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Recognizing the Antecedents of the Iraqi Council of Ministers' Cultural Diplomacy

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the antecedents, preconditions, and enabling factors required for the Iraqi Council of Ministers to formulate and implement an effective cultural diplomacy strategy. The research methodology was based on an inductive approach, using thematic analysis technique outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Data were gathered from semi-structured interviews with 12 experts in cultural diplomacy and analyzed using MAXQDA software. Validity was established through a two-step process member checking and an external audit. This research showed that Iraqi government organizations can implement cultural diplomacy strategies in Iraq more optimally through the identified components in the organizational, national, and international dimensions, and in the framework of the cultural diplomatic antecedents of the Iraqi Council of Ministers. This paper provides an important framework for analyzing cultural diplomacy antecedents in cultural heritage, paying particular attention to regional dimension for strengthening internal cohesion that moves beyond a siloed approach by explicitly integrating national, organizational, and international factors into a single, actionable model, offering a structured roadmap for Iraqi policymakers to translate latent cultural power into tangible diplomatic influence.

Keywords: Cultural Diplomacy, Heritage Diplomacy, Public Policy, Soft Power, Strategic Governance

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1. Introduction

Cultural diplomacy, traditionally defined as “the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture between countries to improve mutual understanding” (Cummings, 2003, p. 1), has long been a strategic tool for nation-states to achieve foreign policy objectives (Grincheva, 2024). While historically analyzed through the lenses of international relations and political science (Cull, 2019) scholars like Brison and Jessup (2024) argue for its broader relevance to disciplines ranging from humanities and cultural studies to the creative arts.

In the present era, digital platforms have transformed this practice, enabling cultural collections to reach global audiences with unequalled scale. These new virtual spaces serve as valuable platforms for addressing foreign policy agendas for overwhelm international mistrust (Grincheva, 2022). Even a short, genuine exchange online opens window to another culture, gently correcting misconceptions and sparking a curiosity that draws people toward real connection (Grincheva, 2024); A large part of this behavior is due to technological development. However, this digital potential is tempered by significant risks; the proliferation of propaganda and disinformation such as bots and fake news can disrupt information exchange, fuel anxiety, and deepen intercultural misunderstandings, thereby undermining genuine cultural dialogue and partnership.

In Iraq a diverse nation with significant ethnic and religious dividing, cultural diplomacy initiatives by government institutions and organizations must navigate potential sensitivities and the risk of being seen as cultural imperialism, although political instability and security concerns further complicate efforts to host events or promote tourism. Moreover, internal political differences and

complex relations with neighbors can hinder a unified approach. Limited infrastructure and resources present additional obstacles, making the guiding role of government organizations like the Iraqi Council of Ministers both prominent and critical. The Council can be developing pertinent policies, allocate budgets, and ensure coordination across ministries to implement a coherent cultural diplomacy strategy. Such efforts could leverage Iraq's rich cultural heritage to increase international awareness and build understanding through international forums.

Research evidence indicates that Iraq's multifaceted and diverse cultural aspects present fundamental challenges in both micro and macro management. These cultural issues act as a critical turning point in commercial and business contexts (Abdulhadi et al., 2023), in health and services (Alkenany et al., 2023), and even in the political sphere.

Therefore, to better understand this process, the present study investigates the antecedents of cultural diplomacy within the Iraqi council of ministers. The goal is to provide a model that supports initiatives such as participation in international forums and the promotion of Iraq's cultural assets, while establishing a framework for monitoring progress. Ultimately, cultural diplomacy remains a vital, if indirect, foreign policy instrument, classically defined by the U.S. Department of State (1959) as the direct communication between peoples of different nations, aimed at creating an atmosphere of trust in which official relations can operate (Jessica et al., 2013).

The fundamental problem in recognizing antecedents of the Iraqi Council of Ministers' cultural diplomacy lies in complex nature of Iraq's modern political identity. The nation's foreign

cultural outreach is not the product of a single, continuous strategy, but is instead shaped by a tumultuous sequence of radically different political regimes from monarchy and Ba'athist era to the post-2003 federal parliamentary system. Accordingly, it has a complex and multiple nature. Each of these periods imposed its own distinct ideological for international cultural engagement, which were often abruptly dismantled or deliberately suppressed by subsequent governments, although its remnants have remained for a long time. Consequently, the historical ancestry is not a clear continuum, but a fractured palimpsest, where crucial documents have been lost, institutional memories are discontinuous, and the very definition of 'Iraqi culture' promoted abroad has been repeatedly contested and redefined. This image still exists even in the imagination of neighboring nations from the war era. This lack of a coherent historical record makes it exceptionally difficult to identify which specific historical policies and structures from these disparate eras have enduringly influenced the Council of Ministers' contemporary approach.

