

## CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the theoretical foundations of cultural diplomacy within contemporary foreign policy strategies. Cultural diplomacy is understood as an important instrument of soft power through which states pursue their interests by promoting culture, education, language, and international artistic cooperation. The paper aims to identify and critically analyse the main theoretical approaches to cultural diplomacy, particularly in relation to soft power theory, public diplomacy, and constructivist perspectives in international relations. The study highlights the growing importance of non-coercive forms of influence in an increasingly interconnected and competitive international environment. It interprets cultural diplomacy as a flexible strategic tool that enables states to shape international perceptions, strengthen national identity, enhance reputation, and expand political influence abroad. The paper further argues that cultural diplomacy has evolved from a supplementary foreign policy activity into an institutionalised component of modern statecraft. By synthesising key theoretical concepts, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of the role and significance of cultural diplomacy in contemporary international relations.*

**Keywords:** cultural diplomacy, soft power, foreign policy, theoretical frameworks, cultural relations

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### INTRODUCTION

In the era. In the era of digital communication, escalating geopolitical tensions, and the gradual weakening of multilateral cooperation, cultural diplomacy has acquired renewed strategic relevance. Both state and non state actors increasingly employ cultural instruments, such as language

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programs, artistic exchanges, scientific cooperation, and digital storytelling, to build trust, shape public opinion, and strengthen their position within the international system. Despite this growing practical significance, the academic discourse on cultural diplomacy remains marked by a surprising degree of theoretical fragmentation: although the concept frequently appears in political strategies, media narratives, and scholarly texts, consensus regarding its precise definition remains absent.

This terminological ambiguity is not merely an academic shortcoming; rather, it reflects the genuine multidimensionality of the phenomenon itself. Cultural diplomacy lies at the intersection of political science, diplomatic theory, cultural studies, and international relations. Diplomats tend to perceive it as an instrument for advancing national interests, curators and artists as a platform for cultural dialogue independent of political agendas, and international relations theorists as a manifestation of soft power. Each of these perspectives is legitimate, yet none is fully sufficient on its own. The search for a single universal definition would therefore risk oversimplifying a complex reality; a more meaningful objective lies in the critical identification and comparison of the principal theoretical approaches.

The current state of research on cultural diplomacy is characterized by dynamic development that intensified after 2000, particularly in connection with debates on public diplomacy following the events of September 11, 2001, the expansion of Chinese, Russian, and Turkish cultural diplomacy programs, and the growing scholarly interest in soft power theory. Anglophone scholarship offers extensive overview studies (Clarke, 2020; Cull, 2008; Goff, 2013) as well as critical reflections (Zamorano, 2016; Channick, 2005). Within Central European scholarship, valuable national and regional case studies are available; however, systematic work integrating Anglo American, Western European, and Central European traditions into a unified analytical framework, while simultaneously addressing the differences among them, remains lacking. The present study seeks to partially fill this gap.

The central research question of this study is as follows: What are the principal theoretical approaches to defining cultural diplomacy in the scholarly literature, and how can their normative assumptions and mutual

tensions be synthesized into a coherent analytical framework? This question is further divided into two related sub questions. The first concerns the differences between the normative foundations of state centric and relational approaches and the implications of this divergence for the operationalization of the concept in political practice. The second examines the role of poststructuralist critiques in exposing the power asymmetries embedded within dominant definitions of cultural diplomacy.

The study makes three interrelated contributions. First, it offers a conceptual contribution by proposing an original three layer typology of approaches to cultural diplomacy that integrates state centric, relational, and critical perspectives within a single analytical framework. Second, it provides a comparative contribution through the systematic comparison of Anglophone, Western European, and Central European academic traditions, thereby uncovering tensions that have thus far received limited scholarly attention. Third, it makes a contextual contribution by situating Slovak academic discourse within a broader international framework and identifying potential directions for its future development.

