

The Role of Mexico's Public Diplomacy and Its Concomitant Connection to Culture and Wellbeing in the Context of MONDIACULT 2022

El papel de la diplomacia pública de México y su concomitante vinculación con la cultura y el bienestar, en el contexto de Mondiacult 2022

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Abstract:

This article explores the possibilities of cultural, culinary, tourism, parliamentary and science diplomacy agendas as part of the Mexican State's public diplomacy strategy (which encompasses the government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE), Mexican representations abroad (RMEs) and other non-state actors) to position Mexico abroad. These agendas incorporate the concepts of inclusion and wellbeing.

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Resumen:

En este artículo se hace un recuento de algunos ejemplos de las posibilidades que tienen las agendas de la diplomacia cultural, diplomacia gastronómica, diplomacia turística, diplomacia parlamentaria y diplomacia científica como parte de la estrategia de diplomacia pública del Estado mexicano (en la que se suman el Gobierno, la SRE, las RME y otros actores no estatales) para el posicionamiento de México, en estas agendas se incorpora un sentido de inclusión y bienestar.

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Key Words:

Public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, culinary diplomacy, tourism diplomacy, parliamentary diplomacy, science diplomacy, wellbeing.

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Palabras clave:

Diplomacia pública, diplomacia cultural, diplomacia gastronómica, diplomacia turística, diplomacia parlamentaria, diplomacia científica, bienestar.

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*Public diplomacy*¹ is not a new concept, but just as the world has changed, so has the way we understand and practice public diplomacy on a stage that now has a much larger, more diverse cast of actors. Public diplomacy helps identify common ground, which can be either physical or intangible, with a view to promoting multilateralism and understanding by fostering ties of cooperation and friendship.

Mexico's first foray into public diplomacy was at trade fairs, expos and international pavilions. One of the first on record is the 1867 Paris International Exposition, where Mexico staged an exhibition in homage to the archaeological site of Xochicalco and showed a reproduction of the Aztec Calendar. Another highlight in the history of Mexican public diplomacy on the threshold of the twentieth century was its pavilion at the 1900 Paris Exposition. In principle, the purpose of participating in these fairs was to introduce Mexico as an independent nation to the world's powers and, having garnered international recognition, use these platforms to spin a national identity narrative targeting foreign audiences.

¹ First applied by Edmund Guillón in 1965, according to Nicholas Cull, public diplomacy is one of the ways in which an actor seeks to manage the international environment. Public diplomacy complements traditional diplomacy by facilitating responses to complex social problems and environments, "making a country's ideals, values, variety of resources and other elements known for purposes of its global positioning."

Culture, or more precisely, national identity, are vehicles for promoting a country's image, and the portrayal of that image is a way of connecting with the world, while understanding between societies makes for better business climates and facilitates agreements with new political and commercial partners. In other words, public diplomacy initiatives provide insight into how a country's population lives and works, which, in turn, helps create scenarios conducive to trade and the consolidation and diversification of global value chains.

Positioning Mexico on the international arena by means of national identity is a task embedded in the country's foreign policy. Yet foreign policy is implemented via interactions with other States, international bodies and subjects of public international law, and a broader audience that necessitates the inclusion of major new actors, from civil society, communities and diasporas to institutional media, academics and universities. To paraphrase Alvin Toffler, the restructuring of this cross-cutting vision should include all that which represents the true forces of the world, while institutions, the United Nations included, should represent all the components of an international society.²

The emergence of the Internet and the growing number of interactions on it have created a much more complex global village that is used to real-time communications. The evolution this has sparked means that actions taken by embassies or consulates in commercial, cultural, culinary, artistic and other spheres are no longer sufficient, while the use of digital tools allows for the flow of communication along three main pathways: diffusion, interaction and feedback. The COVID-19 pandemic opened the floodgates, fast-forwarding the process of adopting digital tools in our daily lives by more than 20 years due to the restrictions on the movement of people introduced in response to the health contingency.

