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PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AS A FACTOR IN STRENGTHENING INTERETHNIC RELATIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract. This article examines the institutional development of public diplomacy as a mechanism for strengthening interethnic harmony and social cohesion in the Republic of Uzbekistan. The study aims to analyse the evolution of state policy in the field of interethnic relations, identify the role of public diplomacy institutions in promoting interethnic harmony, and develop an integrated institutional model of public diplomacy. The research employs institutional analysis, comparative legal analysis, qualitative policy analysis, and the examination of legislative and strategic documents. The findings demonstrate that Uzbekistan's contemporary public diplomacy model represents an integrated system combining constitutional and legal foundations, state institutions, civil society organisations, cultural institutions, and international humanitarian cooperation. The scientific contribution of the study lies in the development of the Integrated Institutional Model of Public Diplomacy, which integrates normative, institutional, socio-cultural, and international humanitarian dimensions within a unified conceptual framework. The proposed model may serve as a theoretical and practical basis for improving public policy in the sphere of interethnic relations and expanding international humanitarian cooperation.

Keywords: public diplomacy; people's diplomacy; interethnic relations; interethnic harmony; social cohesion; cultural diplomacy; state policy; Uzbekistan.

Introduction

The growing complexity of contemporary international relations has significantly expanded the role of public diplomacy as an important instrument for fostering mutual understanding, intercultural dialogue, and sustainable cooperation among nations. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which is primarily conducted through official governmental channels, public diplomacy increasingly relies on the active participation of civil society institutions, academic communities, cultural organizations, professional associations, and individual citizens. In this context, public diplomacy has evolved into a multidimensional mechanism that complements conventional foreign policy while simultaneously strengthening domestic social cohesion and promoting international humanitarian cooperation. [2,4,7]

The increasing cultural diversity of modern societies has further elevated the importance of effective policies aimed at maintaining interethnic harmony and social stability. Many multinational states have recognized that sustainable development depends not only on economic growth and political institutions but also on the successful integration of diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities into a shared civic space. Consequently, strengthening interethnic relations has become an essential component of national security, democratic governance, and inclusive public policy. [13,18]

Uzbekistan represents a particularly valuable case for examining these processes. Since gaining independence in 1991, the country has undertaken comprehensive political, legal, and institutional reforms designed to preserve interethnic harmony while promoting equal rights and opportunities for representatives of more than 130 ethnic groups and 16 religious denominations residing within its territory. During the past decade, these reforms have intensified under the framework of the "New Uzbekistan" development strategy, resulting in the establishment of a comprehensive institutional system aimed at supporting cultural diversity, strengthening civic identity, and expanding international humanitarian cooperation. [10]

A distinctive feature of Uzbekistan's contemporary development model is the integration of domestic policies on interethnic harmony with mechanisms of public diplomacy. National cultural centres, friendship societies, compatriot organizations abroad, educational and cultural exchanges, as well as the SCO Public Diplomacy Centre in Uzbekistan collectively contribute to strengthening social cohesion within the country while simultaneously enhancing its international image and humanitarian engagement. This integrated approach demonstrates that public diplomacy should not be viewed solely as an external policy instrument but also as an institutional mechanism for promoting national unity, intercultural dialogue, and peaceful coexistence. [9,10]

Despite the growing international interest in public diplomacy, existing scholarly literature has largely focused on its external dimensions, including soft power, strategic communication, nation branding, and foreign public engagement. Comparatively limited attention has been devoted to examining how public diplomacy functions as an internal governance instrument for strengthening interethnic relations and supporting social cohesion in multicultural societies. Furthermore, the institutional experience of Central Asian states, particularly Uzbekistan, remains insufficiently represented in contemporary international academic discourse.

The present study seeks to address this research gap by examining the institutional development of public diplomacy in Uzbekistan and assessing its contribution to strengthening interethnic harmony within the broader framework of national development and regional cooperation. Particular attention is devoted to the interaction between constitutional reforms, state institutions, civil society organizations, national cultural centres, friendship societies, and international humanitarian initiatives.

The main objective of this research is to analyse the evolution of Uzbekistan's institutional model of public diplomacy and evaluate its role in promoting interethnic harmony, civic cohesion, and international humanitarian cooperation. The study further aims to identify the principal institutional mechanisms through which public diplomacy contributes to sustainable social development and peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society.