The study is structured as follows. The first section presents the methodological framework and research design. The second section maps the conceptual foundations of cultural diplomacy, including its relationship to cultural relations and soft power theory. The third section systematically analyses the principal academic definitions and critical perspectives. The fourth section synthesizes the findings through the proposed typology and discusses their broader implications. The conclusion outlines the study's theoretical contributions and proposes avenues for future research.

## **1 METHODOLOGY**

Research on cultural diplomacy requires explicit methodological grounding, particularly because the interdisciplinary nature of the phenomenon, situated at the intersection of political science, diplomatic studies, cultural studies, and international relations, renders the selection of methodological instruments especially sensitive. The present study is based on a systematic qualitative research design combining three mutually

complementary methods: Systematic Literature Review, comparative conceptual analysis, and interpretative discourse analysis.

The criteria for including sources in the analysis were as follows: the source had to contain an explicit definition or conceptualization of cultural diplomacy; it had to originate from a peer reviewed academic journal, scholarly monograph, or authoritative institutional document; and it had to be available in one of the four selected languages. Popular science texts, non peer reviewed reports lacking scholarly apparatus, and sources without clear conceptual argumentation were excluded. Based on these criteria, twenty five sources representing Anglophone, Francophone, Central European, and German language traditions were included in the final analysis.

The analytical framework of the study is grounded in conceptual analysis focused on identifying normative assumptions, actor models, and functional definitions within individual sources. Each analyzed source was evaluated according to four analytical categories: (a) the primary actor of cultural diplomacy, namely the state versus non state actors; (b) the direction of communication, namely one directional and asymmetrical versus bidirectional and reciprocal; (c) normative orientation, namely instrumental versus relational; and (d) epistemological assumptions, namely positivist versus poststructuralist. This analytical matrix enabled a systematic comparison of definitions across traditions and created the basis for the proposed three layer typology.

Interpretative discourse analysis was applied primarily in examining the normative assumptions embedded in definitions that at first glance appear to be neutral descriptive formulations. In accordance with the tradition of critical international relations theory (Zamorano, 2016) and Foucault's discourse analysis, every definition of cultural diplomacy not only describes reality but actively constructs it by legitimizing certain forms of cultural engagement while marginalizing others. The objective of the discourse analysis was therefore to uncover these constructive mechanisms.

Among the principal methodological challenges of this research are the problems of impact measurement and scholarly positionality. Cultural diplomatic activities primarily generate diffuse effects, namely long term

changes in perceptions, attitudes, and trust, which are difficult to operationalize (Clarke, 2020). Isolating the effects of cultural diplomacy programs from other factors influencing international relations therefore remains methodologically demanding (Nye, 2008). With regard to researcher positionality, the study is grounded in a Central European academic perspective, which may influence both interpretation and source selection in favour of Anglophone and Central European traditions. Moreover, Zamorano (2016) and Channick (2005) draw attention to the risks associated with research conducted in close proximity to state actors, where the danger of perspectival bias becomes significant. A methodological limitation of the present study therefore lies in its focus on an analytical overview of theoretical literature without a direct empirical component and with relatively limited representation of Francophone and German language traditions.

## **2 CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY**

### **2.1 Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Relations**

The scholarly literature on cultural diplomacy encompasses a broad spectrum of definitions reflecting diverse theoretical approaches as well as the contextual conditions in which they emerged. Although culture as a component of social life has existed throughout human history, its systematic use within the framework of state foreign policy is a distinctly modern phenomenon. One of the most significant methodological contributions to the conceptual delineation of the term remains the distinction formulated by the American diplomat and historian Richard Arndt. In his extensive study of American cultural diplomacy, Arndt (2005) differentiates between cultural relations as a natural, bottom up process of exchange among civilizations and cultural diplomacy as a deliberate governmental policy that shapes, stimulates, and at times instrumentalizes these relations in pursuit of state interests. This distinction has become a methodological foundation for subsequent research, and its analytical relevance has increased in the contemporary environment, where digital platforms and new categories of actors increasingly blur the boundaries

between government directed representation and autonomous cultural exchange.

