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Heritage Diplomacy Discourses in the EU

Notions on Cultural Diplomacy, Cultural Heritage, and Intercultural Dialogue among EU Officials and Heritage Practitioners

Tuuli Lähdesmäki, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, tuuli.lahdesmaki@jyu.fi

The European Commission has recently identified cultural heritage as one of the focus areas for EU cultural diplomacy. The article explores EU cultural diplomacy that deals with cultural heritage and discusses the concept of heritage diplomacy based on a discourse analysis of interviews with EU officials and heritage practitioners working at sites awarded the European Heritage Label. How do EU officials and heritage practitioners understand the role of cultural heritage for cultural diplomacy and what kinds of discourses do they use in talking about it? My analysis indicates that heritage diplomacy means different things for EU officials and heritage practitioners. Their discourses on the uses of cultural heritage for diplomacy construct divergent understandings of cultural heritage and heritage diplomacy, and the power relations between these understandings.

Introduction: Heritage in the EU's International Cultural Relations

Theoretically, cultural diplomacy has commonly been perceived as part of a broader family of connected concepts. While Mitchell (1986), for example, has perceived a scale from cultural propaganda at one end, passing through cultural diplomacy to cultural relations at the other, Zamorano (2016) differentiates between four concepts – cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, propaganda, and branding – in which cultural diplomacy itself can include either culturalist or neo-propagandist tendencies. Helly (2012) identifies seven overlapping concepts – public diplomacy, cultural relations, cultural diplomacy, foreign cultural policy, cultural cooperation, cultural exchanges, and external cultural relations – all differently related to dealing with cultural relations in an international context. Some scholars, however, identify some of these interrelated concepts “only” as different modes of public diplomacy (Cull 2008). Indeed, scholars have put a lot of effort into their attempts to define the transforming and fluid contours of the concept of cultural diplomacy, instead of focusing on exploring how policymakers and practitioners themselves perceive, understand, and define cultural diplomacy.

During the past few years, the European Union (EU) has developed its foreign policy and external relations through culture in response to global challenges and crises within, at, and beyond its borders. In this article, these EU policies and the practices and actions used to implement them are referred to as EU cultural diplomacy. Besides the goal of making the world a better place, the EU's interest in developing its cultural diplomacy includes less altruistic aims, such as “making the European Union a stronger global actor” (EC 2016: 16). In its document “Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations”, the Commission identifies cultural heritage and intercultural dialogue as focal areas for EU cultural diplomacy (EC 2016). These focuses reflect the EU's more general interest in cultural heritage and its potential for intercultural dialogue.¹ During the past decades, the EU has launched several cultural policies and initiatives to promote cultural heritage and through it, advance peaceful dialogue and mutual respect between people with different cultural backgrounds both in Europe and beyond it (Lähdesmäki 2019; Lähdesmäki & Mäkinen 2019; Lähdesmäki et al. 2020).

The aim of this article is to fill a gap in research on EU cultural diplomacy. The few studies that have previously explored it (Cross & Melissen 2013; Benson-Rea & Shore 2012; Raj Isar 2015; Kuus 2016; Trobbiani 2017; Damro, Gstöhl & Schunz 2018; Hausler 2019) focus on the functioning of EU delegations, the development of EU foreign policy

¹ Intercultural dialogue is a practice that is instrumental to implementing the aims of interculturalism that emphasizes the importance of creating new opportunities across cultures and to support interaction between different cultural communities. Intercultural dialogue is an instrument to foster understanding and empathy with others and promote cultural diversity and social cohesion.

at the institutional level, or the nature of the EU's cultural diplomatic attempts as part of EU governance or jurisprudence. Previous research has particularly explored the evolution of the institutional thinking behind EU cultural diplomacy, which Raj Isar (2015) has identified as its limitation. Moreover, scholars have indicated vagueness in the EU's cultural diplomacy instruments and resources as well as in the roles and responsibilities of its actors (Trobbiani 2017). They have shown how the European External Action Service is filled with inter-institutional rivalries that raise questions about who can best represent Europe and/or the EU in its foreign policy and external relations (Benson-Rea & Shore 2012).

It is easy to understand why cultural heritage has gained a strong role in EU policy discourses. It is a topic that usually creates positive impressions, and EU officials, European decision-makers, and European citizens share a profoundly positive notion of cultural heritage (Lähdesmäki et al. 2020). In 2017, 82% of Eurobarometer (EC 2017) respondents considered that culture and cultural exchanges could play an important role in developing greater understanding and tolerance in the world, even where tensions and conflicts exist. At the same time, cultural heritage itself functions as a source for diverse tensions, disputes, contradictions, and conflicts both in Europe and beyond. Indeed, scholars have seen some dissonance as intrinsic to the very idea of heritage (Smith 2006; Graham & Howard 2008; Kisić 2017; Lähdesmäki 2019). Defining, valorizing, preserving, and communicating the meanings of any form of heritage create boundaries and exclude some people while including others, and arrange objects, interpretations of the past, and people into certain categories or positions.

