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Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Focal Points as emergent and integrative cooperation strategies in the resolution of conflicts

MARTA VISIOLI

Nota autore

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to demonstrate, with an original perspective, the necessity of Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Focal Points (CFPs) as new effective sources of cooperation and conflict resolution. In a contemporary global context which is characterized by hybrid conflicts, with a mixture of unofficial and official actors and enemies, and by the overcoming of the state-centred national system, the traditional approaches to crises and conflicts are incomplete. In order to guarantee long-term peace and recovery, it is important to shift from an exclusive political and governmental perspective, to an integration of social and cultural members. In this regard, Cultural Diplomacy claims its place as a new effective response to the contemporary framework, by arising with new resources. As a matter of fact, it moves ever further away from its original meaning in order to encompass a comprehensive approach, with a particular focus on the resolution of domestic crises as a prerequisite to both national and international security. In particular, this form of diplomacy is a new cooperation strategy for conflict resolution because it increases the democratic space within nations between political authorities and civilians, it fosters mutual understanding by fighting stereotypes, it reduces the risk of conflicts and provides the vital resilience to crisis management and post-conflict.

In particular, the first part of the article focuses on the practice and the meaning of Cultural Diplomacy, by also highlighting its advantages and disadvantages in relation to cooperation and conflict resolution. Specifically, its evolution into an even more cooperative and effective strategy at different levels deserves the appropriate consideration within the global and political framework. Concerning this aspect, I demonstrate the opportunity, inherent in a correct use of Cultural Diplomacy, of improving diplomacy, cooperation and international as well as national relations. The second part concerns Cultural Focal Points, that is dynamic centers of cultural preservation and reproduction, tested in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, which are considered new forms of Cultural Diplomacy. The focus is placed on their twofold objec-

tive of promoting dialogue and cooperation and of enhancing the cultural heritage of each ethnic group, by relating it to the key features of CFPs (static nature, dynamism, singularity and plurality). These demonstrate their synergic nature as sources of conflict management, Cultural Diplomacy and resilience in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, as well as in reconstruction and recovery.

Keywords

Cultural Diplomacy, cooperation strategy, Cultural Focal Points (CFPs), identity, conflict resolution.

1. Cultural Diplomacy and its evolution into an increased cooperation strategy

The expression Cultural Diplomacy refers to an extremely effective diplomacy strategy whose advantages changed over time, starting from the use of a nation's culture as source of soft power in international relations. This aspect was conducive both to cooperation with other countries and, above all, to the achievement of foreign policy objectives. A long way from remaining static, Cultural Diplomacy evolved over the years in response to the needs of the international environment. In a global framework which since 1990 has become even more hybrid, regarding both its actors and conflict resolution operations, the borders of Cultural Diplomacy extended. Going back to its original meaning,

it was originally used to refer to the processes occurring when diplomats serving national governments took recourse to cultural exchanges and flow or sought to channel them for the advancement of their perceived national interests¹.

The main players of Cultural Diplomacy in its strict traditional sense were thus the national official governmental bodies who commissioned artists in order to transmit the national interests and image abroad. This had in particular the aim of promoting good political relations. Subsequently,

the world stage has become ever more dense, with a vast range of non-governmental actors, operating both locally and globally and interacting with each other horizontally through transnational communication networks, often intersecting with or even contradicting government-defined purposes and objectives. [...] As a consequence, national governments have seen a decline

¹ Ien Ang, Yudhishtir Raj Isar and Phillip Mar, "Cultural diplomacy: beyond the national interest?" *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 21, no.4, (March 2015): 366, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1042474>.

in ‘their ability to claim the final word at home or speak exclusively for the country abroad’ (Rosenau 2003, p. 69)².

Consequently, the definition of Cultural Diplomacy acquired a wider and more comprehensive meaning, by identifying itself with the following words of Milton Cummings.

The definition of cultural diplomacy used by the American scholar Milton Cummings brings together many of these components. Cummings defines cultural diplomacy as the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding’ which ‘can also be more of a one-way street than a two-way exchange, as when one nation concentrates its efforts on promoting the national language, explaining its policies and point of view, or ‘telling its story’ to the rest of the world³.

Within the current global context, the implementation of Cultural Diplomacy incorporates, but at the same time overcomes, its original sense related to the framework of its birth. As Edmund Gullion states, already at the beginning of 1917 from 70% to 95% of the activities of USIA (*United States Information Agency*) were focused on cultural affairs. In addition, “[...] what is now called PD, from 1938 until 1946, was subordinate to cultural diplomacy and only took charge under the pressures of the undeclared Cold War, [...]”⁴. It was indeed with the Cold War that the two fields of diplomacy separated. Public Diplomacy refers to the exchange of national ideas, even through mass communication, in order to influence the public and to achieve the state objectives. “Even though the subject that practices public diplomacy was assumed to be the state agencies, the word ‘public’ was used to clarify that the publics – as opposed to foreign diplomats – were to be addressed in this new type of diplomacy agenda”⁵. Over the years, it also changed its meaning by adapting to the international context and to the new actors.

The bipolar period saw the peak of Cultural Diplomacy when the two antagonistic blocs began to use national culture to support their own foreign policy and diplomacy. Cultural Diplomacy was implemented in first by the

² *Ibid.*, 371.