In addition, compounding this historical disjuncture is the contemporary challenge of institutional coordination and strategic clarity within the Iraqi government itself, which is mainly due to party and political challenges. Its cultural diplomacy initiatives are influenced by, and must compete with, the agendas of other powerful institutions such as the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and various sub-national entities. This problem, therefore, extends beyond simple historical analysis to current lack of unified, strategic framework that clearly delineates the Council's role. This results in a situation where the 'antecedents' of its actions are not only historical legacies, but also contemporary political compromises, budgetary pressures, and ad-hoc responses

to regional crises. Therefore, the research question is what these factors are to better understand the future actions of diplomacy in cross-border socio-cultural space; without a systematic effort to map these intertwined historical and contemporary influences, any understanding of why the council of ministers pursues specific cultural diplomacy policies remains superficial, hindering the development of more effective, coherent Iraqi strategy for international cultural engagement.

While studies on Iraqi diplomacy exist (Abbas et al., 2024; Jabbar, 2025), they remain limited in scope. Much of this scholarship has focused on the political and international relations of diplomacy, largely overlooking Iraq's considerable cultural heritage. This is a notable gap, as this heritage represents significant soft power potential, particularly for relations within the Islamic cultural sphere (Khalil et al., 2024). Consequently, the lack of research on soft power in Iraq's international relations constitutes a clear research challenge.

This study is critically necessary as it addresses the strategic advantages a comprehensive cultural diplomacy framework, especially in regional intercultural interactions can provide regarding Iraq. Such a strategy, implemented by the Iraqi Council of Ministers, offers multifaceted benefits central to national advancement. First, it can be significantly enhancing Iraq's soft power and international standing by systematically promoting its rich cultural heritage, thereby reshaping its international image. This is more possible given regional commonalities, especially among Muslim countries. Second, cultural diplomacy is a vital tool for fostering regional stability and cooperation, as it builds mutual understanding, facilitates dialogue, and helps mitigate potential conflicts with neighboring states. Finally, this approach yields

direct economic benefits by leveraging a positive cultural campaign to attract tourism and native and non-native investment, thereby driving domestic economic growth. It has a significant value, especially for Muslims and Shiites, with its historical tourism potential and religious attractions. Consequently, this research provides an essential analysis to guide the Iraqi government in this strategically imperative domain.

2. Literature Review

Cultural diplomacy, often defined as a national policy supporting exchange of culture to advance foreign policy goals, has a complex history. In the U.S. context, it became synonymous with Cold War strategy, encapsulated by Frederick Bargorn's 1960 description of it as "the manipulation of cultural materials and personnel for propaganda purposes" (Jessica et al., 2013). While its practice dates back to the early modern period, where cultural display became an expression of relations between states (Clark, 2020), the term today designates a specific foreign policy area where states mobilize cultural resources. This is frequently understood as a component of public diplomacy or, in Joseph Nye's terms, 'cultural display and exchange'.

The use of cultural elements as soft power tactic carries significant implications for international relations and global governance; Sometimes this capability seems ambivalent and even counter-cultural in another country. In fact, sharing of culture can foster international understanding and cooperation, paving the way for a more peaceful and prosperous world (Ding & Saunders, 2006); at the same time, it can also be perceived as a form of cultural imperialism by dominant nations (Rawnsley, 2020). This

duality and contradictory nature make it crucial for policymakers in organizations and institutions related to culture to understand the nuances of wielding culture as a tool of soft power (Zreik, 2023). In the contemporary multipolar world, nations are adopting an increasing plurality of cultural diplomacy strategies, tailoring their approaches based on their perceived global position (Clark, 2020).

This evolving dynamic will be central to the exercise of 'Soft power' where a country seeks to influence others through the appeal of its culture, values, and policies rather than through coercion (Nye, 2008). An issue that has become particularly important, especially with the growing power of cultural institutions within governments. Hence, many nations actively employ cultural promotion as a soft power strategy to enhance their international influence (Zreik, 2023). This requires having cultural capacities and the ability to exchange them within the state structure. A telling example of this shift can be seen in countries with deep civilizational histories, such as India, Japan and China. Their approach to cultural diplomacy is often different, moving beyond conventional ways of transmitting cultural heritage to strategically promote traditional culture and cultural identity as soft power tools. Understanding how this approach shapes cultural interaction and economic growth is therefore crucial (Zreik, 2023).

Government organizations play a significant role in this ecosystem to deal with challenges and promote the effectiveness of culture as a tool of diplomacy. They can allocate funds for exchange programs and develop policies that promote intercultural understanding in sectors such as education, tourism, and arts. However, effectiveness of government agencies in this role is widely based on a country's capacities, policies, and specific context.

