https://eca.state.gov/about-bureau/history-and-mission-eca

[14] https://www.aefe.fr/aefe/operateur-du-ministere-de-leurope-et-des-affaires-etrangeres/systeme-educatif-francais

[15] https://www.ifa.de/fileadmin/Content/docs/forschung/ecp/ECP-Monitor_France_CountryReport.pdf

[16] The **UNESCO Associated Schools Network** (ASPnet) links educational institutions across the world around a common goal: to build the defences of peace in the minds of children and young people. The over 11,500 ASPnet member schools in 182 countries work in support of international understanding, peace, intercultural dialogue, sustainable development and quality education in practice. https://aspnet.unesco.org/en-us/Pages/About_the_network.aspx

specialist services based in embassies or by semi-independent bodies under close direction from the MFA

- **cultural relations model -** UK, EU, Germany: the focus is on the development of long-term relationships in order to provide reputational security and increase trust and mutual understanding. The MFA plays an important role, but activity is delivered by arm's length bodies, either statutory bodies existing within legislative frameworks and supported by public funds, or NGOs in receipt of grant funding. These arm's length bodies have varying degrees of operational freedom
- **Chinese model -** China has a distinctive model which consists of campus-based language and culture partnerships (Confucius Institutes) funded and managed as joint ventures between host country universities and the Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF), a nominally independent organisation registered with the Civil Affairs Ministry, supervised by the Ministry of Education (MOE), and initiated by 27 Chinese universities, companies and social organisations. CIEF manages the Confucius Institute brand and programme and is responsible, working together with Chinese partner universities, for contractual and funding arrangements, not Hanban or MOE.[17] This model is unique in our sample.

Institutional types

The institutions in our sample vary in their nature (see Figure 3, below). At one end of the spectrum are Government Departments – typically Ministries of Foreign Affairs, but other Ministries (Education, Culture) can be involved. At the other are NGOs and Foundations, though the state retains the most significant role through its function as a funder of NGOs, or as the establishing body of charitable foundations.

Arm's length bodies remain the commonest institutional type. The length of the arm varies depending on the statutory and legal basis of the relationship to the state, and the term arm's length here includes both state-created bodies (British Council, Goethe-Institut) and self-created bodies which operate within a framework of state policy and direction, but which retain a high degree of financial and legal independence (Alliance Française).

The role of Embassies is very important. They deliver foreign policy and conduct the diplomatic functions of representation, communication and negotiation. They can of course conduct these activities through a range of channels, and these include education, culture and activities to promote national reputation and identity. They set national policies and strategies and they are accountable for them to national partnerships. They can be directly responsible for local delivery through their services and personnel (France, the USA), they can host semi-autonomous units within the Embassy (Brazil, France), they can work with arm's length bodies and other Departments of Government through a 'Team (name of country)' coordination process, and they can provide financial support through grants and partnerships.

The role of arm's length bodies is crucial, however. Embassies are missions representing specific countries and their interests. They are recognised as such, and their status gives them

[17] https://www.brookings.edu/articles/its-time-for-a-new-policy-on-confucius-institutes/

access to Governments, multilateral organisations, and official bodies. Their functions require high-level engagement on political and economic levels, and in responding to crises. They are not, however, delivery organisations with the capacity, capability or reach to engage with populations of other countries at scale, over time, which is what is required to build trust based on mutual benefit. That requires specialist agencies, and what we found is that most countries create institutions which can do so, and that they recognise that is what is needed to compete for hearts and minds. This recognition is not confined to 'liberal' or 'democratic' states – illiberal states (China, Russia) also create such bodies, recognising that establishing credibility with populations over time requires a degree of separation from national policies and interests. The global popularity of arm's length bodies is illustrated in Figure 3 below.

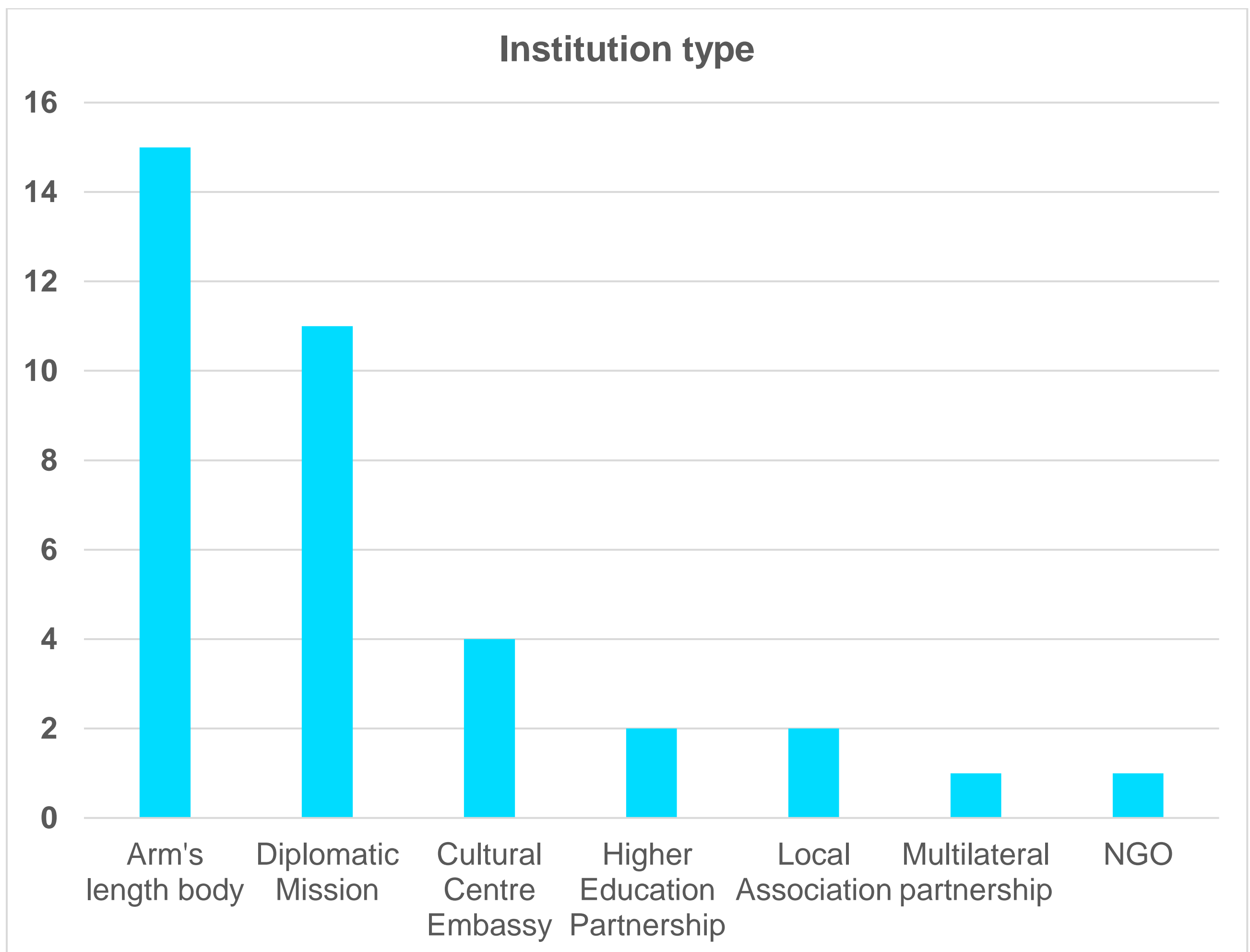

Figure 3 – Institution type across sample

Principal activities

The institutions in our sample engage in a range of activities. The three main areas of activity are arts and culture, education, and language learning, which are the areas that the British Council operates in. Globally, Cultural Institutes report that they engage in the activities shown in Figure 4 below.