The concept of cultural diplomacy became firmly established within scholarly discourse during the second half of the twentieth century. Historically, the first official use of the term is generally attributed to 1959, when Robert H. Thayer, Assistant Secretary of State for the Coordination of International Educational and Cultural Relations in the United States, emphasized that foreign relations are shaped by the ways in which people live, think, feel, and act. According to Thayer, cultural diplomacy had become a central instrument of foreign policy and the most essential means of achieving mutual understanding among nations, thereby also fostering understanding among governments. In the same year, the United States Department of State defined cultural diplomacy in concise terms as direct and enduring contact between people from different countries. This early institutional definition, emphasizing interpersonal contact rather than state programs, represents a noteworthy precursor to later relational approaches.

Australian scholars Ang, Isar, and Mar (2015) further develop Arndt's distinction and conceptualize it as a tension between two modalities: cultural diplomacy as an interest driven governmental practice on the one hand and cultural relations as a broader network of non state cultural exchanges on the other. They critically highlight the tendency of dominant discourse to conflate these two phenomena, thereby obscuring the autonomy and authenticity of cultural actors who do not operate on behalf of the state. This distinction has direct implications for evaluating the legitimacy and effectiveness of cultural diplomacy programs: when a state presents what is effectively one sided propaganda as cultural diplomacy, the credibility of the entire field is weakened.

Historically, some of the earliest systematic definitions of cultural diplomacy emerged from the diplomatic milieu itself. In their terminological dictionary of key diplomatic concepts, Berridge and James (2003) characterize cultural diplomacy as the promotion of a state's cultural achievements abroad, or more broadly, as the promotion of achievements in science and technology, the arts, and the humanities, with particular

emphasis on fostering connections between parallel institutions at home and abroad, such as domestic and foreign universities. This definition captures the presentational and promotional dimension of cultural diplomacy, yet it limits the concept to one directional communication from the state toward foreign audiences. Canadian political scientist Bélanger (1999) proposes a substantively richer characterization, arguing that cultural diplomacy encompasses foreign policy activities related to culture, education, science, and communication. This definition suggests the multisectoral nature of the phenomenon while nevertheless firmly anchoring it within the logic of foreign policy.

Diplomatic theorists Hamilton and Langhorne (2010) describe cultural diplomacy as governmental support for the protection and presentation of national culture abroad. This formulation introduces into the discussion an important tension between the protection of cultural heritage and active foreign policy promotion. A common feature of the cited definitions is their focus on the state as the primary actor. They differ, however, in whether they perceive culture primarily as an instrument or as an autonomous value worthy of presentation, and in whether they conceptualize communication as one directional or reciprocal.

## **2.2 Cultural Diplomacy in the Context of Soft Power Theory**

Culture has gradually established itself in international relations as one of the key sources of state influence. In Joseph Nye's conceptualization (2004), it constitutes one of the three pillars of soft power, alongside the values of the political system and foreign policy, that is, power derived from attractiveness rather than coercion or direct reward. Within this framework, cultural diplomacy becomes the instrument through which states transform cultural attractiveness into concrete foreign policy influence. Nye's conceptualization provided cultural diplomacy not only with a new analytical language but also with strategic legitimacy in the eyes of policy makers: if culture is power, then cultural diplomacy represents foreign policy pursued through alternative means.

According to Nye (2008), the effectiveness of this mechanism depends on credibility. Soft power functions only when foreign audiences perceive a

state's cultural communication as authentic, namely when the values being promoted correspond to actual political practice. Once this coherence is disrupted, the attractiveness of culture weakens and the diplomatic function of culture loses its legitimacy. Cultural diplomacy is therefore not merely a technical instrument of representation but also a reflection of a state's broader commitment to the values it promotes. In practice, however, Nye's argument regarding consistency is only rarely fulfilled. Historical examples, ranging from American cultural diplomacy during the Vietnam War to Russian cultural diplomacy activities following the annexation of Crimea, demonstrate how contradictions between proclaimed values and actual policies systematically undermine the credibility of cultural programs.