Not only the nature of cultural heritage creates challenges to EU cultural diplomacy. Scholars have seen processes and practices of cultural diplomacy as including unintentional and unwanted effects. Cultural diplomacy may both intentionally and unintentionally transfer values and norms from one country or region to another, and rank them to the point that cultural diplomacy has even been accused of echoing (cultural) imperialism and power relations stemming from colonialism (Reeves 2007; Nisbett 2013). Moreover, scholars have pointed out the vagueness and ambiguity of the concept of cultural diplomacy and the lack of consensus on practices that it entails (Mark 2010; Zamorano 2016; Trobbiani 2017; Triandafyllidou & Szűcs 2017). How do EU officials and heritage practitioners understand the role of cultural heritage for cultural diplomacy? What kinds of discourses do they use for talking about heritage diplomacy and how do these discourses differ? Through these questions, I elaborate on the concept of heritage diplomacy and argue that the discourses on the uses of cultural heritage for diplomacy construct distinct understandings of cultural heritage and diplomacy among EU officials and heritage practitioners, and include power relations between these understandings.

Instead of starting with a priori definition of what cultural diplomacy and its focus on cultural heritage – heritage diplomacy – are or what they should be, I take a data-driven and bottom-up approach to these concepts. The data used in this article consists of 44 interviews with EU officials working on cultural heritage policies and initiatives, as well as heritage practitioners implementing the EU's flagship cultural heritage action, the European Heritage Label (EHL). The Commission awards the EHL to cultural heritage sites from EU member states in order to strengthen European citizens' sense of belonging to the EU and to reinforce intercultural dialogue (EP&C 2011). Just after the establishment of the EHL in 2011, the European Parliament encouraged the European External Action Service, the core institution facilitating the EU's foreign policy, to take account of the label "as a tool to be used in relations with third countries with a view to improving knowledge and the dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples" (EP 2012: 140). In practice, the utilization of the EHL action for heritage diplomacy has depended on the efforts and interests of heritage practitioners working at these sites. Comparing the approaches of policymakers to those of the policy implementers enables the evaluation of the potential of the EHL action for heritage diplomacy. The difference between the discourses of these two actors can be interpreted as a challenge for the diplomatic use of this action.

Next, I introduce my empirical data and method of analysis more in detail. After this, I contextualize my analysis with a discussion of the ambiguity of the concepts of cultural and heritage diplomacy in scholarly literature and discuss the power-related challenges involved in these concepts. This section is followed by an analysis of the core heritage diplomacy discourses identified from the data and an exploration of the power relations and the notions of cultural diplomacy, cultural heritage, and intercultural dialogue included in them. I conclude by summarizing the results and discussing the differences of the discourses between EU officials and heritage practitioners. Finally, I elaborate on how the results reflect the challenges identified in the previous research.

Data and Methods

The interviews with EU officials and heritage practitioners were conducted in 2017 and 2018 as part of a broad collaborative ethnographic field research within the EUROHERIT project. This data was examined using critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995, 2009). The roles of the interviewed six EU officials ranged from directors to project managers in two directorates-general – Education, Youth, Sport and Culture and Research and Innovation. The data was supplemented by interviewing a core member of the EHL selection panel appointed by the European Commission. Besides the interviews with these seven persons (referred to below as EU actors), 37 local heritage

practitioners working at 11 EHL sites in ten European countries (referred to as EHL actors) were interviewed.²

The semi-structured interviews dealt with various topics including the interviewees' notions of cultural diplomacy and intercultural dialogue, as well as their views on how cultural heritage could be used in cultural diplomacy and intercultural dialogue. When answering the questions, interviewees were asked to give concrete examples based on their work. In the analysis, I focus on the interviewees' responses dealing with these topics and on responses to brief follow-up questions that sought to clarify some aspects raised by the interviewees. The interviews were conducted mainly in English, but other languages (French, German, Portuguese, Italian, and Estonian) were used in some interviews. All interviews were transcribed and translated into English, and were coded to ensure the anonymity of the informants. The coded references E1–7 indicate the EU actors, while codes P1–37 refer to the EHL actors.

In practice, discourse analysis of the data was carried out through careful reading and re-reading of the transcribed interviews. I examined first how the notions of cultural diplomacy, cultural heritage, and intercultural dialogue were constructed and entangled at the linguistic level and, second, what sociocultural hierarchical structures, positions, and exercise of power these ideas and their entanglement have created.