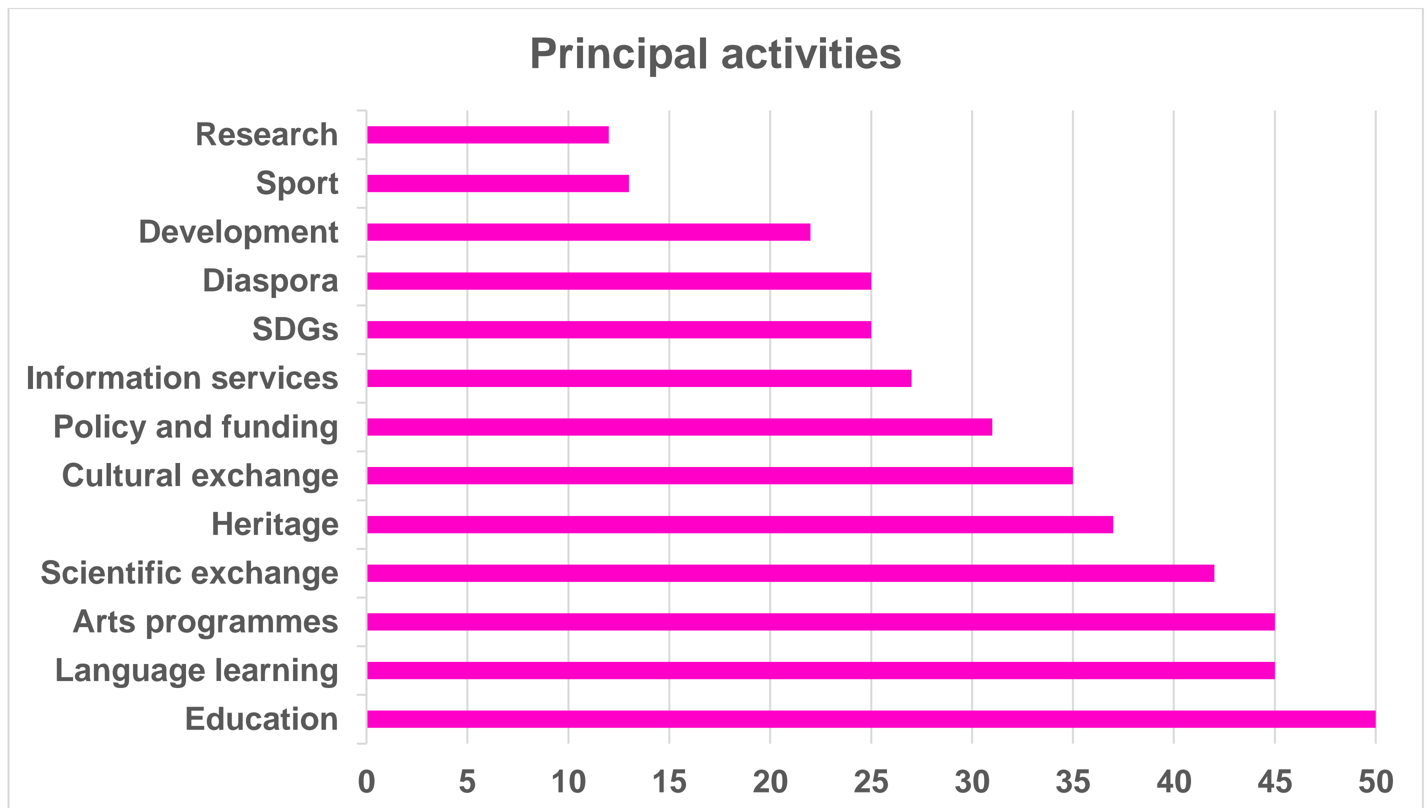

Figure 4 – Principal activities across the sample - number of institutions involved in each type of activity

Education is the commonest (nearly universal) area of activity. This can include:

- providing extensive networks of education services for expatriate communities (France) which can also build long-term local partnerships and networks
- elementary and primary schools in developing countries (Turkey)
- efforts to attract foreign students (nearly all)
- academic exchange (nearly all).

Arts and culture are also universal. Activity most often takes the form of exchange programmes, showcasing, and capacity building.[18] Whatever the difficulty in assessing the impact of arts and culture, it is clear that all countries believe that culture plays an important role in foreign policy and international engagement.

There are some areas of activity that are given a high priority by some countries but not by others. Information services – often aiming to 'correct' imperfect perceptions of a country by others – diaspora engagement, heritage, and sport stand out as examples which are very important for countries such as South Korea, China, Germany, and Japan, respectively. It was perhaps surprising that there were comparatively few references to the Sustainable Development Goals, or to development, given their importance.

[18] In the figure above, there is some overlap between 'arts programmes' and 'cultural exchange', but this is impossible to quantify.

Of these, diaspora engagement stands out as a high priority (indeed the main focus) of some countries' activities and is often, as noted above in the discussion of French international schools, combined with other goals. China, prioritises diaspora engagement in support of its geopolitical and economic goals through the work of the United Front Work Department (UFWD) which is a high-level organisation of the Communist Party (CCP) tasked with developing political and business ties with overseas Chinese, bringing investment and research benefits, as well as helping the CCP shape foreign views of China.[19]

Diaspora engagement also takes other forms, principally the desire to ensure that communities living overseas retain their cultural affiliations to their 'home' country (China, Japan, Russia). The sending of remittances contributes to poverty reduction in countries of origin (Brazil, India). Some countries engage with their diasporas for domestic political reasons (Turkey). Others see the potential in engagement with diaspora communities of other countries as a way to increase aid (UK, USA).

Development is also more important than it might appear from the sample. While there was some evidence that development is a priority for some countries and Cultural Institutes, it is perhaps the case that it is usually an activity that is taken forward by other institutions. The boundary between development and cultural relations/soft power, can also be blurred. Where it does happen, it usually takes the form of educational provision or capacity building, and countries can label these activities either as development or as cultural relations/soft power. The most notable contemporary example is China's Belt and Road Initiative, which is shaping its activities in Asia and Africa and clearly includes both types of activity under the overall aims of geopolitical influence and economic development. Another striking example is the work of the Turkish Maarif Foundation which provides pre-school and school level education in some challenging contexts such as Afghanistan.

Global footprint

We made as accurate a count as we could of the overseas locations of Cultural Institutes, Embassies with cultural and educational services, and other organisations that are important in national soft power and cultural relations efforts, such as think tanks for our comparator group in all Member States of the United Nations and in other territories where they were active.[20]

The whole table is too large to reproduce in this report (it identified 5,282 locations in 192 countries and 4 territories) so we instead analysed locations at the regional level, using the regional definitions of the British Council, to facilitate comparisons. See Figure 5 below.[21]

[19] See: https://jamestown.org/program/united-front-work-department-magic-weapon-home-abroad/

[20] Other territories were: the Holy See, Kosovo, Palestinian Territories, Taiwan.

[21] The figures include representations in UN Member States only.

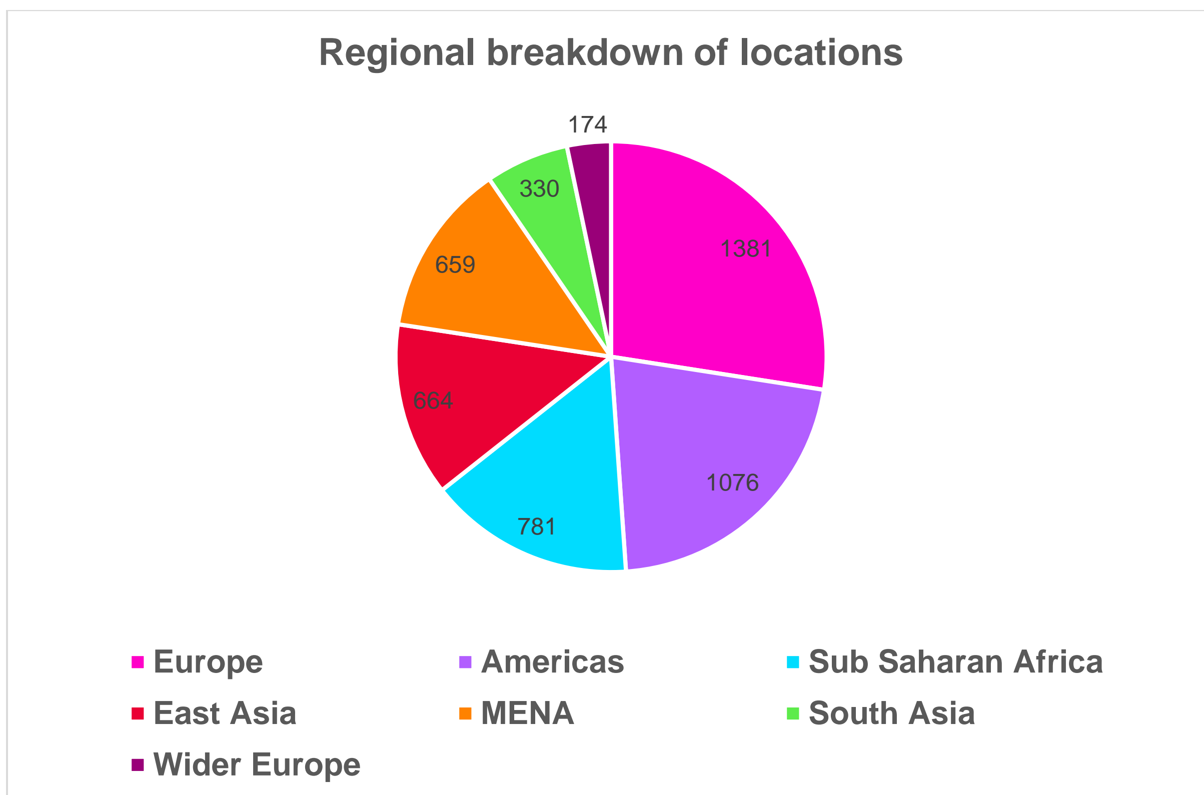

Figure 5 – Regional breakdown of geographical locations

This breakdown shows that the geographical distribution of overseas locations is global, and is dominated by historical patterns, with most locations in Europe and the Americas, though there are significant numbers of locations in Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and the Middle East and North Africa. This could also be explained by the comparatively large number of states in the more popular regions which would require more locations to be established (there are 44 countries in Europe compared to 11 in South Asia).

