

Andriy Sendetskyy*

sendetskyy@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6821-1785>
Institute of Political Science and Administration
Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University
Kazimierza Wóycickiego 1/3
01-938 Warsaw, Poland

Analysis of the Place and Role of Theatre in Cultural Diplomacy: Relations Between Poland and Ukraine (2014-2023)

Abstract: This article presents the results of an interdisciplinary pilot study on the role of theatre in the context of cultural diplomacy between Poland and Ukraine over the past decade. The research period was shaped by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Poland's ongoing support for Ukraine in its fight against the aggressor. The study explores the role of theatre in shaping international cultural relations, with a particular focus on its use as a tool of cultural diplomacy in Polish-Ukrainian relations. The analysis centres on the interactions between representatives, governments, and cultural institutions of both countries. The article examines the place of theatre in cultural diplomacy between Poland and Ukraine from 2014 to 2023. The research methodology included induction (comparing empirical data); deduction (hypothesis verification); analysis; synthesis; and analogy. A historical-comparative analysis was

* **Andriy Sendetskyy** is a PhD candidate at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw. He is the Artistic Director of the LAD Theatre "ScenA8" and the Center for Cultural & Arts Initiatives. His research focuses on cultural policy, intercultural dialogue, and the relationship between performing arts and international relations, with particular attention paid to the role of theatre in cultural diplomacy in the context of Polish-Ukrainian relations in the 21st century. He has implemented international artistic and research projects in Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia, and Canada, and delivered lectures at academic institutions in these countries. He is a recipient of the Gaude Polonia, Lane Kirkland, and SAIA scholarships. His work has appeared in peer-reviewed journals in Ukraine, Slovakia, and Canada.

also conducted, tracking the evolution of cultural relations between Poland and Ukraine. This analysis compares the development of international theatre practices, including festivals, artistic residencies, and cultural exchanges involving artists from both countries. An institutional analysis further identifies the role of specific organizations, their position in cultural diplomacy, and their efforts to strengthen Polish-Ukrainian relations. The article identifies key challenges and obstacles that hinder the execution of Polish-Ukrainian theatre projects within cultural diplomacy. This analysis will assist in developing strategies to overcome these challenges and improve the process of enhancing bilateral relations between Poland and Ukraine in cultural diplomacy.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy, theatre, Polish-Ukrainian relations, cultural dialogue, international relations

What the actor does should remain connected to the surrounding world and its cultural context; however, to avoid the danger of stereotypes, this connection must be approached differently – almost as if freeing the signs from the organic process of the human body.¹

Introduction

The current political situation necessitates constant monitoring of the apparent stability in international relations and the search for solutions to preserve and strengthen the foundations of bilateral agreements based on mutual respect for sovereignty and the comprehensive functioning of each state. In addition to political, economic, military, and medical diplomacy – which often rely on “hard power” applied by dominant states to enforce compliance – cultural diplomacy plays a crucial role in international communication. Its influence is rooted in “soft power”, which involves presenting a country’s values to the world in order to enhance its global image. It is important to note that these forms of diplomacy are not separate; they are interconnected and collectively form the broader framework of public (social) diplomacy.

Recent events, such as the Russo-Ukrainian war, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Gaza war, and other ongoing military clashes and conflicts demonstrate that cultural diplomacy depends on various forms of “hard power” diplomacy when controversial figures govern a country. However, the effectiveness of cultural diplo-

¹ J. Grotowski, *Teksty z lat 1965-1969: wybór* [Texts from 1965-1969: A Selection], Wiedza o Kulturze, Wrocław 1990 (own translation).

macy reveals itself over time and can, under politically favourable conditions, bring about significant positive results. In past centuries, travellers, traders, researchers, and artists acted as informal ambassadors or early diplomats, shaping foreign perceptions of their homeland. In today's world of nanotechnology and digital connectivity, international relations operate under different rules. Nowadays, anyone can, because of the reach of the internet represent their country at any time of day by engaging in social networks.

Today, in the 21st century, it has become evident that the territorial security of every state depends not only on well-thought-out political activities, economic development, and strengthening of their military potential, but also on their harmonious communication in cultural diplomacy, including in the field of performing arts. For this reason, studying cultural diplomacy as a key component of a country's global image remains highly relevant, particularly within the field of political science.²

This article examines the role of theatre in cultural diplomacy within the context of Polish-Ukrainian relations from 2014 to 2023. It aims to achieve this by pursuing the following objectives: identifying the key sources of cultural diplomacy, theatre, and Polish-Ukrainian relations relevant to the topic; characterizing the key functions of theatre as a diplomatic tool; and identifying the effective theatre practices that can serve as cultural ambassadors for the state.

Explanation of Selected Terms in the Thesaurus of International Relations

The term "public diplomacy" first appeared in the media in the second half of the 19th century, initially referring to polite behaviour.³ Over time, the concept evolved in various countries and came to be associated with the dissemination of a state's activities in the public sphere, gradually replacing the term "propaganda", which often carried negative connotations. As a result, more neutral and widely accepted terms, such as "public relations", "external relations", and "international communication", became increasingly common.

The term "cultural dialogue" has similar functions, but the difference is that this form of communication does not need to occur with explicit intentions in the public information sphere. However, official and non-governmental diplomacy always involve representing a state's image, even if there is no consensus between these institutional actors on how to present their country. The author of the name of this phenomenon, Milton Cummings, defines it concisely as the "exchange of

² A. Sendetskyi, *Ukrainsko-polska teatralna diialnist pochatku XXI st.: osmyslennia dialohu kultur susidiv i stratehii yoho vyvchennia* [The Ukrainian-Polish Theatrical Activity of the Beginning of the 21st Century: Understanding the Dialogue of Neighbouring Cultures and the Strategy of its Study], in: *Kulturni ta mystetski studii XXI stolittia: naukovo-praktychne partnerstvo* [Cultural and Artistic Studios of the 21st Century: Scientific and Practical Partnership], National Academy of Culture and Arts Management, Kyiv 2021, pp. 26-28.