From Cultural to Heritage Diplomacy and Questions of Power

I explore my data with a discourse analytic approach since this method enables me to scrutinize the meaning-making of complex and ambiguous concepts and how their uses construct the reality related to them (Fairclough 1995, 2009). Cultural diplomacy is indeed such a concept: it has been used in various disciplines and academic discourses and its move from one discourse to another has simultaneously transformed its meanings and generated transdisciplinary research environments around it. These transformations have brought forth a broader family of connected concepts with which scholars have sought to encapsulate the logic of different kinds of cultural diplomatic endeavors. Heritage diplomacy is one of the more recent conceptual transformations. In it, cultural heritage is conceived as an arena to practice cultural diplomacy. To contextualize my analysis and to understand which scholarly discourses

² Interviews were conducted at the following EHL sites: Alcide De Gasperi House Museum, Italy; Archaeological Park Carnuntum, Austria; Camp Westerbork, The Netherlands; European District of Strasbourg, France; Franz Liszt Academy of Music, Hungary; Great Guild Hall, Estonia; Hambach Castle, Germany; Historic Gdańsk Shipyard, Poland; Mundaneum, Belgium; Robert Schuman House, France; and Sagres Promontory, Portugal. These sites range from archaeological ruins to educational and political institutes and from popular tourist attractions to small home museums (about data selection and collection, see Lähdesmäki et al. 2020).

and conceptualizations my data reflects, I discuss next how cultural and heritage diplomacy have been approached in previous research and how the issue of power is related to these concepts.

Scholars have commonly used the concept of cultural diplomacy for governmental (or governmentally commissioned) attempts to promote the exchange of ideas, values, traditions, and other aspects of culture, whether to strengthen international relationships, enhance sociocultural cooperation with foreigners, and/or promote diverse national interests in other countries (Cummings 2003; Arndt 2005; Bound et al. 2007; Mark 2009). National cultural institutes abroad such as the German Goethe Institut or the British Council are examples of such attempts. According to current views, cultural diplomacy is often characterized by a multiplication of intervening actors at different scales and levels, including civil society and the private sector – often referred to as people-to-people diplomacy or “new” diplomacy – as well as the growing importance of supra-national organizations (Helly 2012; Zamorano 2016). Bilateral friendship societies are typical examples of people-to-people diplomacy whereas EU initiatives reflect the supra-national scale of these attempts. Instead of cultural diplomacy, scholars have often more generally referred to such practices as international cultural relations (Fischer & Figueira 2011; Ang, Raj Isar & Mar 2015). Today, the aims of cultural diplomacy increasingly emphasize supporting a “greater good” such as the mutual understanding of cultural differences between people, which conceptually seem to resemble the idea of intercultural dialogue and may be at odds with the strategic interests of national governments for promoting national interest, often referred to as nation branding (Ang, Raj Isar & Mar 2015).

Despite the fact that heritage is commonly seen as an essential element in transmitting cultural values, narratives, and identities, heritage diplomacy remains under-researched. In his seminal theoretical discussion on heritage diplomacy, Winter (e.g., 2015, 2018) defines it as a mode of activity in which the cultural past – and discourses and practices concerning it – intersects with international relations and geopolitics. As a set of relations, it raises crucial questions about the ways in which broader political forces shape how knowledge about the past is produced. Winter distinguishes between two core theoretical approaches to heritage diplomacy: “heritage in diplomacy” and “heritage as diplomacy” (2015). The first approach refers to various heritage-related initiatives and projects that are coordinated as part of other diplomatic actions. In this approach, diplomatic actions do not depend on the notion of a mutual or shared heritage as a mediator of relations. The second approach draws on the idea of fostering a shared heritage and of building bridges by identifying a shared past. Winter (2015) notes how today various former colonial powers are discursively framing certain

material culture as “shared heritage” to create forms of historical and cultural unity and to give more diplomatic weight to their contemporary international relations. Both of Winter’s concepts can be applied to characterize the nature of the EHL as a cultural diplomatic EU action. They are not, however, particularly useful for explaining the various understandings of the roles and uses of cultural heritage for diplomacy in my data. Instead of relying on these or other conceptual categories, my analysis uses a bottom-up approach to scrutinize EU and EHL actors’ notions and understandings of heritage diplomacy. My study is motivated by the exploration of power embedded in the concepts and practices of cultural diplomacy and cultural heritage.

There is a broad body of literature on cultural diplomacy dealing with the use of power. A widespread paradigm in this research stems from Nye’s (1990, 2004) theorization on “soft power”, which refers to the state’s capacity to deal with international politics without relying on economic or military force. Inspired by Nye’s conceptualization, many studies have focused on state intervention as a way of monopolizing power through culture; thus they have continued state-centered analytical approaches despite the transformations in global conditions that impact today’s cultural policies and people’s cultural behavior. Some scholars have criticized Nye for failing to provide a more informative account of what “soft power” actually is and how it works (e.g., Bilgin & Eliş 2008; Lock 2010; Zahran & Ramos 2010; Baumann 2017). In political and social sciences, cultural diplomacy has often been investigated in a framework of foreign policy analysis and with a focus on a political power play and the “diffusion” of ideas, views, and norms, that is, adoption of and adaptation to external influences due to diplomatic actions (Rasmussen 2010; Cross & Melissen 2013). In the humanities, analysis of cultural diplomacy and the use of power has focused particularly on certain historical periods and political struggles (Halushka 2014; Mikkonen & Suutari 2016). Recently, some scholars have extended the analysis of power to cultural relations between European countries and their former colonies (Yapp 2016; Carruthers 2016).

