



Civic Cultural Diplomacy as a Tool for Promoting Ukraine's Foreign Policy Goals

Oleh Holoborodko  1*

¹ Kyiv University of Culture (Ukraine). PhD Student in International Relations, Public Communications and Regional Studies.

* **Corresponding Author**, e-mail: oleh.holoborodko@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Research Article

DOI:

[10.70651/3041-2498/2026.5.03](https://doi.org/10.70651/3041-2498/2026.5.03)

Received:

25 March 2026

Accepted:

28 April 2026

Published online:

3 May 2026

Copyright © 2026
by authors



This is an open access journal and all published articles are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution—NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0)

The article explores the role of citizen cultural diplomacy as a tool for promoting Ukraine's foreign policy goals in the face of constant geopolitical challenges. The transformation of cultural diplomacy from a state-centric model to an inclusive one is examined, where non-state actors play a key role: artists, activists, and public organizations. This paradigm shift reflects the democratization of international interaction, where non-state initiatives complement official narratives. The mechanisms of citizen cultural diplomacy are analyzed, in particular its decentralized, networked nature, rapid adaptability to crisis events, and the use of digital platforms to disseminate cultural content. Examples of successful initiatives that contributed to the formation of a positive image of Ukraine as a democratic nation are given. The impact of citizen diplomacy on Ukraine's foreign policy is studied (countering Russian propaganda, increasing cultural visibility, attracting international assistance). At the same time, problems are noted (lack of systemic coordination with state institutions, bureaucratic barriers, limited resources in wartime conditions). For the effective integration of citizen diplomacy into national strategies, institutional reform, transparent dialogue between the state and the public, as well as the ethical use of digital technologies to counter disinformation, are necessary. The role of international partnerships and non-governmental actors in the preservation of cultural heritage and the analysis of media discourse is highlighted. It is noted that the lack of high-quality Ukrainian-language media for the diaspora and refugees creates information gaps that reduce the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy. It is established that citizen cultural diplomacy has become a strategic addition to traditional diplomacy, strengthening the "soft power" of Ukraine. However, to realize its potential, systemic changes are needed: institutionalization of coordination mechanisms, support for digital innovations, and strengthening legal and cultural integration. Ukraine's experience demonstrates that citizen diplomacy can become the basis of international interaction in times of crisis, but requires a balance between the autonomy of the public sector and strategic planning at the state level.




KEYWORDS

cultural diplomacy, citizen diplomacy, non-state sector, civil society, foreign policy goals, instruments.



Громадянська культурна дипломатія як інструмент просування цілей зовнішньої політики України

Олег Г. Голобородько  ¹*

¹ Київський університет культури (Україна). Аспірант за спеціальністю «Міжнародні відносини, суспільні комунікації та регіональні студії».

* Автор-кореспондент, e-mail: oleh.holoborodko@gmail.com

СТАТТЯ

АНОТАЦІЯ

Дослідницька

DOI:

[10.70651/3041-2498/2026.5.03](https://doi.org/10.70651/3041-2498/2026.5.03)

Отримана:

25.03.2026 р.

Прийнята:

28.04.2026 р.

Опублікована:

03.05.2026 р.

Авторське право

© 2026 авторів



Цей твір ліцензовано на умовах Ліцензії Creative Commons «Із Зазначенням Авторства – Некомерційна 4.0 Міжнародна» (CC BY-NC 4.0).

Стаття досліджує роль громадянської культурної дипломатії як інструменту просування зовнішньополітичних цілей України в умовах постійних геополітичних викликів. Розглянуто трансформацію культурної дипломатії від державоцентричної моделі до інклюзивної, де ключову роль відіграють недержавні актори: митці, активісти, громадські організації. Вказана зміна парадигми відображає демократизацію міжнародної взаємодії, де недержавні ініціативи доповнюють офіційні наративи. Аналізуються механізми громадянської культурної дипломатії, зокрема її децентралізований, мережевий характер, швидка адаптивність до кризових подій та використання цифрових платформ для поширення культурного контенту. Наведено приклади успішних ініціатив, які сприяли формуванню позитивного іміджу України як демократичної нації. Досліджено вплив громадянської дипломатії на зовнішню політику України (проти дія російської пропаганди, підвищення культурної видимості, залучення міжнародної допомоги). Водночас зазначено проблеми (відсутність системної координації з державними інституціями, бюрократичні бар'єри, обмежені ресурси в умовах війни). Для ефективної інтеграції громадянської дипломатії в національні стратегії необхідна інституційна реформа, прозорий діалог між державою та громадськістю, а також етичне використання цифрових технологій для протидії дезінформації. Висвітлена роль міжнародних партнерств та неурядових учасників у збереженні культурної спадщини та аналізі медійного дискурсу. Відзначається, що відсутність якісних україномовних медіа для діаспори та біженців створює інформаційні прогалини, які знижують ефективність культурної дипломатії. Встановлено, що громадянська культурна дипломатія стала стратегічним доповненням до традиційної дипломатії, посилюючи «м'яку силу» України. Проте для реалізації її потенціалу потрібні системні зміни: інституціоналізація координаційних механізмів, підтримка цифрових інновацій, посилення правового та культурного поєднання. Досвід України демонструє, що громадянська дипломатія може стати основою міжнародної взаємодії в умовах кризи, але потребує балансу між автономією громадського сектору та стратегічним плануванням на державному рівні.



КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

культурна дипломатія, громадянська дипломатія, недержавний сектор, громадянське суспільство, зовнішньополітичні цілі, інструменти.

1. Introduction

In today's globalized world, the importance of cultural diplomacy has grown, moving beyond traditional state-centric approaches to embrace a more inclusive, citizen-centered model. Citizen cultural diplomacy, characterized by the active participation of non-state actors such as artists, activists, and civil society organizations, has become a powerful tool for promoting international understanding and cooperation. These developments reflect a broader democratization of diplomacy, with citizen initiatives complementing or even challenging official state narratives. However, the integration of citizen cultural diplomacy into official foreign policy frameworks remains underexplored, especially in the context of Ukraine's geopolitical environment post-2022. The ongoing period of martial law has encouraged Ukrainian citizens to engage independently in cultural diplomacy, often without direct state support, thereby highlighting both the potential and challenges of this approach. These activities (digital art exhibitions, virtual concerts, educational activities, etc.) demonstrate the resilience and adaptability that traditional diplomacy often lacks, but their volatile nature raises questions about sustainability and strategic alignment with national interests. The issue is the gap between spontaneous, authentic contributions from civil society and the structured state mechanisms needed to enhance their influence on the international stage.

2. Literature Review

The concept of cultural diplomacy has evolved significantly over the past century, with scholarly attention increasing since the late 20th century. Early definitions considered it a state tool of soft power aimed at promoting national interests through cultural exchanges, as noted by J. Nye [1]. However, globalization and digital technologies have democratized the mentioned sphere, allowing non-state actors to play a key role. Ukrainian researchers, A. Goncharuk and G. Lutsyshyn, have studied these transformations in the context of Ukraine, emphasizing the spontaneous emergence of public initiatives in conditions of geopolitical crises [2]. At the international level, I. Wallerstein and J. Melissen have investigated the interaction between state and non-state actors in the formation of global narratives, arguing that citizen cultural diplomacy can both complement and challenge official foreign policy. Recent studies emphasize the role of digital capabilities in promoting diplomacy in modern conditions [3]. Studies in Ukraine highlight how citizens have used digital platforms to project cultural resilience, although institutionalization to integrate these efforts into national strategies is still lacking. In the study [4], cultural diplomacy is seen as a soft power tool to enhance international image and mutual understanding. At the same time, the mechanisms for institutionalizing citizen input remain underexplored. Therefore, the possibilities of citizen cultural diplomacy to be used, especially in post-conflict settings where traditional resources are limited, require deeper exploration.

3. Problem Statement

The purpose of the article is to study the possibilities of applying citizen cultural diplomacy in the context of promoting Ukraine's foreign policy goals.

4. Methods and Materials

The information base of the study was scientific works of domestic and foreign scholars on cultural and civil diplomacy, strategic documents of Ukraine in the field of public diplomacy, analytical materials of international organizations and examples of implementation of civil cultural and diplomatic initiatives.

The study used methods of theoretical generalization and systematization – to determine the essence of civil cultural diplomacy; systemic and structural-functional methods – to study its role in promoting the foreign policy goals of Ukraine; comparative method – to analyze international experience; method of logical analysis and generalization – to substantiate the directions of integration of civil cultural diplomacy into the system of foreign policy activities of the state.

5. Results and Discussion

Citizen cultural diplomacy represents a paradigm shift in international relations, where non-state actors use cultural assets to influence global perceptions and promote cross-border dialogue. In Ukraine, the Russian military aggression in 2022 sparked a wave of grassroots cultural initiatives aimed at garnering international support and solidarity. These efforts, often led by artists, activists and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), eschew traditional diplomatic channels, using social media and digital platforms to instantly reach global audiences.

