

**SOFT POWER – A DIPLOMATIC PAWN.
DYNAMICS OF ROMANIAN SOFT POWER
IN THE CENTENARY YEAR**

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Abstract. *Referring to the approaches of the global actors concerning the attainment and maintenance of power, influence and prestige along with a shift of focus from hard power to soft power, this study addresses the instrumental of a diplomatic strategy, with a detailed focus on a culture joining the political values, public policies and the typical external relations of a state, forming a whole – soft power. Approaching indepth the arguments that constitute the theory according to which soft power is now able to “seduce” through enhancing credibility of the national and international politics of a state, the present study insists on analyzing and rationalizing the soft power skills available to the Romanian political scene, especially of those employed in the Centenary year (2018). Without losing sight of the emergent actions of the Romanian civil society as a model for implementing a soft power intended for collaboration, as a result of the elaborated analysis, a strong institutionalization of the respective soft strategy’s dynamics was observed, along with a lack in cultural expertise and gaps regarding precisely the parameters imposed by what soft power truly means.*

Keywords: *Soft Power, Political Trustworthiness, Cultural Diplomacy, Cultural Values, Diplomatic Strategies, Cultural Policies, Centenary Year*

Soft power, the art of seduction through culture

An integral part of diplomacy starting with the 19th century and developed during the Cold War under the aegis of the USA, the concept of *soft power* was theorized by political scientist Joseph S. Nye Jr., in the 1990s, and architected in his book, “Soft Power” (2004). From this starting point, Nye describes the new diplomatic force as “*the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies*”¹, hence resorting to the set of three defining elements for strengthening interstate relations in a predominantly democratic world. Thus,

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¹ Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The means to success in world politics*, New York, PublicAffairs, 2004, p. X (Preface).

when the culture and political values of a state are harmonized under the aegis of a *soft* strategy, a type of trust between actors wishing to establish and strengthen an interstate relationship is inevitable, the result being the achievement of political and diplomatic objectives.

Simultaneously, we might raise several questions on the reasons behind culture's status as one of the *soft power's* three pillars. The range of responses can vary from the indestructible link between the political values of a state and its culture, that causes fluctuations in the rationality of political decisions, and up to the indisputable fact that *soft* strategies were considered to be an embryo of cultural diplomacy with traditions that appeared back in the nineteenth century and were chiselled in the form of *soft power*, suitable for the actual times. In an admirable exposure of means and trends typical for cultural diplomacy, academic researcher Lucian Jora portrayed the respective practice as a reflection of building trust, in diplomatic terms, resulting in fruitful cooperation and long-term partnerships². Culture becomes both the source and the instrument of *soft power*, but only when it obeys the parameters of the society's cultural values in which the respective diplomatic strategy has its resources.

Furthermore, while there is clearly a plethora of ways and modalities of implementing cultural-diplomatic lines of action, on the international stage, those are regularly included in the lines of unilateral and bi-/multilateral communication. After all, this reflects the two registers set up by James Doerer, an American researcher loyal to the diplomatic field: *reaching out* and *standing out*. Firstly, the differentiation through culture is the typical strategy of an actor such as the United States, amongst whose projects we mention: "América", "Fulbright" or the photographs from September 11th, 2001, signed by *Joel Meyerowitz*³. Notwithstanding those monumental responses to critical moments, a signal of decline in the American soft power policy and an increasing attention to military capability cannot be omitted, whether we are discussing the wars in Afghanistan and Syria, or the NATO anti-missile shields strategically placed against Russia. Secondly, the *standing out soft power* type, having as preeminent practice the cultural-diplomatic collaboration, is the apanage of the Old Continent, through the European Union. For instance, the nature of the European Community, a means of preventing additional hostility between the Member States, encounters diplomatic multilateralism and crisis management through dialogue and culture, arousing the deference of the youth⁴ (the main voice nowadays), thus making the European Union a new gauge of *soft power*.

From the point of view of implementing *soft* actions, a first such means is art, best reflected through the activities of the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG), which embraces and employs art in order to ease cultural exchange, in favour of interstate partnerships and alliances.⁵ Approaching education as another

² Lucian Jora, "New Practices and Trends in Cultural Diplomacy", in *Romanian Review of Political Sciences and International Relations*, vol. X, no. 1 (2013). Bucharest, I.S.P.R.I, 2013, p. 50.