Even though these studies are informative in their emphasis on hierarchical power relations and power politics included in cultural diplomacy policies and practices, they rarely recognize the power embedded in the traditional Western concept of cultural heritage. To understand the potential and challenges of cultural heritage for diplomacy and to avoid creating new or repeating old power hierarchies, we need a critical approach to what heritage is and how it should be understood as a concept and practice. In the 2000s, the concept of heritage has been broadly discussed and reviewed in the framework of critical heritage studies. In this framework, it has been perceived as an act of communication (Dicks 2000), a process of emotional and cultural engagement (Bendix 2009), and as a performance and a cultural practice concerned with regulation,

control mediation, and negotiation of cultural and historical values and narratives (Smith 2006; Waterton & Smith 2009). Due to its discursive and performative nature, heritage is easily politicized. Heritage is, however, a challenging political tool that can be used for strengthening communality, feelings of belonging, and inclusion, but it may also simultaneously and unintentionally cause exclusion and a feeling of non-belonging and create boundaries, divisions, hierarchical power relations, and tensions between people (e.g., Smith 2006; Lähdesmäki et al. 2020).

The exploration of power relations in critical heritage studies has commonly focused on several “grand narratives”, such as nationalism, imperialism, colonialism, Eurocentrism, cultural elitism, fetishizing of expert knowledge, and social exclusion based on class and ethnicity. These have dominated the meaning-making and practices of heritage for centuries (Smith 2006; Smith 2012). I claim that the research on heritage diplomacy, and that of the EU, in particular, should pay attention to power embedded in such “grand narratives” and explore how policies and practices of diplomacy renew or distance themselves from these narratives. This kind of critical analysis of heritage diplomacy can be informed by various studies that have criticized the Eurocentrism of Unesco – despite the organization’s attempts to overcome it (Meskell 2018; Zhu 2019; Lähdesmäki, Zhu & Thomas 2019). Critical analyses have explored the unintentional creation of a “neo-colonial” or “neo-imperial” environment in transnational conservation and preservation projects due to the power exerted by Western experts and their values over non-Western heritage sites, based on methods and equipment in conservation and heritage science (e.g. Waterton, Smith & Campbell 2006; Winter 2007; Kersel & Luke 2015; Lwoga 2018; Butland 2019).

Intersecting and Contradicting Discourses on Heritage Diplomacy

The interviews with EU and EHL actors expressed several notions of cultural diplomacy discussed in previous research. Their views range from governmental-level cultural collaboration and nation branding to a people-to-people type of heritage-related interaction. However, a closer examination of the data revealed several interconnected but contradictory discourses on the roles of cultural heritage in cultural diplomacy, including how these concepts and intercultural dialogue are understood by these actors. To enable comparison between the discourses, I will first focus on the EU actors followed by the exploration of the EHL actors.

To understand EU actors’ discourses on heritage diplomacy, and particularly the diversity of views included in them, it is important to understand the conceptual plurality regarding cultural diplomacy in EU policy documents. In them, heritage diplomacy is discussed interchangeably using the terms cultural diplomacy and public

diplomacy, or by referring to the use of culture and cultural heritage in the EU's external or international relations. The vagueness of the concept in EU documents is reflected in the ambiguity of the interviewees' approaches to it.

EU as a Global Heritage Patron in Conflict Zones

In the interviews, a question was posed to the EU actors: "How could a cultural heritage be used in cultural diplomacy?" In answering the question, interviewees were asked to give concrete examples. In their responses, the EU actors recalled recent conflicts in Mali, Iraq, and Syria, and gave examples of how the EU has taken action in heritage protection and reconstruction there. Three EU actors discussed more in depth the conflict in Mali: the attacks by Islamist rebels in Timbuktu, the destruction of Unesco World Heritage listed monuments of medieval Islamic culture and old manuscripts, and the role of the EU in the attempts to save the manuscripts and reconstruct the monuments. I have chosen the quotation below from a mid-level official's interview (E4) to illustrate the elaboration of the EU's role in this conflict:

The famous example is ... Timbuktu, where the manuscripts were going to be destroyed by ... terrorists, ... and the manuscripts were really important for the community building. In these manuscripts, there is all the history of the community. What the community did is that everybody took action, and they hid the manuscripts in their homes. So they really – the community really acted. And there has been support from the EU, there is the support through Unesco, from the EU, so we also contributed and helped to save those manuscripts. The responsible person is the first person that has been judged for a criminal act against mankind, because, as I said, cultural heritage is something really to do with mankind, so the act [destroying heritage] is against mankind.

The interviewee emphasizes the EU's role in contributing to heritage-related conflict resolution and saving the endangered manuscripts. In practice, this contribution was based on EU funding. The quotation includes a moral justification for intervening in such conflicts: destroying heritage is against humankind. In the case of Mali, Europe also hosted the legal judgment, as the charges against the leader of the attacks were brought to the International Criminal Court in the Hague.

