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Mapping and searching for a theory and concept of library diplomacy

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Introduction. This theoretical paper presents an exploration of how the concept and theory of library diplomacy is portrayed and presented in the library and information science (LIS) and international relations (IR) context. The paper also aims to address research gaps and position library diplomacy in today's 21st-century international environment.
Method. To illustrate how library diplomacy is theorized and conceptualized, a literature review analysis is used to search for theories, concepts, and frameworks to look at the state of knowledge about the term "library diplomacy" and this paper also described the literature using a conceptual framework on the dimensions of library diplomacy.
Analysis. Through reviewing several diverse scholarships on library diplomacy in the LIS and IR context, a selection of theories, concepts, and frameworks were identified. The analysis provided guidance to the trajectory of literature related to the concept and theory of library diplomacy.
Results. Library diplomacy is characterized with a few LIS and IR theories including, realism, liberalism, soft power, constructivism, and the international librarianship as a practice theory. A conceptual framework of library diplomacy dimensions including (1) Libraries in diplomacy; (2) Diplomacy for libraries; and (3) Libraries for diplomacy, is identified to better understand the practices, policies and processes linked to library diplomacy.
Conclusions. There are many fragmented scholarships related to library diplomacy but only few attempted to explore the concept and theory. A grounded and empirical study is needed for better understanding of library diplomacy´s related theories and concepts presented in this study.

Introduction

Library diplomacy is a relatively new term associated with vast scholarship in the field of library and information science (LIS) and the international relations (IR). Libraries have long been contributing as platforms for international diplomacy to advance policies, build relationships and address issues in the international system (Mariano and Vårheim, [2021](#)). However, looking into the fragmented literature, the term remains underexplored despite being deeply rooted in the history of libraries, information, global politics, and international relations.

Many of the global challenges we face in the 21st-century, from information warfare and disorder such as disinformation and fake news to equal access and universal rights to information and education, have LIS and IR dimensions. No nation-state and standalone institution can address these issues and solve these global information challenges alone. Thus, international diplomacy, global cooperation, and partnership are needed and must be adapted and bolstered more than ever to address real-world issues affecting libraries, information institutions, and knowledge societies. Few studies in the distant past, particularly research that talks about wars and crises, discuss the role and linkage between libraries and cultural diplomacy in building relationships and negotiating policies to advance peace and cooperation during the World War 2 and the Cold War periods (Line, [2003](#); Maack, [2001](#); Richards, [2001](#); Robbins, [2007](#)). Although these historical studies are essential, Line ([2003](#)) pointed out that this historical research does not reflect the contemporary discourses on libraries and diplomacy.

In a recent study on the nexus between Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museum (GLAM) institutions and diplomacy, Bell (2022) stressed the neglect and dearth of structured discourse about libraries and diplomacy and how libraries contribute as soft power assets in globalized information environments. In comparison to the growing research attention and efforts of museum studies scholars in conceptualizing and theorizing museum diplomacy, especially in the 21st century (Cai, 2013; Clarke, Bull, and Deganutti, 2017; Eggeling, 2017; Grincheva, 2013, 2015, 2019; Hoogwaerts, 2012), there is still no trace of distinct theoretical discussions focusing on library diplomacy in peer-reviewed journals and books. Indeed, there is a need for LIS scholars to dig deeper into the literature revolving around library diplomacy as a concept and practice to address the theoretical gaps and explore future research possibilities.

The research objectives and goals of this theoretical paper are to answer the following:

1. To present key concepts and definitions;
2. To present theoretical lenses and;
3. To illustrate a conceptual proposition and address research gaps on library diplomacy.

Methods

This paper reviewed the diverse and vast literature and searched for a concept of *library diplomacy* in the fields of LIS and IR contexts available in peer reviewed books and journals. The author analysed the literature by presenting and identifying key theories and concepts and proposed a conceptual framework for the dimensions of library diplomacy to better understand the phenomena.