³ Simon Mark, A Greater Role for Cultural Diplomacy (Den Haag: Netherlands Institute of International Relations ‘Clingendael’, 2009), 6. <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/greater-role-cultural-diplomacy>.

⁴ Richard T. Arndt, “The Hush-Hush Debate: The Cultural Foundations of U.S. Public Diplomacy” *Public Diplomacy Magazine*, Winter 2010, 19, <https://www.publicdiplomacymagazine.com/past-issues>.

⁵ Geun Lee and Kadir Ayhan, “Why Do We Need Non-state Actors in Public Diplomacy? Theoretical Discussion of Relational, Networked and Collaborative Public Diplomacy”, *Journal of International and Area Studies* 22, no.1, (2015): 59, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43490280>.

Americans through musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, and Charlie Parker with the aim of transmitting liberal and democratic values. It saw its cooperative purpose grow over the years, by taking shape in many successful acts. These are reported by the famous *Institute of Cultural Diplomacy*, of which we remember, for example, the *Fulbright Program: Foundation of the International Educational Exchange Program*, in 1946 (first international education program established by the US Senate) and the *Ping-Pong Diplomacy*, in 1971, which produced a relaxation of the Sino-American relations. And then finally came to more recent cultural diplomacy interventions, such as The Shared Value Initiative, in 2001 (which reduced stereotypes against Muslim Americans after the 9/11) and *Before they pass away*, in 2012, (with the aim to preserve cultural heritage in globalization)⁶.

By overcoming the perception of those who believed in a progressive decline of Cultural Diplomacy after the Cold War, this has blossomed since 1990 by encompassing both the national approach focused on soft power and that of an intercultural cooperation led by official and unofficial bodies. In this sense, Cultural Diplomacy emerged as rediscovered response to crisis management and security, by better identifying in the following definition used by Marco Lombardi, director of ITSTIME (Italian Team for Security, Terroristic Issues & Managing Emergencies).

Cultural Diplomacy may best be described as a course of actions, which are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation, promote national interests and beyond; Cultural diplomacy can be practiced by either the public sector, private sector or civil society⁷.

This outstanding meaning of Cultural Diplomacy emphasizes the strengthening and the improvement of socio-cultural cooperation, with a consequent political impact. Cultural Diplomacy, especially in the contemporary world, plays a crucial role in the cooperative framework, enough to be considered a new cooperation strategy in crisis and conflict areas. First of all, it encourages a cooperation which differs from the past, as it focuses not exclusively on élites, but also on local populations: “[...] a world of ‘static and traditional cultural settings’ is being replaced by one ‘where culture is also a medium between people on a mass scale’⁸. However, this does not mean that

⁶ “Historical Acts of Cultural Diplomacy”. *Academy for Cultural Diplomacy*, accessed January 9, 2019, http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/index.php?en_historical-acts-of-cd.

⁷ Marco Lombardi, “Scenari I: Nuovi scenari di cooperazione” (presentation of Post-Conflict e Gestione delle Emergenze, Università Cattolica, Milano, February 2018).

⁸ Yudhishtir Raj Isar, “Cultural Diplomacy: An Overplayed Hand?” *Public Diplomacy Magazine*, Winter 2010, 33. <https://www.publicdiplomacymagazine.com/past-issues>.

the elite-levels are abandoned entirely. With this regard, Cultural Diplomacy makes a strong connection with cooperation in order to: “[...] ensure that all cooperation programs and projects take full account of local culture and contribute to increasing people’s access to culture [...]”⁹, by contact with local populations. This leads to a necessary link between Cultural Diplomacy and cooperation, as all cooperation operations are not possible without reference to the local cultural context where they operate, considering also that culture is the first source of resilience of a people. This issue brings Cultural Diplomacy close to development cooperation assistance, that is to acts of cooperation which are non-neutral, as they do not ignore both intentionally or unintentionally the national link, and which are led by foreign actors who operate *in loco*. The last ones can be official or unofficial and they actively involve the locals, of whom the cultural, social and political context must be considered. For this reason, Cultural Diplomacy may be included in the development cooperation, as it is partly linked to national governments and to the promotion of national culture, in spite of the possibility of a certain degree of independence of the organizations and the unofficial actors. The contribution of Cultural Diplomacy consists of enhancing the cooperative and strategic importance of culture by means of cooperation between States, peoples and individuals and of the implementation of cultural and diplomatic projects in different areas. In summary, although it carries a diplomatic dimension that is missing in the traditional international cooperation, Cultural Diplomacy shares the constituent parts of the development cooperation, which are the necessary and sufficient condition for its implementation as a cooperative strategy. Therefore, Cultural Diplomacy must be better implemented from this perspective at an international level, especially considering the international conflictual atmosphere. “La Cultural Diplomacy diventa la metodologia specifica (supera la Public Diplomacy) per sviluppare cooperazione nelle aree di crisi”¹⁰. Due to the new security challenges that are specific of the contemporary hybrid context, the military power is no longer sufficient to come up with effective solutions. Also *soft solutions* are necessary to ensure the three dimensions of security, that is individual, national and international, that fall within the collective security. Therefore, the implementation of cooperation, prevention and conflict resolution needs to be revised taking into account these solutions. “In our understanding, the most viable solution in preventing conflicts and providing a real chance of world peace

⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁰ “Cultural Diplomacy becomes the specific methodology (it overcomes Public Diplomacy) to develop cooperation in crisis areas”. Marco Lombardi, “Scenari 5: Nuovi scenari e nuove forme di cooperazione. Civil-Military Cooperation e altro ancora” (presentation of Post-Conflict e Gestione delle Emergenze, Università Cattolica, Milano, February 2018).

in a globalizing world in the long term, is cultural diplomacy”¹¹. Culture, which is the constituent aspect of *Cultural Diplomacy*, is clearly part of soft solutions. *The Institute of Cultural Diplomacy* is among the major supporters of Cultural Diplomacy as a central source of reconciliation and promotion of cooperation for conflict resolution.