The interviews reveal a discourse that emphasizes the EU's responsibility and political and economic capacity to intervene globally in conflicts when heritage is endangered or being destroyed. The following quotation from a high-level official's (E6) interview expresses these capacities and policy tools that the EU has created to care for heritage in non-EU countries:

We have a lot of expertise for example on prevention, renovation, saving of cultural heritage that we could offer in regions which have a risk of conflicts, for example. [...] We are coming, we are trying to come in when something is destroyed, and we are offering help to rebuild the buildings, in Timbuktu for example, and so on. I think [that] with very little investment we could really create tools and networks to protect [heritage] before conflicts, or at least to have everything already in our hands for reconstruction. We are just launching, during the year, a social platform on endangered cultural heritage and illicit trafficking of cultural goods to have the stakeholders coming together and think about what should be done at a European level, to have much more efficiency and forward-looking things.

The discourse in this quotation creates an image of the EU as a global heritage patron who understands the essential value of heritage and has a lot of experience with it. Here, the actor is “we”, the EU, whose goal it is to have the needed tools in “our” hands for rescuing heritage in trouble. The role of a global heritage patron described in this discourse seeks to give the EU symbolic power: it acts as a global expert in heritage-related questions and as a moral judge when heritage is threatened or destroyed.

The interviewed EU actors commonly emphasized the EU’s own initiative and interest in being a global heritage patron, but mentioned that heritage-related cooperation was also initiated by countries outside the EU. In such cases, the EU’s role turns into a facilitator of heritage preservation in conflict zones. An excerpt from a high-level official’s (E1) interview indicates the EU’s role in such cases:

There is a project in the Middle East on preservation in cultural heritage. In that case, it is about preservation, because they [participating communities] all are interested in preservation of cultural heritage. And it’s one of the few projects where they say that in order to be able to participate you must hate at least one other partner [laughter] because they all hate each other. But they agree to cooperate, because it matters for them. So it [cultural heritage] can be used for cultural diplomacy definitely.

This interview quotation constructs the EU’s superior status to those who are seen as squabbling among themselves and needing its patronage. The hierarchical division between the positions of “us”, concerned and capable Europeans, and “them”, the unorganized others who are not able to get along, is either explicitly or implicitly embedded in this discourse.

European Excellence in Heritage

While the above-described discourse deals with the EU's role in heritage issues in conflict zones outside the EU, the second discourse identified from the source interviews focuses primarily on Europe and deals with European excellence in heritage. I have chosen the following excerpt from a mid-level official's (E5) interview to illustrate the elaboration of this discourse:

What is really European is the approach, the importance we give to the past, because we know we are an old continent. So, the Europeans recognize that, and I think that cultural diplomacy in this sense can be important, because I see that there is an interest from other countries in knowing what is the European approach, and then, of course, even what are the European knowledge and tools and resources that they give to cultural heritage. [...] Because in this sense Europe has a really, is considered I think, it is one of the – when we say what is Europe for the rest of the world – I think that cultural heritage of Europe is recognized in the world, or the knowledge that is existing in Europe about cultural heritage is undoubtedly considered the best in the world. So, this is an asset for Europe, so for sure I think that is important.

Here, the interviewee develops the idea of Europe as a model region for valuing and fostering cultural heritage with knowledge “undoubtedly considered the best in the world”. These views construct a discourse in which EU cultural diplomacy is about utilizing the prestige and reputation of excellence the EU believes Europe possesses in heritage-related matters around the world. The interviewees commonly felt this excellence to be Europeans' heritage-related technical skills, knowledge of heritage preservation, conservation and renovation of historical buildings, and understanding of the significance and value of heritage for culture and society.

This discourse explicitly and implicitly draws upon the legacy of European tangible heritage such as archaeological ruins, architectural monuments, historical buildings, and works of art. Its notion of cultural heritage relies on a Eurocentric understanding of heritage as material culture requiring educated professionals and technical knowledge and equipment to be properly examined, preserved, and passed on to future generations.

Postcolonial Discourse

All interviewed EU actors had a positive view of EU cultural diplomacy and its focus on cultural heritage. However, one interviewee, a mid-level official (E6), also had concerns about such attempts:

I think cultural diplomacy can be a good concept, but once again, it should not be without a very deep understanding of Europe's position and image in the world. You cannot come with the same concept of cultural diplomacy to China as to African countries that were colonies. [...] I think it is really important to understand that colonialism really shapes approaches to Europe. Europe is not considered [by former colonies] as the European Union, but in many cases as the place to which the former colonial power belongs. [...] I think there is really a sort of un-reflected relation by Europe on the colonial past, which we do not consider belonging to us [the EU], saying that "okay we were created after," but it is a burden, and if someone really wants to deal with cultural diplomacy, [s/he] has to understand it. There are ways to overcome it, but ... we should try a way to understand that you cannot bring the same sort of messages and concepts to the different parts of the world.

Here, the interviewee takes a critical approach to the concept and practice of cultural diplomacy, emphasizing the challenging power relations stemming from a postcolonial global history. This approach hints at a postcolonial critique of heritage diplomacy. This discourse recognizes the world more broadly than the preceding discourses, taking in more than Europe and nearby conflict zones and seeking to understand the controversial role of Europe in today's world.