Methodologically, the research employs institutional analysis, comparative legal analysis, qualitative case study methodology, document analysis, and elements of public policy analysis. These complementary approaches enable a comprehensive assessment of legislative reforms, institutional structures, and practical mechanisms shaping contemporary public diplomacy in Uzbekistan.

The scientific novelty of this article lies in proposing an integrated analytical model of Uzbekistan's public diplomacy that conceptualizes it as a multidimensional institutional system combining constitutional and legal regulation, public administration, civil society participation, cultural diplomacy, and international humanitarian cooperation. Unlike previous descriptive studies, this research interprets public diplomacy not merely as an instrument of foreign relations but as a comprehensive governance mechanism that simultaneously strengthens domestic interethnic harmony and enhances the country's international engagement.

The findings of this research contribute to the expanding body of literature on public diplomacy, interethnic relations, and multicultural governance, while offering practical insights for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners engaged in promoting social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and sustainable peace in ethnically diverse societies.

Literature Review

The concept of public diplomacy has undergone significant transformation over the past several decades, evolving from a state-centred communication strategy into a multidimensional framework encompassing governmental institutions, civil society organizations, academic communities, cultural actors, and individual citizens. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes that public diplomacy extends beyond foreign policy communication and contributes to the formation of long-term international partnerships, intercultural understanding, and domestic social cohesion. [2,4,7]

One of the most influential theoretical approaches was proposed by Joseph S. Nye, who introduced the concept of soft power as the ability of states to influence international actors through attraction rather than coercion or economic incentives [6]. According to Nye, cultural heritage, political values, educational achievements, and the credibility of public institutions constitute essential sources of national influence. Within this theoretical framework, public diplomacy functions as a principal

mechanism through which states communicate these values to foreign audiences and strengthen their international reputation.

Further conceptual development of public diplomacy was undertaken by Nicholas J. Cull, who argues that contemporary public diplomacy should be understood as a continuous process of relationship-building rather than merely the dissemination of information. Cull identifies several interrelated dimensions of public diplomacy, including listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, and international broadcasting. Collectively, these mechanisms facilitate mutual trust and sustainable cooperation between societies, thereby enhancing both international dialogue and domestic stability [2].

Similarly, Jan Melissen emphasizes that the emergence of the "new public diplomacy" reflects profound changes in international relations brought about by globalization, digital communication, and the growing influence of non-state actors. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which relies primarily on official governmental channels, the new public diplomacy promotes inclusive interaction among governments, universities, research institutions, cultural organizations, businesses, and civil society. This approach highlights dialogue, partnership, and collaborative problem-solving as central elements of contemporary international engagement [2].

The relationship between public diplomacy and interethnic harmony can also be examined through the broader concept of social cohesion. Drawing on Robert D. Putnam's research on diversity and community, social capital—manifested through interpersonal trust, civic participation, and networks of cooperation—constitutes one of the principal foundations of democratic governance and sustainable social development [13]. High levels of social capital contribute to reducing social fragmentation, strengthening civic identity, and facilitating constructive interaction among diverse ethnic communities. Consequently, institutional mechanisms promoting intercultural dialogue and civic participation should be viewed not only as instruments of domestic governance but also as integral components of public diplomacy.

The intercultural dimension of public diplomacy has received considerable attention in the works of Milton J. Bennett, whose work on intercultural sensitivity explains how individuals and societies progress from ethnocentric perceptions toward intercultural competence and mutual respect [1]. Bennett's theoretical framework suggests that effective intercultural communication requires not only knowledge of cultural differences but also institutional support for dialogue, education, and sustained interaction among representatives of different communities.

International organizations have similarly emphasized the strategic importance of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity [18]. recognizes cultural diversity as "the common heritage of humanity" and identifies intercultural dialogue as a prerequisite for peace, sustainable development, and social inclusion. Likewise, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations promotes international cooperation aimed at reducing cultural polarization, strengthening mutual understanding, and preventing conflicts rooted in ethnic or religious differences. [18, 19].

Despite the substantial body of international literature devoted to public diplomacy, relatively limited scholarly attention has been paid to its institutional role in strengthening interethnic relations within multicultural states. Existing studies have predominantly focused on strategic communication, national branding, cultural diplomacy, or international image-building, while comparatively fewer investigations examine how public diplomacy contributes simultaneously to domestic social cohesion and external humanitarian cooperation.