Key definitions

Diplomacy. In the foundational sense of international relations, the term *diplomacy* is linked to the ontological stance coming from the ancient Greek word *diploma*, which means a double folded document containing the official agreements, decisions to create understanding and seek representation with neighbouring ancient states and territories. Modern diplomacy has evolved and is institutionalized as the main instrument for communication, negotiating policies, and forming bilateral and multilateral treaties, rules, and agreements. Statecraft diplomacy's primary goal is to maintain peace and avoid war and conflict among nation-states in the international system (Berridge, 2015; Bjola and Kornprobst, 2013). Diplomacy is a mechanism to facilitate the balance of power to negotiate goals and values to achieve understanding in the international system (Bjola and Kornprobst, 2013; Bull, 2012; Nye, 2004).

Cultural Diplomacy. The term cultural diplomacy is defined as *"the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs and other aspects of culture, to foster mutual understanding"* (Cummings, 2003). Cultural diplomacy is associated with the umbrella term of public diplomacy (Cull, 2008), with cultural propaganda (Fayet, 2010; Gienow-Hecht, 2010), and cross-cultural relations (Gienow-Hecht and Donfried, 2010). In cultural diplomacy, publications, motion pictures, cultural exchanges, and radio and television (US Department of State Library, 1987) and new media, social media, and web-based communication technology are the main instruments to promote national cultural interest abroad (US Department of State, 2021). Most researchers adhere that cultural diplomacy is more often linked to diplomatic strategies in achieving the government's foreign policy goals (Gienow-Hecht and Donfried, 2010; Grincheva, 2015). However, Melissen (2005) argued that cultural diplomacy needs to move away from state-centric public diplomacy and suggested the term "new public diplomacy," which represents the holistic practice involving interconnected networks of civil society and non-governmental organizations that are essential actors in creating dialogue and engagement in the international environment.

Library. The term library derives from the Latin word *liber*, which means a *book*, and in Greek and Romance languages, bibliotheca, which refers to the collection of document resources of print and non-print materials, including digital materials. The library is organized by librarians and information professionals who provide physical, digital, bibliographic, or intellectual access and offer targeted services and programmes with a mission of educating, informing, or entertaining a variety of audiences and the goal of stimulating individual learning and advancing society as a whole (Eberhart, 2010). From ancient, monastic, and renaissance humanism to the creation of universities and the emergence of national institutions, libraries assist in the community's daily life and cooperate side-by-side with leaders, scientists, educators, and philosophers to advance knowledge and education. Libraries are essential agencies that serve as memory institutions and repositories for cultural heritage (Luke and Kersel, 2013; Rubin, 2016). Libraries play an influential role as complex and multi-purpose social institutions and have been described and studied as information hubs, social meeting places (Aabø, Audunson, and Vårheim, 2010), community centres (Freeman and Blomley, 2019), and public sphere institutions (Audunson et al., 2019; Larsen, 2020; Vårheim, Skare, and Lenstra, 2019). The American Library Association (ALA) (2006) Library Bill of Rights illustrates the critical aspect of universal rights to freedom of expression and democratic ideals as foundations of libraries in development and enlightenment.

Libraries and diplomacy: in search of a definition

Library diplomacy has brought libraries to the forefront of connecting people to books, knowledge, and information in the international environments. Laugesen (2019) used the term *library diplomacy* to explain the efforts of the civil society organizations, including the ALA, International Federation of Library Association (IFLA), and UNESCO, to advance librarianship and international library development via professional connections such as library exchanges, study tours, seminars and conferences, volunteer programmes and library visits. Wedgeworth (1998) has further utilized the term library diplomacy to illustrate ALAs efforts to coordinate international library work alongside government diplomacy. Prieto-Gutierrez (2015) characterized the conception of library diplomacy using the term "world libraries" to characterize the function of libraries as diplomatic instruments for cultural diplomacy. He found out that around 3,745 global cultural centres actively promote cultural relations and cultural-political dialogue with counterpart national cultural agencies abroad. The Alliance de Français (1907); the Italian Cultural Centre (1926); American Spaces, formerly known as the US Information Agency (1927); the British Council (1934); the Indian Cultural Centre (1950); Germany's Goethe-Institut (1951); the Japan Foundation (1972); and Spain's Instituto Cervantes (1991) have been present on the library diplomacy scene in the last century. In recent years, the People's Republic of China's Confucius Institute and Classrooms (2004), the Russian Centre for Science and

Culture (2008), and the Korean Cultural Centre (2009) have entered the 21-century diplomacy, building cultural and innovation connections via state and non-state actor relationships.