According to a Eurobarometer survey, Europeans continue to strongly support Ukraine. An overwhelming majority – almost nine in ten (89%) – support providing humanitarian aid to those affected by the war. More than eight in ten (84%) approve of welcoming into the European Union people forced to flee the fighting. Three-quarters of respondents (72%) support the provision of financial assistance to Ukraine, and the same proportion (72%) are positive about the introduction of economic sanctions against the Russian authorities, businesses and individuals. About six out of ten respondents welcome the granting of candidate status to Ukraine for EU membership (61%) and the financing by the European Union of the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine (60%). The majority of respondents (57%) expressed satisfaction with the EU's actions in response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. At the same time, slightly more than half of Europeans (54%) positively assess the response of their countries' authorities to the situation, which indicates a high level of sympathy and readiness to support the Ukrainian people in a difficult period [5]. The mechanisms of citizen cultural diplomacy are multifaceted, defined by their decentralized nature and citizen-ledness. First, the approaches considered work through flexible, adaptive networks that allow for a rapid response to geopolitical events. For example, Ukrainian artists have used platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to distribute digital artwork and short films. [6] The diverse initiatives, often launched within hours of major events, differ from the slower, more bureaucratic processes of state-run diplomacy. Second, citizen cultural diplomacy thrives on its independence from state control, which gives it an authenticity that resonates with international audiences. Third, the use of digital technologies broadens its reach and accessibility.

The impact of citizen cultural diplomacy on Ukraine's foreign policy is evident in its ability to spread soft power and international solidarity. Since 2022, initiatives have been building a resilient Ukrainian identity, countering disinformation, and fostering empathy. These efforts have increased Ukraine's cultural visibility, strengthening its position as a democratic, culturally rich nation deserving of global support.

In addition, citizen cultural diplomacy complements state efforts by filling gaps where official resources are limited. For a long time, there has been a lack of a comprehensive state approach in this area, which has led to the emergence of private initiatives that have tried to fill the existing gap. An important milestone was the establishment in 2017 of the Ukrainian Institute under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, designed to coordinate the state's cultural and diplomatic efforts [7]. The Ukrainian Institute, a state body, collaborates with independent public organizations to support autonomous projects, such as international exhibitions of Ukrainian art and literary events [8]. International exhibitions of Ukrainian art, organized jointly with NGOs, strengthen bilateral ties and promote Ukraine's integration into European structures. Such initiatives are also effective tools for countering Russian propaganda, strengthening Ukraine's position as a democratic state.

This synergy broadens the reach of cultural messages, aligning them with foreign policy goals of strengthening bilateral ties and promoting European integration. However, the lack of systemic coordination often limits the strategic impact of initiatives. Many projects remain fragmented and short-term, requiring better integration into national strategies. In the future, the Ukrainian Institute has the potential to become a central body for coordinating cultural diplomacy, but it needs greater institutional support and resources.

Despite its potential, integrating citizen cultural diplomacy into formal foreign policy frameworks presents challenges. Coordination between government agencies and civil society is often hampered by bureaucratic inertia and conflicting priorities. NGOs favor creative freedom and citizen engagement, while the public sector focuses on strategic messaging aligned with geopolitical goals. Successful collaboration requires transparent dialogue and mutual recognition of strengths.

The digital dimension creates both opportunities and risks. While it democratizes access and expands outreach, it exposes initiatives to disinformation and cultural appropriation. Ensuring digital

justice and the ethical use of technology are crucial to maintaining trust. In addition, financial, logistical, and human resource constraints create obstacles to sustaining citizen efforts, especially in times of war. Opportunities lie in using international partnerships and digital platforms to overcome constraints, as evidenced by the cooperation with UNESCO for the preservation of cultural heritage [9]. Non-governmental actors are also showing flexibility in adapting to new roles, such as data analysis and support for international sanctions, which indicates the potential for a broader integration of citizen diplomacy into foreign policy strategies.

Let's Data, together with analysts from Detector Media, monitored media discourse on Ukraine in 36 countries across Europe, Asia, Africa and South America. The results showed that coverage of Ukrainian issues in European media has its own specificities, depending on the country and the context of the presentation of materials, which highlights the need to adapt cultural initiatives to the specificities of each media market [10].

Since the full-scale Russian invasion, over 6.8 million refugees from Ukraine have been registered worldwide, with the vast majority (92%) seeking safety in Europe [11], but they lack quality Ukrainian-language media. This creates an information vacuum, making integration and maintaining contact with Ukraine more difficult. The lack of reliable and timely information about state initiatives and important events reduces the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy [12].