In this interval, we learned to participate in online meetings and cultural forums, pay virtual visits to museums and expos, and even travel to other countries. This is why digital diplomacy is one of the main approaches we need to develop. Countries need to devise digital strategies to disseminate

² José Manuel Calvo Roy, "Alvin Toffler: 'Lo que tenemos son sistemas políticos obsoletos,'" *El País*, April 30, 1994, at https://elpais.com/diario/1994/05/01/cultura/767743205_850215.html (date of access: 17, 2022).

and reaffirm their image and culture in ways that would be difficult to achieve using other media.³ In this regard, social media and other platforms play an important role in spreading other, broader referents and reaching wider audiences, with a view to encouraging political dialogue, creating more growth opportunities, improving conditions of wellbeing and strengthening global value chains.⁴

Digital platforms are key to dissemination and promotion processes, and to establishing contact with non-traditional actors such as social groups, foreign audiences and private companies with investment capacity, to name just a few. This can be attributed to the relative accessibility, low cost and easy interoperability of social media networks.⁵

Basically, the difference between traditional diplomacy and public diplomacy is the audiences they target. While the former involves State-State interactions, the latter engages non-official individuals and sectors, and messages are generally aimed at foreign audiences.⁶ Public diplomacy is the inclusion of society at large in diplomatic endeavors, its goal being to reach a broader public. It is by means of public diplomacy that dialogue between specific actors is fostered and the priority goals of country promotion strategies achieved.⁷

³ Daniel Aguirre Azócar, Ilan Manor and Alejandro Ramos Cardoso, “La digitalización de la diplomacia pública: hacia un nuevo marco conceptual,” in *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior*, No. 113, May-August 2015, pp. 7-13.

⁴ Daniel Pascual Duarte Muñoz, “El papel de la diplomacia pública y la diplomacia cultural en el diálogo y la cooperación internacional,” in *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior*, No. 105, September-December 2015, pp. 155-167.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁶ Jan Melissen, “The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice,” in J. Melissen (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2005, p. 5.

⁷ Alfonso Zegbe, Angelina Mendoza Martínez, Sara Valdés Loza and Rodolfo Pastor de María y Campos, “Diplomacia pública: una estrategia para el posicionamiento de México,” in Dámaso Morales Ramírez, Carmelo Cattafi, Jessica De Alba Ulloa and Rafael Velázquez Flores, (eds.), *Relaciones Internacionales: Diplomacia cultural, arte y política exterior*, Mexico, Asociación Mexicana de Estudios Internacionales, 2021, p. 45. After public diplomacy came other forms of diplomacy such as new public diplomacy, soft power and smart power. Joseph Nye defines *soft power* as a State’s capacity to influence the behavior of another using attraction or coopta-

In response to the complexities of the current, much more dynamic, highly interrelated context, the various agencies of the Mexican State have come together to execute an extensive list of tasks to position Mexico abroad and that incorporate the concepts of inclusion and wellbeing. Through the executive arm of the federal government and with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE), the Legislature and the Senate, the Mexican State manages all the actions and actors involved in a bid to create a coherent, consistent narrative that identifies Mexico in international eyes.

It should be noted that the practice of public diplomacy does not fall exclusively to the State, as foreign policy does. Many non-state actors participate in the building of a more positive image of our country and in public diplomacy efforts focused on wellbeing.⁸

To identify global trends and their direct and indirect impacts, the SRE, at the initiative of Chancellor Marcelo Ebrard, created the Executive Office of Strategy and Public Diplomacy (DEEDP), which analyzes challenges, risks and opportunities related to the agendas of agencies of the Federal Public Administration, local authorities, the private sector, entrepreneurs and expatriate communities, so Mexico's foreign representations (RMES), which are responsible for economic and tourism promotion, in addition to trade, cultural and diplomatic promotion efforts, can position the country's image abroad with the invaluable support of the Mexican Foreign Service, embassy and consulate staff.