The intersection between libraries and diplomacy can be noticed particularly with the promotion of books, print, and informational materials globally (Cavell, 2009; Dalton, 2007; Laugesen, 2010; Maack, 2001; Makinen, 2001; Mokia, 1995; Morinaka, 2019; Prieto, 2013; Richards, 2001), the utilization of language and cultural programmes (Glant, 2016; Guth, 2008; Laugesen, 2010; Maack, 2001; Mokia, 1995; Morinaka, 2019; Prieto Gutierrez and Segado Boj, 2016; Robbins, 2007) and advocating for literacy and educational programmes to use libraries and library programmeme for peace and understanding. (Prieto Gutierrez and Segado Boj, 2016; Richards, 2001). Libraries serve as purveyors for facilitating intercultural dialogue, cultural exchange, and multilateral cooperation at the local, national and international levels (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2012).

Theoretical lenses on library diplomacy

This section presents prevailing theoretical lenses in international relations and library and information science about libraries and diplomacy.

Realism and liberalism

In the context of international relations, library diplomacy can be rooted in the epistemological inquiry of two leading international relations theories of realism (Miller, 2019) and liberalism (Courtland, Gaus, and Schmidtz, 2022), particularly in the height of war crisis such as the World War 2 and the Cold War. Realists like Hans Morgenthau described that

> "politics is a struggle for power over men, and whatever its ultimate aim may be, power is its immediate goal and the modes of acquiring, maintaining and demonstrating it to determine the technique of political actions." (Morgenthau, 1993).

Realists believe that international relations' structural and architectural system causes states to compete and behave aggressively to obtain economic and political power because they view the system as in nature with no higher authority that mediates the international environment. Therefore, states need to seek and maximize material power like the economic and military capability for national interest, security, and dominance in the international order (Jackson, 2010; Waltz, 2010).

Likewise, liberalists claim that the system is anarchic and a self-help environment; however, states can create international systems, processes, and rules to maintain peace and cooperation (Berridge, 2015; Courtland et al., 2022) and avoid aggression and conflict among nations through democratic ideals and cooperation (Jackson, 2010; Keohane and Nye, 2012). Keohane and Nye (2012), two of the top neo-liberalists, described that government and non-government should exist interdependent by using diplomacy to enable international cooperation. The realists and liberalists´ perspective is connected with the instrumentalization of libraries, knowledge, and information as tools to obtain economic, political, and cultural power and at the same time advance peace and cooperation in the international system. In the 1960s, American books and the publishing industries increased exponentially as an economic and cultural instrument of the US, particularly in developing countries with limited access to books (Makinen, 2001). The US government spearheaded the promotion of books as tools to disseminate ideas and information and bridge peace and understanding across the world. The US national policy on international books and library activities (NPIBLA) influenced the dissemination of American books and literary materials, introduced reading habits to children, and provided educational materials for teachers in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Latin American regions. Books brought hope, enlightenment, and stability to countries devastated after the second world war (Laugesen, 2010; Mokia, 1995; Morinaka, 2019). Under the Iron curtain, Finland and Hungary welcomed American books to public and academic libraries and worked with US agencies to open USIA libraries and readings rooms to symbolize harmony and friendship (Glant, 2016; Makinen, 2001). The Benjamin Franklin Book Aid, a quasi-governmental programmeme with agencies including the Peace Corps, ALA, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), has disseminated American books to advance liberal and universal rights to information access and promote literacy, freedom of expression in developing nations. Alongside the book collection, the United States Information Agency built and franchised modern and state of the art reading rooms, library technology, and machine-readable cataloguing system (MARC) technology to advance American librarianship and technologies abroad (Maack, 2001; Richards, 2001). The Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 facilitated library training and exchanges to introduce and promote the concept of the American public library model and technologies (Laugesen, 2010). While the Soviet Union has also fostered library training, and exchanges and emphasized the importance of Soviet librarianship to manage and organize Soviet allied libraries and cultural centres (Richards, 2001). France and Great Britain have united their footsteps with the US in their western librarianship campaign in the European region. Alliance de Francaise, one of the oldest private non-profit cultural agencies, disseminated books and literature in public and academic libraries and equipped the centres with language training, particularly in the Francophone region. The British Council engaged in similar cultural efforts to emphasize and educate librarians in library programmeming, instruction, and access (Maack, 2001). The Western and Soviet institutions have influenced the cultural, technological, economic, and scientific development to win countries' and institutions' hearts and minds, especially during the Cold War. Some scholars have depicted the era of cold war librarianship as a race for better libraries, library practices, and librarianship in the international arena. Although the aim was to advance international library development, the cold war librarianship strategies confronted challenges regarding issues of cultural propaganda and hegemonic relationships, specifically with the global south and developing regions (Dalton, 2007; Laugesen, 2019; Maack, 2001; Prieto, 2013).