In the context of modern global development, cultural diplomacy is gaining special importance as a powerful mechanism of intercultural communication. The application of a systematic approach to the study of this phenomenon, using culturological, synergetic, analytical and comparative methods, allows us to consider civic cultural diplomacy as an integral part of the state's international activities [13].

Civic diplomacy is a fundamental tool of foreign policy that contributes to the development of strong international ties and deepening mutual understanding between different countries [14]. In the context of globalization processes, its importance continues to grow, opening up new opportunities for cultural exchange and preserving cultural diversity. Technological innovations, in particular digital platforms and virtual reality, create additional tools for strengthening cultural interaction between nations [13].

The institutionalization of Ukrainian civic diplomacy is a key factor in its effective functioning in the international arena [15]. For a long time, there was a lack of a comprehensive state approach in this area, which led to the emergence of private initiatives that tried to fill the existing gap. As noted, an important milestone was the creation of the Ukrainian Institute under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, designed to coordinate the cultural and diplomatic efforts of the state [7]. Today, the civil cultural diplomacy of Ukraine is aimed at solving the following strategic tasks: popularization of national culture in the world; protection of the rights and interests of Ukrainians abroad; integration of Ukraine into the global information and European political and economic space; raising awareness of the international community about the challenges facing Ukraine [16]. Of particular value is the symbiosis of cultural and legal potential in the field of civil diplomacy. This combination provides the opportunity to effectively convey to a foreign audience the specifics of Ukrainian culture through the prism of science, education and art. The formation of a favorable image of the state through cultural and diplomatic tools contributes to the implementation of key tasks of Ukraine's international policy [17].

In the context of globalization, citizen cultural diplomacy acquires the status of a priority instrument of foreign policy [14]. The role of creative industries is growing, which are becoming a powerful driver of strengthening cultural and diplomatic relations [13]. For Ukraine, citizen cultural diplomacy is an important element of strategic activity with the help of which it is possible to effectively position the state in the international arena and find support at the public level [15]. An urgent task remains an in-depth study of the development of citizen cultural diplomacy in the Ukrainian scientific space in order to strengthen Ukraine's international relations in the process of globalization [14].

Thus, citizen cultural diplomacy in Ukraine operates through decentralized networks, digital reinforcement and authentic positioning, significantly influencing foreign policy by broadcasting soft power and international support. Its integration into national strategies requires overcoming problems of coordination and use of digital capabilities, offering a model for other countries overcoming similar crises.

6. Conclusions

Citizen cultural diplomacy has become a dynamic and influential component of Ukraine's foreign policy toolkit, especially after 2022. By harnessing the creativity and initiative of the non-state sector, Ukraine has built a resilient, culturally rich national identity, fostering international solidarity and support. This approach complements traditional diplomacy by filling resource gaps and enhancing cultural outreach through digital means. However, its full potential remains unrealized without systemic integration into national strategies. Effective cooperation between the state and civil society, balancing autonomy and strategic alignment, is essential to sustain and scale up the necessary efforts. Digital technologies offer a way to expand influence, although challenges such as disinformation and resource constraints need to be addressed. Ukraine's experience provides an example for other countries, demonstrating how citizen cultural diplomacy can project soft power and advance foreign policy in times of crisis. Future efforts should prioritize institutional structures, transparent partnerships, and ethical digital practices to ensure that this approach remains central to international engagement.