According to the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy (ICD), a Berlin-based NGO concerned with the promotion of global peace and stability, cultural diplomacy describes a form of peaceful and constructive intercultural dialogue aimed at fostering sustainable relationships based on understanding, and trust. The ICD further asserts that cultural diplomacy has the power to ‘reduce the likelihood of socio-cultural, political, and military conflicts’¹².

As *The Institute of Cultural Diplomacy* states, there were different actions of *Cultural Diplomacy* throughout history (many of which stated above) which favored the reduction of conflicts by including the use of different cultural and art forms, “[...] drawing attention to issues of universal concern through cultural expression to ease conflict and promote international cooperation”¹³. In addition, as Dana Pantea and Alina Stoica of the *Department of International Relations and European Studies of University of Oradea* say, *Cultural Diplomacy* has an increasing role in political, ethnic and religious conflicts because it promotes respect for the typical cultural features of groups and nations “[...] and the importance of different cultural activities in promoting peace”¹⁴. The enhancement of cultural activities in promoting peace is emphasized also by UNESCO. As *MacLeish’s UNESCO preamble* claims that: “[...] since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed”¹⁵, culture and Cultural Diplomacy perform a valuable role in shaping these ideas and therefore identities. One of the central elements of Cultural Diplomacy consists of “[...] the construction of collective identities of peace, understanding and diversity at the international level”¹⁶. As a matter of fact, according to the theory of Constructivism through Cultural Diplomacy there is no mere transfer of

¹¹ Dana Pantea and Alina Stoica, “The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Contemporary Crises and Conflict Reconciliation”, *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Stusia Europaea* 1 (Spring 2014), 220, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2536830>.

¹² Chidiogo Akunyili, “Nollywood Diplomacy”, *Public Diplomacy Magazine*, Winter 2010, 99 Winter 2010, 33, <https://www.publicdiplomacymagazine.com/past-issues>.

¹³ *Academy for Cultural Diplomacy*, “Historical Acts”.

¹⁴ Pantea and Stoica, “Cultural Diplomacy in Contemporary Crises”, 219.

¹⁵ César Villanueva Rivas, “Cosmopolitan Constructivism: Mapping a Road to the Future of Cultural and Public Diplomacy” *Public Diplomacy Magazine*, Winter 2010, 47, <https://www.publicdiplomacymagazine.com/past-issues>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

cultural principles, thus of identities, from a people to another; but a cultural cross-contamination occurs between different cultural identities, which has an impact on both and results in different collective identities. For this reason, cultural values play a pivotal role in building collective identities of peace and the UNESCO preamble is related to the theory of Constructivism. Values and cultural norms of a society affect of course the *forma mentis* of a population and consequently its approach and predisposition to conflict. In this sense, culture plays an even greater role in the promotion of peace, not only during conflict and post-conflict, but also and above all in outlining the values that will shape the collective identity of a group or society.

Given in addition the fact that, as David Clarke explains, in contemporary Cultural Diplomacy (which experiences a greater cultural globalisation) the cultural products that a nation “sends” abroad are less and less perceived by another nation unilaterally. Moreover, the way this perception occurs is rarely predictable by policy-makers, which is different from the past, where the persuasion of other nations by means of cultural soft power for asserting the national interest was stronger. The use of Cultural Diplomacy as cooperation strategy in conflicts requires an increasingly bottom-up approach, rather than a top-down one. The audience of this diplomacy turns from a passive target to an active player. Nowadays, a nation’s cultural products are perceived in a more subjective way, with an increased influence of audiences’ cultural contexts on their meaning-making process. The local context of the receiving cultural identity affects thus the way it interprets a foreign cultural identity, by enriching in addition both cultural identities, that is the sending and the receiving nation. The meeting of cultural identities may therefore facilitate cooperation and not only the achievement of the foreign targets of a single nation. Globalisation must be interpreted positively, by being able to identify the advantages of sociocultural contamination in building collective identities of peace. It is therefore necessary to interpret and implement culture and cultural activities properly considering “[...] that culture needs to be not only analysed and understood for purposes of activist conflict resolution, but rethought and re-imagined – re-engineered – as well (Avruch, 1998: 20-1)”¹⁷. Culture has to be also reinvented and interpreted in order to enhance peace-building operations and conflict resolution. The researchers of different interdisciplinary areas related to safety problems came to the conclusion that, the lack of knowledge of the other’s reasons leads to foreign policy mistakes which trigger conflicts. Repeated crises have shown that, unfortunately, punctual

¹⁷ Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse and Hugh Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The prevention, management and transformation of deadly conflicts*. Fourth Edition (Malden USA: Polity Press, 2016): 390.

preventive interventions are not sufficient and should be inserted in complex, long-term actions, which are to take into consideration the assembly of the problems [...]”¹⁸. Cultural Diplomacy plays a role in conflict resolution field as it makes it possible to identify the major risks and to draw up programmes in order to strengthen mutual confidence in areas with a high potential for conflict. In this way, it expands the democratic space, creating new relations not only between nations, but also within them.