Public diplomacy actions to position Mexico's image abroad are intended to complement the SRE's traditional diplomacy endeavors and include representative elements of the tapestry of colors, aromas, flavors, melodies

tion, as opposed to military or economic coercion. Public diplomacy and its more modern version—new public diplomacy—engage a variety of actors who can help build more diverse networks, have more resources, a wider scope of action, and that can be used to promote a country's soft power. Consequently, as an instrument of public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy is aligned with this goal.

⁸ Wellbeing being understood in this context as the epicenter of a new way of visualizing public policies based on frameworks for legal action that incorporate the senses, including socioemotional values and the rituals that characterize communities. A. Zegbe, "Socioemotional Wellbeing: A Revisited Approach," *metapolis*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January-June 2020, pp. 43-49.

and textures that make our country so diverse and inspiring, and, at the same time, a key global actor with substantial cultural capital.

As such, public diplomacy can be interpreted as the management of a country's positioning using all its referents to create a sense of identity. Correctly fitting together these building blocks of a country's image facilitates the drawing up of a consistent, plural public diplomacy strategy capable of creating synergies that build bridges between countries and attract foreign direct investment, which, in turn, acts as an incentive to tourism, stronger trade relations and the diversification of global supply chains. When the outside world has greater knowledge of a country, this not only opens the door to opportunities, but helps keep it open.

Some of the diplomatic agendas that shore up Mexico's public diplomacy include: cultural, tourism, culinary, sports, science, medical, indigenous, business and parliamentary diplomacy,⁹ among others. The practice of public diplomacy in each of these areas requires the involvement of a wide range of actors, facilitation measures and forums that encourage receptiveness and sensitivity toward their recognition, while capitalizing on their potential to reach a target audience.

Public diplomacy takes many forms and can be approached from a variety of angles. Some of the more concrete tools of action new public diplomacy favors are international exchanges; programs for the recognition and conservation of cultural heritage; the dissemination of a positive country brand; relations with diasporas in far-flung countries; and participation in sporting events with high media coverage.¹⁰ One of the forms used by Mexico is cultural diplomacy, which is at the heart of its public diplomacy strategy to position the country abroad, partly due to its cultural diversity, but also because its attractions are recognized beyond its borders.

⁹ Nicholas J. Cull, "Diplomacia pública: consideraciones teóricas," in *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior*, No. 85, November 2008-February 2009, p. 77.

¹⁰ See Eytan Gilboa, "Public Diplomacy," in Oxford Bibliographies, April 30, 2019, at <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756841/obo-9780199756841-0087.xml> (date of access: August 10, 2022).

Cultural diplomacy

According to Cynthia P. Schneider, public diplomacy and the promotion of culture are closely related.¹¹ The main difference is that public diplomacy serves as a framework to explain the exchange and flow of information between non-traditional actors who contribute to actions taken to promote a country abroad.

As regards cultural diplomacy, there are several definitions. Some countries use terms semantically similar to cultural diplomacy. For example, the United Kingdom employs *cultural relations* as a tool to develop soft power with a collaborative, “bottom-up” approach, while Japan uses *cultural exchange* to refer to activities similar to those of cultural diplomacy.¹² Semantics aside, cultural diplomacy promotes collaboration with a view to broadening the spectrum of social participation, cooperation between nations regardless of their political affiliations, the redirecting of conflicts to positive outcomes, the combatting of negative perceptions of a country, the mitigation of misunderstandings, and the creation of neutral platforms that bring people together.¹³

Mexico has a long and colorful history of cultural promotion abroad that ranges from art exhibitions and colloquiums to regular appearances at international fairs. Mexican culture is present in all the major capital cities, from food and music to works of literature, while Mexican design and art grace public spaces the world over and in some cases have become powerful symbols. One example is Frida Kahlo, whose unique, post-revolutionary art has transcended borders, evoking as it does the empowerment of women.

Other public diplomacy actions the State has taken include efforts to safeguard the symbols of Mexican identity, protect intellectual property rights, defend the right to royalties and take legal action in cases of cultural appropriation by multinationals. Likewise, Mexico has taken measures to recoup

¹¹ Cynthia P. Schneider, “Culture Communicates: US Diplomacy That Works,” in J. Melissen (ed.), *op. cit.*, 147-168.