Ang, Isar, and Mar (2015), however, emphasize that cultural attractiveness in itself does not yet constitute soft power. It becomes a source of soft power only when it is deliberately and strategically employed to achieve specific political objectives. This perspective connects the analytical understanding of soft power with its instrumental application while simultaneously rejecting the assumption that cultural exchange alone automatically generates political capital.

In this context, the relationship between cultural policy and cultural diplomacy becomes particularly important. UNESCO (1969) defines cultural policy as a set of social practices and interventions aimed at satisfying the cultural needs of society through the use of all available material and human resources. From this perspective, cultural diplomacy emerges as the external dimension of cultural policy, namely its projection into the international sphere. Papaioannou (2018) emphasizes the mutual interdependence of these concepts, arguing that without a strong domestic cultural policy, external cultural representation cannot remain either credible or sustainable. This argument raises an important question for small and medium sized states: countries with limited cultural policy capacities face a structural disadvantage in building authentic cultural diplomacy, regardless of how sophisticated their diplomatic instruments may be.



### **3 ACADEMIC DEFINITIONS: AN OVERVIEW OF APPROACHES**

#### **3.1 Major Theoretical Approaches to Cultural Diplomacy**

The academic community offers a broad range of definitions of cultural diplomacy reflecting diverse disciplinary perspectives, regional contexts, and normative orientations. For the purposes of comparative analysis, the approaches examined in this study are categorized into three groups, which will be further elaborated in the Discussion section: (a) state centric definitions emphasizing the foreign policy function of cultural diplomacy, (b) relational definitions focused on mutual understanding and bidirectional communication, and (c) poststructuralist critical approaches addressing power asymmetries. The following overview presents the principal representatives of these traditions.

Within Slovak scholarly discourse, Pajtinka (2016) defines cultural diplomacy as a specific component of diplomacy aimed at advancing the foreign policy interests of the state primarily through instruments originating in the cultural sphere. In this conception, the practice of cultural diplomacy extends beyond the mere presentation of national art and includes direct assistance to national cultural actors abroad, the proactive organization of events in cooperation with local institutions, the dissemination of language and cultural values, as well as the preparation of international agreements on cultural cooperation and support for expatriate communities. Pajtinka's definition is instrumental and normatively neutral: culture constitutes the means, while foreign policy interests represent the objective. Kurucz (2007) further argues that cultural diplomacy is closely linked to both foreign and cultural policy and mediates the international exchange of ideas, information, and values in the fields of art, education, science, sport, and popular culture, while its effectiveness depends on the coherence between cultural diplomacy and the state's domestic and foreign policy.

Hubinger (2006) describes cultural diplomacy as a means of representing and promoting the state within the international environment, through which a country strengthens cultural awareness and builds a

positive image abroad. Rusiňák, Mattoš, and Rusiňáková (2012) perceive it as a distinct dimension of state foreign policy aimed at supporting and developing cultural influence within international relations, identifying culture, art, science, and sport as its principal instruments. Ivey and Cleggett (n.d.) enrich this state centric line of thought with a relational dimension by defining cultural diplomacy as a domain of diplomacy whose purpose is to establish, develop, and maintain relations with foreign nations through cultural exchanges. Despite the emphasis on mutual exchange, however, their definition remains firmly embedded within formal diplomatic practice.

The German diplomat Enders (2005) characterizes cultural diplomacy as an instrument serving the political objectives of the state. Even where cultural diplomacy pursues its own goals, these remain derived from and subordinated to the broader framework of foreign policy. Enders therefore represents the tradition of continental European, specifically German, diplomacy, which emphasizes institutional hierarchy and the political dependence of cultural programs. Hubinger, by contrast, stresses the representational and communicative dimension: cultural diplomacy is not merely a political instrument but also a platform through which a country shapes its identity abroad. The two perspectives are complementary, with Enders emphasizing the strategic foundation and Hubinger highlighting communicative autonomy.