Expanding the democratic space through cultural diplomacy will [...] replace the old type of relationship based solely on military force and economic pressure, creating democratic mechanisms for dialogue and strengthening cooperation between the political and civil society, [...]”¹⁹.

As Dana Pantea and Alina Stoica say again, the implementation of cooperation through Cultural Diplomacy is realised by increasing the trust of citizens in authority figures and by reducing the causes of conflicts through the expansion of democratic societies with a higher level of stability. Referring back to the role of culture in the determination and resolution of conflicts, there are three key elements in their outbreak and resolution: language, ethnicity and religion, that are all cultural aspects. “A clear example of the involvement of cultural diplomacy in peace negotiation is both the knowledge of the Other’s language and promoting your own language”²⁰. Cultural Diplomacy emphasizes the increasing role of culture in international relations: thanks to cultural contact it is possible to understand the reasons for cultural differences which can cause the outbreak of conflicts, by identifying consequently also common purposes. Ethnic and religious factors, that constitute the cultural dimension of security, form the basis of many contemporary conflicts by threatening national security and, in extreme cases such as terrorist attacks, even the international one. Ethnic features, language, religion and traditions determine how a social group relates to other groups. Consequently, a deep understanding of these elements through Cultural Diplomacy is necessary to prevent conflicts. “During moments of tension and conflict such as these, cultural diplomacy can emerge as an effective – and sometimes the only viable – means of communication”²¹. For this reason, Cultural Diplomacy and culture in general can solve conflicts and foster peaceful multi-ethnic coexistence. It helps therefore create a favorable environment for government

¹⁸ Pantea and Stoica, “Cultural Diplomacy in Contemporary Crises”, 220.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Cynthia P. Schneider, “Cultural Diplomacy: Hard to Define, but You’d Know It If You Saw It”, *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 13, no. 1 (Fall/ Winter 2006): 196, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24590653>.

policies by building long-term relationships. Michelle LeBaron, a distinct professor of the *University of British Columbia*, explains that the management of cultural dimension in conflicts through activities of Cultural Diplomacy is crucial to find a common ground between different cultural identities and to prevent them from sustaining stereotypes towards the other. These imply indeed negative reactions which can increase violence and start a conflict. It is thus essential to implement an environment where culture and Cultural Diplomacy activities can increase, by giving to this form of diplomacy a central role in the process of government, as it creates “[...] ‘the space where individuals can express, explore and re-imagine difficult issues’ thus bringing together people from intellectually or culturally opposed groups [...]”²². The awareness of a proper use of Cultural Diplomacy is crucial to its success in the promotion of safety and in reduction and resolution of conflicts. “The impact of culture on diplomacy raises many concerns because if a party does not have an extensive knowledge of and is not familiar with the other party’s cultural traits, one cannot expect success of the talks”²³.

In addition, the contemporary implementation of Cultural Diplomacy has to combine its international role with its increasing national importance. In a global framework where security threats are ever more characterised by the “contamination” of global aspects by local ones, and vice versa, domestic targets gain particular importance among its different objectives. These include, as Simon Mark explains, the strengthening of national identity and of social cohesion between groups and ethnic minorities. Indeed, Cultural Diplomacy can have a strong impact on cultural stereotype and on domestic policies. By placing greater value on ethnic groups within a nation, it helps to raise identity awareness and national cohesion, as well as a nation’s image abroad. As a matter of fact, Cultural Diplomacy aims to “[...] provide powerful opportunities for racial minorities, religious groups, and linguistic groups to show their culture [...]”²⁴. The valorisation of a nation’s ethnocultural richness also facilitates its economic growth, which is particularly useful to developing countries, through cultural commerce and tourism.

The focus on a domestic approach of Cultural Diplomacy is also a key issue in *peacemaking*, *peacebuilding* and *state building*. As it is clear from the analysis of approaches of contemporary conflict resolution, it is a need to listen to local traditions and to involve indigenous communities concerned.

Imposing external patterns is not effective in building lasting peace. Culture is the first source of resilience of a population and cultural rituals and

²² Pantea and Stoica, “Cultural Diplomacy in Contemporary Crises”, 226.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Institute of International Relations, Mark, *Greater Role*, 32.

traditions can be a source of peace. A good example is the kambaata culture of the Kambaata people, which live in a south-center province of Ethiopia and speak the language “kambatisa”. As the famous authors of the *The Palgrave International Handbook of Peace Studies. A Cultural Perspective* explain, peace cannot be established by political elites or built according to western standards. It requires, in the Kambaata culture as well as in other African cultures, to live in community. Even individual peace is related to the members of society to which it belongs. “Therefore, peace is not only the absence of war or a micro- or macro-sociological disagreement. It is rather a socio-political functioning of the society of the kambaata [...]”²⁵. Through cultural conventions an update of peace takes place, which is disengaged by the standardized concept adopted by politics, as the ritual function of culture is strong. Even the pacification process can be considered a kind of ritual act. The restoration of the atmosphere of peace makes it possible to remember cultural conventions. These are shown in daily acts, that evoke the solidarity of members of a cultural group. What better example of Cultural Diplomacy than this: popular culture as a source of agreements between communities that have different laws, despite living within the same nation. This popular culture allows to reach the domestic target of the enhancement of peace and social cohesion. Certainly, they are informal diplomatic agreements, but they are valid if they keep political and social peace. The example of the Kambaata culture represents the integration between peace-making and traditional cultural rituals. As a matter of fact for the Kambaata the cultural and social philosophy is very important in the peace-making process and gives the background for the subsequent reconciliation. This takes place both between two individual conflict parties and within the community²⁶.