The theoretical literature of present study is based on contemporary research that examines cultural diplomacy as a disclose and dynamic instrument of foreign policy. Recent research which will be discussed further highlights diplomacy application across various contexts, revealing distinct strategic models and functional mechanisms. This literature can be synthesized into several key thematic areas relevant to understanding cultural diplomacy's role in the 21st century.

A significant body of this work explores how nations leverage cultural assets to enhance their regional standing and project a specific identity; Shamsi (2023) mentions positions cultural diplomacy as a strategic 'weapon' for sustainable peace, demonstrating how Persian Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman consciously mobilize distinct cultural strengths, be it ideological, economic, modernistic, or topographical, to attract tourism and investment. On the other hand, this strategic use of culture is further illustrated in competitive contexts. Pourali et al. (2022), in their comparative study of Iran and Turkey in Iraq based on historical and cultural perspectives, reveal how cultural diplomacy is often rooted in deep-seated ideological or historical narratives, such as Shiism and Iranism versus Turkish nationalism and neo-Ottomanism. These roots, due to historical background, allow for coexistence with deep cultural diversity. Hence, historical intellectual infrastructures can be the basis for state-nation-state interactions. Similarly, Koch (2024) shows how even 'second-tier' global events, like the Qatar Horticultural Expo, are utilized as platforms to cement state narratives, linking Qatari identity to a commitment to sustainable and global development.

Contemporary theory has moved beyond a state-centric view to

recognize the polyphonic and multi-actor nature of cultural diplomacy. Rijo (2024) explicitly argues for a reconceptualization of the field, decentralizing top-down, state-driven approaches in favor of a 'semantic constellation' that includes bottom-up initiatives from musicians, cultural communities, and non-state actors. A significant portion of these actors are ordinary people, celebrities, famous figures, and influencers due to technological development. This is empirically supported by Intetilia and Putri (2024), whose study of consulates in Bali found that public and cultural diplomacy practices are mediated through digital technology and encompassing news management and relationship building. The role of non-state actors is further emphasized by Ahmadi et al. (2024), who identify diasporas as critical components of cultural diplomacy, with shared culture and identity acting as the structural link between dispersed communities and state interests.

The institutional frameworks and long-term memory-building functions of cultural diplomacy, which are based on functional mechanisms form another critical thematic strand. Holoborodko et al. (2024) analyze the European Union's efforts, concluding that an integrated approach using both direct and indirect tools is crucial for effectively promoting common values. Furthermore, the focus on sustained institutional impact is echoed historically by Lapadat (2024), who demonstrates how the long-term activities of institutions like the Goethe-Institute can create enduring networks of cultural exchange that profoundly shape civil society and cultural memory, as seen in German-Romanian relations.

Research in the field of diplomacy in Iraq is considerable and spans diverse sub-fields. Scholars have examined health diplomacy (Kevany et al., 2014), public diplomacy (Duggan, 2012), scientific diplomacy (Al Hasanavi, 2025), media diplomacy (Jassim

Muhammad, 2022; Al-Kaabi, 2024), sports diplomacy (Al-Zahavi, 2024; Al-Yasiri, 2024), and religious diplomacy (Kamel Alivi, 2023), as well as bilateral relations with specific states such as Japan (Sakai, 2001). Despite this breadth, cultural diplomacy in Iraq has received comparatively less focused attention (Al Hasanavi, 2025). This is notable given Iraq's historical and ongoing significance in cultural diplomatic engagements with neighboring countries, particularly Iran (Moradi & Sohrabian, 2023; Qahtan Adnan, 2023).

3. Research Method

This study, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework for thematic analysis, adopted an inductive approach to thematic analysis. These steps continued from studying and implementing interviews and text analysis to axial coding for categorization. In the first step, the interviews were transcribed to generate initial codes. These codes were then systematically reviewed and collated to identify recurring patterns, which were developed into key themes grounded directly in the data.