References

1. Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. Public Affairs.
2. Lutsyshyn, H., & Honcharuk, A. (2017). Osoblyvosti rozvytku kulturnoi dyplomatii Ukrainy v suchasnykh umovakh [Features of the development of cultural diplomacy of Ukraine in modern conditions]. *Humanitarian Vision*, 3(1), 25–30. http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/hv_2017_3_1_7 (in Ukrainian)
3. Kononenko, V., & Komarova, T. (2024). Tsyfrova dyplomatiia yak zasib stratehichnoi komunikatsii derzhavy [Digital diplomacy as a means of strategic communication of the state]. *Visnyk Kharkivskoho natsionalnoho universytetu imeni V.N. Karazina. Serii "Pytannia politolohii" – Bulletin of V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University. Series "Issues of Political Science"*, (45), 15–20. <https://doi.org/10.26565/2220-8089-2024-45-02> (in Ukrainian)
4. Rudniev, A. O., Malovan, Yu. H., & Arseniuk, M. S. (2024). Kulturna dyplomatiia yak instrument formuvannia imidzhu Ukrainy [Cultural diplomacy as a tool for shaping Ukraine's image]. *Rehionalni studii – Regional Studies*, (37), 63–67. <https://doi.org/10.32782/2663-6170/2024.37.11> (in Ukrainian)
5. Eurobarometer. (2023). *Opytuvannia Yevrobarometra pokazalo, shcho yevropeitsi prodovzhuiut rishyche pidtrymuvaty Ukrainu* [Eurobarometer survey showed that Europeans continue to strongly support Ukraine]. <https://surl.li/uxjjmy> (in Ukrainian)
6. Suchkov, D. (2023). Media-mystetstvo yak trend suchasnoi audiovizualnoi kultury [Media art as a trend of modern audiovisual culture]. *Ukrainska kultura: mynule, suchasne, shliakhy rozvytku – Ukrainian culture: past, present, ways of development*, (47), 84–89. <https://doi.org/10.35619/ucpmk.v47i.727> (in Ukrainian)
7. Tereshchuk, V. (2019). Cultural Diplomacy as a Tool of Ukraine's Foreign Policy: Institutional Dimension. *Historia i polityka*, 35(28), 59–70. <https://doi.org/10.12775/HiP.2019.015>
8. Ukrainskyi instytut pidtrymaie visim proektiv z ukrainistyky u shesty kraynah [Ukrainian Institute will support eight Ukrainian studies projects in six countries]. (2025). *Ukrainian Institute*. <https://ui.org.ua/sectors/ukrayinskyj-instytut-pidtrymaje-visim-proektiv-z-ukrayinistyky-u-shesty-krayinah/>. (in Ukrainian)
9. Uchast Ukrainy u diialnosti YNESKO [Ukraine's participation in UNESCO activities]. (2024). *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine*. <https://mfa.gov.ua/mizhnarodni-vidnosini/yunesko/uchast-ukrayini-u-diyalnosti-yunesko>. (in Ukrainian)
10. Protydiia naratyvam rosiiskoi propahandy pro Ukrainu v zakhidnykh media [Countering narratives of Russian propaganda about Ukraine in Western media]. (2023). *LMF*. https://lnk.bio/LMF_Networks. (in Ukrainian)
11. Ukraine Situation: Regional Refugee Response Plan 2025–2026. (2024). *UNHCR*. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/113657>.
12. Ukrainski media, stavlennia ta dovira u 2024 r. [Ukrainian media, attitudes and trust in 2024]. (2024). *USAID*. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kwsclr3Qm2QaqaIVv0_l4saWRFY_NXWb/view. (in Ukrainian)
13. Drach, V. V. (2024). Kulturna dyplomatiia v umovakh hlobalnoho rozvytku suspilstv [Cultural diplomacy in conditions of global development of societies]. *Visnyk Natsionalnoi akademii kerivnykh kadrov kultury i mystetstv – Bulletin of the National Academy of Management of Culture and Arts*, (2), 33–38. <http://doi.org/10.32461/2226-3209.2.2024.308270> (in Ukrainian)
14. Kostyria, I. O., Shevchenko, M. I., & Yanchenko, N. M. (2021). Kulturna dyplomatiia yak identyfikator derzhavy v konteksti hlobalizatsii [Cultural diplomacy as a state identifier in the context of globalization]. *Visnyk*

Natsionalnoi akademii kerivnykh kadriv kultury i mystetstv – Bulletin of the National Academy of Management of Culture and Arts, (4), 20–25. <https://journals.urau.ua/visnyknakkkim/article/view/250236/247668> (in Ukrainian)

15. Mytsyk, L. M. (2022). Cultural diplomacy as a tool for shaping the international image of Ukraine. *Literatura ta kultura Polissia – Literature and Culture of Polissia*, (105), 70–84. <https://doi.org/10.31654/2520-6966-2021-15i-105-70-84>
16. Dubovyk, N., & Shylo, O. (2023). Kulturna dyplomatiia yak instrument mizhnarodnoi komunikatsii Ukrainy [Cultural diplomacy as a tool for Ukraine’s international communication]. *Molodyi vchenyi – Young Scientist*, 4(116), 72–76. <https://doi.org/10.32839/2304-5809/2023-4-116-14> (in Ukrainian)
17. Stasevska, O. A., & Malanchuk, I. I. (2021). Kulturna dyplomatiia: symbioz kulturnoho ta pravovoho potentsialu [Cultural diplomacy: a symbiosis of cultural and legal potential]. *Pravo ta innovatsii – Law and Innovations*, (1), 89–95. [https://doi.org/10.37772/2518-1718-2021-1\(33\)-13](https://doi.org/10.37772/2518-1718-2021-1(33)-13) (in Ukrainian)