Apart from the benefits of Cultural Diplomacy which have emerged so far, disadvantages in its practice still exist and hinder its effectivity as a cooperation and conflict-resolution strategy. Cultural Diplomacy is indeed frequently used to privilege a particular political group, often covertly, rather than to build bridges. This situation turns Cultural Diplomacy from an advantage into a disadvantage regarding conflict and crisis management, as it not only amplifies already-existing divergences, but it does not foster cooperation on the ground. Another disadvantage that may result from Cultural Diplomacy is excessive exploitation, for example in order to raise funds for repairing national damages. The problem of exploitation concerns in particular cultural activities which are used for political purposes, as it can create operational

²⁵ Josefina Echavarría Alvarez et al., *The Palgrave International Handbook of Peace Studies. A Cultural Perspective*, (Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011): 430.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 438.

disadvantages. Although Cultural Diplomacy implies, in its more traditional meaning, the use of artistic and cultural activities to support diplomacy, it is vital to maintain the necessary balance for ensuring success. More to the point, it is important to move away from the “old” idea of Cultural Diplomacy in order to encompass the contemporary one, which goes beyond the dominance of national interest in international relations. The exaggerated imposition of the national power in a more one-sided Cultural Diplomacy works against its establishment as a cooperation strategy for conflict resolution. “The reverse side of the coin of culture ‘keeping doors open’ is that cultural Institutions sometimes work in fragile political circumstances”²⁷. Mainly in unstable political situations, it is vital to maintain the delicate balance between culture and politics. It is necessary to lay down the rules of this good relationship between political purposes and the artistic and cultural activities of Cultural Diplomacy. “[...] Doing cultural work calls for a reflective ‘practice’ – a moment-to-moment awareness of the complex dynamics at play, a kind of continuous radar sweeping the room”²⁸. As Cynthia Cohen, director of the *Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts* of the *International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life* at the *Brandeis University* explains, Cultural Diplomacy also entails ethical risks, which arise from the power of nations, from their way of asserting a country’s own interests in the world and from the consequent degree of manipulating arts. Diplomatic initiatives do not often respect the principles of mutual respect, of listening and of mutuality on which Cultural Diplomacy is based. This can compromise the success of cultural activities in support of diplomacy, as the transformative power of arts depends on the respect for artistic and cultural integrity and it cannot be fully subordinate to politics. Political agencies have thus some “duties” to artistic initiatives: “these concerns suggest responsibilities for the sponsoring agencies: they should respect their autonomy, the spaces they create, and the technical requirements of their work”²⁹. The balance between political will and the nature of performances is necessary in order not to devalue the intrinsic cultural value of performance.

²⁷ Kirsten Bound et al., *Cultural Diplomacy: Culture is a Central Component of International Relations. It’s Time to Unlock Its Full Potential* (London: Demos, 2007), 62.

²⁸ Daniel Banks, “The Question of Cultural Diplomacy: Acting Ethically”, *Theatre Topics* 21, no. 2, (September 2011): 110.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

2. Cultural Focal Points as a new source of Cultural Diplomacy: beyond the national interest towards domestic reconciliation

With a view to strengthening democratic politics and home security, Cultural Diplomacy can be expressed in the innovative form of *Cultural Focal Points (CFPs)*, dynamic centres of cultural enhancement that were piloted in Ethiopia in three different locations: *Cunama Cultural Focal Point* (in the town of Shiraro), *Irob Cultural Focal Point* (in the city of Dirē Dawa) and *Alitena Cultural Focal Point* (in Alitena). They facilitate the peaceful coexistence between different ethnic groups within the same nation. In order to unlock the full potential of these sources of Cultural Diplomacy, as well as of Cultural Diplomacy as a whole, the practical changes mentioned above need to be implemented for achieving the best results. For the understanding of the specific application of Cultural Focal Points as tools of Cultural Diplomacy, it is first necessary to clarify their definition:

Cultural Focal Points (CFP): insieme di raccolte rappresentative della cultura materiale e immateriale di una specifica comunità locale e di attività di riproduzione della cultura locale, affinché diventino motori propulsori di iniziative di scambio culturale, promozione del dialogo e della conoscenza reciproca tra le varie realtà etniche coinvolte³⁰.