Discourse of Cultural Heritage Relations

In the following four subsections, I explore heritage diplomacy discourses among the EHL actors, who were asked in the interviews: "Could your site be used in cultural diplomacy?" The EHL actors were also asked to give concrete examples. The question was contextualized by mentioning the EU's recent interest in cultural diplomacy. None of the interviewed EHL actors mentioned knowing that the EU had recently strengthened its cultural diplomatic activity and launched a strategy for international cultural relations. However, all interviewees thought that their heritage site would be suitable for cultural diplomatic use. In fact, all but two EHL actors mentioned already implementing cultural diplomacy at their heritage site. I illustrate the first reaction to the question with the following excerpt from an EHL actor's (P17) interview when hearing about the EU strategy. The interviewee worked at the site as a section head:

I am very happy to hear this – that it exists. We never experienced, never met anybody, and nobody approached us, so we don't know anything about this, but if something happens, then we are happily part of it, of course, because that's what we do actually, with our partner institutions, we have many, many partners in Europe, and exchanges, so, we are very active with this, without any diplomatic, whatever, help.

The quotation exemplifies the EHL actors' most common discourse on heritage diplomacy. In it, cultural diplomacy simply means cultural interaction and promotion of cultural relations with people from other countries, from Europe or beyond, at their heritage sites. In the following excerpt, an EHL actor (P8), working in a leading position, describes these activities more concretely:

I think that we also have practiced it in the past, so taking the example of the Emperor's conference that took place in Carnuntum [308 AD] and the role Carnuntum played in accession process to Christianity: we are talking about tolerance. [...] [W]e also had an ecumenical meeting some years ago, where the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church met with Catholic and Evangelical partners here in Carnuntum. So, Carnuntum would be the best place for diplomatic roles.

Here, the interviewee connects the idea of heritage diplomacy to the events that took place in the history of the site as well as to a more recent event that brought representatives of different churches together at the site.

In the EHL actors' interviews, cultural interaction promoted at heritage sites fell into one of the following categories: interaction between nations and peoples in the history of the site and communicating this history to visitors; international collaboration with institutions, universities, and authorities from other countries; international heritage projects and networks of heritage professionals; and the EHL site as a physical meeting place for people from different backgrounds.

Collaboration with Foreign Governmental Actors

Some interviewed EHL actors linked heritage diplomacy to collaboration with foreign governmental and/or diplomatic actors at their heritage sites. These interviewees mentioned ambassadors, embassies, and consulates in their countries and emphasized the importance of creating contacts and collaborating with them and introducing the site and its exhibitions to them. I illustrate this approach to heritage diplomacy with the following quotation from an interview with an EHL actor (P31) working as a section head at an EHL site:

[W]hen I'm in contact with the Polish embassy in Belgium and the European Polish representation in Brussels, we are in a diplomatic sphere. But not the official one from the ministry of Poland, for example. We are not so far. And it's more ... direct to speak with them ... for example, here, we have a newspaper from Italy, we were contacted by an institution to try to do something [cultural heritage collaboration]. I know that through the embassy of Italy in Belgium.

As a response to the question on cultural diplomacy at the EHL site, the interviewee describes personal-level, “direct” contacts with people working in embassies and a national representation in Brussels. Having such contacts is seen as central for heritage diplomacy. The following quotation from the interview with an EHL actor (P12) working in an expert position approaches the importance of these diplomatic contacts from another angle:

In my experience already there are [cultural diplomacy activities taking place at this EHL site]: if there’s a new ambassador, as part of getting to know Holland, they always visit Westerbork, as being a really prominent part of Dutch identity and history.

Here, the interviewee brings forth the symbolic value of such high-level foreign contacts. The visit of a new ambassador indicates that the site has a significant history and value – and heritage diplomacy means telling this history to such high-level actors. Such accounts in the interviews construct a discourse in which heritage diplomacy means promoting the history and narratives of the site and raising its significance and visibility through contacts and collaboration with high-level foreign governmental actors and diplomats or hosting their visits at the site.

Nation Branding

The above-described discourse is connected to the EHL actors’ more general views of the importance of introducing the typical cultural heritage of their country to foreign audiences. These views are illustrated by the following interview excerpt in which an EHL actor (P31) working as a section head gives a concrete example of heritage that could be used for cultural diplomacy:

I take for example [the artist] Magritte [as the exemplar] for Belgium who can possibly be a source of diplomacy because he is known almost worldwide. I think we can say that. This [is a] major cultural element, which identifies Belgium with surrealism or at least with a country with a bit quirky vision. Things like this can be part of cultural diplomacy.

In this quotation, the interviewee emphasizes the worldwide fame of Magritte and the ability of his art to situate Belgium in art history through surrealism and create an identifiable image of the country. This kind of approach to heritage diplomacy reflects the ideas of nation branding discussed in the literature of international relations (Ang, Raj Isar & Mar 2015; Zamorano 2016). These perspectives in the data form a

discourse in which heritage diplomacy means a tool enabling foreign audiences to explore, learn, and consume the famous, typical, or important features of national cultural heritage. In this discourse, heritage diplomacy could be connected not only to a state or nation, but also to branding regional cultural heritage within a country. Only one interviewee felt that their heritage site could brand Europe for European or non-European audiences.