³ Cynthia P. Schneider, "Diplomacy that works: 'Best practices' in cultural diplomacy", in *Cultural Diplomacy Research Series*. Washington DC, Centre for Arts and Culture, 2003, p. 11.

⁴ Joseph Nye, *quoted work*, ch. 3 "Others' soft power", p. 79.

⁵ James Doerer *et.al.*, *The art of soft power: A study on cultural diplomacy at the UN Office in Geneva*, "Introduction". Londra, King's College London, 2017, p. 18.

means of *soft power*, we note the unimpeachable value of academic exchange for such a strategy – ERASMUS+ being its most prestigious program; not only does it offer the possibility of discovering the international academic environment, but it also encourages the beneficiaries to broaden their mind limits by contacting other cultures and thus, encounter cultural diversity. Finally, a last instrument that needs our attention is sport – another fundamental aspect of the new diplomacy, facilitating the meeting of different citizenships, either in a physical space or in front of the screens, for the love of the fairest methods of *soft power* application. The latter instruments, education and sport, are today among the most globally used ones, by virtue of the involvement of remarkable figures from the respective fields, whether we are talking about *Usain Bolt* or *Germaine Greer*.

*The culture of a two-way soft power:
institutionalization and decentralization*

Subsuming the practices of the current international scene to the rapid changes that characterize the present century, and in order for the cultural-diplomatic strategies to be relevant to our times, an adjustment of the main *soft power* instrumental is paramount. Consequently, the directions of action of the whole assembly comprising the *soft power* let us witness the rationale causing the contemporary decentralization of the named strategies; they address clearly defined strategic objectives, designed to untangle the main dilemmas of the present century, called *milieu goals*: promoting democracy, jointly with the respect for human rights and the open commercial market, all possible in open and tolerant societies⁶. In the current configurations, the consequences of globalization and the proliferation of new technologies are key moments in the evolution of a brand-new *soft power*, with a core in the power conferred on individuals, associations, coalitions and non-governmental organizations, in order to solve crises whose logical thread cannot be found by the great leaders of the world.

Beyond the repeatedly cumbersome process of institutionalizing cultural diplomacy, through different *soft power* strategies, decentralizing culture and cultural diplomatic practices are required to be accepted as up-to-date topics of international debates. The research conducted by Lucian Jora, in this regard, establishes that the effects of new technologies and the development of the media communication means have allowed the emergence of individuals networks, social and protest movements and organizations from the private environment, which take common actions in the name of cultural exchanges and cooperation⁷. Throughout a simple analysis concerning the fashion of influence caused by these non-state actors on the slow and rather rigid evolution of national or regional policies, a significant improvement in international scene's paid attention to the real problems of the present societies is observed. Likewise, the justification of such actors' increased popularity and the support of civil society is portrayed

⁶ Joseph S. Nye Jr., *quoted work*, ch. 1 "The changing nature of power", p. 17.

⁷ Lucian Jora, "New Practices...", p. 44.

through the transparency and informal attitude that characterizes them, the rapid adaptation to the changes begot from globalization and the call for creativity and innovation – whether we discuss movements such as #metoo, #rezist, *The Clinton Health Access Initiative* or *Greta Thunberg*.

Reasserting the ideas acknowledged in the previous paragraphs, through Nye's similar observations, according to which “*governments compete for credibility not only with other governments, but with a broad range of alternatives*”⁸, we can therefore approach the topic of institutionalized *soft power* practices, with reference to the Romanian model fitted to European requirements. In this respect, the bastion in charge of developing, managing and employing the *soft power* strategy is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to which, in addition to developing various cooperation projects, bodies such as the Romanian Cultural Institute, the Romanian Academy, lectureships, language institutes, embassies or consular offices are added. Providing RCI's *soft power* expertise that ensures the involvement of foreign citizens in different projects – informal ambassadors securing the propagation of a culture beyond the ambits to which official behaviour and policies extend, most diplomatic actions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have a closed circuit intended exclusively for the diplomatic environment, without directly involving the citizens. Given the speed of information flow and the ability of new technologies to connect the corners of the world in an instant, we are compelled to embrace the momentousness of the target audience that should be much broader, as the Government is forced “*to look beyond one-way 'announcement-style' communication and start the process of engagement, participation and collaboration*”⁹.