Mark (2010) defines cultural diplomacy as a form of state diplomacy conducted within the framework of foreign policy or in support of governmental diplomatic objectives. It involves the deliberate use of cultural activities to present the identity, values, and cultural heritage of the state to foreign publics and elites. Mark emphasizes that cultural diplomacy is not limited to traditional instruments such as language courses, artistic tours, or academic exchanges; rather, its essence lies in its flexibility and multilayered character, which allows programs to be adapted to different target audiences. A key element of Mark's approach is also its long term orientation: the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy activities cannot be measured through short term outcomes or conventional diplomatic indicators.

Cummings (2003) conceptualizes cultural diplomacy as an instrument of international communication that facilitates interstate and intercultural understanding through the transmission of ideas, artistic works, knowledge, and broader cultural values. Importantly, this mechanism does not necessarily operate on the basis of reciprocity. It often functions as a unilateral form of influence in which an actor employs cultural means to support its own foreign policy objectives or shape a favorable image in the eyes of foreign audiences. Cummings's definition therefore suggests that cultural diplomacy may operate as an asymmetrical instrument of influence rather than solely as a platform for equal dialogue.

Tomalová (2008) presents cultural diplomacy as a systematic component of state foreign policy aimed at positively influencing the perception of a country abroad through cultural activities. It is implemented through foreign cultural institutes, language instruction, exhibitions, artistic and academic exchanges, translations of literary works, and media projects. The concrete form of cultural diplomacy depends on the cultural model of the state, its political will, and its financial capacities, while in practice increasing emphasis is placed on cooperation among the state, the private sector, and civil society. Goff (2013), beyond offering definitional analysis, emphasizes four strategic functions of cultural diplomacy. First, it facilitates deeper understanding of social values and norms, often through personal experiences such as student exchanges. Second, it possesses the capacity to overcome political barriers and reach audiences beyond the scope of traditional diplomacy. Connections established within the cultural sphere may endure even in the absence of official relations, keeping communication channels open and creating conditions for future political dialogue. Finally, cultural diplomacy provides context for political decisions and humanizes the image of the state abroad, thereby disrupting simplified stereotypes.

Schneider (2006) understands cultural diplomacy as a long term process of mutual exchange and understanding among nations functioning as a bidirectional channel of communication. It does not serve as a substitute for unpopular political decisions but rather enables the presentation of a state's values, traditions, and cultural characteristics, including diversity, freedom

of expression, opportunity, individual self realization, and meritocracy. The success of cultural diplomacy lies in creating space for communication between diplomats and the publics of target countries, even during periods of strained relations. Although its effects cannot be precisely quantified, it contributes to qualitative improvements in relations between states and cultures. In the contemporary environment of limited budgets, Schneider emphasizes the necessity of creative planning, flexibility in adapting programs, and the effective use of available opportunities. Schneider's approach, emphasizing symmetry, authenticity, and values, differs substantially from instrumental logic and anticipates later poststructuralist critiques.

The Institute for Cultural Diplomacy (ICD) further expands the perspective by arguing that cultural diplomacy extends beyond traditional state activity and actively involves non state actors, including universities, cultural institutions, artists, and civil society organizations. An illustrative example is provided by American cultural exchange programs during the Cold War, when the United States employed jazz musicians as ambassadors of goodwill. Although these activities were supported by state institutions, they were carried out by non state artists and contributed to shaping a positive image of the United States while simultaneously creating space for intercultural dialogue during periods of political tension. This multi actor perspective corresponds with the distinction formulated by Arndt and later developed by Ang et al. between government directed diplomacy and autonomous cultural relations.

