

# Cultural Promotion of Mexico in the United States: Demography and Implementation Proposals

## *Promoción cultural de México en Estados Unidos: demografía y propuestas de ejecución*

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### **Abstract:**

This article analyses how the cultural promotion strategy of the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs can adapt to the new demographic reality of the United States, and take advantage of the resources already in place in the field of arts administration to increase the outreach capacity that the Mexican consular network deploys annually in different American cities.



### **Resumen:**

En este artículo se analiza cómo la estrategia de promoción cultural de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores puede adaptarse a la nueva realidad demográfica de Estados Unidos y aprovechar los recursos ya existentes en organizaciones estadounidenses en materia de gestión cultural, para apuntalar los esfuerzos que despliegan anualmente las representaciones consulares de México en las distintas ciudades de la Unión Americana.



### **Key Words:**

Culture, Mexico, consulates, administration, arts, community.



### **Palabras clave:**

Cultura, México, consulados, gestión, artes, comunidades.

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## Introduction

Mexico and the United States have a rich, complex relationship. Every day, the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs (SRE), our embassy in Washington D.C. and our network of 50 consular offices attend to manifold bilateral matters related to trade, security, border crossings, academic exchanges and the environment, to name just a few. In most cases, the importance of these matters can be evidenced by hard data, like the total in dollars of annual exports from one country to another, the total number of people that cross the border within a certain period or the number of visas issued to researchers and students in each country. Yet there is another area that, due to its nature, cannot be quantified like the examples just given, but is present in virtually every aspect of the bilateral relationship on a daily basis: culture.

For a specific definition of the term *culture*, this paper resorts to the UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity of 2001, which foreword states that “culture should be considered as the set of distinctive spiritual and material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs”.<sup>1</sup> This anthropological defini-

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, at [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/5\\_Cultural\\_Diversity\\_EN.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/5_Cultural_Diversity_EN.pdf) (consulted on: August 23, 2019).

tion, in turn derived from the World Conference on Cultural Policies held in Mexico City in 1982,<sup>2</sup> provides a useful conceptual framework for reflection on the SRE's cultural diplomacy strategy in the United States, which, as we will be discussing later on, could potentially take advantage of two systemic aspects of the U.S. reality: on the one hand, demographic changes that have turned Hispanics into the country's largest minority population<sup>3</sup> and on the other, the existing capacity of the U.S. cultural industry.<sup>4</sup>

## Demographics in the United States

The demographic aspect acquires relevance when we consider that the SRE's innovative vision for cultural diplomacy<sup>5</sup> aims to incorporate the sense of identity of Mexican communities abroad and, in the case of the United States, prioritize cultural projects originating locally in U.S. cities.<sup>6</sup> This approach opens up valuable opportunities for the implementation of Mexico's cultural diplomacy strategy, because although the migration of Mexicans to the United States has been numerically negative since 2010,<sup>7</sup> there are close to 35 million individuals who consider

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>3</sup> As of 2016, 63.3% of the 58 million Hispanics in the United States (36 million people) were of Mexican origin. See Antonio Flores, "How the U.S. Hispanic Population is Changing," in Pew Research Center, September 18, 2017, at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/18/how-the-u-s-hispanic-population-is-changing/> (consulted on: August 27, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> For a general overview of the financial assistance available to the U.S. cultural industry in 2018 alone see: National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), *2018 Annual Report*, Washington, D.C., NEA, 2019, available at <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/2018%20Annual%20Report.pdf> (consulted on: August 27, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Enrique Márquez, *La diplomacia cultural de México 2018-2024, 7 propuestas para su fortalecimiento e innovación*, Mexico, SRE, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, "More Mexicans Leaving than Coming to the U.S.," Pew Research Center, November 19, 2015, at <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2015/11/19/more-mexicans-leaving-than-coming-to-the-u-s/> (consulted on: August 27, 2019).

themselves as being of Mexican origin<sup>8</sup> in the United States, 11 million of whom were born in Mexico.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the 24 million second or later-generation Mexicans or the just over half a million Mexican *dreamers* with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)<sup>10</sup> status demonstrate that the demographic reality of the United States is still in transition, and that people of Mexican origin have a considerable presence, not just in large metropolis such as Los Angeles and Chicago, but also in cities in eminently rural counties throughout the length and breadth of the United States that are unfamiliar to the collective Mexican imagination.<sup>11</sup>