3. 1. Participant Selection

We selected participants through criterion-based purposive sampling, recruiting until theoretical saturation (Parker et al., 2019) was achieved with a final sample of 12 individuals. An expert referral network was used to support recruitment and enhance the sample's diversity; based on this, participants met strict criteria, including: (1) a senior academic position (associate professor or higher) or more than ten years of relevant work experience; (2) a

managerial or executive role with macro-level responsibilities; and (3) proven expertise in cultural diplomacy, government, or political science, specifically in university-international organization diplomacy. Participants were also familiar with international relations concepts and the research questions. We emphasized maximizing demographic and experiential diversity, with full details provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of the Sample of Participant

Code	Sex	Field of Study	work experience
1	Male	Political Science	15
2	Male	Policymaking	18
3	Male	International Relations	12
4	Female	International Law	14
5	Male	Political Sociology	16
6	Female	Public administration	13
7	Male	Cultural Management	12
8	Male	Public administration	15
9	Male	Political Science	16
10	Male	Cultural Management	17
11	Female	International Law	18
12	Male	Political Science	16

Source: Authors

3. 2. Data Collection

This study used semi-structured interviews for data collection, utilizing a flexible protocol that allowed for probing questions adapted to each session's context (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). To ensure methodological accuracy, a comprehensive strategy was implemented to address trustworthiness, during which credibility was established through expert validation of the protocol,

purposive sampling to achieve diverse experiences and thematic saturation, and iterative member checking where participants verified transcripts and initial codes. Dependability was strengthened via an external audit of the data collection and analysis processes, while conformability was ensured by maintaining a transparent audit trail. To enhance the transferability of findings, thick descriptions of the research context were provided. The data analysis involved verbatim transcription, repeated immersion in the data using MAXQDA software, and a systematic process of identifying essential statements to derive codes and themes, which were identified based on coding protocols, ensuring all interpretations remained grounded in the participants' responses.

3. 3. Ethical Considerations

The data collection for this research was carried out between 2024 and 2025. Ethical principles were considered in accordance with the principles outlined in APA Manual. Before participation, all individuals received a detailed explanation of the study's aims and procedures and provided written informed consent, affirming their voluntary and informed participation. We upheld strict confidentiality, and all data were anonymized and stored securely to protect participant privacy.

4. Findings

The findings of this study are categorized into three levels of organizational, national, and international antecedents, as illustrated in in Tables 2 to 4.

4. 1. Organizational Antecedents

Table 2. Components and Sub-components of Extracted Codes in the Organizational Antecedent's Dimension of Cultural Diplomacy

Dimension	Main Component	Sub-component	Key Characteristics / Implementation Summary
Governance & Strategy	Macro Strategy	National cultural diplomacy strategy document	A ratified document defining clear objectives, geographical priorities, and key cultural domains.
		Integration of foreign & cultural policies	Coordination between ministries (Foreign Affairs, Education, Culture) and other relevant institutions.
		Annual operational plan with quantitative targets	Translating strategy into specific, executable programs for lead organization, with clear timelines and responsibilities.
	Legal & Support Frameworks	Supportive legislation Transparent executive bylaws	Specific laws that grant a mandate and budget for cultural diplomacy to relevant organizations.
		Regulations for non-governmental cooperation	Clear guidelines for project delegation, international hiring, and procurement. A framework for engaging and collaborating with private cultural institutions and NGOs as executive partners.
	Structure & Coordination	Designation of a lead institution Specialized offices within the structure Cultural attachés in embassies	A single organization with clear responsibility for leading and coordinating all cultural diplomacy activities. Dedicated departments or vice-presidencies for "International Affairs & Cultural Diplomacy" within the lead organization.
Inter-Agency coordination mechanism (Joint Committee)		Posting cultural experts in foreign missions to act as direct liaisons and executors. A council or committee with representatives from all involved entities for decision-making and coordination.	
Resources & Empowerment	Strategic Resource Vision	Independent and sustainable budget allocation	A specific, reliable budget line in the organization's annual budget for international activities.
		Financial transparency and oversight	Mandatory detailed financial reporting and accountability for expenditures.
		Diversification of funding sources	Enabling financial participation from the private sector and foundations in specific cultural projects.
	Human Resources & Expertise	Recruitment of specialists with intercultural skills	Hiring personnel proficient in foreign languages, international relations, and global etiquette.
Continuous training in		Conducting training courses on narrative-	

Dimension	Main Component	Sub-component	Key Characteristics / Implementation Summary
Operational Processes	Tools & Platforms	public & cultural diplomacy	building, media management, and cultural analysis for staff.
		Performance-Based incentive system	Designing financial and career incentives for personnel who successfully execute international projects.
		Networking with cultural elites as advisors	Identifying and utilizing prominent artists, writers, and professors for advisory and informal representative roles.
		Multilingual digital platforms	Establishing and updating effective portals and social networks for direct communication with global audiences.
		Project knowledge management system	Creating a database of reports, experiences, and produced content to prevent redundant efforts.
	Project Planning & Execution	Professional content production & broadcasting facilities	Equipping studios and technical facilities to produce high-quality content (film, podcast, documentary).
		Target audience identification & analysis	Researching the tastes, interests, and cultural needs of the target society before designing any project.
		Designing dialogue & exchange-based projects	Emphasizing programs like film screenings with director Q&As and joint artistic panels.
		Precise event scheduling & management	Regular, well-planned execution of events adhering to international professional standards.
		Content Production & Management	Producing authentic & engaging content for foreign audiences
Cultural & political content review	Ensuring content is properly translated and does not cause cultural misunderstanding or political sensitivity.		
Monitoring & Evaluation	Defining key Performance indicators	Establishing objective metrics like audience reach, positive media feedback, and event participation levels.	
	Audience surveys to gauge impact	Measuring changes in audience attitude and increased awareness of the country's culture post-project.	
		Continuous program improvement based on feedback	Using evaluation results to refine and correct future programs.