³ N. Cull, *Public Diplomacy: Lessons from the Past*, Figueroa Press, Los Angeles 2009.

ideas, information, art, language and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding”.⁴ The foundation of contemporary cultural diplomacy is Joseph Nye’s neoliberal concept, which contrasts neorealism’s “hard power” with a different set of factors that he called “soft power” (the ability to shape others’ preferences).⁵ Three methods are deemed to exert influence: threats and coercion; motivation; and engagement. This approach shifts the focus from the realist category of conflict to the idealist category of cooperation and peaceful coexistence.

The academic issue at hand involves specific terms that have long existed, the translation of which carries subtle semantic nuances. Particularly in the Polish language, there are words and expressions that are unique to it and often lack the same range of meanings when translated into other languages. One such issue concerns the use of the adjectives “*kulturalny*” and “*kulturowy*” – both of which can be translated as “cultural” in English within the context of diplomacy. Justyna Langowska has examined this distinction, providing a thorough explanation of the differences between these adjectives and the noun “diplomacy”.⁶ In our study, which analyzes the place and role of theatre in cultural diplomacy, it is essential to refer to Langowska’s opinion:

In the field of diplomacy, within the *kulturalny* dimension, actions promoting a country’s culture focus on organizing exhibitions and cultural events related to music, theatre, and film. This is a demonstration and presentation of the most important and beautiful elements of a nation’s culture. Referring to the *kulturowy* dimension involves undertaking activities that foster cultural exchange, dialogue, meetings, workshops, and joint initiatives, allowing participants to get to know and understand each other. This approach aligns more closely with the American concept of soft power, which views culture as a soft force that attracts attention and interest from countries involved in international relations. However, such a definition of culture’s role brings it very close to issues of power and influence.⁷

Building on Langowska’s definition and applying the concept of cultural diplomacy to theatre practices, staging performances by a theatre troupe from one country can be considered an act of “cultural diplomacy”. In contrast, organizing joint workshops, artistic residencies, and creative collaborations aimed at fostering a deeper understanding of foreign colleagues’ creativity and worldview constitutes an act of “cultural exchange diplomacy”.

⁴ M. Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey*, Americans for the Arts, Washington, DC 2009.

⁵ J. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, PublicAffairs, New York 2004.

⁶ J. Langowska, *Dyplomacja kulturalna czy kulturowa – definiowanie kultury i jej roli na arenie międzynarodowej z perspektywy nauk humanistycznych* [Cultural Diplomacy – Defining Culture and Its Role on the International Arena. Perspective of Humanities], “Zeszyty Naukowe TD UJ. Nauki Humanistyczne” 2018, Vol. 21, pp. 37-60.

⁷ Ibidem, pp. 39-40 (own translation).

In our view, theatre practices merge these two semantic nuances present in the Polish language. The audience watching a performance is not a passive receiver but an active participant in the event, engaging with it critically. By choosing to attend, the audience has already committed itself to being part of the experience. While observing the actors on stage, the viewer continually identifies with the characters, drawing on personal experiences, comparing familiar situations, symbols, and messages, and empathizing with the emotions portrayed, ultimately evaluating the aesthetics of the performance. This multidimensional engagement with reality allows theatre to occupy a prominent place in cultural diplomacy, positioning itself alongside other representative forms such as visual art exhibitions, musical concerts, literary forums, museum collections, sporting events, and tourist excursions.

In numerous studies, the term “cultural diplomacy” is used synonymously with “dialogue of cultures”, which in English-language studies is often referred to as “cross-cultural communication”.⁸ At this level of communication, participants may be representatives of different races, ethnicities, nationalities, religions, and sub-cultures, possessing individual levels of development. During communication, they may recognize similarities and differences in verbal aspects, traditions, worldviews, intellect, and other elements, either breaking stereotypes or confirming them.

Intercultural communication operates on two levels: first, at the level of nations, where ethnic cultures have, through various processes and transformations, developed distinct civilizations; and second, at the level of the products of these civilizations, including spiritual reflections and artistic symbols. These two levels together create a shared space for dialogue among the parties involved. Both are intertwined with the cultural diplomacy programmes carried out by a given country. In this context, cultural diplomacy should be understood as a broad normative force that supports cultural development, facilitates intercultural dialogue, and promotes a country’s brand through its cultural production.⁹

Thus, cultural dialogue refers to constructive communication between two or more parties seeking compromises and shared interests in and for long-term engagement. In contrast, the dialogue of cultures involves communication between representatives of different ethnic, social, religious, and other groups, aimed at gaining mutual understanding, building relationships, and/or defending respective interests. Such interactions between representatives of these diverse communities do not always result in positive outcomes.

⁸ M. Lustig, J. Koester, *Intercultural Competence*, 7th ed., Pearson Education, Boston 2012; “International Journal of Intercultural Relations” 1989, Vol. 13(3): Special Issue on Intercultural Communication Competence; D. Deardorff (ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence*, Sage, Thousand Oaks 2009; L. Arasaratnam, M. Doerfel, *Intercultural Communication Competence: Identifying Key Components from Multicultural Perspectives*, “International Journal of Intercultural Relations” 2005, Vol. 29(2), pp. 137-163.

⁹ A. Triandafyllidou, T. Szűcs, *EU Cultural Diplomacy: Challenges and Opportunities*, “Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies Policy Briefs” 2017, Vol. 2017/13, pp. 1-6.