During the routine course of consular work, particularly at mobile consulates and consulates on wheels (pop-up offices) that serve populations far removed from the cities where consular offices are generally located,<sup>12</sup> this new demographic reality inevitably generates conflict in the self-iden-

<sup>8</sup> Search results for the national total in states in the United States Census Bureau, “2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates”, American Fact Finder, available at [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_17\\_5YR\\_DP05&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_DP05&prodType=table) (consulted on: October 11, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Jynnah Radford and Luis Noc-Bustamante, “Facts on U.S. Immigrants, 2017: Statistical Portrait of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States. Foreign Born, by Region of Birth and Years in the U.S.: 2017”, Pew Research Center, June 3, 2019, at [https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/06/Pew-Research-Center\\_Nativity-Current-Data\\_Statistical-Portrait-of-the-Foreign-Born-2017\\_2019-05.xlsx](https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/06/Pew-Research-Center_Nativity-Current-Data_Statistical-Portrait-of-the-Foreign-Born-2017_2019-05.xlsx) (consulted on: October 11, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Approximate Active DACA Recipients: Country of Birth: As of April 30, 2019”, Immigration and Citizenship Data, June 12, 2019, at [https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/Reports%20and%20Studies/Immigration%20Forms%20Data/All%20Form%20Types/DACA/Approximate\\_Active\\_DACA\\_Recipients\\_Demographics\\_-\\_Apr\\_30\\_2019.pdf](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/Reports%20and%20Studies/Immigration%20Forms%20Data/All%20Form%20Types/DACA/Approximate_Active_DACA_Recipients_Demographics_-_Apr_30_2019.pdf) (consulted on: October 11, 2019).

<sup>11</sup> The southwest region of the state of Kansas, which includes the counties of Finney, Ford and Seward, is a good example. In the county of Ford alone, the Mexican population of its largest city, Dodge City, represents 52% of its almost 28,000 inhabitants. Search results for Dodge City in United States Census Bureau, “2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates”, in American Fact Finder, available at [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_17\\_5YR\\_DP05&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_DP05&prodType=table) (consulted on: October 11, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> See General Office of Consular Services (DGSC), Normas para la realización del Programa de Consulados Móviles en su modalidad de “Consulados Móviles”, “Jornadas Sabatinas, Dominicales o en días Inhábiles”, “Consulados Sobre Ruedas” and “Actividades de Documentación entre Semana y Fuera de la Oficina Consular”, Mexico, SRE, 2014, 3, at <https://sre.gob.mx/images/stories/docnormateca/dgsc/2014/norm2801.pdf> (consulted on: October 11, 2019).

tity sense of people of Mexican origin in the United States, both in their daily lives and between generations, precisely in the terms indicated by UNESCO. Consequently, given that one of the guiding principles of the SRE's current cultural diplomacy strategy is that Mexicans "are also what we conceive",<sup>13</sup> it might be worthwhile asking ourselves what cultural policy tools the 50 Mexican consulates in the United States possess to help them identify the scope, aspirations and limits of this demographic transition in the United States, in which people of Mexican origin are a predominant component. To what extent can Mexico's cultural policy influence communities, whether in rural or urban counties, and improve the country's image in the eyes of the American imaginary in the coming decades? How can Mexico use its extensive network of consulates that cover virtually the entire territory of the continental United States to cultivate, via its cultural diplomacy strategy, a sense of binational identity in second and later-generation Mexicans?

These questions lead us to reconsider cultural diplomacy as a valuable foreign policy tool in our dealings with the United States. This brand of diplomacy can then consider culture as yet another diplomatic instrument of Mexico to predispose U.S. citizens to take a positive view of both our country and of Mexicans residing in the United States, including government officials, public opinion, the mass media and new generations of Mexicans and Americans of Mexican descent who are redefining the very meaning of binationality.