At the level of which were the most popular receiving countries, the USA was still the most popular country with significant numbers in Latin America (Brazil, Argentina).

Receiving country	Number of cultural institutes in 2022
USA	276
Germany	116
Brazil	112
UK	99
India	94

Argentina	92
Italy	85
Mexico	85
Australia	84
Lebanon	84
Spain	82
China	79
Morocco	77
Madagascar	76
France	73
Russia	66
Canada	64
Japan	60
Netherlands	56
Thailand	56
Tunisia	51
Pakistan	54
South Africa	50
Colombia	49
Indonesia	49
Portugal	48
Republic of Korea (South Korea)	48
Mali	47
Afghanistan	45
Egypt	45

Figure 6 – Top 30 receiving countries

We then compared the UK's global footprint to that of a limited number of comparator countries with operating models broadly similar to the UK.[22] That revealed not only that the UK has a significantly smaller global (and regional) footprint, but that the gap between the UK's overseas presence and that of other comparable countries is in some cases very wide indeed. Footprint does not equate to influence, but it could equate to lower visibility and poorer perception of the importance the UK attaches to its overseas partners.

	UK	France	Germany	Japan
Europe	43	565	112	54
MENA	26	309	43	23
Sub Saharan Africa	24	311	62	43
Americas	15	583	70	42
East Asia	23	220	25	41
South Asia	23	94	65	12
Wider Europe	15	45	20	9
Total	169	2,127	397	224

Figure 7 – Global footprint of UK, France, Germany and Japan[23]

The operating model also has an impact on geographical reach. Countries such as the USA that operate mainly through their embassy and consular networks achieve breadth, and they can augment central resources in specific contexts by working in partnership with NGOs and local partners such as universities which significantly expands their reach. China also achieves breadth through its comparatively cost-effective large network of Confucius Institutes based in Higher Education institutions. This approach does not always result in low impact: the Fulbright Program[24] is run out of US Embassies by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, is very well-known, and extremely attractive. Japan's JET programme[25] is similarly run through embassies.

Countries that operate mainly through dedicated arm's length agencies (as noted above) achieve more visibility and focus, even if that tends to be related to physical facilities in capital cities. This relationship to place is often derived from the pattern of the historical relationship between countries, or from the desire to connect with diasporic communities. Perhaps the most striking example of the assertion of commitment to place is the Japan House initiative, where signature buildings by prominent architects in prominent locations aim to attract local consumers to 'an authentic encounter with Japan'.[26]

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[22] They operate through arm's length bodies rather than Embassies and carry out a similar range of activities.
[23] Based on the most recent available data for each state/institution as of 31 March 2022.
[24] See: https://eca.state.gov/fulbright
[25] See: http://jetprogramme.org/en/
[26] See: https://www.japanhouselondon.uk/about/what-is-japan-house/

The rapid expansion of digital cultural relations during the pandemic changes the spatial (and temporal) possibilities for engagement. As EUNIC noted: *'lockdowns and physical distancing measures quickly rendered physical venues inaccessible, forcing members to privilege digital formats.'*[27] No longer dependent on face-to-face encounters in specific places, cultural relations is untying itself – to some extent – from activity in specific locations. The long-term implications as the pandemic becomes endemic, remain to be seen, but it is likely that some changes will be permanent.

Path dependencies

It is hard to generalise, but there is evidence that the geographical distribution of activity reflects historical patterns of colonisation and emigration and regional engagement. Whether it is the priority that Brazil gives to Latin America, the continuing focus on representation in Europe and the USA, the attention France gives to Francophonie countries, or engagement with and through diaspora populations, the legacy of the past is still present.

Broadcasting

A number of countries operate international broadcasting services. Some of these services date back to the Cold War, but others are more recent. They reach significant numbers of people on a regular basis. In our sample, broadcasting, media, information and Internet services are delivered by specialist agencies

	China	France	Germany	Japan	Russia	UK	USA
Media	CGTN	France Médias Monde	Deutsche Welle	NHK World	ITAR-Tass	BBC World Service	Voice of America
Languages	5	15	32	19	6	40	47
Audience: broadcast (million per week)	150	150	289	380	256	280	349
Audience: online (million)	150	43	122	N/K	N/K	N/K	N/K

Figure 8 - International broadcasting services and their reach

[27] See: https://www.eunicglobal.eu/media/site/1107552304-1623271794/eunic-digital-study_november-2020_full-report.pdf

Conclusions

The conclusions presented below update those we came to in 2021. In most cases, although events have moved at pace over the last year, and we were looking at a slightly different range of comparator countries, the conclusions about the nature and practice of soft power and cultural relations remain valid. This has not always proved to be the case, however. By including a different range of countries and, more importantly, institutions, we can see that last year's picture needs to be updated in some areas. These are indicated below.

Context

The overall context of crisis continues. In terms of the pandemic, countries and their Cultural Institutes are adapting to the online environment. There have been significant negative impacts on finances, especially in the sectors (culture, education) on which the practice of cultural relations / soft power relies, but these have been offset to some extent by support from Governments. Some Cultural Institutes have seen their operating models challenged by loss of income from paid-for services, a challenge which affected Cultural Institutes that were dependent on such income harder than those which received a greater proportion of their income from the state. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, however, countries continue to invest in cultural relations / soft power.

Perhaps a more serious long-term challenge is that of the impact on geopolitics and the world order posed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It is too early to come to firm conclusions about the impact of this, but it seems likely that there will be pressure on countries to align more closely with like-minded nations, and to choose sides. It is possible also that there will be increased competition for influence with others, particularly developing countries. The crisis may also prompt a need to reassess the role of cultural relations/soft power in relation to the changed global order.

Our other conclusions consider what has changed over the last year, and what has stayed the same. Our 2021 conclusions are in ***dark blue bold italics.***

Both competition and co-operation are needed in today's world.

In 2021 we found that countries operated both to achieve influence through soft power, and to build trust through long-term engagement and co-operation. In 2022, that remains the case. The terms of both competition and co-operation have changed, however. Geopolitical considerations will inevitably drive policy, and priority markets for engagement may have to be reassessed as security considerations become more important than previously. That will have consequences for the role that soft power and cultural relations play in foreign policy and in transnational engagement more widely.

There was no consistent understanding of what is meant by 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. That confusion persists. Countries still use terms such as 'soft power',

‘public diplomacy’, ‘cultural diplomacy’ and ‘cultural relations’ interchangeably. While the term ‘soft power’ is largely abandoned in academia, and the indices that measure it are increasingly challenged and even seen as dangerous[28], the term is still used loosely in policy and delivery contexts. Cultural relations, on the other hand, is a term used by a relatively small number of countries (and the EU) and cannot be considered universally descriptive. This confusion matters. In the absence of a commonly understood term to describe what is undoubtedly an area of public policy and practice, it is hard to create a narrative about it, or to have a public debate.

There was an urgent and increasing need for credible international collaboration for the common good.

Geopolitical crises distract from the need to tackle global challenges and to engage internationally for mutual benefit. The strongest support for this comes from like-minded democratic countries. In 2022, our 2021 conclusion that even governments that would normally be considered competitors, or with whom the UK often does not agree, support the idea of international co-operation on global challenges, needs to be revised. It is simply no longer the case, at least for the present, in relation to Russia.

That suggests that we need to co-operate even more effectively with our allies. That will mean a reassessment of who we want to co-operate with, where, and to what end. We implied in 2021 that there was an opportunity for the UK to take a global lead in creating the conditions for collaboration between like-minded democratic countries. It is even more important in 2022 that the UK does so, and with more of a focus on regional rather than global priorities (starting with the European Union).

In the terms of this report, it is essential that co-operation in scientific research, knowledge exchange, higher education, skills development, freedom of speech and expression, support for victims of conflict, is enhanced. We also need to ensure that channels of communication are kept open, not least through the lingua franca of the English language (especially as a second language), that enables exchange and co-operation between peoples. Other considerations such as commercial gain should take second place.