¹² N. J. Cull, *op. cit.*, pp. 67 and 69.

¹³ Ina Kokinova, “Qué es la diplomacia cultural,” in RRYF, May 7, 2020, at <https://relacionateypunto.com/que-es-la-diplomacia-cultural/> (date of access: August 10, 2022).

stolen cultural property and conserve the most representative constituents of its artistic, archaeological and architectural heritage, especially unique, intangible expressions of that culture and its biodiversity.

Mexico is one of the most well-known countries in the world, something that can largely be attributed to its culture. The name *Mexico* crops up frequently and automatically conjures up images and sensations that run the whole gamut, from the arts to historical references; in the mind's eye of many, Mexico is a mystical place where you can find everything from beaches to volcanoes. This cultural, archaeological and architectural wealth is reflected in a multiplicity of ethnic communities and languages, while its strategic geographical location has established the country as a bridge between cultures and the birthplace of syncretism. Mexico boasts 35 UNESCO World Heritage Sites—more than any other country on the American continent and number seven worldwide in terms of sites of cultural and natural value—, which, viewed separately, would appear to belong to different worlds.¹⁴

Add to this its diversity of peoples, traditions, festivities, culinary and artistic expressions. Ten expressions of Mexican culture have been catalogued as Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO, including traditional Mexican cuisine, the ritual *Voladores de Papantla* (flying men) ceremony, *Pirekua* (the song of the indigenous Purépecha people), the process for making Talavera pottery, mariachi music, charrería (Mexican horsemanship), Day of the Dead festivities and a whole host of traditions that, once experienced, can never be forgotten.

Culturally speaking, Mexico has managed to position itself internationally in several spheres, both historically and by hosting events that have bolstered its reputation as an actor concerned about the conservation and promotion of cultural property—events like the World Conference on Cultural Policies MONDIACULT organized by the UNESCO, whose very first edition took place in Mexico City in 1982.

Forty years later, in September of this year, Mexico will be hosting MONDIACULT 2022 in a bid to prompt reflection on culture as a cross-cutting

¹⁴ World Heritage Convention-UNESCO, "Mexico," at <https://whc.unesco.org/en/stateparties/mx-t/?iso=mx> (date of access: August 10, 2022).

tool that contributes to social and economic development, and facilitates well-being, resilience and prosperity. The conference will be attended by governments, civil society organizations, inter-governmental organizations, UNESCO experts and networks specialized in promoting culture and the arts.

Mette Lending refers to a line that has been drawn between traditional cultural activities and informational ones. Some areas cultural diplomacy touches on are: the promotion of human rights and democratic values, governance and the role of the media.¹⁵ Meanwhile, the way in which cultural activities are conducted and promoted has also changed, partly due to the rate at which communications have become digitalized and also because of new trends attributable to generational changes.

Culinary diplomacy

Food is an example of one of the more influential components of cultural diplomacy and could even be deemed a diplomacy in its own right. Or at least it is acknowledged as such by the SRE, the Ministry of Culture and the National Institute of indigenous Peoples, which have joined forces with embassies and consulates to promote Mexican cuisine. An excellent tool of public diplomacy, food has always been a means of breaking down cultural barriers, not to mention a valuable source of income for families and companies—one that incorporates ingredients of cultural value.

The diversity of Mexican cuisine can only be explained by geography and history. Hemmed in by two oceans, Mexico has historical, cultural and trade ties with the Asia-Pacific region, towards which the world's new geopolitical centers are gravitating, and from across the Atlantic, it has inherited European ideas and customs, influences from the Arab world, and Islamic and Jewish traditions. Mexican cuisine also has hints of the Pacific cultures that helped create Mesoamerica's legacy as one of the founding cultures of civilization and a pioneer in agriculture.

This body of age-old customs and traditions has produced some unique flavors. It is hard to imagine an international cuisine devoid of tomatoes,

¹⁵ J. Melissen, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

corn, different types of peppers, avocado in its various presentations and especially cocoa in the form of chocolate.