The Role of Theatre as a Diplomat

Despite the extensive body of literature on cultural diplomacy worldwide, relatively few sources have focused specifically on the role of theatre in international communication, particularly in the context of Polish-Ukrainian relations. The available research shows that most relevant sources touch indirectly on the topic, primarily appearing in theatrical journals and online platforms. These publications predominantly address theatrical, artistic, and biographical issues, with only brief references to cultural diplomacy processes.¹⁰

Among the monographs and academic articles relevant to our study, the works of scholars exploring the social dimension of theatre – particularly its significance in the context of cultural diplomacy – are especially noteworthy. This research places particular emphasis on the role of societal elites and non-governmental organizations in this phenomenon.

In this context, it is worth considering Daniel Przystek's statement that:

For most entities operating in the cultural sphere, local government structures remain the founding body. In this way, what is being built is not so much a dual as a multi-level model of participation in the field of culture. Individual municipalities, counties, and regions independently shape the financing of artistic phenomena. Involvement in cultural activities is carried out in accordance with the will of the local government authorities. The state's policy, due to its possession of funds for realizing its own vision in the field of culture, constitutes only a small part of the overall engagement.¹¹

Additionally, we must mention the role of theatre as the most social of the arts for several reasons, with which we fully agree:

First, theatre is a social (public) institution – possessing its own organizer, team, and collaborators. It is a team – a living organism embedded in a specific social reality, functioning according to norms and rules defined by the state. Second, in no other field of art does a direct, daily interaction between the creator and audience occur as frequently. These interactions affect the reception and reactions of viewers. [...] Third, theatre is the quickest and most accurate art form in terms of responding to social changes. [...] Fourth, theatrical art is open – in one sense, it often engages in discourse with the external world, becoming political art. [...] Thus, every theatrical action has social (and, in a narrower sense, political) connotations.¹²

¹⁰ A. Sendetskyi, *Cultural and Artistic Dialogue of Ukrainian Theaters on the Pages of Polish Periodicals at the Beginning of the 21st Century*, "Bulletin of Mariupol State University. Series: Philosophy, Culture Studies, Sociology" 2022, Vol. 23, pp. 131-143.

¹¹ D. Przystek, *Polityka kulturalna w Polsce (i na świecie)* [Cultural Policy in Poland (and Around the World)], "Studia BAS" 2016, Vol. 2(46), pp. 9-35 (own translation).

¹² D. Przystek, *Polityki kulturalne a wolność wypowiedzi artystycznej w Polsce w latach 1989-2015* [Cultural Policies and Freedom of Artistic Expression in Poland in 1989-2015], Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, Warszawa 2017 (own translation).

In this way, we can draw clear parallels between theatre, as a form of performing art directed at those who appreciate creativity, and cultural diplomacy, which primarily functions as a media representative of a community's image, seeking a positive reception from its audience. The aesthetics of information presentation, the visualization of artistic language, and the verbalization of positive messages bring theatre and cultural diplomacy closer to their shared goal: winning the audience's favour. Both phenomena pursue their specific objectives: the art of persuasion and the art of compromise.¹³

Therefore, theatre's essential role as an ambassador lies in its subtle oratorical skill and clear rhetoric, as foreign audiences choose to attend a performance by a visiting troupe or observe another theatrical tradition, including its form and content. In the context of stage performances, oratory can sometimes be wordless: the message from the stage may be conveyed more through non-verbal communication than through spoken words.¹⁴ This unique characteristic of theatrical art enhances the understanding of both the text and its context, especially in foreign-language settings. Indeed, a foreign-language performance often poses a challenge to the audience's full comprehension of a theatrical work. A notable example of a friendly gesture aimed at fostering better understanding between Ukrainian actors and Polish spectators was the presentation of a Ukrainian play in the Polish language at the International Theatre Festival in Rybnik, Silesian Voivodeship, in 2017. The production was staged by the non-institutional creative collective the Lviv Authorial Drama (LAD) Theatre "ScenA8" in collaboration with the Educational Theatre Laboratory "SPIROGRAPH".¹⁵

Theatre functions as a diplomat, building trust in its practices while also taking on the role of a stage psychologist. By addressing fundamental life themes to a collective "patient" in the audience – unique in that the same group of viewers with the same mood never repeats – it aims to satisfy the individual needs of each viewer. In other words, the subject of the staged work, and thus the culture of the creator, targets each individual in the audience.

This qualitative characteristic of theatre – its multifunctionality as an institution – is closely tied to cultural diplomacy. When effectively utilized in cultural

¹³ P. Kieliszewski, M. Poprawski, *Instytucje publiczne i dyplomacja kulturalna. Potencjały i wyzwania* [Public Institutions and Cultural Diplomacy. Possibilities and Challenges], "Zarządzanie Publiczne" 2009, Vol. 3(9), pp. 19-32.

¹⁴ A. Sendetskyi, *Neverbalika v mystetstvi na prykladi tvorchosti Lvivskoho teatru estradnykh miniatiur "I Liudy, i Lialky"* [Nonverbals Govern How in Art on the Example of the Work of the Lviv Theatre of Variety Miniatures "Both People and Puppets"], in: *Mystetska kultura: istoriia, teoriia, metodolohiia. Tezy dopovidei VIII Mizhnarodnoi naukovoï konferentsii* [Artistic Culture: History, Theory, Methodology. Abstracts of the 8th International Scientific Conference], Vasyl Stefanyk National Scientific Library of Ukraine in Lviv, Lviv 2020, pp. 163-164.