Countries which were recognised by other countries as exemplifying best practice, all had formal policies and arrangements for the delivery of their soft power and cultural relations activities.

We did not specifically look at this question in 2022. There was no sign that countries had made significant changes to their legal frameworks, policies or institutions in the past year (except perhaps for China which acted to make the governance of the Confucius Institutes at more arm’s length from the state). The top 5 countries in the Brand Finance Global Soft Power Index 2022 all had such clear frameworks.[29]

[28] See: https://online.ucpress.edu/gp/article-abstract/3/1/33108/120323/Soft-Power-Polls-and-the-Fate-of-Liberal-Democracy?redirectedFrom=fulltext

[29] The Index is an imperfect proxy for how countries’ soft power policies and institutions are seen. It is, however, an indicator of how well the ‘brand’ is perceived: https://brandirectory.com/softpower/report

Higher education including innovation, science and skills - was the key priority for cultural relations bodies, internationally.

This remains the case. However, there is an increased need to ensure the deployment of all soft power and cultural relations assets as effectively as possible and that the assets used should be those which contribute the most to strategic goals. An over-focus on Higher Education could, in some contexts, be less effective than activities which contribute to the competition for hearts and minds. People, after all, make decisions on criteria that are not always rational,[30] and can be influenced as much by emotions stimulated in this case by arts and culture as by self-interest or calculation. Cultural relations theory says that the most effective interventions are those which are context specific. The activities deployed in any given context, should be based on an understanding of that context, which requires the availability of a full spectrum of potential soft power and cultural relations interventions.

We noted that the UK does not focus on UK-origin diaspora populations, though the Devolved Administrations do.

This year's research confirmed the importance of diasporas. We continue to argue that this is a question which would benefit from further investigation and should include the crucial role of inward diasporas in the UK as contributors to multicultural cosmopolitanism, as networks of connection with their home country, and as target audiences for country-of-origin Governments.

Other countries invest considerably more in their soft power and cultural relations than does the UK.

This remains the case, and the gap may be widening in 2022.[31] We suggest that this question of relative resources be examined in more detail in relation to any review of strategic priorities. The two cannot be separated.

There was no one right answer to how to optimise global footprint. Judgements as to effectiveness should 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.

That conclusion stands. However, it should be noted that the UK's global footprint is already a great deal smaller than that of comparable countries.

The experience of other countries[32] suggested that the British Council needed to transform itself into a hybrid organisation, combining physical and digital reach, everywhere that it operates.

We are aware that this process is underway.

[30] See: https://hbr.org/2006/01/decisions-and-desire, or for an academic/scientific account: https://academic.oup.com/cercor/article/10/3/295/449599

[31] There were insufficient published data to confirm this, but other countries appear to be maintaining or increasing their efforts while the UK is reducing.

[32] In the 2021 sample, Sweden stood out as an example of good practice. In 2022 it was harder to identify countries that stood out, partly as most directly comparable countries were in the process of transformation in response to the pandemic.

Evidence-based policy and decision making, effective knowledge sharing, evaluation, organisational learning, and data-driven approaches are inevitable requirements for success.

We have had to revise this assessment as the world has changed. Our privileging of the knowledge economy predated the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, our finding that there was a need for more data-driven, research and insight-led, approaches remains.

We asked if the UK had the capacity and capability it needed to address the need for global collaboration given the challenges. We found that the UK was undoubtedly one of the world's leaders in soft power and cultural relations. Its reputation is strong. This status was not, however, guaranteed to continue and the UK could not rely on past achievements in a more competitive world.

This finding remains valid and given recent events, will have to be reassessed.

Appendix A: Comparator Country Profiles

Brazil

Brazil 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 30 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 coordination 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 Co-operation 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 Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF), which has taken over the work formerly done by Hanban, oversees the network of Confucius Institutes, the most prominent of China's soft power initiatives/institutions. It should be noted that CIEF works alongside other organisations: the Center for Language Education and Co-operation (CLEC), a non-profit professional educational institution for international Chinese language education; the China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE), and the United Front Work Department (UFWD – an organisation of the Chinese Communist Party) which directs 'overseas Chinese work,' including diaspora engagement. A number of other key affiliated organisations, guided by China's broader United Front strategy, conduct influence operations targeting foreign actors and states. The extensive international network of the Confucius Institute has grown rapidly over the past decade. They are simultaneously low-key in their operations and high profile thanks to the various controversies which they generate. They have a presence in a very large number of universities (and, through Confucius Classrooms, in schools) worldwide, and they are focused, concentrating on Chinese language learning and to some extent cultural relations (though on occasion they diversify, offering activities such as free martial arts classes). Confucius Institutes are not large, with each Institute being based in an overseas university, and having a very small staff. They target students, as they are future leaders. The CIEF is not an institution which is directly comparable to the British Council, but it is undoubtedly important. It is often cited by Chinese 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.

It should be noted that the CIEF works alongside other organisations: the Center for Language Education and Co-operation (CLEC), a non-profit professional educational institution for international Chinese language education; the China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE), and the United Front Work Department (UFWD – an organisation of the Chinese Communist Party) which directs 'overseas Chinese work,' including diaspora engagement (which seeks to co-opt ethnic Chinese individuals and communities living outside China). A number of other key affiliated organisations guided by China's broader United Front strategy conduct influence operations targeting foreign actors and states.

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 has the largest networks of overseas institutions of any country. Programme 185 of the French State (Diplomacy of Influence) and Programme 209 (International Development) together contribute very large sums, channelled through a range of bodies with specific functions. Policy responsibility lies with the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and is based around two pillars: (i) strengthening France's intellectual and cultural outreach, and (ii) promoting the cultural and creative industries. Delivery is coordinated in country via Embassies. While the nearest institutional equivalent to the British Council is the Institut français, 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 Institut français, however, plays a central role in France's cultural relations alongside the Alliance Française which has the largest global network (832 locations) of any institution. 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. It will be interesting to see how this develops in the changed geopolitical circumstances in Eastern Europe. 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 Goethe Institut has the Basic Agreement. The Goethe Institut 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 (MEA). It has a traditional cultural remit and very heavy governance arrangements which ensure that it is tied closely to the MEA. 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. The MEA also launched in 2018 the Bharat Ek Parichay initiative to establish 'Bharat Ek Parichay' corners in prominent educational institutions globally. These corners are an information service, providing a focal point for information and knowledge about Indian art, culture, religion, philosophy, and economy.

Japan

The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) publishes its strategy for promoting understanding and trust in Japan in its annual Diplomatic Blue Book. While its efforts aim to improve global understanding of Japan, the Ministry is responsible for a substantial public diplomacy programme which includes 'Public Relations Abroad (including Japan House)', 'Cultural Exchange', 'People to People Exchange' and co-operation with international organisations (including UNESCO). The Japan Foundation (JF) is Japan's only institution dedicated to carrying out comprehensive international cultural exchange programmes throughout the world. 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.'[33] 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 polices such as culture and education, Visit Japan, Cool Japan etc. The Japan Foundation is technically an arm's length body, but in reality, informal 'coordination 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. The other major initiative, Japan Houses, are high-profile, innovative and sophisticated physical institutions sited in 3 key target geographies (São Paulo, London and Los Angeles). They are an initiative designed to boost Japan's soft power, work closely with the private sector and are led by experienced cultural professionals, rather than practitioners of cultural relations.

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[33] See: https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/culture/exchange/index.html

Qatar

Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs supports the UN Initiative of the Alliance of the Civilizations as one of the pillars of its approach to international co-operation, believing that it is 'a unique opportunity for all nations to bypass their national framework towards the domain of cross-cultural exchange of ideas and experiences'. Qatar is also preparing to host the World Cup in Doha in 2022, and Sports Diplomacy is a major priority. The MFA wishes to highlight the importance of Sports in enhancing development, peace, respect and tolerance. Qatar's soft power and cultural relations, however, are also taken forward through the work of two major institutions, the Qatar Foundation, and the broadcaster, Al Jazeera. The Qatar Foundation is focused on education and works by attracting leading universities to Qatar. Al Jazeera is an independent news organisation funded in part by the Qatari government. Launched in 1996, Al Jazeera Arabic was the first independent news channel in the Arab world. Al Jazeera English, which was launched in 2006, is part of a growing network comprising more than 10 channels and divisions. The Al Jazeera Media Network, operates from more than 70 bureaus around the world.

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.' Soviet history, tradition, and terminology are important for understanding the Russian approach. 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 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 Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund), 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 the full financial position of the agencies is not published. More work is needed to gain a good understanding of the Russian institutions, whose future operations would seem to be in doubt given the restrictions on contacts with Russia, and bans on Russian broadcasters, following the invasion of Ukraine.