This vast historical heritage that encompasses biodiversity, agriculture, ancient knowledge, culinary techniques and the rituals and traditions of native peoples are all blended together in the mixing bowl of traditional Mexican cuisine, which was declared Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2010.

Centuries of culinary fusions and experimentation in a megadiverse country have enriched this ancestral heritage that Mexico aspires to share with the world by means of public diplomacy. The flavors of Mexico are perhaps one of the oldest tools of diplomacy and indubitably a primary vehicle for the positioning of the country internationally. Far from being a well-kept secret, Mexican cuisine is among the most popular in the world. You would certainly not be hard-pushed to find a Mexican restaurant in New York, London, Shanghai or Tokyo.

By the same token, it is not uncommon for Mexican cuisine to feature as the guest of honor at regional forums, like the Gastro Diplomacy Forum hosted in Qatar in May 2022 by the Katara Cultural Village Foundation, which Mexico has been a member of since 2019. Topics included the role of gastronomy in diplomacy and how the culinary arts bring nations and societies together, creating a valuable opportunity to learn more about the history and origins of different cuisines and the methods they employ.

The contribution of public diplomacy to wellbeing, resilience and prosperity

As regards positioning strategies for emblematic products, Mexican spirits like mezcal and tequila are presently the best-positioned in the world, and promote wellbeing by contributing to local economies. In just two decades, Mexican wine has won awards in the most prestigious of competitions, an achievement that can be attributed to the diversity of climates in Mexico, namely the so-called Mediterranean-like climate that makes for “good wine-growing” conditions. With a view to further positioning Mexican wine on international markets, Ensenada will be hosting the 43rd World Congress of Wine and Vine in November 2022. This joint effort

by the Ministry of Agriculture, the SRE, Mexico's foreign representations, the state of Baja California and the Mexican Wine Council is a clear example of public diplomacy at work.

Other aspects to consider involve value chains that engage individuals, families and communities, and that encompass activities related to agriculture, tourism, culture, biodiversity and wellbeing. MONDIACULT 2022 is clear about the contribution of culture to the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and is a prime example of UNESCO's commitment to the wellbeing of the world population.

Tourism diplomacy, resilience and connectivity

For public diplomacy to have an impact on the wellbeing of a country, a series of actors need to be empowered in its implementation. In many cases, these are local producers, but all the individuals and communities engaged in the tourism sector could well be involved. This is what makes public diplomacy a cross-cutting activity that contributes to social and economic development, and fosters the wellbeing of individuals and their communities both locally and internationally. When a nation's image coincides with its goals, this translates into a greater influx of foreign tourists, and opportunities for investment, development and wellbeing.

A positive image is linked to a country's credibility, stability and how the rest of the world perceives it, and is a decisive factor in creating an environment of confidence. Image is "essential to establishing political dialogue and, in turn, facilitates [international] cooperation, because the better a nation's reputation, the simpler the process of forging ties and contacts with actors and individuals within the international community."¹⁶

In Mexico, public diplomacy extends to the promotion of tourism nationwide, not just the country's more well-known destinations. Tourism is a strategic sector in that it is one of the country's main sources of foreign-currency denominated revenues and a driver of the economy. It also contributes to wellbeing by engaging individuals, families and communities throughout

¹⁶ D. P. Duarte Muñoz, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

the entire value chain. And in the eyes of today's new brand of tourism, this chain has a duty to be inclusive, respectful of the environment, and to facilitate stability and social mobility.

But while public diplomacy focuses on promoting Mexico abroad, it also seeks to acknowledge and recover tourism assets the length and breadth of the planet.

Parliamentary diplomacy

In the case of Mexico, parliamentary diplomacy covers a broad spectrum of issues related to governance and is a key component of its public diplomacy strategy. This form of diplomacy is exercised within the Inter-Parliamentary Union, at inter-parliamentary meetings of the Legislature accompanied by the SRE, friendship groups and as part of the activities conducted by members of the Mexican congress abroad. These activities are directly linked to the representational duties of policymakers, which enrich and are aligned with foreign policy so as to encourage cooperation on all levels.