Enhancing Cohesion through Common Heritage

The interview section that dealt with cultural diplomacy included a question on whether cultural heritage can be used to increase social cohesion. Both the EU and EHL actors responded positively. The discussion on cohesion often continued in the EHL actors' responses regarding cultural diplomacy. I have chosen the following quotation to illustrate this. In it, an EHL actor (P11) working in an expert position responds to the question on cultural diplomacy:

I think it's important to ... show again and again and again these, not differences, but things we have in common and which is European heritage. It's easy to find the differences and for a lot of people it's hard to find all the things we have in common but it's a lot [that] we have in common. And heritage is one of these things and it could help, I think, very much to get more ... understanding for each other.

Here, the interviewee emphasizes enhancing cohesion through common heritage. Such views in the data form a discourse in which cultural heritage is seen as having universal features that are shared and can appeal to people regardless of their background. Instead of emphasizing peculiarities and differences, interviewees in this discourse saw it as important to underline similarities in cultural heritage through which people can understand each other and connect. In the following quotation, an EHL actor (P27) working as a director describes such views:

I think that we, in fact, do – at the basic level – cultural diplomacy: showing this multilingual and multicultural context of solidarity and other values. So, I think that we are part of cultural diplomacy. But I think, yes, these tools should be more powerful. [...] Because, the other side of our unity is in politics. There are many differences and many conflicts. The other way is culture, which should be used for unification.

As the excerpt indicates, in this discourse heritage diplomacy is equated with the idea of increasing communality and unity by taking common culture or cultural heritage as a tool to overcome political confrontations.

Perspectives on Intercultural Dialogue

As the concepts of cultural diplomacy and intercultural dialogue have recently come closer to each other in scholarly literature, I was interested in exploring EU and EHL actors' views on intercultural dialogue. In the interviews, the EU actors were posed a question: "How could a cultural heritage be used in intercultural dialogue?" EHL actors were asked: "Could your site be used in enhancing intercultural dialogue between different groups within your country?" In their responses, the EU actors recognized the conceptual difference between cultural diplomacy and intercultural dialogue. While cultural diplomacy was perceived as a target-oriented, an EU-led activity practiced mostly outside the EU, intercultural dialogue was more commonly approached as broader interaction between different peoples, population groups, or communities also in the EU, Europe, or within one European country. Three of the EU actors linked the multi-perspective interpretation process of cultural heritage to intercultural dialogue. As one high-level official (E1) claimed:

[Y]ou must use cultural heritage to build or share the interpretational history of the past, so you contribute to intercultural dialogue. That's what we did in Northern Ireland, in Kosovo, in Bosnia. That's what we are trying to do in the more complicated regions of the world right now.

For this interviewee, sharing interpretations of the past is about practicing intercultural dialogue. The example given indicates that it is seen as a way to resolve conflicts within countries in crisis. Two EU actors saw cultural heritage as a symbol of intercultural dialogue or even as its result. As one mid-level official (E5) claimed, through a successful process of intercultural dialogue between communities who interpret the same heritage in different ways, "it can become really a symbol of mixing different values, traditions, cultures, and whatever." For another mid-level official (E4), knowledge of the history attached to cultural heritage could reveal its intercultural potential:

[C]ultural heritage is the product, is the result of this dialogue. So, it's very easy, if you want to do it, to trace back and to find this dialogue. ... the stones of Venice are not stones from Venice, they come from Croatia. And the people that have worked [on them] came from the other countries.

The policy paper "Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations" defines intercultural dialogue and cultural heritage as interlinked tools to promote cultural diplomacy (EC 2016). While it frames intercultural dialogue particularly as a means to strengthen peaceful inter-community relations, the EU actors also saw it as something more – an essential component and context of cultural heritage.

The EHL actors, by contrast, did not make any conceptual or practical distinction between cultural diplomacy and intercultural dialogue, as both were understood to be about cultural interaction. The EHL actors commonly gave very similar responses to the questions about how they could use their site for cultural diplomacy and intercultural dialogue. All of the interviewed EHL actors mentioned practicing intercultural dialogue at their heritage sites – except for one who did not see him/herself practicing cultural diplomacy, either.