South Korea

The terminology of the Korea Foundation 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 organization, the Korea Foundation 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 5-year master plan and annual plans down to the level of overseas diplomatic missions in conformity with the master plan. The first plan was published in 2016 to cover 2017 to 2022. Internal objectives reflect brand thinking. The aim, according to the Korea Foundation's president is: 'In 2020, the Korea Foundation 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 Korea Foundation 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 Korea Foundation's activities are education led, reaching out to young people, including leaders. The Korea Foundation has a limited global footprint (8 centres), but the distribution of Korea Foundation 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).

Turkey

The Turkish MFA has policy responsibility for overseas promotion and cultural affairs in support of bilateral and multilateral relations, and through participation in multilateral organisations. Promotional activities include activities carried out by Turkish diplomatic missions, including Turkish Culture Days/Weeks, Turkish Film Days, Turkish Festivals, Turkish Food Week, exhibitions, dance performances, concerts, conferences and seminars on culture and art, and so on. Turkey is also actively developing efforts to establish and strengthen the legal basis of its cultural relations, to serve bilateral relations with other countries in the fields of culture, education, youth, sports, archives, librarianship and science. 46 agreements, protocols and

memoranda of understanding were signed in 2021. The MFA funds the work of the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers (54 Cultural Centers in 43 countries) which teach Turkish to foreigners, conduct cultural and art activities and support scientific research. Heritage forms a major part of Turkey's cultural diplomacy strategy, to support tourism and to protect Turkey's heritage from the trade in illicit goods. Since 2016, the Turkish Maarif Foundation has been supported by the Ministry of National Education to 'enhance cultural and civilisational interaction and pave the way for achieving common wellbeing. To do this, it opens and manages pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education institutions, and other types of educational infrastructures around the world. It also establishes study centres for informal education and cultural centres.

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

The UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation (MOFAIC) is responsible for the UAE's policy on cultural and public diplomacy. The Office of Public and Cultural Diplomacy, established in MOFAIC in 2018, leads on delivery, seeing its activities as 'vital to facilitating awareness and appreciation of culture, in the service of improved mutual respect and prosperity.' Its activities are limited in scope, and take place in the UAE, but they still enable the UAE to be the Gulf State ranked highest in the Brand Finance Soft Power Index, and to be #15 in the world, based on perceptions that it is an easy place to do business in, and on the Abraham Accords (the first public normalisation of relations between an Arab country and Israel since that of Jordan in 1994), rather than on its cultural activities, though it was recognised that it has made great improvements in education and science. The UAE has no overseas cultural or educational infrastructure.

United States of America

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 arms-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 keeps petty politics out but grand politics still decides which regions gets the largest budgets. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. 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 women 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 Centres 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% 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 FY 2017 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

Introduction

This literature review conceptualises the understanding and practice of public diplomacy in its contemporary global context marked by an ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, various crises in the system of international relations as well as fast developments in the sphere of technology. Following Cull (2019), public diplomacy can be understood as an umbrella term to refer to the power of attraction of states in international affairs, also known as soft power, on the one hand, and activities oriented towards mutuality and dialogue, namely, cultural relations, on the other. To do so, the relevant scholarly and practitioner literature is reviewed against the background of major socio-cultural as well as political events. While the role of public diplomacy is of increasing importance in the foreign (and internal) policy toolkit of both state and non-state actors across the world, its nature seems to be far more complex than initially anticipated by experts and scholars. Driven by various motivations, diverse forms of public diplomacy have appeared, expressions marked by significant transformations such as the rise of artificial intelligence, the relative decline of the West´s hegemony, and not least the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. As the rules of engagement seem to have changed, an analysis of the contemporary dynamics of public diplomacy is key to understanding international relations. At the time of writing this literature review, a major conflict has broken out in Europe following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022. Although the consequences and impact on international politics are not yet clear at this stage, it is likely that its outcomes will reflect on the changing nature of public diplomacy.

Global crisis and public diplomacy in the 21st century

The system of international relations is in crisis. Geopolitical tensions and armed conflict across the world, rising inequalities, a lack of trust in politics and media, and an ongoing pandemic illustrate this situation. This current state of affairs cannot, however, be fully understood without considering the growing importance of sophisticated communication strategies and influence shaping techniques, including public diplomacy, alongside the need for international co-operation to tackle these global challenges. Aiming to set forth a critical overview of the contemporary dynamics of public diplomacy in international relations, this literature review considers public diplomacy as an umbrella term which includes two variants of foreign engagements: soft power and (international) cultural relations (Cull 2019).

Public diplomacy refers to 'an instrument used by states, associations of states, and some sub-state and non-state actors to understand cultures, attitudes, and behaviour; build and manage relationships; and influence thoughts and mobilize actions to advance their interests and values' (Gregory 2011, 353). Following Cull (2009, 10), the core aspects of public diplomacy are listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange, and international broadcasting. Among its major objectives are 'increasing awareness, managing reputations, changing legislation or altering attitudes' (Coombs and Holladay 2010 cited in Simons 2018, 143). In recent times, the

importance of strategic narratives and storytelling in international relations has gained importance (Chernobrov 2021), a tendency related to the ongoing process of the digitalisation of diplomacy which has brought many opportunities in terms of outreach and audience engagement but similarly challenges and threats, ranging from security and privacy concerns to the increasing difficulty in controlling narratives as well as the complexity of stakeholder management. As Avgerinos explains 'A successful public diplomacy campaign requires integrating a country's key stakeholders, including government agencies, major corporations, NGOs, artists and celebrities, into a system of brand management that supports a single, long-term national strategy.' (2009, 118). The fundamental transformation of public diplomacy has resulted in a new terminology and conceptualisations such as 'new public diplomacy' which is marked by an increased focus on audience engagement and the participation of non-state actors (Snow cited in Simons 2018, 144), or more recently, digital public diplomacy (known as public diplomacy 2.0), marked by the use of digital technologies and new media.

Joseph Nye coined the term `soft power` in the late eighties and provided its initial theoretical framework. According to Nye, soft power represented the power states can exert through their image and reputation abroad. Through intangible assets such as national culture, political and social values, as well as foreign policy, it was asserted that states could leverage their position on the international scene (Nye 2004). Although only coined towards the end of the 20th century, the practice of deriving 'power from attraction' refers to a practice of influence shaping which has been deployed throughout the ages, but which seems to have accelerated and been transformed by technological developments. Examples are the setting up of cultural institutes during the 19th century (such as the Dante Alighieri Institute) with the aim of spreading cultural influence (Paschalidis 2009), the deployment of international broadcasting during the cold war, or the organisation of mass events such as the FIFA World Cup.

Historically linked to foreign policy, various motives have been identified for states to develop soft power ranging from the reaping of economic benefits to the willingness to become more influential on the international scene. However, the concrete outcome of possessing soft power remains an element of discussion in the scholarship. While some are critical about soft power and reconsider its importance in relation to hard power (Kounalakis & Simonyi 2011), others have linked tangible outcomes to its potential, such as economic growth or even an increased level of trust in international relations (MacDonald 2018).[34] This prompts the question, how does soft power work? In its basic application soft power works through the effective and strategic projection of certain assets (or behaviours) with the aim of attracting a particular audience, eventually even triggering it to emulate them. It is a gradual process wherein 'soft power resources work indirectly by shaping the environment for policy' (Nye 2004, 99).

The second dimension of public diplomacy is the practice known as (international) cultural relations. Generally viewed as focused on the fostering of dialogue and mutual trust and understanding (Gillespie et al. 2018), and therefore, intrinsically different from soft power, cultural relations have been defined as 'reciprocal transnational interactions between two or more cultures, encompassing a range of activities conducted by state and/or non-state actors

[34] Although the link between trust and soft power is contested, it was stated by UK MP J. Baron who explains it as follows: 'Soft power builds trust, a commodity that is in increasingly short supply in an era of growing international instability and the rise of fake news, 'alternative facts´ and digital misinformation. Trust is core to forging alliances and to reaching agreements between nations' (MacDonald 2018, 2).

within the space of culture and civil society.' (Gillespie et al. 2018, 7) Its outcomes are understood in terms of 'greater connectivity, better mutual understanding, more and deeper relationships, mutually beneficial transactions and enhanced sustainable dialogue between people and cultures.' (Gillespie et al. 2018, 7) Most importantly, they are expected to be 'shaped through engagement and attraction rather than coercion' (Gillespie et al. 2018, 7). Generally, they involve activities in the realm of language learning, education, and arts, but can similarly take place in science, sports, or technology (Gillespie et al. 2018).