Cull (2008) attributes a dual role to cultural diplomacy within the framework of public diplomacy theory: it serves both to present the identity and values of the state and to build long term relationships and understanding with foreign audiences. It operates in conjunction with other components of public diplomacy, including listening, advocacy, exchanges, and international broadcasting. Cull emphasizes that efforts to influence the international environment through the presentation of cultural resources possess deep historical roots, ranging from the construction of the Library of Alexandria to the education of elites from allied nations in the Roman Republic. Contemporary institutions such as the British Council, Italian

cultural institutes, and the extensive network of French schools continue this tradition by securing global influence and prestige for their respective countries.

Clarke (2020), in an encyclopedic entry, highlights the problem of defining the cultural content of cultural diplomacy. Beyond art in the narrow sense, the cultural dimension encompasses radio, television, education, science, sport, as well as language and religion. Such breadth complicates the operationalization of the concept while simultaneously reflecting the genuine multidimensionality of cultural processes. In this regard, Polgár (2013) distinguishes between narrow and broad definitions of cultural diplomacy. The narrow definition primarily serves an informational function, whereas the broader definition encompasses the full spectrum of activities, ranging from exchanges of artists and academics to scientific cooperation and language dissemination.

### **3.2 Critical and Analytical Perspectives**

Alongside definitional approaches, the literature also contains functional, strategic, and critical perspectives that move beyond questions of terminology and examine cultural diplomacy within its broader socio political context. Finn (2003) understands cultural diplomacy as a means of shaping a positive image of the state and securing the support of foreign publics through cultural activities. This approach emphasizes the direct connection between cultural policy and the strategic objectives of foreign policy, including ideological influence and the strengthening of national security. This was particularly evident in the practice of the United States after the Second World War, when the state employed cultural diplomacy to disseminate democratic values and promote American culture throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Finn specifically highlights the potential of cultural exchanges to influence younger generations in target countries and the capacity of cultural ties to sustain relationships even during periods of strained diplomatic relations.

Laqueur (1994) emphasizes the strategic function of cultural diplomacy within foreign policy. Through cultural diplomacy, states are able to present their values, political positions, and ways of life to foreign audiences. Unlike

traditional diplomacy or military power, both of which possess clear limitations of reach, Laqueur considers cultural diplomacy a long term instrument for shaping public opinion and fostering mutual understanding. He argues that after the end of the Cold War, the United States underestimated its strategic importance. Significant budget cuts and the termination of key programs, including the broadcasting services Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, represented a serious weakening of the United States' ability to communicate its values during a period of growing global instability. According to Laqueur, cultural diplomacy should not be perceived as a luxury but rather as a fundamental component of national interest and security that systematically shapes the image of the state over the long term.

Stamatoudi (2009) describes an innovative application of cultural diplomacy as a mediating instrument in disputes concerning the repatriation of cultural artifacts to their countries of origin. This approach is based on flexible procedures that extend beyond strictly legal mechanisms. In such a framework, cultural diplomacy facilitates constructive dialogue and contributes to the achievement of agreements through negotiation. Successful cases, including the return of the Obelisk of Axum to Ethiopia, the transfer of human remains to South Australia, and the repatriation of a ceremonial mask belonging to the Kwakwaka'wakw community in Canada, demonstrate that cultural diplomacy may at times prove more effective than formal legal instruments. In this context, culture functions not only as the object of dispute but also as a method of diplomatic communication.

The most significant challenge to the dominant framework is represented by the poststructuralist critique advanced by Zamorano (2016, p. 167). He argues that although the concept of soft power presents itself as a neutral analytical instrument, it in fact naturalizes power asymmetries, legitimizes foreign policy interests, and conceals them beneath the language of cultural attractiveness. Drawing on Foucault's understanding of power as an inherent component of all social relations, Zamorano demonstrates how the logic of soft power within cultural diplomacy obscures the actual sources and agendas of power projection. Sophisticated propaganda

instruments thereby acquire the appearance of autonomous cultural exchange, weakening the capacity for critical reflection, including within academia itself.