Soft Power

In the LIS context, libraries have both implicitly and explicitly connected with the concept of soft power diplomacy (Bell, 2022). Soft power is the ability to shape preferences and employing a voluntaristic approach to attract and co-opt to obtain outcomes one wants in the international system (Nye, 2004, 2011, 2021). Libraries can serve as a platform for state and non-state actors to engender attractive culture, values, ideals, and policies to foster cooperation and not coercive action. One of the attractive elements libraries have is their advocacy of universalistic and shared values such as democratic ideals, education, freedom of speech, equality, social justice, and

human rights, which reflects the core values of librarianship (Laugesen, 2019; Richards, 2001; Robbins, 2007; Snow and Cull, 2020). Bell (2022) advanced the concept of soft power discourse by finding out that national libraries' projected national cultural identity and cultural knowledge are through soft power assets and resources.

Constructivism

Constructivism developed as a result of the dearth of better understanding of the actors and structures in the international system using the traditional theories of realism and liberalism. Constructivists believe that the international system is constructed by social interaction by which identities and practices are created (Jackson, 2010). Alexander Wendt debunked the idea of realism and liberalism that the self-help environment and competing actors construct the international system through material forces such as military and economic power. On the contrary, the international system is shaped and determined primarily by the social actors' ideas, norms, values, and beliefs, particularly by the non-state actors interacting in the international. Cosmopolitan constructivists aimed for multilateral cooperation of diverse actors in shaping arena (Wendt, 1992). Villanueva (2018) furthered the conception of cosmopolitan constructivism, which refers to the intersubjective construction of cosmopolitan and shared ideas, norms, and identities that help create understanding and relationship (Jackson, 2010; Villanueva, 2018). In the LIS context, the theory of cosmopolitan liberal progressivism is used to describe the efforts of UNESCO's library internationalism in bringing the world together with libraries and library programmes for shared and common ideals of peace and united by books and information to put forward modernization and development (Laugesen, 2019). Witt (2014) also argued that the case of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP) and the American Library Association's programme for the Paris Library School positioned the library profession towards the ambition to advance librarianship using library internationalism.

International librarianship as a practice theory

International librarianship in theory and practice is described as a summation of interdisciplinary studies and practices between libraries, information and knowledge and the advent of globalization, and variations of ideas about international political economy, world information flow, innovation and policy transfer, development, aid, and influence (Lor, 2008, 2019). International practices are patterns of socially organized activities and processes of doing something as a form of meaningful performance and competent action in the international system. With intersections of LIS and IR theories in diplomacy, international librarianship can be associated with the so-called practice theory (Adler and Pouliot, 2011). Few LIS practitioners like Stueart (2007) presented international librarianship as a practical guide for librarians to think internationally to address the diverse needs of the community by offering various opportunities for international connections with the international library associations, local and state library associations, governmental and non-governmental organizations, national libraries, and information policy institutions. Bordonaro (2017) highlighted the essence of international librarianship in bringing in everyday practices to enrich librarians' work by employing learning from diverse perspectives at home and abroad. LIS scholars like Constantinou et al. (2017) compiled a series of case studies and global insights from LIS professionals by bringing forward international development, intercultural and educational opportunities, and challenges for international librarianship. Some earlier works of Krzys et al. (1983) described comparative and world librarianship as a means for librarians to understand practices, systems, and development in countries and institutions beyond their national boundaries. Another essential concept is the term global librarianship. Kesselman and Weintraub (2004) described the function of libraries in collecting, organizing, and disseminating information in the global community. They underscored the importance of library collaboration and dialogue across nations and institutions to address social issues about literacy, access to information, preservation of cultural heritage, and economic development that affect libraries and library development globally.