Source: Authors

As outlined in Table 2, the organizational prerequisites for an effective cultural diplomacy apparatus are categorized into some levels. At the governance and strategy level, emphasis is placed on the development of a national document, integrated policies, and an operational plan, which includes establishing legal frameworks and

transparent regulations that facilitate cooperation with the non-governmental sector. The subsequent level, resources and empowerment, focuses on independent budget allocation, financial transparency, diversifying resources, and the critical tasks of attracting, training, and motivating expert human resources. Within operational processes, attention have been given to project planning and implementation, content production and management, networking with elites, and developing digital platforms. The final component, monitoring and evaluation, emphasizes the definition of performance indicators, surveying audiences, and continuous refinement of programs based on the resulting feedback.

4. 2. National Antecedents

Table 3. Components and Sub-components of Extracted Codes in the Dimension of National Antecedents of Cultural Diplomacy

Dimension	Main Component	Sub-component	Key Characteristics / Implementation Summary
Foundational & Historical Pillars	Civilizational Depth	Ancient Mesopotamian heritage	Leverage Iraq's status as a vast civilization (urbanization, water management, ancient libraries) for unparalleled cultural credibility.
		Golden age of Islam	Utilize Baghdad's historical role as a former global center of science and knowledge.
		Religious coexistence	Draw on the historical experience of interfaith coexistence among Abrahamic religions as a powerful narrative for peace.
	Symbolic Resources	Historical symbols (Mesopotamia)	Deploy ancient history and globally recognized symbols as a foundational narrative.
		Language & Arabic identity	Utilizing Arabic language as a core element of identity and a bridge to the Arab world.
		Culture of resistance	Framing modern struggle against terrorism as a narrative of resilience and renewal.
		Contemporary symbols & national myths	Developing new unifying symbols and reinterpret ancient myths to build a cohesive modern identity.

Dimension	Main Component	Sub-component	Key Characteristics / Implementation Summary
Governance & Strategic Vision	Political Stability	Continuity of democratic institutions	Ensuring stable, transparent, and accountable governance as the bedrock for all international cultural initiatives. Foster participation of all groups in political life to project an image of national unity.
		Inclusive ethnic-religious participation	
		Sustainable national Security & reduced Sectarian tension	
	Cultural Policymaking	National cultural Strategy document	Developing a ratified national strategy with clear objectives and domains for cultural diplomacy. Allocating reliable funding and establish mechanisms for inter-agency coordination and financial accountability. Enforcing transparent laws to safeguard heritage and standardize cultural activities for ensure quality.
		Long-Term cultural budgeting & transparent oversight	
		Laws protecting cultural heritage & standardization	
	Cultural Vision & Ambition	A grand national "Idea" or role	Defining a clear aspirational role for Iraq such as Cultural Hub of the Arab World. Articulating a clear vision for how Iraq wants to be perceived on global stage in the next 20-50 years. Developing a strategic, actionable plan to build regional and global cultural influence.
		A desired future image of Iraq	
		A roadmap to becoming a "Soft Power"	
Operational & Infrastructural Capacity	Cultural Infrastructure Development	Modernized museums & international venues	Upgrade physical infrastructure such as museums and performance halls based on international standards. Creating robust online portals and archives to make the Iraqi culture globally accessible. Preserving and revitalizing historic districts to strengthen cultural identity and boost cultural tourism.
		Digital networks for cultural access	
		Revitalization of historical urban areas	
	Cultural Economy	Exports of cultural goods (Cinema, Music)	Invest in and promote contemporary cultural industries to create a modern, dynamic image of the country. Develop tourism around both ancient heritage and contemporary culture to foster people-to-people exchange. Encourage financial and creative partnerships with private entities and foundations to diversify cultural production.
		Cultural tourism	
		Private sector & NGO partnership	