¹⁵ A. Sendetskyi, *Theatrical Art of Ukraine in Cultural Dialogue with European Union Countries 2014-2023*, "Ukrainian Culture: Past, Modern and Ways of Development. Branch: Cultural Studies" 2023, Vol. 47, pp. 103-113.

diplomacy, theatre practices can shape international public opinion, influence individuals' worldviews, and impact the attitudes and perceptions of local communities and nations. An illustrative example is the play *Donbas, Rise Up! A Tale about Novorossiya (Donbas, povstan! Kazka pro Novorosiiu)* by Pavlo Yurov and Anastasiya Kasilova, which explores the military situation in eastern Ukraine and the mentality of the Donbas region's inhabitants. The work was presented in an authorial reading format in Lublin and Warsaw.¹⁶

The search for an encounter between the ego and the alter ego, a representative of one culture in the environment of another, forms the credo of cultural diplomacy. Theatre is constantly engaged in this search. These processes are particularly evident in the work of Antonin Artaud, who was a significant inspiration for many 20th- and early 21st-century artists and published his views on the role and place of theatre in his work *The Theatre and Its Double (Le Théâtre et son double)*.¹⁷

Observations of cultural transfer processes have also become valuable for understanding the role of theatre, particularly in one of the critical fields of theatrical art – dramaturgy, and, more specifically, in the translations of plays by foreign authors.¹⁸ A landmark event in the Polish-Ukrainian cultural dialogue within the context of theatrical practices occurred in 2015 with the publication of a collection of plays by Ukrainian playwrights titled *New Ukrainian Drama. Waiting for Maidan (Nova ukrainska drama. V ochikuvanni na Maidan)*, translated into Polish by Anna Korzeniowska-Bihun and Andrei Moskvina.¹⁹ This bilateral initiative introduced two significant themes: the Ukrainian people's modern struggle against a long-standing enemy for the right to choose – epitomized by the Euromaidan events of 2013-2014 – and the presentation of contemporary Ukrainian drama in neighbouring Poland. The project sparked a new wave of opportunities for creative exchange. Three years later, another important collection was published: *Contemporary Ukrainian Drama. From A to Z (Suchasna ukrainska dramaturhiia. Vid A do Ya)*.

Researchers note that when staging a foreign playwright's work, the primary interest of the theatre troupe lies in presenting a specific cultural situation, which according to the work occurred in another country (this best illustrates the dia-

¹⁶ N. Sokolenko, Pavlo Yurov. *Eksportovane peklo* [Pavlo Yurov. Exported Hell], "Ukrains'kij teatr" 2014, Vol. 5, pp. 16-17; eadem, *Liublinska alternatyva* [Lublin Alternative], "Ukrains'kij teatr" 2014, Vol. 5, pp. 42-43.

¹⁷ A. Świątek, *Miedzy świętością a szaleństwem. O podróży Antonina Artauda do Sierra Tarahumara, czyli do ziemi "zmarłychwstania" teatru* [Between Sanctity and Madness. About Antonin Artaud's Travel to Sierra Tarahumara, i.e. to the Land of Theatre's "Resurrection"], "Laboratorium Kultury" 2012, Vol. 1, pp. 82-90.

¹⁸ D. Pick, *Czym jest transfer kultury? Transfer kultury a metoda porównawcza* [What is Culture Transfer? Culture Transfer and the Comparative Method], in: M. Zielińska, M. Zybura (eds), *Monolog, dialog, transfer. Relacje kultury polskiej i niemieckiej w XIX i XX wieku* [Monologue, Dialogue, Transfer: Relations between Polish and German Culture in the 19th and 20th Centuries], Centrum Willy'ego Brandta, Wrocław 2013, pp. 93-108.

¹⁹ S. Vasyliiev et al., *Ukrainskyi teatr: shliakh do sebe. Zdobutky. Vyklyky. Problemy. Analitychno-sotsiologichne doslidzhennia* [Ukrainian Theatre: The Path to Self. Achievements. Challenges. Problems. Analytical and Sociological Research], KZhD "Sofiia", Kyiv 2018.

logue of cultures), rather than focusing on foreign culture in general, which is typically the domain of cultural diplomacy.²⁰

In interdisciplinary research on cultural diplomacy and theatre practices, it is essential to consider the specificity of cultural transfer. Proponents of this theory argue that comparative analysis is not entirely adequate, as it assumes the search for unique and universal features of two or more phenomena, followed by their comparison based on noticeable opposition. However, cultural transfer emphasizes the mutual penetration of cultures and the adaptation of a “foreign” agent in the environment of “one’s own” enclave. For example, the dissemination of fairy tales by Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, and other writers has been eagerly embraced by theatre troupes worldwide, interpreting them in line with local aesthetics, the director’s artistic vision, and the specific institution’s capabilities.

Despite its cultural mixing and identity-shattering features, this essential communicative aspect is a reliable channel of influence that cultural diplomacy can utilize. By creatively blending the authentic product of one culture with the audience’s culture, rapprochement occurs, fostering a better understanding of the characteristics of a multicultural environment. Thus, another role of theatre practices in cultural diplomacy is adaptation (adjustment). In the case of coordinated actions with representatives of state authorities, it is called implementation (programme realization) in the cultural domain.

The above-mentioned roles of theatre practices – unforced oratory, including through non-verbal means, that is, the entire complex process of a performance; the psychological depth of the presented work, and the search for empathy in the viewer; and the organic inclusion of representative cultural elements in the recipient’s environment – are the valuable qualities of performing art that help convey the key messages of beneficial ideological concepts for the state in an aesthetically pleasing and non-confrontational manner. Cultural diplomacy always seeks to achieve the same goal. Thus, the cohesion of theatre practices and cultural diplomacy can have a powerful impact on international communication.

The Place of Theatre as an Ambassador

In addition to exploring the role of theatre in international communications, this study also aims to define the place of theatre within the context of cultural diplomacy between Poland and Ukraine over the past decade.²¹ The research timeframe is shaped by Russia’s resurgence of aggressive policies and military escalation in

²⁰ E. Fischer-Lichte, J. Riley, M. Gissenwehner (eds), *The Dramatic Touch of Difference: Theatre, Own and Foreign*, Gunter Narr Verlag, Tübingen 1990.

²¹ A. Sendetskyy, *Kulturna dyplomatiia XXI st. Ukrainy i Polshchi: spilni ta vidminni oznaky* [Cultural Diplomacy in the 21st Century: Ukraine and Poland – Common and Unique Characteristics], in: *Ukraina ta Yevropa. Kultura v hlobalnykh vykykakh sohodennia* [Ukraine and Europe. Culture in Today’s Global Challenges], Modern Art Research Institute, Kyiv 2023, pp. 124-127.