Dimensions of library diplomacy

In 2010, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and the Royal Society saw the crucial role of science and scientific practices concerning international diplomacy, global policies, and international processes. Therefore, they positioned science at the heart of the international system by conceptualizing the three dimensions of science diplomacy (The Royal Society and American Association for the Advancement of Science, 2010), namely:

Science in diplomacy:
Science can inform international policies and diplomatic decisions, and agreements with scientific advice

Diplomacy for science:
Diplomacy that facilitates international cooperation to advance scientific goals and cooperation.

Science for diplomacy:
Using scientific interaction and programmes to improve international relations by engaging countries to reinforce relationships and ease tensions in a situation of political strain.

Parallel to the science diplomacy conceptual framework, this paper argues that similar viewpoints can be practiced and applied to study library diplomacy's changing trajectories and roles in international environments. Therefore, "libraries in diplomacy," "diplomacy for libraries," and "libraries for diplomacy" must be further investigated and explored. This theoretical paper operationally defines "library diplomacy" as a strategy to engage countries and institutions in libraries and library programmes and services to build relationships, reinforce partnerships, influence international policies affecting libraries, and advance librarianship globally. In studying library diplomacy, it is crucial to look at and explore the library's foundational elements and processes, including (1) the material – resources, collection, both physical and digital formats; (2) the institution -- public, academic, special, and school libraries; (3) the processes -- acquisition, organization, dissemination, access, and preservation; (4) the policies and standards; (5) the community -- actors and audiences and the (6) the library profession and its core values (Buschman and Leckie, 2007; Rubin, 2016).

Libraries in diplomacy

The concept of libraries in diplomacy refers to the library actors, including an individual librarian or a group of librarians, information professionals, library leaders, and advocates' involvement in foreign diplomatic policies and international processes in influencing standards and global policy actions.

- IFLA, as the global voice for the library profession, impacts and contributes to the UNESCO's Public Library Manifesto ratified in 1994 and the recent IFLA's involvement in the UN 2030 Policy Agenda by supporting the integrated framework of the 17 sustainable development goals and influencing the UN to put libraries at the forefront of these global goals and policy actions (International Federation of Library Associations, 1994, 2018).
- ALA's involvement in the International Copyright Law concerns the library community. The ALA Policy Corp informs and advises the Office of the US Trade Representatives and the members of the US Congress on issues of fair use and copyright policies affecting the library community. The US government and other agencies negotiate these policies with the World Intellectual Property Organization through conventions, agreements, and treatises (American Library Association, 2020).
- The delegation of library diplomats at the US Department of State, particularly the Regional Public Engagement Specialists (formerly known as Information Resource Officers), create an opportunity to integrate policies, processes, and programmes focusing on libraries and cultural centres into US foreign policy mission goals and objectives which help develop stronger linkages with other countries (Office of American Spaces, 2022b).

Diplomacy for libraries

The concept of diplomacy for libraries happens when library actors and stakeholders, including cooperation between countries to countries, institutions to institutions, and countries to institutions vice versa work together to advance libraries, librarianship, and library cooperation.