## The Implementation of Cultural Diplomacy from a Consular Standpoint

The answers to the previous questions can be gleaned from the most novel component of the SRE's cultural diplomacy strategy, which differs from previous ones in that, for the first time, it places explicit emphasis on the importance of acknowledging the art produced by Mexicans in the United States and in the grassroots networks for its administra-

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<sup>13</sup> E. Márquez, *op. cit.*, 18.

tion.<sup>14</sup> This change is groundbreaking in that it implies officially accepting that individuals of Mexican descent in the United States have been able to use local resources at their disposal in their respective cities of residence to conceive of, create, curate and present their works, even in the absence of an institutional policy explicitly designed to promote them in recent years.

Moreover, this body of community art, while understandably extensive and varied, has common themes indicative of the aspirations and challenges of Mexican communities in the United States that, taken together, can serve as a guide, a starting point for consulates and the SRE itself as to the most important issues Mexico's cultural diplomacy efforts in the United States need to focus on. The experience of swearing allegiance to the U.S. flag and becoming a citizen after years of living in the country as an undocumented person;<sup>15</sup> of raising completely bilingual children without a parent who speaks English as a first language; or of being imprisoned for migration offenses that are not essentially criminal in nature are just a few of the trials and tribulations Mexican communities have faced for decades and that have found an outlet in artistic expressions.

In the implementation of this renewed cultural diplomacy strategy, the first thing that needs to be acknowledged is that consulates operate within an institutional framework that provides for annual programs funded not just by a budget allocated by the SRE itself, but through partnerships with cultural institutions like museums, galleries, art schools and state, county and city governments for the organization of events and activities in the performing and visual arts, music, film, gastronomy, literature and other fields. Yet there is a margin of opportunity to further contribute to these annual programs in terms of the identification and cataloging of Mexican cultural products, and the use of existing U.S. resources.

<sup>14</sup> E. Márquez, *op. cit.*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> One example is the *Dacamented* exhibition by Fidencio Fifield-Pérez, an artist from Oaxaca who is now a U.S. citizen. The exhibition features the same envelopes he used to correspond with the U.S. Office of Immigration and Citizenship: Annie Kniggendorf, "In a Kansas City Gallery Run by a New U.S. Citizen, Immigration Stories Hit Close to Home", in *KCUR* 89.3, June 11, 2018, at <https://www.kcur.org/post/kansas-city-gallery-run-new-us-citizen-immigration-stories-hit-close-home#stream/0> (consulted on: September 28, 2019).

While recognizing that each consular jurisdiction has its own particularities (geographical area, total population, annual budget, to name just a few) and that each consulate must determine its performance targets accordingly, the SRE could take the initiative and implement the concrete actions described below to broaden their scope of action and the cultural diplomacy tools at their disposal. These proposals are aligned with the goals established in the multilateral agreements Mexico is a signatory to,<sup>16</sup> like the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), and the Decalogue of Actions for the Mexican Migrant Protection Strategy,<sup>17</sup> particularly as regards points relating to the:

- Active promotion of Mexican cultural identities among communities of first and subsequent generations of migrants.
- Deployment in new locations of integral mobile consulates<sup>18</sup> focused on the most vulnerable communities.
- Empowerment of the Mexican and Mexican-descent community by recognizing and promoting their contributions to society.<sup>19</sup>

## Installed Capacity and Implementation Proposals

Bearing in mind the changes in the demographic reality of the United States and the margin of action consulates have in cultural matters, this

<sup>16</sup> For details of the multilateral component in Mexican consular practices see Alfonso Navarro Bernachi, “La perspectiva transversal y multilateral de la protección consular”, in *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior*, no. 101, May-August, 2014, 81-97, at <https://revistadigital.sre.gob.mx/images/stories/numeros/n101/navarrob.pdf> (consulted on: August 31, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> SRE, “El canciller Marcelo Ebrard presenta la estrategia de protección al migrante del Gobierno de México”, March 1, 2019, at <https://www.gob.mx/sre/articulos/el-canciller-marcelo-ebard-presenta-la-estrategia-de-proteccion-al-migrante-del-gobierno-de-mexico-193226> (consulted on: August 31, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> The concept of *integrality* at mobile consulates means that Mexicans can not only gain access to documents like birth certificates, passports and consular IDs, but consular protection services and information on the activities promoted with the support of the Institute for Mexicans Abroad, which, aside from health and education, have a cultural component. See DGSC, *op. cit.*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> SRE, *op. cit.*



section contains three proposals that could broaden their operating capacity in this field.