Ukraine, alongside Poland's role in supporting Ukraine's resistance against the invaders. While the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, initiated and perpetuated by Russia, has spanned many centuries, since 2014, it has intensified into renewed military assaults and open genocide against the Ukrainian people, including the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage. In the context of globalization, this political situation has deeply affected Ukrainian society and has had a significant global resonance.

The study used research methods – in particular historical-comparative and institutional analysis – to examine specialist periodicals from Poland and Ukraine that published materials on these countries' bilateral activities in the field of theatrical art. Based on the literary sources identified in journals such as *Dialog*, *Miesięcznik poświęcony dramaturgii współczesnej*, *Didaskalia*, *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, *Sce-na*, and *Teatr*, it is possible to generalize the main themes of the publications related to Polish-Ukrainian cultural ties: historical (retro and recollections); current events (the latest developments in theatre art, announcements of performances); personalities (creative biographies, discoveries of new names); and literary-theatrical reviews (play texts, performative script readings, dramaturgical meetings).²²

Ukrainian theatre journals were also analyzed, where information about Polish-Ukrainian theatrical contacts regularly appeared. Publications in *Ukrains'kij teatr*, *Proscenium*, *Kino-Teatr*, and to a lesser extent in *Teatralna besida*, received the most attention. A critical review of articles and reports helped define their primary themes: retrospection, traditions and innovations, personalities, institutions, dramaturgy, and theatre practices.²³

The study also identified a number of online platforms and digital journals – such as *Proto produkciia*, *Suspijne Kultura*, *Hromadske Radio*, *Mirror of the Week*, and *LB.ua*, which also proved helpful. Short online reports supplemented knowledge about the development trends in Polish-Ukrainian dialogue, particularly revealing the specifics of organizing artistic events.²⁴

Additionally, the websites of Ukraine's national opera and ballet theatres were analyzed in order to explore the representation of Polish-Ukrainian cultural relations. The study specifically focused on the "national" status of these cultural and artistic institutions in order to track the promotional content supporting them. Of Ukraine's four national theatres, the Solomiya Krushchynska National Academ-

²² A. Sendetskyi, *Cultural and Artistic Dialogue...*; O. Kolisnyk, *Theatre in the Socio-Cultural Dynamics of Today*, "Aktualni problemy filosofii ta sotsiologii" 2016, Vol. 11, pp. 56-58.

²³ O. Kvitneva, *Ukrainskyi "Hamlet" na Hdanskomu Shekspirivskomu festyvali* [Ukrainian "Hamlet" at the Gdańsk Shakespeare Festival], "Proscenium" 2017, Vol. 47-49, pp. 141-145; A. Shymonik, *250 rokiv publichnogo teatru u Polshchi* [250 Years of Public Theatre in Poland], "Ukrains'kij teatr" 2015, Vol. 4/5/6, pp. 12-13.

²⁴ J. Hodun, "Polskyi teatr zrobyv krok upered, aby osuchasnyty stsenichni myfy": rozmova z Yaroslavom Hodunom, dyrektorem Polskoho instytutu u Kyievi, radnykom Posolstva RP v Ukraini ["Polish Theatre Has Taken a Step Forward to Modernize Stage Myths": Conversation with Jarosław Godun, Director of the Polish Institute in Kyiv, Counselor of the Polish Embassy in Ukraine], "Mirror of the Week", 30 November 2013.

ic Opera and Ballet Theatre in Lviv has developed the closest cultural ties with Poland. This is due in part to Lviv's geographical proximity to Poland's borders, the region's long-established cultural and artistic traditions, and the theatre's intentional policy of internationalizing its artistic activities.

The international dialogue of theatre practices reflected on the websites of Ukraine's national theatres appeared in the form of productions, auditions, and employment of theatre personnel in Poland; participation in festivals of various scales and funding; guest performances by orchestras, opera, and ballet companies, and individual artists. It is important to note that, in general, the activities of these theatres are poorly represented on their official websites – not due to institutional inactivity but rather due to a lack of professional public relations managers.²⁵

Thus, institutional analysis, which identifies the characteristics of individual creative centres, regional or national cultural communities, and cultural executive bodies on the micro, meso, or macro levels of their systemic creation, helped define the functions of theatre within cultural diplomacy. Comparing the empirical data obtained – typical of the induction method – revealed the ability of theatre and artistic institutions to manifest themselves in cultural diplomacy. The next stage of the study will involve interviews with theatre administrators, critics, actors, cultural ambassadors, and other officials.

Based on the empirical results, the author has identified the primary diplomatic loci of theatre institutions that can serve as cultural ambassadors. At this stage of the research, key diplomatic loci (or areas) have been identified where theatre practices have already emerged as active participants in cultural diplomacy. These include theatre tours, play readings, acting workshops, the publication of dramatic works, specialized stage education, and academic research in the field of theatre arts. Several of these areas are examined herein in greater detail.

The results of the author's analysis of the Polish-Ukrainian cultural dialogue within the context of theatrical practices – as reflected in specialized publications from both Ukraine and Poland – confirm the assumption that artistic cooperation between the two countries has been ongoing, albeit with varying degrees of intensity, depending on external factors and state ideologies.²⁶

Direct theatre activities represent the most significant contribution to international relations in the domain of direct theatrical practice. Such theatre practices include tours carried out by agreements at the ministerial or departmental level or directly with hosting theatre centres. These tours include both commercial visits with performances as well as charitable festival meetings.