- The ALA and Guadalajara Book Fair is a collaborative effort of American and Mexican librarians working together to support the development of Spanish-language collections in all types of libraries in the Americas and partnership led to sister library network programmes, library exchanges and training opportunities (American Library Association, 1999, 2007; Topper, 2007).
- The AUNILO, or the Libraries of ASEAN University Network, working collaboratively with the ASEAN member states to encourage resource sharing and digital collection cooperation among the university libraries in the ASEAN region (Libraries of ASEAN University Network, 2008).
- The 2022 Saving Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Online (SUCHO), a group of more than 1,300 cultural heritage professionals, librarians, archivists, researchers, and programmemers working together to advance cultural heritage preservation by archiving and saving cultural institutions at-risk sites (SUCHO, 2022).
- The 2008 to 2011, China-US Librarians Cooperation, in collaboration with the PRC's Ministry of Culture, US Institute of Libraries and Museum Services, Library Society of China, and Chinese American Librarians Association, established a cooperative and cultural library exchange to further the development of digital resource sharing between US-China with a project theme "Think Globally, Act Globally" (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library, 2012).

Libraries for diplomacy

Libraries for diplomacy are practices and interactions wherein library actors, experts, and information professionals build platforms to create relationships, reinforce understanding, and serve as instruments for international diplomacy with countries and institutions abroad.

- The US Department of State's engagement in establishing American Spaces, a cultural diplomacy platform to engage with public and university libraries abroad, creating a network of cultural and community spaces for people-to-people understanding between Americans and foreign publics (Office of American Spaces, 2022a).
- The EU National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) is the European network of cultural organizations and centres engaging in cultural relations (e.g., Alliance Francaise, Instituto Cervantes, Goethe Institut, and many more European cultural agencies). EUNIC aims to build a fair partnership by practicing mutual listening and interaction and engaging in dialogue, co-creation, and joint capacity building using innovative library programmes and projects across its partner institutions (EUNIC, 2022).
- The Mortenson Centre for International Library programmes at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign aims to strengthen international ties among libraries and librarians through promoting education, understanding, and peace. The Community-Library Inter-Action (CLIA) programme advances the centre's mission to promote libraries for peace through intercultural and participatory dialogue using the Illinois Lab and the Colombia Lab for peace-building policy actions (University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign Library, 2017).

Convergences of concepts and practices

The three dimensions of library diplomacy can overlap in concepts, processes, and goals. It is a fluid concept related to three areas:

1. Influencing policy actions and international processes (libraries in diplomacy)
2. Facilitating international library cooperation to advance libraries and librarianship (diplomacy for libraries)
3. Using library cooperation, interactions, and programmes to create relationships, dialogue, and understanding between countries and institutions (libraries for diplomacy)

In the case of the US-Guadalajara library collaboration, this paper describes a scenario of the convergences of library diplomacy dimensions. The library diplomat at the DoS incorporates information and open access policies to further US foreign policy objectives in American Spaces by supporting book fairs and library exchanges (libraries in diplomacy). The ALA and the Guadalajara librarians worked together to establish a sister library network to invigorate both countries' successful partnership and continued support in participating in the Guadalajara International Book Fair collaboration. The DoS helps bring Guadalajara librarians by supporting visa

assistance to the US for an exchange programme hosted by ALA (diplomacy for libraries). Furthermore, the American Space at the Benjamin Franklin Library in Mexico reaches out to Guadalajara librarians to engage them in other DoS cultural diplomacy programmes such as English language learning, cultural nights, and technology camps to sustain cultural understanding and diplomacy (libraries for diplomacy).

Conclusion

Library diplomacy seeks to strengthen the relationship between the interests and motivation about libraries and the international policy communities. This theoretical paper aims to map and search for a theory and concept about libraries and diplomacy and shed light on the underexplored concept associated with fragmented scholarships in the LIS and IR fields of study. This paper presented diverse theoretical lenses concerning library diplomacy, such as realism, liberalism, soft power, constructivism, and international librarianship as a practice theory. It also drew a conceptual proposition patterned to the AAAS science diplomacy framework. As a result, this research proposed three dimensions of library diplomacy, namely: (1) Libraries in diplomacy, (2) Diplomacy for libraries, and (3) Libraries for diplomacy, and presented a few examples linked to the framework. This study has sought to develop a theoretical framework for research analysis, providing guidance for exploring the network of actors, processes, practices, and policies. However, thorough theoretically grounded and empirical research investigating library diplomacy in the 21-st century is the backbone for the advancement of the concept concerning library practices, librarianship, international cooperation, and influence on global policies and values affecting the international environments.

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