Science diplomacy

Science diplomacy is another of the pillars of Mexico's public diplomacy agenda, which aims to formulate a strategy for the positioning of home-produced scientific knowledge and the embracing of new technologies as geopolitical tools to promote and address healthcare and wellbeing issues in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Mexican government backs academic and scientific exchanges, supports research projects with other countries and makes a concerted effort to involve science and innovation experts in the drafting of public policies. There are two main institutions for the execution of science diplomacy: the National Science and Technology Council (CONACYT) and the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID). The SRE has also set up a Technical Board for Knowledge and Innovation as an advisory body for the promotion of technological development.

Likewise, Red Global Mx is a global network created by the SRE via the Institute for Mexicans Abroad to identify and organize highly qualified diasporas, with a view to promoting cooperation and specific projects that foster social and economic development and progress in science, technology and innovation in Mexico.

On the regional front, of note is the proposal for the creation of a Latin American space agency, with Mexico advocating a program focused on science diplomacy during its presidency pro tempore of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). One of the 14 projects proposed was for cooperation in space and aeronautics via the Latin American and Caribbean Space Agency (ALCE).

Conclusion

For public diplomacy to be effective, communities need to be involved in decision-making processes and play an active role in improving their quality of life. This, however, requires better educational opportunities and better-paid jobs, and the conservation of the environment via the rational, sustainable use of natural resources, in compliance with the legal frameworks in force. Ultimately, efforts like these translate into recognition and respect for indigenous peoples.

While the concept of *public diplomacy* has met with general acceptance among the international community, it is constantly evolving, with each country adopting its own version based on its understanding of local realities and taking into account national capacities, vulnerabilities and strengths. Public diplomacy is not the exclusive domain of governments, but may arise from a sense of belonging and inclusion that combines images and elements representative of identity and that tend to reflect plurality.

In the case of Mexico, while public diplomacy actions have been taken in recent years, these have been mainly isolated initiatives and efforts. That said, the growing body of research on the subject has gradually made the study of public diplomacy possible; authors and experts are gaining visibility and there are proposals to include public diplomacy on bachelor's degree and postgraduate courses related to International Relations

at universities and study centers. Needless to say, Mexico has already produced some solid publications on cultural and public diplomacy.

In this regard, the creation of the Executive Office of Strategy and Public Diplomacy (DEEDP) at the SRE is an unprecedented initiative of the Mexican Government and the Federal Public Administration to set up a public diplomacy area within its organizational structure that reports directly to the Offices of the C. Secretary and that is bound by the SRE's internal regulations. The DEEDP seeks to implement cross-cutting public diplomacy initiatives, draw up public policies and coordinate their components, beginning with the creation of a culture and knowledge of that culture. On the international arena, more and more governments are turning to their foreign ministers and international organizations as they look to create, develop and strengthen their public diplomacy areas and capacities.

Public diplomacy is a pending task for multilateralism, for while there are institutions and thought centers for global action in public diplomacy, these actions are limited to the traditional foreign policies of States and, as yet, there is no international organization specializing in public diplomacy. This, however, could change with the initiative led by Qatar, Mexico and other countries via the Global Public Diplomacy Network (GPDNet), which looks set to be an exceptional example of such an organization. This forum has laid the groundwork for the creation of a global center for public diplomacy policies and actions, and will seek to bring more and more countries on board through national—but not necessarily government—institutions that practice public diplomacy, with a view to becoming the first-ever international public diplomacy organization in its own right.

The participation of new actors is essential to the planning of positioning and cooperation strategies that are as comprehensive as they are effective. These actors include individuals and communities of Mexicans both in the country and abroad, artists, exhibitors, the media, museums, centers for thought and analysis, foundations and organizations of all kinds in what can be deemed an inter-institutional public diplomacy effort with a two-fold mission: to include a broader public in the implementation of a public diplomacy agenda that showcases Mexico's cultural wealth and to bring public diplomacy to a wider audience.