### *Partnerships with National and Regional U.S. Entities*

As an inevitable consequence of the American lifestyle, the country has an extensive network of civil society organizations, foundations and companies that donate substantial resources, both human and financial, not just to large exhibitions by famous artists and the more prestigious cultural institutes, but also to smaller shows and rising talents. The sustained fund-raising efforts and sophisticated curatorship, dissemination and logistics capabilities of this highly consolidated network are of enormous potential benefit to Mexico and have enabled specialized institutions like the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Council for the Traditional Arts to provide infrastructure, financing and contact networks for cultural centers and artists in rural communities, minority populations and small and mid-size cultural enterprises.



By way of example, in 2018 alone, the NAA had a budget of over US\$150 million, 64% of which was channeled into small cultural companies in the United States, while another 14% was used specifically to support projects with a rural component.<sup>20</sup> These NAA grants are predictable and permanent, because by law, the organization is obliged to allocate at least 40% of its annual budget to state arts institutes and regional arts organizations.<sup>21</sup> The advantage of this fund-distribution mechanism is that it makes national resources available to local entities that work directly with artists and the cultural industries in their counties and cities on a daily basis, and that are therefore more in tune with what their greatest needs are in operating terms.

A good example of a regional arts organization is the Mid-America Arts Alliance (MAAA).<sup>22</sup> Although located in Kansas City, Missouri, its network of contacts with art galleries, artists, donors and curators directly extends to five states in the Midwest region (Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma) and the southern part of Texas. It also has partnerships with organizations in 32 states across the country.<sup>23</sup>

Given that the MAAA's installed capacity includes the curatorship and transportation of works of art directly via its regional network,<sup>24</sup> a regional partnership with this organization would greatly complement the resources and logistics of consulates in Austin, Dallas, Houston, Kansas City, Omaha and Little Rock, and help shore up their annual programs in two specific areas. On the one hand, it would allow these consular posts to identify venues with suitable facilities for artistic events in the cities and on the dates mobile consulates are programmed to visit more isolated municipalities, enabling them to offer more integral services.<sup>25</sup> And on the other, it would

<sup>20</sup> NEA, *op. cit.*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> The organization's complete profile is available on its website: <https://www.maaa.org>.

<sup>23</sup> MAAA, "Geographic Reach", at <https://www.maaa.org/about/geographic-reach/> (consulted on: August 31, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> For a full list of partner organizations, see MAAA, "Partner Organizations", at <https://www.maaa.org/about/partner-organizations/> (consulted on: August 31, 2019).

<sup>25</sup> Related to the concept of *integrality*. See note 18.

make it possible to schedule and broaden the geographical reach of exhibitions organized by consulates, both in their own jurisdictions and in the Midwest. For the SRE, it would translate into savings in transportation costs and man-hours spent by consulates on logistical aspects like packaging, requesting shipping estimates and drawing up reports on the artwork condition prior to and after exhibitions.

Consulates could also pair works the MAAA has available in its own collections<sup>26</sup> with the protocol, political and trade promotion events of each consulate, be it to highlight the contribution of Mexicans in their respective jurisdictions or to promote specific trade or political topics of interest to Mexico.

It should be noted, however, that considerable planning goes into both NAA and MAAA projects, sometimes beginning years before an exhibition is opened or goes on the road, meaning any future partnership with organizations of this nature would require improved coordination between the SRE and its network of consulates, so as to comply with any agreements entered into to the letter.

In the medium term, consulates could enter into institutional partnerships with regional arts organizations by signing, for example, Memorandums of Understanding that establish deadlines, costs, points of contact and well-defined art collections, enabling them to indirectly address two structural problems inherent to their network: the constant need to procure private funding to cover basic operating aspects of their annual arts programs (like the transportation of works from one jurisdiction to another), and the natural turnover of Foreign Service staff that inevitably affects the priority given to the cultural aspect, depending on the circumstances of each head of post.

As for the *quid pro quo* with organizations like the MAAA, the SRE could, in turn, address a structural weakness of U.S. cultural organizations by providing orderly, guided access to Mexican art, which brings us to our next point.

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<sup>26</sup> To give a specific example, in August 2019, the MAAA began contacting its network in search of venues interested in hosting an exhibition that will take place somewhere between 2021 and 2026: *Aliento a tequila* on the traditional production of agave by the Mexican-American Joel Salcido. See Exhibits USA, “Aliento a tequila,” at <https://eusa.org/exhibition/tequila/> (consulted on: August 31, 2019).