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Dimension	Main Component	Sub-component	Key Characteristics / Implementation Summary
Social & Environmental Context	Innovation & Forward-Looking Culture	Cultural startups & tech adoption	Supporting innovation in creative industries and adopting new technologies for cultural production; Encouraging emergence of contemporary expressions that reflect a modern Iraq. Move beyond a sole focus on the past by producing cultural content that speaks to the future.
		New & hybrid art forms	
		'Future-oriented' narratives	
	Social Capital	Public trust in cultural institutions	Build credibility for cultural entities to encourage public participation in international programs.
		Interfaith & inter-sectarian dialogue	Actively promote dialogue to project an image of Iraq as a tolerant and cohesive society.
		Elite & grassroots cultural networks	Engage both cultural leaders and civil society organizations as effective ambassadors.
	Geography & Environment as Cultural Bedrock	Rivers as civilizational icons	Frame the relationship with these rivers as a central part of the national story and cultural diplomacy.
		Local cuisine, architecture, and landscapes	Leverage unique cultural elements such as food, adaptive architecture, and natural sites as cultural assets.
	Environmental Diplomacy	Shared water challenges as cultural context	Use common environmental issues with neighbors as a basis for cultural dialogue and cooperation.
		Traditional ecological knowledge	Highlight historic and cultural practices of water conservation and environmental management.

Source: Authors

Table 3 presents a comprehensive framework for analyzing the national antecedents of Iraq's cultural diplomacy, organized across several key dimensions. In this table, the political-governance dimension assesses factors such as political stability, the structure of cultural policy-making, and the existence of a long-term strategic vision. Moreover, the economic-infrastructure dimension focuses on the development of cultural infrastructure and the strengthening of cultural economy. Furthermore, the socio-cultural

dimension examines Iraq's social capital, symbolic resources, and profound civilizational depth as foundational elements. Socio-environmental context dimension analyzes the role of geography and climate as a platform for cultural formation, as well as the potential for water and environmental diplomacy.

4. 3. International Antecedents

Table 4. Components and Sub-components of Extracted Codes in the Dimension of International Antecedents of Cultural Diplomacy

Dimension	Main Component	Sub-component	Key Characteristics / Implementation Summary
International Engagement	Cultural-Diplomatic Relations	Expanding cultural counsellors in embassies	Structuring international communications by strengthening the cultural mandate of diplomatic missions.
		Bilateral cultural agreements & UNESCO projects	Establishing formal, targeted partnerships and engaging with global cultural institutions to showcase Iraqi capacities.
		Academic chairs & regional conferences	Creating dedicated Iraqi studies programs in global universities and hosting international cultural forums.
	Public & Media Diplomacy	Multilingual content production	Developing engaging media that reflects Iraq's cultural diversity to reshape global perceptions.
		International TV channels & digital diplomacy	Leveraging broadcast media and social networks for direct communication with global public opinion.
		Global media presence & international festivals	Actively participating in foreign media and hosting cultural festivals in world capitals to build a positive image.

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Dimension	Main Component	Sub-component	Key Characteristics / Implementation Summary
Economic & Educational Leverage	International Cultural Trade	Export of cultural goods & crafts	Using the export of cinema, handicrafts, and cultural products as both an economic driver and an image-building tool.
		International cultural tourism & branding	Attracting cultural tourists to historical sites and developing a strong national brand for Iraqi cultural products.
		Foreign investment in cultural projects	Attracting external funding for cultural infrastructure and initiatives to boost scale and impact.
	Academic & Scientific Cooperation	Scholarships for foreign students & faculty exchange	Hosting international students and academics to Iraq, creating future cultural ambassadors.
		Joint research & archaeological projects	Collaborating on scientific and archaeological missions to highlight Mesopotamia's civilizational grandeur.
		International publications & cross-cultural training	Co-publishing research and offering training to foster deep academic and cultural understanding.
Cultural & Religious Exchange	Artistic & Cultural Exchanges	International cultural weeks & support for artistic troupes	Showcasing contemporary Iraqi culture abroad through live performances and artistic delegations.
		Hosting international artists & intellectuals	Enriching the domestic cultural dialogue and building bridges by welcoming global creative figures.
		Diaspora artist networks & international biennials	Tapping into the potential of Iraqi artists abroad and hosting prestigious international art events.
	Heritage Diplomacy	UNESCO world heritage registration	Securing global recognition for historical sites to enhance Iraq's cultural standing and preservation standards.
		International restoration projects & traveling exhibitions	Partnering with world-class institutions for conservation and taking Iraqi artifacts on global tours.