Although one of the major characteristics of cultural relations is the limited role of the state, the paradigm remains in the centre of an academic discussion. While some argue, it is a mere application of soft power, and view it as a component of public and/or cultural diplomacy,[35] others have distinguished it from soft power. Tim Rivera (2015, 11), for example, explained the difference as follows: 'The absence of government is just as important for cultural relations as its presence is for cultural diplomacy. Cultural relations is the mutual exchange of culture between peoples to develop long-term relationships, trust, and understanding for the purpose of generating genuine goodwill and influence abroad.'

Throughout recent decades, the understanding of public diplomacy, soft power and cultural relations has been reconceptualised and reworked, resulting in new terminology and the gradual understanding that these concepts are not fixed. In relation to soft power, for example, terms such as positive and negative soft power, high (targeting elites) and low soft power (targeting the public), or indirect and direct soft power have appeared (Hossain 2020, 601). Nye himself also reworked the concept by coining the notion of smart power which he defined as 'the ability to combine the hard power of coercion or payment with the soft power of attraction into a successful strategy' (2010, 9). While the theoretical problems and over popularising of the term (Rawnsley speaks of the so-called 'bandwagon effect' and a 'fashionable catch-all term' (2012, 124) have been pointed out (Fan 2008), many relevant questions have also been asked about the problematic nature of its measurement and its complex relationship to hard power and wider global events (Hill & Beadle 2014; Gallarotti 2011).

These global efforts to rethink public diplomacy from a theoretical perspective stand in direct relation to the changing reality wherein its practices function. This reality is one marked by crises on multiple levels ranging from outright geopolitical conflict, climate change to the ongoing pandemic. It finds its reflection in identity politics, the resurgence of nationalism, the reappearance of history (memory wars) and widening economic inequalities; and is pushing countries to confront each other as well as rethink co-operation.

The new (changing) face of public diplomacy

Often viewed in the context of Nye´s soft power theory, public diplomacy is no longer viewed as a Western, let alone American phenomenon. Throughout the last decade, many non-Western as well as Western countries have been asserting themselves as proficient public diplomacy

[35] Cultural diplomacy has been defined as 'the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding' (Cummings 2003, 1).

players possessing considerable amounts of soft power, while the paradigm of cultural relations has experienced increasing interest from both state and non-state actors.[36] This acknowledgment of new players cannot be disconnected from the changing nature of public diplomacy as well as the ongoing processes of globalisation and digitalisation. Non-Western powers, such as India, China, and Russia, are among those identified as possessing large quantities of soft power, while their interpretation of what is considered public diplomacy, soft power and cultural relations differs significantly from their Western counterparts. Repnikova (2022) writes, for instance, on China that 'Chinese visions of soft power are influenced by the original concept coined by Joseph Nye, but they also diverge from it in some ways. For example, the Chinese interpretation of soft power is more fluid when it comes to separating between hard and soft power resources, as well as between domestic and external audiences of its diplomatic initiatives.' The same principle is true for countries such as Russia whose public diplomacy is informed by identity politics towards its diaspora communities across the world and tends to accompany their hard power, through the establishment of Russkiy Mir Centers which aim to spread the notion of a unique Russian civilisation going beyond Russian borders.

The global competition in public diplomacy and its related practices has been triggering a discussion on the understanding of the term by illiberal countries. Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig (quoted in Kucharczyk et al. 2017, 13), coined the term 'sharp power' to describe the use of 'soft' aspects of foreign policy by authoritarian regimes: 'These regimes are not necessarily seeking to ´win hearts and minds´, the common frame of reference for ´soft power´ efforts, but they are surely seeking to manage their target audience by manipulating or poisoning the information that reaches them.' Such attempts, however, start from the idea that there is one right way to practice public diplomacy, failing to understand the complex nature of public diplomacy and its interaction with socio-cultural and political events. The engagement of emerging powers cannot be disconnected from the rapidly changing geo-political landscape marked by a relative decline of the West and by the rise of non-western powers, particularly China and India, but similarly South Korea and Russia. Furthermore, the aftermath of crises such as Western military failures in the Middle East, the financial crisis (Hill & Beadle 2014, 13) and disruptive political events such as the UK's exit from the European Union could be considered as causes or triggers of Western soft power loss (O´Toole 2021).

Growing geopolitical disputes and political shifts are reshaping the practice of public diplomacy, making it a vital instrument in the global competition for power. As more countries have been asserting their public diplomacy strategies, new forms and expressions have emerged. This means for some a return to history, while others are guided by new technologies or have reconceptualised paradigms. This is the case with respect to the notion of (international) cultural relations. While a country such as Germany has incorporated the paradigm as their so-called 'third pillar of foreign policy,' more have used it to spread influence. An example is to be found in the EU´s strategy for external cultural relations which discursively distinguishes itself from cultural diplomacy but tends to act following the principles of soft power/cultural diplomacy (MacDonald & Vlaeminck 2020).

[36] Soft power overviews such as Finance Brand are taking many non-Western, and even illiberal countries into account, and are even ranking them high, while the distinguished character is acknowledged.

There are alternative theoretical frames to explain public diplomacy, for instance, geocultural power which refers to 'the centrality of cultural heritage and history in understanding international affairs and global politics today,' and 'speaks to the strategic mobilization of select aspects of culture, religion and history' (Lin et al. 2021, 4) in order to 'win friends and build loyalties, and to legitimise expansionist ambitions to public audiences, both at home and abroad.' (Winter 2019, 18 quoted in Lin et al. 2021, 4). It has been used to explain narratives, for instance, in the context of China´s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Ibid).

The image of public diplomacy has arguably been damaged in the so-called post truth era, due to the ubiquitous presence of misinformation and disinformation circulating online.[37] Under the guise of public diplomacy, strategic communications, and even psychological operations are conducted by state and non-state actors with the aim of spreading influence and harming competitors. Culture is very central to these processes and has become the prime target of manipulation, as Kononenko (2021, 3-4) argues: 'In the original Nye's 'soft power' concept, 'culture' was understood as something that can be 'projected' onto the other as a sort of ideological treatment. In practice, however, culture is rarely about homogeneous, one-way streaming of ideology. As the current age of identity politics and culture war suggests, culture is intrinsically linked to social interaction, interpretation and manipulation on all sides.' While this relates to a more general crisis in trust, it has had tangible impacts in world affairs as exemplified in mass polarisation, populist uprising and deteriorating international relations. A recent example is the quarrel between Germany and Russia over the suspension of German NGOs active in Russia which in turn resulted in a tit for tat of the German government suspending its participation in the Petersburg Dialog, the major forum of civil society contacts between Russia and Germany.

The outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022 has arguably added a new layer to the interrelation between public diplomacy and geopolitics as major tools of Russian soft power, such as the broadcaster RT, are being considered as war propaganda, and expressions of cultural relations between the West and Russia have come under severe attack. Although, the impact of this conflict on public diplomacy and international politics is not yet clear at this stage, it has been spurring a debate among experts and scholars. While Suslov had already announced the beginning of a new cold war between Russia and the US (Shvartsman 2022), others have been pointing at possible shifts on the international scene. Joseph Nye (2022), for example, suggested that 'the invasion spells the end of the post-Cold war order.'

At the same time, public diplomacy brokers and initiatives, particularly in the form of cultural relations, function as drivers of international development, peacekeeping, and bridges of communication during difficult times in international relations. This is exemplified in the sending of humanitarian aid (see below), the protection of cultural heritage, the fostering of social cohesion and intercultural dialogue or the promotion of human rights and democracy. This dimension has been formulated as follows: 'cultural and educational activities can provide a shared platform for engagement and co-operation with governments even when relations in all other areas remain challenging and can enable people-to-people and institutional dialogue and exchange to continue and thrive.' (ICR 2021a, 4)

[37] For more information, see Bjola, C. "The ´Dark Side´ of Digital Diplomacy." *CPD Blog*, January 22, 2019, https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/dark-side-digital-diplomacy

Tendencies, Challenges and Opportunities

Arguably the most significant change in the practice of public diplomacy, soft power, and cultural relations in the 21st century is its digitalisation. Through digital tools, social media and the internet, digital public diplomacy has become a new reality. Echoing the digitalisation of diplomacy (also known as e-diplomacy or diplomacy 2.0), efforts to brand a nation, shape perception, or create sustainable relations have become digitalised. This has enabled Cultural Institutes, diplomats, and citizen diplomats to exponentially grow their reach across the world resulting in a new field of global competition. Although its efficiency remains a topic for debate, the practice of public diplomacy has been transformed, a process which goes along with the increased participation of ordinary citizens and grass-roots initiatives in this process (people-to-people relations), a turn which has been assessed positively, as Payne (2009, 579) argues: '[...] effective public diplomacy is rooted in strategic people to people communication in the effort to establish a sustaining relationship. And, fundamental to achieving success in such vital communication, regardless of the sponsorship of such activities, is a commitment to build a relationship with the targeted public through grassroots encounters.' The digitalisation of public diplomacy has, however, also brought challenges, as Chernobrov (2021, 5) argues: 'The increasingly digital media ecology contributes to the proliferation of a post-truth culture in public diplomacy and strategic narratives, which is characterised by the declining value of facts and growing role of emotional messages and uncertainty.' It has similarly an effect on its measurement. Due to technological developments, large amounts of data have become available, resulting in new insights and methods, such as, sentiment analysis, to inform and potentially measure the impact of soft power and cultural relations (MacDonald & Singh 2018, 24).