²⁵ A. Sendetskyi, *Natsionalni operni teatry Ukrainy v ukrainsko-polskomu kulturnomu dialozi pochatku XXI st.: analiz ofitsiinykh saitiv* [National Opera Theatres of Ukraine in the Ukrainian-Polish Cultural Dialogue of the Beginning of the 21st Century: Analysis of Official Websites], in: *Humanistic Corpus*, Vol. 43, National Pedagogical Drahomanov University; TVORYI, Vinnytsia 2022, pp. 25-28.

²⁶ A. Sendetskyi, *Cultural and Artistic Dialogue...*

An example of already-established Polish-Ukrainian cultural ties is the annual International Festival of Ukrainian Theatre “East-West”; held since 2014 at the Henryk Jordan Youth Centre in Kraków.²⁷ The event aims to support and promote Ukrainian theatrical art in Poland, as well as to foster cooperation and creative exchanges between theatres from both countries. The festival includes the participation of professional theatres as well as amateur, student, children’s, and youth theatre groups. Notably, the organizers have made consistent efforts to include non-governmental projects in the festival programmes, thus introducing Polish audiences to the diversity of the independent Ukrainian stage.²⁸ Similar international contacts have occurred through the involvement of theatre studies students from Lviv in the Wrocław studios (Vroslavski studii), organized by the local university.²⁹

Subsequently, other international initiatives emerged in Poland, and in which Ukrainian theatre groups took an active part. For instance, in 2022, during the International Festival “Direction – East” (Napriamok – Skhid) in Białystok, the Kyiv Academic Theatre of Drama and Comedy on the Left Bank of the Dnieper performed *Class (Klas)*, directed by Stas Zhyrkov.³⁰ In response to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a new initiative called *Desant.UA* was launched in Warsaw, offering a platform for showcasing Ukrainian theatre productions.³¹

A common practice in theatre is inviting creative professionals from abroad to stage a performance. Examples include productions with intermedial connections, such as *Albert Herring* by Benjamin Britten and *Mermaid* by Antonín Dvořák, staged in 2023 by the Ukrainian director Eugene Lavrenchuk at the Grand Theatre – National Opera in Warsaw and the Grand Theatre in Poznań.³² And at the Zygmunt Hübner Powszechny Theatre in Warsaw, Ukrainian director Roza Sarskian created the performance *Radio Mariia*.³³ In turn, at the Lviv National Opera,

²⁷ M. Kornushchenko, *Zirkovyi chas* [Star Time], “Ukraïns’kij teatr” 2015, Vol. 4, pp. 6-7.

²⁸ P. Loza, *Rozpochavsia V Mizhnarodnyi festyval ukrainskoho teatru u Krakovi* [The 5th International Festival of Ukrainian Theatre Has Begun in Kraków], “Nashe slovo”, 22 April 2018, <https://nasze-slowo.pl/news/v-mizhnarodnij-festival-ukrainskogo-teatru-u-krakovi> [accessed: 08.05.2025].

²⁹ U. Roi, *Vroslavski studii* [Wrocław Studios], “Ukraïns’kij teatr” 2015, Vol. 1/2/3, pp. 38-39.

³⁰ A. Sendetskyi, *Theatrical Art...; V.H., U Bilostoku tryvaie teatralnyi festyval “Napriamok – Skhid”* [The Theatre Festival “Direction East” Is Underway in Białystok], “Polskie Radio – Ukrainska Sluzhba”, 7 October 2022, <https://www.polskieradio.pl/398/7856/artukul/3049655> [accessed: 08.05.2025].

³¹ O. Apchel, *Pro ukrainskyi teatr i pro te, yak yoho zminyla viina* [About Ukrainian Theatre and How the War Changed It], “LB.ua”, 19 March 2023, https://lb.ua/culture/2023/03/19/549180_pro_ukrainskiy_tetr_i_pro_te_yak_yogo.html [accessed: 08.05.2025].

³² A. Sendetskyi, *Theatrical Art...; O. Apchel*, op. cit.

³³ S. Zhyla, *Importnyi ukrainskyi teatr: Yak nashi teatraly shyriat ukrainsku kulturu ta pravdu pro viinu za kordonom* [Imported Ukrainian Theatre: How Our Theatre-goers Spread Ukrainian Culture and the Truth About the War Abroad], “Ukrainska Pravda”, 23 August 2002, <https://life.pravda.com.ua/columns/2023/08/22/256073/> [accessed: 08.05.2025].

Zbigniew Chrzanowski, recipient of the “Meritorious for Polish Culture” award, staged Wolfgang A. Mozart’s opera *The Magic Flute* in 2013.³⁴

This dynamic collaboration between the Lviv Les Kurbas Theatre and Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski transformed, following the latter’s death, into an ongoing cooperation with the Grotowski Institute in Wrocław. This engagement functions not only as a tribute to the Polish maestro, but also reflects a mutual creative interest in developing new projects. On the institute’s stage in 2012, Lviv-based director Volodymyr Kuchynskyi premiered *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, based on the work by Friedrich Nietzsche. During the same period, actor Orest Sharak from the Lviv Les Kurbas Theatre began collaborating with the Wrocław-based ZAK Theatre.³⁵

Organizing play readings has also gained popularity. This form of international communication and collaboration is interdisciplinary: on the one hand it belongs directly to the work of set designers and directors; and on the other hand to the playwright as a literary figure. Another key aspect of intercultural communication through theatre is the participation of foreign colleagues in performances. Their collaborative creativity often serves as the beginning of cultural exchanges.