Dimension	Main Component	Sub-component	Key Characteristics / Implementation Summary
Strategic & Transnational Channels	Religious & Interfaith Diplomacy	International museum development & archival exchange	Modernizing museum practices and exchanging historical documents with global archives.
		Global interfaith dialogue & cross-sectarian conferences	Positioning Iraq as a model for religious tolerance by hosting international theological discussions.
		Religious tourism & scholarly outreach	Leveraging the spiritual significance of holy cities (Najaf, Karbala) and promoting religious texts globally.
		International peace initiatives & studies centers	Engaging religious leaders in global peace programs and establishing centers for religious studies.
	Diaspora Networking	Advisory councils & digital platforms for expatriates	Formally engaging Iraqi diaspora for advice and investment in homeland projects.
		Tapping into expatriate academic & cultural capital	Leveraging the skills and influence of Iraqi elites abroad to act as cultural ambassadors.
		Supporting cultural activities of expat communities	Funding and promoting cultural events within diaspora communities for maintaining a living link to Iraq.
	Digital & Informal Channels	Youth & digital content creation	Empowering the young generation and connected generation to create compelling digital content about the Iraqi culture.
		Video games & virtual reality for heritage	Using modern technology like VR to create immersive experiences of Iraq's culture.
		Informal networks & influencers	Utilizing tribal networks and cross-border familial ties for cultural transmission.
Foundational Global Factors	Peace & Reconciliation Diplomacy	Hosting regional peace dialogues & international initiatives	Leveraging Iraq's experience with conflict to establish itself as a credible host for peace talks.
		Training international peace mediators & peace literature	Sharing Iraq's hard-earned lessons in conflict resolution and publishing literature on peacebuilding.
		Cultural programs for crisis zones & peace studies centers	Developing cultural initiatives for post-conflict healing and establishing academic centers for peace studies.

Dimension	Main Component	Sub-component	Key Characteristics / Implementation Summary
	Sustainable Development Diplomacy	Cultural projects linked to UN SDGs	Aligning cultural initiatives with global goals for sustainable development to enhance international credibility.
		Environmental cultural programs & climate cooperation	Using culture to promote environmental messages and engaging in global cultural efforts on climate change.
		UN cultural programs & development exchange networks	Participating in United Nations cultural programs and networks to share developmental experiences.
	National Psyche & Collective Mindset	National confidence & cultural pride	Cultivating a society with high self-esteem, which is essential for projecting a positive image.
		Openness to interaction & social resilience	Fostering a willingness to engage with other cultures for leveraging the narrative of national resilience.
		Post-crisis social fatigue & morale	Addressing barriers of social exhaustion to ensure it does not hinder positive cultural projection.

Source: Authors

Table 4 outlines the key components influencing cultural diplomacy, categorized into five main areas. International Interactions encompass cultural diplomatic relations, public diplomacy, and media diplomacy. The International Economic component focuses on global cultural trade. On the other hand, Cultural Exchange includes scientific and academic cooperation, artistic and cultural exchanges, and cultural heritage diplomacy. Furthermore, Transnational Communications cover shared identity and mentality, religious and interfaith diplomacy, Iraqi diaspora networks, digital capabilities, and informal media. Finally, the Global Strategic component involves peace and reconciliation diplomacy and sustainable development diplomacy. This

framework comprehensively captures the dimensions of cultural diplomacy, from bilateral relations to global strategy.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The organizational antecedents for an effective Iraqi cultural diplomacy, as outlined in the finding, reveal a significant capacity gap, particularly in the foundational dimension of Governance & Strategy. In fact, for Iraq to project a coherent cultural identity abroad, the establishment of a unified national strategy is paramount. The current fragmentation among ministries and lack of a ratified national document hinder the ability to present a consistent narrative. As a result, the designation of a single lead institution, such as institution within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is a critical prerequisite. This institution would be responsible for integrating policies and overseeing an inter-agency coordination mechanism. Without this centralized strategic command, Iraq's cultural diplomacy efforts risk remaining disparate, failing to translate nation's profound cultural assets into a strategic international advantage.

As argued by Dinnie (2015), effective cultural strategy moves beyond traditional, state-to-state approaches to focus on relational, network-based models involving a multitude of actors, from NGOs and artists to academics. Therefore, creating interactive networks within the Iraqi decision-making system is of serious importance. Without a central mechanism to harmonize these diverse efforts, they can send conflicting messages undermining national brand.

In another part of the research findings, building upon a coherent strategy, the Resources & Empowerment dimension highlights a second major challenge, that is, the transition from

intent to sustainable action. The findings emphasize the necessity of an independent budget, financial transparency, and diversified funding, where Iraq faces structural hurdles. Overcoming a reliance on fluctuating state budgets through legislation that mandates funding and enables private-sector sponsorship is essential for program continuity. Furthermore, human capital requirement is acute. The recruitment and continuous training of specialists in intercultural communication and modern media are not merely administrative tasks but strategic investments. This not only helps to reproduce intellectual capital, but also motivates continuity in the organization. Without a performance-based incentive system and a cadre of skilled professionals, even the most well-conceived strategic plans will falter at the implementation stage, leaving Iraq unable to professionally manage its international cultural engagements.