A second, significant trend is the emergence of new actors who deploy public diplomacy for a range of motives, and function both in relation to, or to a lesser or greater extent independently from, governments. This can arguably be viewed as a reflection of the decentralisation of diplomacy and stands in direct relation with other tendencies such as digitalisation, globalisation, and disruptive geopolitics. Among new (independent) players, we can count (global) cities and regions, citizen diplomats, international organisations, multinational corporations, and NGOs.

The public diplomacy of global cities is attracting increasing attention from the scholarly and practitioner communities. Very similar to states, their motivations are various, but often relates to branding, networking, or the attracting of investment. The research *Cultural Relations and Cities* mapped the rising role of cultural relations dynamics in city administrations. The document lists a range of motivations ranging from various positive impacts such as peer learning, socio-economic impact and even 'boosting social inclusion' and argued that cities are often guided by a 'clear set of cultural and political values' and that cultural relations therefore function as a bridge in city relations: 'Cities often prefer institution to institution contact rather than 'official' political channels when working with cities in areas of political instability, geopolitical tension, or with regimes that do not respect human rights.' (Eurocities 2017, 20-23)

NGOs are also increasingly playing a role in public diplomacy. Zhang and Swartz (2009) list several reasons for this: a distrust in government, an 'increased sense of entitlement and expectation to engage in the policy making process,' and new technologies (cited in Simons

2018, 149). The same is true for international organisations and multinational corporations which ‘may contribute to certain programs that promote mutual interests and enhance the name of the country they represent.’ (Pantoja 2018)

The resources of soft power have similarly adapted to the current times, opening the space to go beyond Nye´s neo-liberal understanding of soft power as being the result of a common set of values, as Carminati (2021) argues: ‘More and more studies have investigated additional sources of soft power such as normative aspects, foreign aid, and even naval diplomacy, all heavily dependent on contextual observation.’ In relation to China, for example, Repnikova (2022) writes: ‘Other than in the education realm, there is also vast potential for Chinese soft power via communication infrastructure as part of the Digital Silk Road, including provision of Internet and digital television access, but also in sales of affordable smart phones.’ Among other powerful resources is the global climate debate which has become a major topic of public diplomacy strategies across the world with particularly western powers, attaching much value to it. This was exemplified in 2021 following the election of US President J. Biden, as he re-joined the Paris Climate agreement as his first act in office. The European Green Deal went together with cultural projects such as the European Bauhaus. (Kononenko 2021) While this echoes the so-called greening of soft power, it similarly points to blurring between international cultural relations and soft power. Sport is also an increasingly important resource of soft power, and big events such as the hosting of the FIFA world cup or the Olympics are viewed as major soft power opportunities. Finally, we ought to mention the role of social and cultural identities, such as religion, ethnicity, and gender, for instance, in the incorporation of themes such as anti-colonialism (Ebert 2021)

There has also been a shift in terms of audience. Originally aimed at foreign audiences, public diplomacy now also focuses on domestic and intermestic audiences (international and domestic). ‘While public diplomacy has long been associated with only foreign publics, it should also include activities directed towards domestic citizens. Their understanding and support of a government’s policy and their efforts to reach out to peers abroad are crucial to a country’s (inter)national credibility and efficiency.’ (Huijgh 2019, 176) Finally, an important dimension is the engagement of diaspora communities, a priority for many states. In doing so, they make sometimes use of proxies, such as in the case of Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church.

COVID-19 and implications for public diplomacy

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a discussion on the (changing) nature and future of public diplomacy, soft power, and cultural relations. World leaders such as Ban Ki Moon took part in the discussion stating that they might be key to find a way out of the health crisis: ‘But the reality is that it is only through a coordinated global effort that the virus will be brought under control. And that depends to a large degree on countries’ soft power – their ability to influence, build a consensus and forge alliances.’ (British Council 2020) Although some countries´ reactions to the global health crisis were interpreted within the frame of public diplomacy, resulting in terms such as vaccine diplomacy, mask diplomacy and so on, this was not generally the case and even resulted in a new field of competition. While countries such as China and Russia actively resorted to humanitarian aid during the start of the pandemic (acts by

some interpreted as public diplomacy and nation branding), this was not the case in many Western countries where a ‘my country first-policy’ was implemented. The impact of the pandemic on public diplomacy is becoming a topic of research concerning the role of diaspora politics, the use of celebrities (Manor & Pamment 2022) as well as the emergence of pandemic narratives as demonstrated by Cull (2021) who found that communications strategies in the context of the pandemic were marked by following narratives: the self as success, the other as failure, gift, and partnership.

The impact of the pandemic on cultural relations has generally been considered negative, as it caused unemployment and the cutting of cultural budgets, but also ruptures in cultural relations: ‘The pandemic also had a negative impact on international cultural relations between countries. This is because quarantines and travel restrictions made the most common types of co-operation - like the mobility of professionals and offline collaborative projects - practically impossible. Following one of the major trends of the pandemic era - ´going local´ - some organisations that previously collaborated internationally, suspended their international collaborations and instead shifted their priorities towards local audiences and projects. Some had to cancel all of their activities whatsoever.’ (Ukrainian Institute 2021, 6) On the other hand, it has brought innovation, mostly in the form of digital cultural relations.

The accelerated digitalisation of public diplomacy, soft power and cultural relations is one of the major outcomes of the pandemic. This has resulted in the inevitable move from live events to virtual and hybrid events and practices. The long-term and arguably ever-lasting impact has been observed by McClory (2021) who distinguished the following characteristics of the most recent version of public diplomacy: a hybrid nature, a link to the home front, active listening, and an emphasis on partnership. Of particular interest is the author´s urge to focus more on partnership, firstly because of a declining level in trust and secondly, as a move toward COVID-recovery for many organisations. McClory (2021) continues: ‘To bring this principle to life, public diplomacy practitioners will need to eschew any temptation to pursue one-way, broadcast-like programming and operate more of a collaborative platform with local partners.’ While this seems a further move towards international cultural relations, there are, however, challenges, as pointed out by Bjola (2022): ‘At the same time, the very conditions that have allowed public diplomacy to prosper in the digital space appear now to be responsible for fostering a growing sense of ´social media fatigue´ and a lack of confidence in the digital future of public diplomacy.’

The effects of the accelerated digitalisation have similarly raised concerns in relation to a growing digital divide and a lack of resources, but also in relation to security-related issues (Karanasou 2021; ICR 2021b). This has brought important topics such as inclusion/exclusion on the agenda of cultural institutes who have understood that ‘the digital space is not an inclusive space’ referring to issues such as, literacy, disability, age as well as digital access (Ukrainian Institute 2021, 11). While the trend of digitalisation represents a ‘natural’ next step in the development of public diplomacy as a practice, its impact appears to be wider, resulting in budget cuts and consequent significant internal restructuring, such as in the case of the UK where increasing pressure has been put on the role and function of the British Council.

Conclusion

This literature review has attempted to give an overview of the transformation of public diplomacy (soft power and cultural relations) in the 21st century with a focus on the present day. One of the key take-aways is the changing nature of public diplomacy in the current information era reflected in the messy nature and interaction between its two dimensions, here understood, as cultural relations on the one hand, and soft power on the other. This is not only an outcome of rapid technological developments (for instance, in the emerging sphere of AI), but similarly of the organic reconceptualisation of the practice as well as a changing geopolitical landscape. Among the major tendencies which have been identified is the digitalisation of public diplomacy. It has accelerated developments such as the emergence of new actors, the outreach to new audiences as well as the utilisation of new resources and the reduction of costs. Regardless of its major impact, digitalisation has not replaced the more traditional forms of public diplomacy, though, and should therefore above all be viewed as a tool, rather than a new reality. While the benefits of digitalisation are clear, the challenges and threats are also relevant, though often neglected. As the importance of public diplomacy grows, it has become an increasingly important instrument of global competition between powers. While there remain many open questions concerning its transformation in the 21st century, known issues such as its measurement are still problematic.