This research addresses this gap by analysing the institutional development of public diplomacy in Uzbekistan. Rather than viewing public diplomacy exclusively as an instrument of foreign policy, the present study conceptualizes it as a multidimensional governance mechanism that integrates constitutional principles, state institutions, civil society participation, national cultural centres, educational initiatives, and international humanitarian cooperation. Such an analytical perspective provides a broader understanding of how public diplomacy contributes to strengthening interethnic harmony, promoting civic identity, and enhancing regional stability within the context of the "New Uzbekistan."

Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design based on an institutional approach to examine the development of public diplomacy as a mechanism for strengthening interethnic relations in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Given the multidimensional nature of the research topic, the study combines several complementary methodological approaches that enable a comprehensive assessment of legal, institutional, socio-cultural, and international dimensions of public diplomacy.

The primary methodological framework is institutional analysis, which is used to examine the evolution of the organizational and legal mechanisms governing interethnic relations and public diplomacy in Uzbekistan. Particular attention is devoted to the interaction between constitutional principles, state institutions, civil society organizations, national cultural centres, friendship societies, and international humanitarian initiatives. This approach makes it possible to evaluate how institutional reforms have contributed to the formation of an integrated system for maintaining interethnic harmony and promoting civic cohesion.

To assess the normative foundations of public diplomacy, the study applies comparative legal analysis. This method facilitates the examination of constitutional provisions, presidential decrees, governmental resolutions, and strategic development documents regulating interethnic relations and humanitarian cooperation. Particular emphasis is placed on the evolution of Uzbekistan's legislative framework following the adoption of the Development Strategy of the New Uzbekistan and the constitutional reforms aimed at strengthening equality, tolerance, and the protection of cultural diversity. [8, 10, 11].

The research further utilizes document analysis to examine official policy documents, strategic development programmes, reports of governmental institutions, publications of the Committee on Interethnic Relations and Friendly Ties with Foreign Countries, materials of the SCO Public Diplomacy Centre in Uzbekistan, and international normative instruments adopted by the United Nations and UNESCO. These documentary sources provide the empirical basis for evaluating both domestic institutional reforms and Uzbekistan's participation in international humanitarian cooperation. [10, 18, 19]

A qualitative case study methodology has been selected because Uzbekistan represents a unique example of a multinational state that has developed a comprehensive institutional system integrating domestic interethnic policy with public diplomacy. Rather than testing a universal theory through quantitative indicators, the study seeks to understand the specific institutional mechanisms through which public diplomacy contributes to strengthening social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and regional cooperation. The case-study approach enables an in-depth analysis of national experience while identifying practices that may be applicable to other multicultural societies.

The study also incorporates elements of public policy analysis, allowing for an assessment of the effectiveness of state policies aimed at promoting interethnic harmony. Particular consideration is given to the implementation of strategic priorities concerning the development of civil society institutions, support for national cultural centres, expansion of humanitarian cooperation, and strengthening of friendship societies and compatriot organizations. This analytical perspective facilitates evaluation not only of formal institutional structures but also of their practical contribution to social stability and peaceful coexistence.

To strengthen the analytical dimension of the research, the study applies the principle of methodological triangulation, integrating legal analysis, institutional analysis, document analysis, and qualitative case-study methods. The combination of these complementary approaches increases the reliability of the findings by allowing the same institutional phenomena to be examined from different analytical perspectives.

The empirical foundation of the study consists of three principal categories of sources. The first includes national legal and strategic documents regulating interethnic relations and public diplomacy in Uzbekistan. The second comprises official reports and institutional materials published by governmental bodies responsible for implementing these policies. The third encompasses international academic literature addressing public diplomacy, soft power, intercultural communication, social cohesion, and multicultural governance. The integration of domestic empirical evidence with internationally recognized

theoretical approaches provides a comprehensive framework for analysing Uzbekistan's evolving model of public diplomacy.

The methodological approach adopted in this research makes it possible to move beyond descriptive analysis and to identify the institutional relationships that connect constitutional reforms, public administration, civil society participation, cultural diplomacy, and international humanitarian cooperation. Consequently, the study not only documents the evolution of Uzbekistan's public diplomacy but also explains the mechanisms through which it contributes to strengthening interethnic harmony and sustainable social development.