The operationalization of cultural diplomacy occurs within the Operational Processes dimension, where Iraq's capacity must evolve from ad-hoc events to sustained, professional engagement. This requires a shift from a supply-driven approach to a demand-driven one. Paying attention to the expectations and demands of society is an important part of reproducing the infrastructure of cultural diplomacy, which is produced by the people as the audience. It seems that the reproduction of interaction-based culture will arise from capability. The sub-components of target audience analysis and the design of dialogue-based projects are crucial. Iraq must move beyond simple cultural exhibitions toward joint artistic productions, academic exchanges, and film screenings that foster mutual understanding. Moreover, strategic use of multilingual digital platforms and professional content production facilities is non-negotiable in the 21st century. Paying attention to

this sector, as developed countries benefit from it, is of strategic importance. Producing authentic yet accessible content that avoids political sensitivities, managed through a knowledge management system, would allow Iraq to tell its own story effectively, rather than having it narrated by others.

Iraq's national capacity for cultural diplomacy is profoundly rooted in its unparalleled Foundational & Historical Pillars, which provide a unique reservoir of credibility and power. Paying attention to this dimension is essential for developing cultural relations in the field of civilization with neighbors and countries with great civilizations. This is complemented by potent symbolic resources, from the globally recognized legacy of Mesopotamia and the Arabic language to a modern narrative of resilience against extremism. These assets form an immutable identity, offering a compelling foundation upon which to build a cultural diplomacy strategy that can capture global respect.

To effectively leverage these historical assets, a robust framework of Governance & Strategic Vision is indispensable. Foundations that have been strengthened both internally with audiences and in terms of relations with neighbors and can support cultural diplomacy; for this Political stability, inclusive governance, and sustainable national security are the essential preconditions that enable long-term cultural planning and build international confidence. Beyond stability, Iraq requires a deliberate and well-resourced cultural policymaking apparatus, including a ratified national strategy, transparent long-term budgeting, and protective heritage laws. Private sector development and global support through non-governmental organizations can be effective for this purpose. This strategic vision provides the roadmap to transition from resting on past laurels to actively

shaping a desired future image as a relevant and influential soft power.

Based on what this article presented as a socio-political and framework, the ultimate efficacy of these efforts is contingent upon Iraq's ability to engage with Foundational Global Factors and project a cohesive national narrative. By linking its cultural initiatives to universal goals such as peace and sustainable development, Iraqi government organizations can transform their country's image from a conflict-affected state to a responsible international actor. Hosting regional peace dialogues and aligning cultural projects with the UN Sustainable Development Goals enhances its international credibility and relevance. As previously mentioned, this will not be possible without taking into account the social and political capacities of neighbors and major powers such as Iran on the one hand, and strengthening internal integration as a unified Iraq on the other. Without internal confidence and a clear resolution of post-crisis social fatigue, Iraq will struggle to project an authentic and compelling identity on the world stage, no matter how sophisticated its international strategy may be.

6. Implementation

Based on the analysis of this research's findings, the effective implementation of Iraq's cultural diplomacy strategy necessitates a phased and prioritized approach, beginning with foundational governance. The priority must be the establishment of a lead cultural diplomacy institution and resources to ratify and execute a unified Cultural Diplomacy Strategy. This first operational step should be performed to formalize inter-agency coordination mechanisms and launch a digital portal to communicate as a

centralized hub for multicultural content. Strengthening the connection between government organizations through NGOs and developing regional connections in the Islamic civilization area is an important capability for Iraq. This includes initiating the UNESCO registration process for launching an international campaign for producing a professionally crafted, multi-language documentary series showcasing Iraq's civilizational depth and contemporary cultural scene. These initial actions create the necessary structural backbone and generate early wins that build domestic and international confidence.

It is recommended that Iraq systematically host a 'Year of Iraq' in a select partner nation and create joint bases with neighbors combining archaeological exhibitions and trade fairs to build a concentrated and powerful impression. Furthermore, based on the findings, is recommended that Iraq proactively frame its narrative in order to strengthen interfaith cultural diplomacy within global contexts for international dialogues in Najaf and Karbala and design cultural projects explicitly linked to SDG. This strategic alignment not only amplifies Iraq's voice, but also positions it as a relevant and cooperative partner in addressing universal challenges, thereby coagulating its renewed role on the global cultural stage.

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This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

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The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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