Cultural Focal Points (CFPs) are cultural sources with a twofold objective: promoting dialogue, cooperation and reconciliation, in crisis situations and post-conflict, between different ethnic communities; enhancing the cultural heritage of each group by raising the awareness and the value of its cultural traditions as means of promoting peace. The aims of CFPs are closely linked, as, by creating fully-fledged centers of revitalization of cultural features, communities develop a “dialogue between cultures” that strengthen or create relations which are difficult to establish only with political or diplomatic means. On one side, CFPs exceed the traditional Cultural Diplomacy, by implementing its contemporary version which adapts to the demands of globalisation: local communities (and not governments) are the main actors in promoting peace. On the other side, CFPs may at the same time discover their function of useful resources for a Cultural Diplomacy connected with

³⁰ “Cultural Focal Points (CFPs): set of both representative collections of material and immaterial culture of a particular local community and of reproduction activities of local cultures, with the aim of promoting initiatives of cultural exchange, dialogue and mutual understanding between the different ethnic realities involved”. Marco Lombardi and Barbara Lucini, “Cooperazione e Cultural Diplomacy: resilienza e cultural focal points”, ITSTIME, January 9, 2019 <http://www.itstime.it/w/cooperazione-e-cultural-diplomacy-resilienza-e-cultural-focal-points-by-marco-lombardi-e-barbara-lucini/>.

the governmental field. As a matter of fact, they facilitate a good governance of diversities by reaching a common ground that helps mediation. Not only do these contributions therefore enable the Ethiopian Government to better manage the high level of Ethiopian multiethnicity (by providing each community with an area of expression), but they will also facilitate the knowledge of socio-cultural reality by foreign governmental and non-governmental bodies, who need to operate on foreign territory. Indeed, it is not possible to know a social context only from a political point of view. Only by understanding cultural traditions connected with local politics, various bodies (from embassies to peacekeeping and peacebuilding operators and cooperation agents) may act efficiently also in a governmental way.

With this regard, they give the opportunity for a future Cultural Diplomacy within the nation between government bodies of the Ethiopian federalism and some of the numerous local ethnic communities. As a matter of fact, they can help the political activities by facilitating the mediation with ethnic groups through the exchange of different cultural values and traditions. They are about a new Cultural Diplomacy, which is two-way, keeping governmental actors, but making local communities the main players. Finally, this form of Cultural Diplomacy gives priority to the far more important domestic situation, which is crucial especially for Ethiopia, rather than to the national image abroad. This perspective is a hypothesis of possible future development of the role of CFPs and justifies their value as multifaceted strategies of Cultural Diplomacy. CFPs thus embody one of the main necessary strategic changes in the contemporary context, in order to enable cooperation to overcome its traditional implementation and to achieve more effective long-term results. With a focus on the cohabitation of different ethnic identities, Cultural Focal Points foster socio-cultural and political cooperation. They are both concrete centres and strategies, as their features make them a synergic resource of crisis management (in particular of resilience) and of Cultural Diplomacy, which realises this strategic innovation effectively. This synergy is moreover represented by the main features of Cultural Focal Points. The static nature, the dynamism, the singularity and the plurality characterize them like an oxymoron, by showing, in their different aspects, the role of Cultural Focal Points as new cooperation strategies for the management of conflicts. Specifically, it is about static cultural tools as they represent cultural objects and processes like museums; but at the same time, it is also about dynamic centres because they encourage the social meeting by teaching the ethnic communities how to replicate and to make “live” handed down cultural traditions. The artifacts and the cultural practices which are represented may indeed not be an end in themselves, but they are the precondition for the meeting and knowledge of culture, including, possibly, by the other ethnic group. In this sense, CFPs

can be considered innovative “peace museums”, the role of which can be interpreted as static and at the same time dynamic. Dynamism lies in the promotion of peace through cultural activities. “Cultural activities are very important in building relationships between countries that have previously been involved in conflicts”³¹. In particular, the work of CFPs comes close to that of peace museums as, through the enhancement of cultural traditions of each ethnic group, they enable the rediscovered ability of culture to mediate. This creates a network of pacific cohabitation of diversities. Due to the rediscovered function of culture, each community can develop ways of promoting peace, without having to totally align itself with the others, and it can deeply understand the value of culture.

Peace museums provide spaces in which use is made of art and other media to present and project the values of peace and conflict resolution. Carol Rank has described in more concrete terms what peace museums worldwide actually do, particularly where they preserve and present the material of peace culture (art and artefacts) in programmes where art and history are utilized to advance peace and conflict resolution education. She points to the range of visual and performing arts [...] and reiterates the idea that ‘the power of the arts lies in their emotive nature: the arts can help people feel the pathos and waste of war and help instil a desire and commitment to end war and work for peace’ (Anzai et al., 2008:15)³².

In this sense, it is also possible to increase the dynamism of CFPs in their important function of “social reproduction of culture”: if they tried to use more performing and visual arts with a more vivid representation of ethnic cultural traditions, with the aim of enhancing particular issues, conflict resolution and peace education would be improved. The contribution of the static nature and soundness of CFPs to their value of cooperation strategies for conflict resolution lies in their fundamental activity of preservation of the cultural heritage, especially in areas of violent conflict. This first feature of CFPs enables cultural identities of warring parties to be preserved, allowing them to reach an agreement at the end of conflict easier. In case of destruction of the cultural heritage, its rebuilding is crucial to enhance reconciliation and peacebuilding. This issue is also related to the contribution made by the dynamism of CFPs. It encompasses, by extension, also the functions of promoting peace, enhancing resilience and, consequently, of facilitating not only the prevention and resolution of conflicts, but also the reconstruction and recovery activities in the post-conflict.

³¹ Pantea and Stoica, “Cultural Diplomacy in Contemporary Crises”, 227.

³² Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, 407.