The original production *DPYU (DPIU)* by Dima Levytskyi, based on a script created by a group of veterans of the Russo-Ukrainian war (premiered in Kharkiv in 2016 with the participation of actors from the Beautiful Flowers Theatre), was performed by Polish director Jakub Skrzywanek in the format of a performative script reading. The Polish interpretation of the work aimed to explore an expressive language and form for narrating the events, with the goal of revealing the horrors of war.³⁶

The performance of *This Walk (Tsia prohulianka)* – created by the artistic group Pic Pic – for a Kyiv festival reflects new possibilities for theatrical forms under pandemic conditions. The work presents an exploration of urban space through a female perspective. Issues of women’s rights in various dimensions – gender, political, social, and economic – became central to the project, which was developed in cooperation with feminist activists from Poznań and included the participation of local artist Patryk Lichota. The thematic impact of the work was reinforced by a companion documentary film by Magda Mosiewicz.³⁷

³⁴ 23 serpnia – V. A. Motsart, opera “Charivna fleita” [23 August – W.A. Mozart, Opera “The Magic Flute”], Lviv National Theatre of Opera and Ballet, 29 October 2023, <https://opera.lviv.ua/en/mistse-de-trap-lyayutsya-najguchnishi-premyeri/> [accessed: 08.05.2025].

³⁵ V. Yatsenko, Orest Sharak: “My holodni novoi formy u teatri” [Orest Sharak: “We Are Hungry for a New Form in Theatre”], “Culture.pl”, 26 December 2022, <https://culture.pl/ua/stattia/orest-sharak-my-holodni-novoi-formy-u-teatri> [accessed: 08.05.2025].

³⁶ V. Skliarova, Mizh identychnistiu ta imitatsiieiu [Between Identity and Imitation], “Ukrains’kij teatr” 2017, Vol. 5-6, pp. 30-33.

³⁷ A. Haishenets, “Blyzki neznaomi”: yak teatr dopomahaie buduvaty vidnosyny Ukrainy ta Polshchi [“Close Strangers”: How Theatre Helps Build Relations Between Ukraine and Poland], “LB.ua”, 17 November 2020, https://lb.ua/culture/2020/11/17/470376_blyzki_neznayomi_yak_teatr.html [accessed: 08.05.2025].

Another form of international cooperation can be workshops, although these tend to have a more distinct educational focus. This diplomatic locus also encompasses other educational activities, particularly lectures aimed at specific audiences, which present theatre in the context of showcasing the image of the representing country.

The director of the Lutsk-based The Garmyder Theatre, Ruslana Porytska, delivered a public lecture titled *Jerzy Grotowski and Tadeusz Kantor – On Opposite Sides of Polish Postwar Theatre* (*Yezhy Grotovskiy i Tadeush Kantor – po rizni boky polskoho povoiennoho teatru*) at the art space Cultural Shelter.³⁸ This important initiative reflects the growing intensity of efforts in Ukraine to commemorate and represent the memory culture surrounding prominent Polish figures of the theatrical scene. In contrast, a mutually symmetrical response from Ukrainian cultural elites in Poland remains sporadic and underdeveloped, thus requiring significant engagement from both the Ukrainian government and the broader cultural and artistic community.

Thanks to a 2022 art residency at the Polish Theatre in Bydgoszcz, playwright Lena Lyagushonkova from Stanytsia Luhanska established a connection with the leadership of TR Warszawa. The management of this institution became interested in her work *Chronicles from Donbas* (*Khroniky z Donbasu*), and by spring 2023 the theatre staged a pre-premiere performance.³⁹

An additional area of theatre practice is publishing, which involves presenting professional information through reviews of works, theatrical studies, and coverage of performances, personalities, or ensembles. This also includes articles in specialized journals or even on general cultural websites. Monographic studies play a particularly important role here, highlighting significant events and providing insights into the key outcomes of theatre practices.

In the context of cultural dialogue, attention should be given to the article “Many Truths” (“Bahato pravd”) by A. Drozdovskyi, in which the author, among a range of performances about the Revolution of Dignity staged on Polish stages, highlights *Maidan Diaries* (*Shchodennyky Maidanu*) by Natalya Vorozhbyt. Equally valuable, however, is the author’s summary, in which Drozdovskyi raises critical questions about the realities in both countries and the veiled interference of Putin’s Russia in their mutual relations:

³⁸ E. Vylotnyk, *Po rizni boky teatru. U Lutsku provely vidkrytu lektsiu pro polskykh rezhyserv* [On Opposite Sides of the Theatre. An Open Lecture about Polish Directors Was Held in Lutsk], “Monitor Wołyński”, 12 April 2023, <https://monitorwolynski.com/uk/news/4887-wyklad-o-jerzym-grotowskim-i-tadeuszu-kantorze> [accessed: 08.05.2025].

³⁹ V. Harmatiuk, *U Varshavi pokazhut vystavu Lieny Liahushonkovoi “Khroniky z Donbasu”* [Lena Lyagushonkova’s Play “Chronicles from Donbas” Will Be Shown in Warsaw], “Polskie Radio – Ukrainka Sluzhba”, 23 April 2024, <https://www.polskieradio.pl/398/7861/artykul/3156363> [accessed: 08.05.2025].

What matters is that Polish theatre is not afraid not only to speak about Ukraine but, above all, to undergo a test of conscience and to expose a global falsehood, of which it itself is a part; one of the mentioned performances could not go on tour in Poland because the energy supplier company, which sponsors the theatre organizing the tour, refused to support it.⁴⁰

This statement requires no additional commentary, as a significant part of society is fully aware of the instruments of influence used by Russian authorities to manipulate the global community through fuel-related blackmail. It is important to emphasize that cultural diplomacy – and cultural dialogue more broadly – depends heavily on the political ambitions of ruling structures, which renders international cultural relations particularly vulnerable.

Finally, diplomatic expressions appear in the activities of profile institutions, primarily through research, scholarship programmes, artistic residencies, conferences, seminars, symposia, and round tables, with a focus on theatre practices, among other related initiatives.