Comparing EU and EHL Actors' Notions of Cultural Diplomacy

Previous literature on cultural diplomacy contains a variety of understandings of the term. Similar ambiguity can be identified from the interviews in which I asked EU and EHL actors about their understandings of cultural diplomacy. My data showed that different actors of EU cultural diplomacy hold different views of it and of the EU's role in it. For some EU officials, EU cultural diplomacy was strictly about the interaction between the EU as a unified political actor and non-EU countries, while for others the EU's cultural diplomatic initiatives implied cooperation among EU member states through EU-funded initiatives. Heritage practitioners' views on the actors of EU cultural diplomacy also differed from each other, and they held divergent views on the role of the EU in cultural diplomacy. While the EHL actors were generally positive about cultural diplomacy at their heritage site and welcomed the EU's attempts to strengthen cultural diplomatic initiatives, some of them were critical of the EU's role as a "diplomat". As one of them (P17) noted: "We are practicing [cultural diplomacy], so, if [the EU] come[s] into the picture, that [makes things] always very difficult. So, we don't, maybe we don't need [the EU]." While some EHL actors were happy that the EU has not given any guidance for their heritage diplomatic activities or engaged in them at their site, others were disappointed by the EU for the same reason. As one of them (P33) noted:

I think that it's very sad to see that actually the European institutions are not using this place for this [cultural diplomacy]. As I said, we are not too far from the different European institutions, so it's quite easy to come here, it's quite easy to use it, and to ... make it a diplomatic place. Currently, nobody [from the EU institutions] has tried to do that.

This crystallizes the main challenge raised by my interpretation of the data: the interviewees had different, even contradictory, views on the key actors and the role of the EU in EU heritage diplomacy and thus different understandings of what such diplomacy actually is.

In the EU actors' discourses overall, the main player in EU heritage diplomacy is the EU, which implements such diplomacy through EU delegations and local actors in EU-funded heritage-related programs, actions, and initiatives. In these discourses, however, it remains unclear how much initiative the implementers can take without the EU's guidance. In the EHL actors' discourses, the EHL sites are seen to function as a platform – recognized by the EU with a brand label – on which the actors implement heritage diplomacy independently. For some, this implementation means small-scale people-to-people heritage diplomacy, while for others, it involves state-level attempts, governmental interaction, and actors from the EU institutions.

The EU and EHL actors saw cultural heritage as an arena for practicing both cultural diplomacy and intercultural dialogue. The interviewees saw these concepts as closely linked, overlapping, or (particularly in the case of the EHL actors) even having the same meaning. The interviewees' notions of intercultural dialogue reflect their understandings of EU cultural diplomacy and its key actors: the more their understanding included people-to-people-type of activities, the more their views on cultural diplomacy and intercultural dialogue overlapped.

Conclusions

My analysis reveals how cultural diplomacy that deals with cultural heritage – heritage diplomacy – means different things for EU officials and heritage practitioners. Three interlinked heritage diplomacy discourses were identified from the interviews with EU actors. Two of them, *the EU as a global heritage patron in conflict zones* and *European excellence in heritage*, stemmed from a Eurocentric approach to cultural heritage. The third, a *postcolonial discourse*, recognized this Eurocentrism in EU cultural diplomacy. In terms of the responses by EHL actors, my analysis uncovered four interlinked discourses. EHL actors' notions of heritage diplomacy included creating and sustaining *cultural heritage relations* and *enhancing cohesion through common heritage* with foreign partners, founded on people-to-people diplomatic activities. They also held more traditional views of heritage diplomacy as *nation branding* and *collaboration with foreign governmental actors*.

These discourses express and construct certain understandings of cultural heritage, heritage diplomacy, and the power relations within them. The *patron* and *excellence* discourses build on Eurocentric notions of cultural heritage and the EU's role in the world as a key heritage player. These discourses rely heavily on the view of Europeans as leading experts on research, conservation, and preservation of cultural heritage. The *postcolonial* discourse challenges the Eurocentric basis of these discourses. The *nation branding* discourse constructs the idea of cultural heritage as unique and specific to each

nation and thus as something that distinguishes nations, while the *cohesion* discourse is based on a universalist view of cultural heritage. While the nation branding discourse is based on the idea of competition between countries, the cohesion discourse promotes a more general European unification discourse common in EU cultural policy. All these discourses contribute to constructing the idea of Europe or a nation by framing certain qualities, features, or capacities about what these entities are or have – and what the “others” or competitors are not, or do not have.

My analysis of the data has addressed renewal and reflections upon the various grand narratives that have been the focus of critical heritage studies. The *patron* and *excellence* discourses renew the grand narrative of Eurocentrism, the *nation branding* and (some registers of) *collaboration* discourses draw upon nationalism, and the *excellence* discourse relies on the fetishization of European expert knowledge. The *postcolonial* discourse is the only discourse that explicitly seeks to call into question one of the grand narratives and to distance the policies and practices of diplomacy from it. Interviewees’ emphasis on intercultural dialogue can be interpreted as a discourse that implicitly seeks to overcome the hierarchical positions embedded in grand narratives.

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Tuuli Lähdesmäki, PhD (art history, sociology), is an associate professor at the Department of Music, Art and Culture Studies at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. She has the title of Docent in Art History at the University of Jyväskylä, and in Area and Cultural Studies at the University of Helsinki. Her research interests and publications focus on intercultural dialogue, cultural identities, belonging, cultural heritage, and the EU's heritage, diversity, and cultural policies. Lähdesmäki is currently leading the project on EU Heritage Diplomacy and the Dynamics of Inter-Heritage Dialogue (HERIDI), funded by the Academy of Finland.

(tuuli.lahdesmaki@jyu.fi)