## *Creation of an Inter-ministerial Catalogue of Cultural Products*

Just as regional arts organizations can save Mexico's consulates time and resources implementing their cultural diplomacy strategy, so the SRE can optimize the time and effort U.S. organizations invest in identifying new talents and works by artists of Mexican origin in their respective geographical areas of operation. This is because consuls already have tabs on what is going on in the social and political circles of the communities they serve, to the extent that they can even identify which type of work or theme is the most appropriate for the various cities in their jurisdictions, depending on the timing or audience profile in question.

Taking this into consideration, and in line with the vision for Mexico's new cultural diplomacy strategy,<sup>27</sup> it would be advisable for the SRE to compile a digital catalogue of Mexican works of art available both in Mexico and the United States, drawing not just on its own network of consulates, but the Cultural Diplomacy Council, the Ministry of Culture and Mexico's states and cities. Ideally, the catalogue should include detailed descriptions of the works and specific logistical and operating aspects related to their exhibition (lineal yards required for their mounting, humidity parameters, lighting and packaging requirements, etc.). Similarly, each work should ideally be accompanied by a description and presentation in English and any other native language deemed relevant to the project.<sup>28</sup>

In principle, the Cultural Promotion Platform (PPC), an internal tool used by consulates to manage their annual programs, could serve as a basis for the compilation of this pan-governmental digital catalogue,<sup>29</sup> which

<sup>27</sup> E. Márquez, *op. cit.*, 8.

<sup>28</sup> For the first time, in 2019, the cultural program of the SRE's representations in the United States included a digital collection: *68 voces, 68 corazones* on the oral traditions of Mexico's native peoples. For a more detailed description of the collection, visit the website: <https://68voces.mx/>.

<sup>29</sup> Pursuant to the guiding principle of the PMM, which advocates regulatory coherence on all levels of government, both vertically and horizontally, in serving migrant communities. See UN General Assembly, final proposal of the Inter-governmental Conference on the Pact on Migra-

would ideally be added to and consulted by users at the Ministry of Culture, the SRE's Cultural Diplomacy Council, Mexican consulates in the United States and government agencies in charge of cultural activities in states, municipalities and cities across the country that are interested in showcasing the work of their artists in the United States.

Additionally, the catalogue should allow artists in both countries to register their work directly<sup>30</sup> and provide them with digital information on opportunities regarding arts scholarships, continuous training, and funding in Mexico and the United States<sup>31</sup> as a vehicle for their constant empowerment.

To facilitate this inter-ministerial dialogue, the SRE could cooperate with the Ministry of Culture and replicate the mechanism used by the Ministry of Health to finance its Health Access Windows (VDS) at 50 consulates. Under this mechanism, the Ministry of Health provides a yearly seed capital to the SRE, which the Institute for Mexicans Abroad then allocates to each consular representation to fund said Health Access Windows.<sup>32</sup> In other words, the SRE and its network of consulates already have established administrative tools and outlets at its disposal to implement this type of inter-ministerial cooperation on a federal level. This means potential contributions by the Ministry of Culture to Mexico's cultural diplomacy strategy in the United States would have a well-defined roadmap to follow, guaranteeing these funds directly impact Mexican communities

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tion "Pacto Mundial para una migración segura, ordenada y regular", A/CONF.231/3, July 30, 2018, 6, at <https://undocs.org/es/A/CONF.231/3> (consulted on: August 31, 2019).

<sup>30</sup> Pursuant to two guiding principles of the PMM: actions should be centered on people in the pan-social sense, and should elicit cooperation by civil society actors, including diasporas, migrant communities and the private sector. *Ibid.*, 5, 6.

<sup>31</sup> In the example of America's Midwest, the six consulates within the MAAA's operating range could include artist training programs in their respective constituencies in the Inter-ministerial Catalogue of Cultural Products. For the full catalogue of educational programs the MAAA offers, see "Artist INC", at <https://www.maaa.org/professional-development/artist-inc/> (consulted on: August 31, 2019).