Appendix C: Methodology

We drew on the methodology we used in the previous comparative study we carried out for the British Council in order to maximise the potential for continuity, which consisted of:

- 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 coordination
- 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
- analysis: the material was analysed to provide the British Council with a snapshot of cultural relations activity across all of the countries involved.

In terms of scope, information on the countries and institutions examined is at Appendix D.

Appendix D: Data Tables

Numbers and types of overseas representations

Country	Institution	Function
Brazil	Ministério das Relações Exteriores (Itamaraty)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)
	Rede Brasil Cultural	Brazilian Cultural Network: • Brazilian Cultural Centres • Brazilian Studies Groups
	Programme for Language and Culture Diffusion (PDLC).	Language and diaspora engagement programme of the MFA.
	Alexandre de Gusmão Foundation (FUNAG)	Foreign policy think tank.
	TV Globo Internacional and Globo TV Sports.	International broadcaster.
China	Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF)	Headquarters of Confucius Institutes network: • Confucius Institutes • Confucius Classrooms
	Center for Language Education and Co-operation (CLEC).	Chinese language examinations and tests administered through Confucius Institutes. Supported by Ministry of Education.
	China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE)	International educational exchanges and co-operation
	CGTN	International broadcaster.
European Union (EU)	European External Action Service (EEAS)	EU delegations carry our Public Diplomacy at EU level
	EUNIC Clusters (European National Institutes of Culture)	Groups of Cultural Institutes (CIs) of Member States. Membership varies depending on location.

France	Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs	Cultural Diplomacy: policy and oversight of French overseas cultural network: • Institut français • Foundation of Alliances Françaises (accreditation/franchising/branding) • Co-operation and Cultural Action Service (SCAC) culture and development.
	AEFE: Agence pour l'enseignement français à l'étranger (French education system abroad)	Operator of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs.
	Alliance Française	State-recognised higher education establishment and training organisation.
	Campus France	Higher Education and Research. Works under the supervision of the Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Higher Education and Research.
	Institut français	Public organisation charged with international cultural relations. Works under the supervision of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Culture.
	France Médias Monde	Group in charge of French international broadcasting
Germany	Auswärtiges Amt (AA) (Federal Foreign Office)	Foreign cultural and education policy (AKBP): • Cultural preservation • Voluntary service overseas • Science Diplomacy • Religion and foreign policy • German language promotion • German schools overseas • International cultural programmes

		• Strategic communication
	Alexander Von Humboldt Foundation	Academic exchange and cultural co-operation. Non-profit organisation founded by the Federal Republic of Germany. It operates independently but in close co-operation with AA.
	DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst)	German Academic Exchange Service. Funded by the AA, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development and the European Union.
	Deutsche Welle	International broadcaster.
	Goethe Institut	State funded, non-profit, cultural relations organisation which works in close co-operation the AA as it is a major actor in the AKBP.
	Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (IFA)	Cultural relations organisation engaging in art and cultural exchange activities, funding and research. Funded by the AA, the state of Baden-Württemberg and the state capital of Stuttgart.
India	Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)	Supports 'Bharat Ek Parichay' corners in educational institutions around the world. Single point reference for information about Indian art, culture, religion, philosophy, economy,
	Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)	The 'cultural arm' of the Ministry of External Affairs
Japan	Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)	Policy on Public Diplomacy including: • Cultural exchange • People to People exchange • Co-operation with Multilateral organisations (UNESCO) • Cultural Grant assistance • Sports Diplomacy (Tokyo 2020) Also 'issues regarding history'.

	Japan Foundation	Cultural exchange programmes throughout the world.
	Japan House	Initiative of MOFA: 3 cultural centres: curated to position Japan as the 21st century’s cultural standard bearer.
	NHK World	International broadcaster.
Qatar	Al Jazeera	International broadcaster.
	Qatar Foundation	Endowment fund wholly owned by the royal family. Education, Science, and Community Development operations.
Russia	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Soft power strategy and funding of institutions.
	Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund	Think thank/non-profit public foundation founded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Current chairman is S. Lavrov.
	ITAR-Tass	International broadcaster (state owned news agency).
	Rossotrudnichestvo	Rossotrudnichestvo functions under the jurisdiction of the Russian MFA to promote Russian education, science, language and culture, and connect with the diaspora.
	RT	International broadcaster (state owned news agency).
	Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (Moscow Patriarchate)	Partner of the state in Russian soft power in relation to sovereignty, ‘compatriot rights’ (diaspora), values (identity building).
	Russkiy Mir	International cultural institute. Joint project of the MFA and the Ministry of Education and Science.
	Sputnik	International broadcaster (state owned news agency).
South Korea (Republic of Korea)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Public Diplomacy. 5 goals: • Share Korean culture • Deepen understanding of Korea

		• Gain global support for Korea's policies • Strengthen public diplomacy capacity • Promote public-private partnership.
	Korea Foundation	Designated by Foreign Minister to promote Korea to the world and to perform and support public diplomacy.
	Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE)	Designated by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to do international cultural exchange.
	Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS)	Designated by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism: • Cultural Centres around the world • Information services: korea.net; content production; 'correcting' false information • Promotion of national brand
Turkey	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Policy on overseas promotion and cultural affairs
	Turkish Maarif Foundation	State funded foundation to support Turkish international education (schools) network.
	Yunus Emre Enstitüsü	State funded foundation to promote Turkish culture, operating under Embassies.
United Arab Emirates (UAE)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation (MOFAIC)	Policy on Cultural and Public Diplomacy
	Office of Cultural and Public Diplomacy	Communication of UAE; support for Embassies; cultural exchange; values promotion; attraction to UAE (education).
United Kingdom (UK)	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)	Foreign and Development Policy. Fostering the environment for soft power. Use arm's length bodies to

		strengthen the UK's influence with other countries.
	British Council	Public corporation and registered charity, sponsored by the FCDO to: • Promote cultural relationships • Develop a wider knowledge of the English language • Encourage educational co-operation between the United Kingdom and other countries.
	BBC World Service	International broadcaster.
United States of America (USA)	State Department Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs	Policy to expand and strengthen the relationships between the people of the United States and citizens of other countries.
	Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)	Designs and implements educational, professional, and cultural exchange and other programmes to create and sustain mutual understanding with other countries in support of US foreign policy goals.
	US Agency for Global Media	International broadcaster. The Agency oversees the work of: • Voice of America • Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty • Office of Cuba Broadcasting • Radio Free Asia • Middle East Broadcasting Networks • Open Technology Fund.

Figure 9: Numbers and types of overseas representations of countries in this report

List of countries and institutions

Country	Institution	Number of	Note
Brazil	Diplomatic Missions	191	Embassies
	Cultural Centres	30	
China	Confucius Institutes	539	Estimate
European Union	EEAS Delegations	140	Diplomatic Missions
	EUNIC Clusters	111	Each cluster contains a number of CIs from Member States
France	Diplomatic Missions	181	Embassies
	SCAC	137	Based in embassies
	AEFE	550	French schools
	Alliance Française	832	In 131 countries
	Campus France	184	
	Institut français	96	96 IFs, 135 branches, 6 bi-national cultural centres
Germany	AHF Alumni Associations	76	Based in universities
	DAAD	193	Regional offices, information centres and information points in more than 60 countries
	Goethe-Institut	158	Goethe-Instituts, Goethe-Centres, cultural societies, reading rooms and exam and language

			learning centres in 98 countries
	ifa	2	Both locations are in Germany
India	Bharat Ek Parichay corners	604	Based in universities and educational establishments
	ICCR	38	
Japan	Diplomatic Missions	192	Embassies
	Japan Foundation	29	
	Japan House	3	Brazil, UK, USA
Qatar	Missions	21	Embassies
	Qatar Foundation	0	Based in Qatar, no overseas locations
Russia	Diplomatic Missions	192	Embassies
	Alexander Gorchakov Fund	2	
	Rossotrudchinestvo	88	
	Russkiy Mir		No data available
South Korea	Diplomatic Missions	188	Embassies
	Korea Foundation	29	
	Korean Cultural Centres	33	
Turkey	Diplomatic Missions	166	Embassies
	Turkish Maarif Foundation	265	
	Yunus Emre Institute	44	
UAE	Diplomatic Missions	92	Embassies

UK	Diplomatic Missions	280	Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates
	British Council	169	
USA	Embassies	177	US public diplomacy activities are run out of embassies, often in partnerships with US NGOs or local partners

Figure 10 – List of countries and institutions in sample[38]

[38] Based on the most recent available data for each state/institution as of 31 March 2022.

Appendix E: Data Sources

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