Channick (2005) develops this critique from the perspective of artistic practice and distinguishes between two fundamental approaches to the implementation of cultural diplomacy. The official approach perceives culture primarily as an instrument for advancing national interests, with artists functioning as ambassadors of state values. The alternative approach, by contrast, is grounded in the authenticity of artistic expression and argues that unconstrained artistic creativity and open dialogue are ultimately more persuasive and more effective in the long term than deliberate political promotion. This tension between the instrumentalization and the autonomy of culture remains one of the central themes of the entire discourse and is directly connected to the question of who ultimately controls the content and form of cultural diplomatic communication.

#### **4 DISCUSSION**

The systematic analysis of the approaches presented above demonstrates that cultural diplomacy is not a monolithic concept but rather a dynamic conceptual space in which three distinct logics intersect and mutually condition one another. On the basis of the analytical framework formulated in the methodological section, encompassing actor models, direction of communication, normative orientation, and epistemological assumptions, this study proposes a three layer typology of approaches to cultural diplomacy.

The first layer consists of state centric instrumental approaches, represented by Pajtinka, Kurucz, Hubinger, Enders, Mark, and Cummings. These definitions share the assumption that the state constitutes the primary actor, communication may be unilateral, normative orientation is instrumental, and epistemological assumptions are predominantly positivist. Within this framework, cultural diplomacy is understood as an instrument, whether effective or ineffective, for achieving predefined foreign policy objectives. The principal strength of these approaches lies in

their operationalizability: they allow the measurement of inputs, activities, and at least partially the outputs of cultural diplomacy programs. Their weakness, however, lies in the potential reduction of culture to a mere instrument and in the neglect of informal and non state forms of cultural exchange.

The second layer comprises relational and dialogical approaches, represented by Schneider, Goff, Cull, the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, and partially also by Tomalová. These definitions emphasize bidirectional communication, mutual understanding, and the long term cultivation of relationships, while assigning a central role to non state actors. Their normative orientation is relational: cultural exchange possesses intrinsic value independent of short term political outcomes. This approach corresponds with the normative ambitions of international organizations such as UNESCO and the European Union, as well as with the practice of cultural institutions that resist direct political control. The weakness of relational approaches lies in their lower degree of operationalizability and the risk of idealization: cultural exchange is neither automatically symmetrical nor inherently apolitical.

The third layer consists of poststructuralist critical approaches represented by Zamorano and Channick. These perspectives challenge not only definitions of cultural diplomacy but also the epistemological assumptions underlying the dominant discourse itself. Cultural diplomacy is examined through the lens of power relations: who defines which forms of culture are worthy of presentation? In whose interests does the rhetoric of authentic cultural exchange operate? How are asymmetries between culturally dominant and peripheral actors legitimized? These questions are particularly relevant in the Central European context, as states in the region have historically often occupied the receiving end of the cultural diplomacy activities of major powers.

Productive tensions exist among these three layers, reflecting the real dilemmas of practical cultural diplomacy. The first is the paradox of authenticity: cultural diplomacy is often most effective precisely when it does not appear to be diplomacy, namely when cultural exchange unfolds naturally and without visible state direction. For this reason, states invest



in seemingly autonomous cultural institutions such as the British Council, Goethe Institut, Institut Français, and Instituto Cervantes, all of which maintain a degree of operational independence. The critiques advanced by Zamorano and Channick nevertheless remind us that such autonomy is always conditional and partial. The second tension concerns the dilemma of asymmetry: if cultural diplomacy is inherently asymmetrical, as suggested by Cummings, can it simultaneously remain ethical? The third tension relates to temporal horizons. Instrumental approaches tend to define success within short political cycles, whereas relational approaches require generational patience, something that is difficult to reconcile in practice with electoral and budgetary cycles.