<sup>32</sup> For a detailed description of the program, see Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, "Ventanilla de Salud", November 24, 2016, at <https://www.gob.mx/ime/acciones-y-programas/ventanilla-de-salud> (consulted on: August 31, 2019).

and that they complement the installed capacity of regional and local arts organizations in the United States.

### *Creation of Regional Cultural Attachés*

Aside from finding financial resources for the implementation of Mexico's cultural diplomacy strategy in the United States, the situation of the consular network's human resources needs to be reassessed. For years, members of the Mexican Foreign Service have had a heavy workload, but limited resources given the extensive territories they cover and the tasks they must perform on a daily basis. As such, it would be commendable for the SRE to appoint *regional cultural attachés*, so members of the Foreign Service can concentrate on overseeing, implementing and gauging the impact of the country's cultural policy in the United States. This would not involve swelling the ranks of the Foreign Service, but it would entail training existing cultural staff at specific consulates—as determined by the SRE—to assist with certain administrative aspects, like identifying the best regional practices in terms of logistics, artistic production and costs; shoring up Mexico's negotiating capacity with potential local and regional allies in the art industry; drawing up fund-raising projects; programing itinerant exhibitions in different consular jurisdictions; and identifying local cultural administration training opportunities for the Foreign Service and the SRE. These regional cultural attachés would have a direct precedent in the consular network's regional IT representatives, who are in constant communication with the General IT and Innovation Department and who are responsible for coordinating consolidated tenders of IT equipment in each region, overseeing digital security parameters at the consulates under their supervision and providing support for IT personnel at consulates who have specific queries or requirements.

These proposals for the implementation of Mexico's cultural diplomacy strategy in the United States are feasible in the short and medium terms because, as we have seen, a good part of their operating fundamentals are already in place and depend primarily on internal decisions by the SRE.

## *Final Reflections*

It is worth pointing out that deploying resources or paying attention to culture only under exceptional circumstances, such as large art festivals in major cities like New York and San Francisco, is tantamount to disregarding the presence of the Foreign Service in practically every region and aspect of daily life in the United States. The reality is that during key political moments of the bilateral relationship like, for example, the negotiation and ratification of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), the local views of cities, counties and states have been just as relevant to public debate and the casting of votes by federal congressmen and women as the support—or lack thereof—of the institutions and national actors involved. Clearly, then, the diplomatic efforts Mexico channels into cultural aspects of the binational relationship are just as valuable in states like Kansas, Missouri or New Mexico as they are in California, Illinois or New York.

All things considered, Mexico's cultural diplomacy strategy has a great deal of untapped potential when it comes to providing better operating tools and more resources for diplomatic staff at its consulates. As mentioned previously, on stating “we are what we conceive”, Mexican consuls should not just have the operating instruments they need to answer the question “what does it mean to be Mexican?” from a bi-national standpoint, but, indirectly, our cultural strategy should also help Mexican migrants in the United States determine “what it means to be American in the 21st century”.

At the end of the day, showcasing Mexican culture is an opportunity to apply soft power<sup>33</sup> to the most important international actor of our times, which will indubitably contribute to the wellbeing of Mexican communities in the United States and the promotion of bilateral interests in decades to come.

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<sup>33</sup> The American internationalist Joseph Nye defines soft power as getting what you want from other countries without resorting to coercion, but instead appealing to culture, political ideals and public policies as a means of persuasion. See J. P. Singh and Stuart MacDonald, *Soft Power Today: Measuring the Influences and Effects*, Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh/British Council, 2017, 7, at [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/3418\\_bc\\_edinburgh\\_university\\_soft\\_power\\_report\\_03b.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/3418_bc_edinburgh_university_soft_power_report_03b.pdf) (consulted on: September 28, 2019).

## Conclusions

Culture permeates every aspect of Mexico's relationship with the United States and can be an effective foreign policy tool, provided efforts to promote it are properly coordinated. Incorporating as it does artistic production and community cultural administration among its goals, Mexico's cultural diplomacy strategy in the United States is a valuable opportunity for Mexican consuls to reach out to American cities with growing populations of people of Mexican origin, regardless of whether these are in rural or urban zones. There are internal measures the SRE can take in the short and medium terms to capitalize on this opportunity and help consulates predispose the United States to taking a positive view of the many and varied affairs that enrich the bilateral relationship on a daily basis.