Why Libraries Matter in the New Diplomacy Era?

Randolf Mariano

UiT The Arctic University of Norway

randolf.mariano@uit.no

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5953-8612

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Libraries, museums, and cultural centers have long been widely advocated for diplomacy as an enabler for knowledge sharing, cultural exchange, and scientific cooperation, advancing people-to-people ties and mutual understanding in the international system (Mariano and Vårheim, 2021). In spite of the contribution of libraries as a public sphere institution (Vårheim, Skare, and Lenstra, 2019), a memory institution for historical accounts and artifacts and cultural heritage (Luke and Kersel, 2013; Rubin, 2016), and social meeting place to promote multicultural societies (Aabø, Audunson, and Vårheim, 2010), libraries are still facing 21st - century uncertainties and challenges such as but not limited to the information and cultural crisis in the new cold war period, and the rampant spread of information disorder and infodemic crisis (Jankowicz, 2020; Stengel, 2019). Libraries and diplomacy are more crucial than ever to advance global solutions that no single country and group of nations and organizations can solve.

In a traditional sense of diplomacy, state actors worldwide establish cultural, economic, and science affairs departments in embassies, consulates, and cultural centers to advance their national interests while creating dialogue and understanding across the globe (Cull, 2008; Gienow-Hecht and Donfried, 2010; Laugesen, 2010; Maack, 2001; Robbins, 2007). Similarly, non-state actors such as international organizations, civil society institutions, universities and research institutes, and business and media influencers are the main drivers for so-called new diplomacy in advancing mutually and cross-culturally beneficial policies and advocacies in the global arena (Chambers, 2016; Reimann, 2004; Snow and Cull, 2020). The contribution of these multitudes of actors involved in libraries and diplomacy is essential in moving forward dialogue and partnership in the international system to solve real-world challenges. (Knapp, 2018; Melissen, 2005)

In this Ph.D. project, library diplomacy is conceptually defined as a strategy to engage countries, organizations, institutions and societies in international library work, and programs for mutually beneficial relationships and partnerships, to support solutions to global challenges. This position paper, which is part of an ongoing Ph.D. project, specifically aims to discuss the ff:

1. why library diplomacy matters in the new diplomacy context;

2. how policies and experts in the field of international and global librarianship use the concept of library diplomacy implicitly and explicitly; and

3. how the conceptual dimensions of library diplomacy namely libraries in diplomacy, diplomacy for libraries, and libraries for diplomacy are being identified, and explored in both policies and expert perceptions in the U.S. context (see Table 1).

Table 1: Conceptual Dimensions of Library Diplomacy.

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.
Diplomacy for libraries	The term 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.
Libraries for Diplomacy	The conceptual dimension of 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, and tools for international diplomacy with countries and institutions abroad.

Research Design and Analysis

This research will use a two-stage qualitative research design. The first stage will examine policy documents and white papers published by state and non-state actors in the U.S. library diplomacy context. Analyzing policy documents using a systematic method of document analysis is appropriate for evaluating existing programs and usage of library diplomacy in practice (Asdal and Reinersten, 2022). The second stage will consist of individual interviews with experts in international librarianship and diplomacy, both state and non-state actors in the United States. These interviews aimed to explore how experts implicitly and explicitly utilize the concept and how library diplomacy in practice reflects libraries' current and future realities in the new diplomacy era. The expert interviews will triangulate and cross-validate the policy documents across various theoretical and conceptual perspectives. All the data will be transcribed, coded, and analyzed using template analysis, a form of thematic analysis ((Braun and Clarke, 2022; King and Brooks, 2017)). Key themes will be identified, including broad themes with several levels of specific themes, and coded using Nvivo. The conceptual dimension of library diplomacy namely: (1) libraries in diplomacy, (2) diplomacy for libraries, and (3) libraries for diplomacy, developed through my previous conceptual paper, will be used

as a priori theme in advance. As a principal investigator, I will critically examine the codebook to ensure that the thematic structure reflects the data. Two researchers, including my thesis supervisor and a Ph.D. colleague, will check the codebook and thematic findings for validity.

Conclusion

With this position paper, it is hoped to introduce novel research about the concept of library diplomacy and better understand why libraries are important in the new diplomacy era through the presentation of thematic findings of the study. This research has potential limitations particularly with the geographical scope of the study but this limitation also poses an excellent opportunity to explore the research questions and analysis further in various contexts.

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