The Central European, and particularly Slovak, tradition of research on cultural diplomacy provides valuable conceptualizations of the phenomenon within national and regional contexts (Pajtinka, 2016; Kurucz, 2007; Polgár, 2013; Rusiňák, Mattoš and Rusiňáková, 2012). However, the systematic integration of relational and critical perspectives remains largely absent. This gap is not accidental. The Central European tradition historically developed within a context in which the state functioned as the dominant actor of foreign policy and where critical reflection on power asymmetries was not institutionally embedded within academia. Processes of globalization, digitalization, and the growing role of non state actors in international relations therefore require a reassessment of this legacy and the incorporation of critical perspectives developed within Anglophone scholarship. The present study seeks to contribute precisely to this process of integration.

From the perspective of future research, the proposed three layer typology opens several directions for further inquiry. The first involves empirical testing of the typology through concrete case studies of cultural diplomacy programs within the Central European context, with the aim of assessing the extent to which declared institutional definitions correspond to actual practice. The second concerns comparative analysis of how different types of states, whether small or large, democratic or authoritarian, employ distinct definitional frameworks to legitimize their cultural diplomacy activities. The third direction involves examining how

digital environments and social media transform the boundaries between government directed cultural diplomacy and autonomous cultural relations.

## CONCLUSION

The present study has provided a systematic and critically grounded overview of the theoretical foundations of cultural diplomacy as an instrument of soft power in contemporary international relations. The analysis of twenty five academic sources drawn from Anglophone, Francophone, Central European, and German language traditions demonstrates that the terminological inconsistency characterizing this field is not the result of conceptual negligence, but rather reflects genuine differences in political traditions, disciplinary perspectives, and normative assumptions concerning the nature and role of culture in international relations.

The first and most significant contribution of the study is the proposal of a three layer typology of approaches to cultural diplomacy integrating state centric instrumental definitions, relational and dialogical approaches, and poststructuralist critical perspectives within a single analytical framework. This typology is not merely descriptive. It enables the systematic comparison of normative assumptions, actor models, and functional definitions of cultural diplomacy across different traditions while also providing an analytical instrument for future empirical research. The second contribution lies in the comparative positioning of the Central European, and particularly Slovak, scholarly tradition within the broader international context. The identification of the absence of critical and relational perspectives in Central European discourse should not be understood as criticism but rather as a challenge and direction for future development: under contemporary geopolitical conditions, these perspectives are analytically and normatively indispensable. The third contribution is methodological. The systematic research design combining Systematic Literature Review, comparative conceptual analysis, and interpretative discourse analysis offers a replicable framework for future review studies in this field.

The findings of the analysis confirm that the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy depends on the fulfilment of three mutually interconnected conditions. The first is consistency between declared values and actual political practice. Nye (2004, 2008) formulates this requirement as a critical condition for the credibility of soft power. The second is the authenticity of cultural exchanges and the respect for the autonomy of cultural actors. Channick (2005) and Ang, Isar, and Mar (2015) demonstrate that culture loses its attractiveness precisely when it becomes excessively transparent as an instrument of propaganda. The third condition is critical reflection on the dimension of power. Zamorano's (2016) analysis reveals how the rhetoric of autonomous cultural exchange may conceal structural asymmetries of power, a reality of which both practitioners and researchers in this field must remain aware.

The study intentionally limits itself to an analytical overview of theoretical literature without a direct empirical component. Future research should therefore connect the proposed typology with empirical examination of specific cultural diplomacy programs, particularly within the Central European context, where cultural diplomacy acquires distinctive characteristics shaped both by historical experience and contemporary geopolitical challenges. At the same time, a particularly promising avenue of inquiry lies in examining how digital environments and artificial intelligence are transforming the practices, definitions, and power relations within the field of cultural diplomacy, a question to which existing scholarship has thus far provided only limited answers. Cultural diplomacy remains a compelling subject of research in the twenty first century precisely because it stands at the intersection of some of the most significant tensions of the contemporary international order: between national interest and global responsibility, between state control and cultural autonomy, and between power and dialogue.

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