Nowadays, more than ever, nations need to redefine their cultural boundaries and reaffirm their national cultural identity – through sound cultural policies, strengthening therefore the *soft power* strategy. Along these lines, we define cultural (national) policies as the measures and actions of the state institutions carried out in order to regulate, consolidate and ultimately promote culture. Specifically, Romanian cultural policies have changed over time, always being determined by the history and the forms of government that have followed since the (first landmark) 1866¹⁰, up until now. Accordingly, we concede the policies of the Ministry of Culture (MC) regarding culture as a constituent of internal cohesion, simultaneously reminiscing that one of these objectives is to achieve sustainable development through culture. Nevertheless, MC's “considerable” projects, such as *RO-Cultura* (the economy's and society's development via cultural entrepreneurship) or those meant to increase the international exposure of Romanian culture¹¹, by attending the *Venice Biennale*, the *Europalia Festival* or organizing

⁸ Lucian Jora, “Cultural diplomacy today – aspects from the ongoing debate”, in *Romanian Review of Political Sciences and International Relations*, vol. IX, no. 1 (2012). București, I.S.P.R.I, 2012, p. 185.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ The moment when, after the unification of the Romanian Principalities, the people opened their arms in front of the constitutional monarchy, of their first King, Carol I, and of the first Constitution.

¹¹ Ministry of Culture, *Romania's National Cultural Strategy for 2016-2022*. <http://www.cultura.ro/sites/default/files/inline-files/_SCPN%202016-2022inavizare.pdf>.

the *George Enescu Festival* or the *Romania – France Season 2019*, fade in front of some Romanian cultural symbols consigned to oblivion. Architectural jewellery such as the Herculane Bath Complex or the Casino in Constanța are just two such examples – a major impact on *soft power*, reflecting authorities' recklessness towards cultural heritage. With this in mind, although tenuous and deficient, we can assume that today's national cultural actions and policies have an auspicious character, but require a broad restructuring of their long-term objectives.

*Centenary Year (2018) – enhancing
political trustworthiness*

Conceding that the status of European Union and NATO has facilitated Romanians' withdrawal from lethargy and an isolationist state of being resulted from the communist regime, Romania is forced, today, 100 years after the Great Union, to generate additional efforts for a better connection with the current trends of the international stage. Apprehending the potential of conviction and seduction of a credible and grounded culture, we could deem that, through a *soft* strategy, Romania can enhance the role and influence of a successful diplomacy, supported by a recovery and cancelling of the existent gaps, establishing, consolidating and fructifying its foreign relations, from equilibrium positions. In light of Nye's premise according to which good *soft power* should reflect the authentic cultural values and elements of a society¹², I propose to turn our attention to the main actors from the private and public environment who have implemented *soft* strategies for the Centenary year.

Having said that, the above-mentioned centralization commences with the private sector, taking into consideration the fact that in the last decades the non-state actors have penetrated the long-closed sphere of cultural diplomacy, assuming today certain objectives and roles that belong, theoretically, exclusively to national authorities.¹³ Consequently, this adjustment implies the minimization of the authorities' monopoly on a strategy that should be facilitated by the whole society, to the extent that it has the necessary tools for action. To give an illustration, firstly I consider bringing to the attention of the readers one of the most creative projects of 2018, belonging to *The Institute: Creative Centenary*, whose purpose was to promote artists reinterpreting, through product design, of the symbolic elements of the Great Union¹⁴, involving the artisans, directly and actively, in the artistic celebration of 2018. Secondly, we can turn our attention towards the project carried out under the aegis of the *Art in dialogue* and *Make Better* entities, entitled *LO±VE. Habitation and Neighbourhood*¹⁵, an exhibition funded by the Ministry of Culture that aims to explain how Romanians, in the 100 years of Great Romania, have reported themselves to the history of habituating and the idea of

¹² Joseph S. Nye Jr., *quoted work*, ch. 1 "The changing nature of power", pp. 10-11.

¹³ Lucian Jora, "New Practices...", p. 44.

¹⁴ The Institute Editors, "Centenar Creativ", *The Institute*, <<https://institute.ro/centenarcreativ>>.