In 2015, with the adoption of the 17 *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), culture was introduced for the first time in the global framework as a key element in peacebuilding and post-conflict operations. Moreover, *Strategy for the Reinforcement of UNESCO's Action for the Protection of Culture and the Promotion of Cultural Pluralism in the Event of Armed Conflict* (2015) promoted an approach to cultural sensitivity as response to crises. In particular this strategy, pertaining to the function of CFPs, highlights the role of cultural pluralism “[...] in post-conflict and post-disaster settings”³³ and the need for cooperation between cultural players, local communities and political bodies who are out of the cultural field (Eg: *peacebuilding actors*). The cultural dimension has thus acquired an increasing importance in the reduction of conflicts, in reconciliation, in reconstruction and in the community development, as stated in *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

Intangible cultural heritage consists of practices, representations, expressions, skills, and traditional knowledge and management systems recognized by communities as part of their cultural heritage and transmitted from generation to generation. Although rarely considered, intangible cultural heritage is particularly important in recovery and reconstruction processes for its power in rebuilding the social fabric as well as for effectively maintaining and managing cultural diversity, fostering intercultural dialogue, and enabling the effective monitoring of cultural change in post-conflict situations³⁴.

In this way, Cultural Focal Points, according to a syllogism, also bear a central responsibility and especially for post-conflict operations and the recovery of a community. Due to CFPs, the intangible cultural heritage is indeed preserved, enhanced and passed down as a major resource of resilience. In view of these considerations, the focus of conflicts on the destruction of cultural heritage, as in the case of Ethiopia, is even more understandable. As a matter of fact, by eliminating it, the capacity for a people's resilience to react against a conflict is severely affected. “Similar targeted acts of destruction are undertaken to erase cultural diversity and pluralism and to deny victims their cultural rights and fundamental freedoms”³⁵. Cultural Focal Points, as opposing forces to this trend, enhance cultural backgrounds which are still intact or threatened with destruction and rebuild what, on the contrary, has

³³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] and The World Bank Group, *Culture in City Reconstruction and Recovery*, Report Number 131856 (Washington D.C., 2018): 20, available from <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/708271541534427317/Culture-in-City-Reconstruction-and-Recovery>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

been already damaged. They undertake therefore a kind of reconstruction of the societies stricken by conflicts. With this regard, CFPs are “cultural industries”, as they preserve cultural tangible and intangible goods through their production and distribution between and outside the respective ethnic groups, to which they belong. Right through the building and rebuilding of “cultural indicators” (locations and cultural sites which are important reference points for the different communities) the process of reconciliation starts, as stated in the second principle of CURE *Framework (Culture in City Reconstruction and Recovery)* and as quoted also in the next one: “Principle 3. Fostering cultural expressions to offer appropriate ways to deal with post-crisis trauma and reconcile affected communities”³⁶. The matter of reconciliation is crucial not only for the recovery of an area or region, but also for the increased effectiveness in the efforts. As a matter of fact, through the revitalization of different cultural heritage and sites, CFPs realise the possibility of cohabitation between various ethnic groups which promote reconciliation. And not only that, the reconciliation between communities is itself a source of recovery as it makes possible the dialogue and the sharing of resilience strategies in order to emerge from the crisis. This improves community resilience, since each group develops different methods of resilience according to its own cultural background and which complement each other.

Hence the link with the feature of plurality of Cultural Focal Points, which demonstrates, by its very definition, their cooperation function in the conflict resolution field. They are indeed plural, because they allow cultural identities, although they possess a great value on their own, to rediscover even more so their sense in mutual dialogue. “[...] perché ogni cultura si ritrova nella relazione necessaria con gli altri nodi (culture) della rete, mantenendo reciproche relazioni funzionali”³⁷. In this regard CFPs, foster mutual knowledge of the communities and reduce prejudice and hostility towards the other ethnic groups, by enhancing the different “cultural nodes” of the network as sources of plural and substantive answers in way based on dialogue and harmony. The knowledge, on the part of an ethnic group, of their own abilities and of the richness of differences increases the awareness of resources and reduces stereotypes as factors of vulnerability in conflicts. A necessary prerequisite for the peaceful coexistence is indeed the elimination of stereotypes, which are sources of deformed and distorting pictures of others: by consolidating them the relationship between different identities evolves into fear, rejection and

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁷ “[...] because each culture is in a necessary relationship with the other nodes (cultures) of the network, by maintaining mutual functional relations”. Lombardi and Lucini, “Cooperazione e Cultural Diplomacy”.

often violence and conflict. Even more in contemporary conflicts, which are characterized by “hybridisation”, difficulties in identifying the causes and by an even greater interethnic violence, resilience increases its strategic role in the management of diversities. This is a key function also of Cultural Diplomacy, of which CFPs constitute precisely an innovative form in promoting non conflicting paths to conflict resolution.

Local communities are therefore directly involved in a project of mutual dialogue, both because their ethnic and cultural practices are the protagonists and because they make a physical space available for the realization of Cultural Focal Points.

The project aims to promote culture as a tool of development and empowerment of local ethnic minorities and a means to support peace, dialogue and solidarity between different communities in Tigray region. Taking inspiration from the Ethiopian motto ‘Unity in diversity is our strength’, the project wants to preserve and enhance the cultural heritage of the ethnic minorities and foster cooperation between them³⁸.