For instance, the Polish Institute in Kyiv has been actively fostering effective dialogue and the exchange of cultural heritage between Ukraine and Poland, particularly in the field of theatrical art. In 2014, the Institute published Ukrainian translations of plays by Janusz Głowacki and the anthology *Confession After a Breakup* (*Spovid pislia zlamu*). In 2017, it initiated the translation and publication of an anthology of contemporary Polish drama for children and youth, under the emotionally reflective title *Or Maybe Not... (A mozhe, ni...)*. The Embassy of Ukraine in the Republic of Poland provided organizational and financial support for the publication of a second anthology of Ukrainian drama in Poland. These projects reflect the Institute's commitment to promoting awareness of Polish literature in Ukraine. In contrast to retrospective historical productions, and based on the concept of another initiative within the Gaude Polonia Scholarship Programme of the Polish Ministry of Culture, a collaborative project emerged in 2015 between the Arabesky Theatre from Kharkiv and the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute, which operates in the Polish capital.⁴¹ This cooperation, titled "Theatre after Transformation" ("Teatr pislia Transformatsii"), continued in Kharkiv from 2016 to 2018 in the format of educational and discussion-based meetings.⁴² The partnership led to close ties. In 2023, on the occasion of World Theatre Day, Ukrainian director and head of the Kharkiv-based Arabesky Theatre, Svitlana Oleshko, was selected

⁴⁰ A. Drozdovskyi, *Bahato pravd* [Many Truths], "Kino-teatr" 2015, Vol. 6, pp. 6-7 (own translation).

⁴¹ O. Velymchanytsia, *Tvorennia spilnoty teatru* [Creating a Theatre Community], "Ukraïns'kij teatr" 2015, Vol. 1/2/3, pp. 20-21.

⁴² S. Oleshko, *Teatr pislia transformatsii: Varshava-Kharkiv* [Theatre after Transformation: Warsaw-Kharkiv], "Culture.pl", 15 September 2018, <https://culture.pl/ua/stattia/teatr-pislia-transformatsii-varshava-kharkiv> [accessed: 08.05.2025].

by the Polish branch of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) to deliver the official address – the first time in history that this honour was granted to a representative of Ukraine.⁴³

It is worth noting that there are no clear boundaries between the above-mentioned diplomatic loci; they can merge in terms of goals, tasks, and concepts. Several factors, including the expansive executive structures in Poland and Ukraine, justify the proposed definition of theatre's role as an ambassador. In Poland, cultural affairs and representation are handled by two separate ministries: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. At the same time, in Ukraine these responsibilities fall under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy. However, even within the same country ministries often do not coordinate their actions to promote the national image. In addition, among the evident obstacles hindering the development of international theatrical cooperation in general – and that of specific institutions in particular – are the language barrier of the stage product, lack of funding, or more precisely economic freedom, a shortage of qualified professionals, insufficient technical infrastructure, and lack of independence at all stages of a production – from repertoire selection to casting decisions; as well as weak management and limited informational support.

Despite the wide range of direct theatrical practices, it is essential to highlight the growing role of new funding sources within the influential vectors of Ukrainian-Polish cultural communication. Poland has become a key financial and economic resource for many contemporary Ukrainian theatre projects.

A separate and significant topic in Ukrainian-Polish cultural and artistic reflections is the horror of the Russo-Ukrainian war and its impact on bilateral relations between Ukraine and Poland in the areas of mutual understanding, assistance, and the creation of performative works addressing this painful reality. At the same time, one example of the tangible results of close Polish-Ukrainian cooperation is the 2023 report by the Polish Support Centre for Culture in Ukraine of the National Heritage Board. The report presents impressive statistics: 72 Polish institutions, including 22 theatres, invited 36 Ukrainian artists to participate in art residencies.⁴⁴

Thus, the role of theatre as an ambassador typically emerges through loci such as direct theatre practices, including tours, educational activities, publishing, and scientific-artistic exchanges.

⁴³ A. Oleksienko, "Mizhnarodnyi den teatru v tini viiny v Ukrainy". *Kudy varto pity u tsei den ukrainsiam v Polshchi?* ["International Theatre Day in the Shadow of War in Ukraine". Where Should Ukrainians in Poland Go on This Day?], "Wprost Ukraina", 27 March 2023, <https://www.wprostukraine.eu/ua/kultura/10716775/mijnarodniji-den-teatru-v-tini-vijini-v-ykrayini-kydi-varto-piti-y-ceji-den-ykrayincyam-v-polschi.html> [accessed: 08.05.2025].

⁴⁴ K. Żalasińska (ed.), *Ocalić dziedzictwo Ukrainy. Raport Narodowego Instytutu Dziedzictwa – Centrum Pomocy dla Kultury na Ukrainie* [Saving the Heritage of Ukraine. Report of the National Heritage Board – Polish Support Center for Culture in Ukraine], Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa, Warszawa 2023.

Conclusions

This study's findings on the place and role of theatre in cultural diplomacy between Poland and Ukraine from 2014 to 2023 – based primarily on an analysis of Ukrainian and Polish theatre journals and online platforms – helped identify the loci (fields or forms) of theatrical activity. These can be broadly categorized as: tours, play readings, acting workshops, dramaturgical publishing, specialized stage education, and scientific research in theatrical art.

The role of theatre as a participant in cultural dialogue has been manifested through the representation of works by means of universally accessible non-verbal communication, enhanced by the dialogues in the script. The aesthetics of stage art and the communicative forms of acting serve as distinct transmitters of ideas, ideologies, and the state doctrines represented by the theatre troupe. Therefore, theatrical art can be more actively utilized within the framework of cultural diplomacy.

At the same time, the study has also identified several obstacles and challenges that hinder bilateral cultural dialogue. These include the often uncoordinated actions of state institutions responsible for representing national theatre abroad; the language barrier during international performances; limited financial resources and economic freedom; weak theatre management; and inadequate media support.

The analysis of key political, economic, and military events, along with the impact of the pandemic, led to the hypothesis that theatre has secured its place within cultural diplomacy largely through the efforts of cultural elites. The next stages of research will focus on exploring the scope and intensity of the influence exerted by cultural elites associated with theatrical art on international relations, specifically in the context of cultural diplomacy between Poland and Ukraine.

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