¹⁵ MKBT Editors, "100 de ani de locuire în România – expoziție curatoriă de MKBT: Make Better", *mkb.t*. <<https://mkb.t.ro/?p=1213>>.

neighbourhood.¹⁶ Thirdly, one of the most popular projects from the private sphere is *100 Romanian faces*, started at the initiative of five companies wanting to radiograph the Romanian society at 100 years, with the help of a series of photographs portraying the most important Romanians, essays, a printed album and many reports and interviews.¹⁷

Returning our focus to public institutions, among the most important such actors that have developed soft strategies for the Centenary year are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through its embassies and consular offices, the Romanian Academy (remembering here *100 Gala for the Centenary*), the Ministry of Culture, but especially the Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI). Regarding the status of the latter named institution, in the context of Romanian *soft power*, it should be recalled that, being a member of the European Union, RCI is part of EUNIC, the latter functioning as an “umbrella” for European cultural institutes.¹⁸ Notably, such a membership ultimately means the guarantee that *soft power* and cultural diplomacy strategies represent the pillars of European construction and of the member states’ fashion of celebrating their unity through diversity.

Accordingly, the project carried out under the aegis of ICR Beijing, called *Romania seen through the eyes of a Chinese painter*¹⁹, is included in RCI’s lines of action destined for the big event. Then again, the Institute’s *Report on the Centenary Program* reflects that following the event opening and discussions between participants and both Romanian and Chinese officials, an impressive program of Romanian folk dances was also held, whose protagonists were not Romanian, but Chinese citizens in love with the tradition of the *mioritic* meadows. In the context of the Romanian-Chinese event, the trust was the result of a fruitful cultural collaboration, with advantages on both sides: the Romanians showcased their culture away from home, whereas the citizens of Beijing were able to acknowledge a completely foreign culture. Evaluating the entire range of projects under the aegis of the RCI, carried out in the Centenary year, the similarities between the way in which those projects unfolded and what Joseph Nye considers to be central to an effective and successful long-lasting *soft power* strategy – seduction, could be clearly observed. As for the rest of the public projects intended for the 2018 celebration, a simple analysis allows us to conclude that the actions of the respective institutions demonstrate the existence of a *soft power* strategy, yet still fragile, uncertain, with purposes concerning the achievement of political and image capital, with a citizenry kept away from active participation, a result of a lack in cultural expertise, of not adhering to the minimum requirements of the updated *soft power*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Official page of the “100 de chipuri românești” project, “Despre proiect”, *100 de chipuri românești*. <<http://100dechipuri.ro/despre-proiect>>.

¹⁸ Gregory Paschalidis, “Exporting national culture: histories of Cultural Institutes abroad”, in *International Journal of Cultural Policy* online, vol. 15, no. 3 (2009). Taylor & Francis, 2009, p. 284.

¹⁹ Romanian Cultural Institute, “Report on the Centenary Program”, included in the *2018 Activity Report*. Bucharest, ed. Romanian Cultural Institute, 2019, p. 147.

Conclusions

Theorizing what we define as *soft power* and analysing the characteristics and resources mentioned above, we are now able to understand the fact that *soft power* is today the attribute of leading public institutions, whose policies can be of, in the terms defined by James Doerer, *reaching out* or *standing out* type²⁰, the approach being given by the respective public actor's way of perceiving the cultural and foreign relation scenes. Provided that globalization has also transformed the *soft power* scene, "releasing" the concept from the "grips" of the entrenched and institutionalized sphere, the named strategy is used today by countless non-state actors, of which the most important are non-governmental organizations. Most of the time, their *soft power* overlaps with that of the state, but at the same time it drives public institutions towards a greater openness and involvement of civil society in all that means a national *soft* strategy. Likewise, this is also Romania's instance, but with major differences between the two points of view: public *soft power* projects tend to approach the *standing out* register, whereas the *soft power* of the civilians has the citizen in its centre, implying the mechanism of *reaching out* register. Then again, the application of a *soft* strategy differs from the national to the international level, but the common points of the two are given by the existence of cultural institutes, academic exchanges, international exhibitions and conferences that fall within *soft power*'s sphere of action. Notably, this melting pot characteristics of cultural diplomacy, in the manner theorized by Joseph Nye, gave birth to the *soft* strategies of the present, more citizen-centred, on all that means the trustworthiness offered by properly promoted and instrumentalized cultural and social values, allowing individuals to become informal cultural ambassadors.

All things considered, regardless of the future configurations of the international scene, we can firmly state that today's data is defined by the *soft* diplomatic strategies and tactics, necessary for a viable cultural and political reconstruction of a world marked by the *hard* modalities. Finally, the alternative is to implement and apply *soft power* tactics, Romania having at its disposal all the cultural strengths needed in this sense to culturally individualize itself and to obtain, through the recourse to *soft power*, the necessary international prestige support for initiatives undertaken in this regard.

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²⁰ James Doerer *et.al.*, *quoted work*, p. 14.

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