In this regard, the contribution of CFPs to the local communities of Ethiopia should be clarified in relation to their inclusion in the global system and in the conflict revolution. Globalisation clearly led to a change in the nature of conflicts and wars and to a demand in homologation of differences. This last point is a pretension, and not an inevitable consequence or a synonymous of globalization. The wrong myth of globalization as standardisation must be thus disproved, by interpreting the different “nodes” which constitute it as unique ones, since they express different relational bonds and identities. Globalization is misinterpreted as homogenization if we do not adopt a constructive and evolutive vision. “[...] la chiave di accesso sono le relazioni, che devono essere in grado di gestire le differenze tra i nodi: [...] i processi relazionali sono gli ‘elastici’ culturali e politici che permettono la forma reticolare delle diversità”³⁹. These nodes together form thus the global network of diversities, each of which must be valued by drawing on local cultures to develop cultural diplomacy, resilience and cooperation strategies.

Cultural Focal Points contribute significantly to the valorization of the nodes thanks to their last feature, that is singularity. They are singular in the plural network as they highlight the ethnic peculiarities of each community,

³⁸ Marco Lombardi, “Scenari 6: Civil Military Cooperation e altro ancora. Progetto in Etiopia” (presentation of Post-Conflict e Gestione delle Emergenze, Università Cattolica, Milano, March 2018).

³⁹ “[...] the access key concerns the relations, which have to be able to manage the differences between the nodes: [...] the relational processes are the cultural and political “rubber band” which allow the reticular shape of diversities”. Lombardi and Lucini, “Cooperazione e Cultural Diplomacy”.

by expressing the uniqueness of each identity within the collectivity which is Ethiopia. This characteristic, too, demonstrates the support of CFPs to conflict resolution, since their singularity is related to the space of representation which they give to a specific ethnic identity and which integrate the deficit of politics, as in the case of the Ethiopian Federalism. As a matter of fact, as Lahra Smith states, in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, which was proclaimed in 1995, although the ethnic federalism and the new cultural and language policies represent a success, there are still conflicts both between ethnic communities and against the central government. The federal policy, even if it had appeared attractive to the different communities with its defense proposal of ethnic rights, generated disagreements and conflicts about how this proposal should be implemented by the government in the best way. Within the proposal of guaranteeing the political representation of each ethnic citizenship, there are indeed different valid possibilities and concepts of political expression, which concern not only the different regions of Ethiopia, but also the ethnic groups within a single area. If the democratic governmental approach is limited in guaranteeing the multiple ethnic necessities and if an ethnic federalism is not enough to solve the numerous problems of expression of identities within the local governments, that means that additional resources should be implemented in order to value the different ethnic identities. Cultural Focal Points are a concrete and successful answer to this situation, as they express each ethnic individuality (due to their feature of singularity) by maintain harmony with the multi-ethnic collectivity (due to their feature of plurality).

Where politics is inadequate, in spite of its positive efforts, cultural activities step in to support and integrate it, by keeping their enriching independence. This is the same conception which is present in Cultural Diplomacy and in the use of culture for peacebuilding operations. In this regard, Cultural Diplomacy has found application also in the work of some NGOs, which have promoted the valorization of traditional cultural activities with the aim of integrating and improving the political work. The integration derived from Cultural Diplomacy and from CFPs acquires an added value when the political regime does not guarantee the minimum protection of ethnic diversities, differently from what happens in the current Ethiopian situation.

3. Conclusion

What I would propose in light of the above is that policy makers, but also non-governmental actors and civil and local communities, need to deeply take into consideration Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Focal Points by changing their international perspective. Although the state-centered appro-

ach has already been abandoned, this is not enough to guarantee a better security. Even the multilateral peace operations alone, despite of representing a great achievement, are insufficient to reach the best results. For this reason, a parallel integration in the field of diplomacy and a joint effort of cultural, political and peace operations are crucial to a significant improvement of national and international security. The future concerns an increase in hybrid attacks and in natural disasters, which are also deeply connected to crises and conflicts. Local peoples, civilians and ethnic identities are the resources, as well as the potential threats, of the future. The positive option depends on the improvement of the political and social system from its basis, through the integrative power of local cultural resources and of cultural education and by creating the mentioned collective identities of peace. In this regard, joined cultural and political operations should be a key to improve the future of conflict management and resolution, as well as of cooperation. In particular, the following points should be implemented:

- Cultural Diplomacy in conflict and post-conflict areas, in domestic reconciliation and in recovery, by going beyond the national interest;
- programs of resilience and peace education, through the awareness-raising of communities especially within critical areas;
- the development of Cultural Focal Points in other countries, with the prospect of a better integration of the government work in order to guarantee the rights of minorities;
- the encouragement of an increasing active participation of cultural institutions in political programs and in diplomacy.

In conclusion, Cultural Focal Points and Cultural Diplomacy have a great integrative responsibility, which is applicable to different difficult political and social situations. Their effectiveness specifically lies in the additional contribution which derives from their synergic and multidisciplinary nature. The value of Cultural Diplomacy and of CFPs can be therefore summed up in the following meaningful metaphor:

Each culture brings about its impact upon the whole world and if we want the world to be a space of peace we should share Michelle LeBaron's view: every culture is like the member of an orchestra; an individual player, but together they make great music, so culture could make a great world⁴⁰.

⁴⁰ Pantea and Stoica, "Cultural Diplomacy in Contemporary Crises", 228.

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