Results

1. Institutional Evolution of Public Diplomacy and Interethnic Policy in Uzbekistan.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the development of public diplomacy in Uzbekistan has followed a gradual process of institutionalization closely linked to the country's broader political and constitutional transformation. Rather than evolving as an isolated instrument of foreign policy, public diplomacy has increasingly become integrated into the national system of governance, where it performs both domestic and international functions. This institutional evolution reflects a strategic understanding that sustainable international cooperation begins with domestic social cohesion, interethnic harmony, and respect for cultural diversity.

Since gaining independence, Uzbekistan has consistently pursued policies aimed at preserving peace and stability within its multinational society. Equal rights regardless of ethnicity, language, religion, or social background have remained fundamental constitutional principles guiding state policy. Over time, these principles have been supplemented by comprehensive legal reforms and institutional innovations designed to strengthen civic unity while preserving the cultural identity of all ethnic communities residing in the country [10].

A significant transformation occurred during the implementation of the "New Uzbekistan" development agenda, which introduced a more systematic and institutional approach to interethnic relations. The adoption of the Concept of State Policy in the Sphere of Interethnic Relations, together with successive national development strategies, established an integrated legal framework aimed at promoting equality, tolerance, intercultural dialogue, and cooperation between state institutions and civil society organizations. These strategic documents expanded the understanding of interethnic policy beyond conflict prevention by emphasizing inclusive governance, civic participation, and sustainable social development. [8, 10, 11].

One of the principal findings of this research is that Uzbekistan has gradually shifted from a predominantly administrative model of ethnic policy toward an institutional partnership model. This transformation is reflected in the increasing involvement of public institutions, national cultural centres, friendship societies, educational organizations, and civil society actors in implementing state policy. Rather than relying exclusively on governmental regulation, the contemporary system encourages cooperation among multiple stakeholders responsible for promoting intercultural communication and strengthening social trust.

An important milestone in this institutional evolution was the establishment of the Committee on Interethnic Relations and Friendly Ties with Foreign Countries under the Cabinet of Ministers in 2017. The creation of a specialized governmental institution significantly strengthened policy coordination by consolidating activities related to interethnic harmony, cooperation with national cultural centres, friendship societies, and compatriot organizations abroad. As demonstrated by the empirical evidence analysed in this study, the Committee performs not only administrative functions but also serves as an institutional platform facilitating dialogue between governmental authorities and civil society organizations. [10]

The research further indicates that the effectiveness of Uzbekistan's institutional model largely depends on the extensive participation of civil society institutions. National cultural centres play a particularly significant role by preserving linguistic diversity, supporting cultural traditions, organizing educational initiatives, and strengthening intercultural dialogue among representatives of different ethnic communities. Their activities contribute not only to safeguarding ethnic identities but also to fostering a shared civic identity based on equality, mutual respect, and common citizenship.

Unlike many multicultural states where ethnic organizations function independently of state policy, Uzbekistan has developed a coordinated institutional mechanism that combines governmental support with civic initiative. Friendship societies and compatriot organizations operating abroad complement the activities of national cultural centres by extending humanitarian cooperation beyond national borders. Consequently, public diplomacy serves simultaneously as an internal mechanism for strengthening interethnic harmony and as an external instrument for expanding international cultural and humanitarian engagement.

Another important finding concerns the constitutional dimension of institutional development. The renewed constitutional framework of Uzbekistan reinforces guarantees of equality, cultural diversity, linguistic rights, and freedom of religion, thereby providing legal certainty for the continued development of multicultural governance. These constitutional guarantees create favourable conditions for preserving the languages, customs, and cultural heritage of all ethnic communities while simultaneously strengthening civic integration and national unity [10].

The analysis demonstrates that the institutional architecture established in Uzbekistan differs from traditional models of ethnic policy observed in many post-Soviet states. Rather than concentrating exclusively on minority protection, the Uzbek model emphasizes the formation of an inclusive civic community in which ethnic diversity is regarded as a strategic resource for national development. Within this framework, public diplomacy functions as an institutional bridge connecting constitutional values, domestic governance, cultural policy, and international humanitarian cooperation.

Overall, the findings presented in this section indicate that the institutionalization of public diplomacy has become one of the defining characteristics of Uzbekistan's contemporary development strategy. By integrating constitutional reforms, specialized state institutions, civil society organizations, and international partnerships into a coherent governance system, Uzbekistan has established a comprehensive model that strengthens interethnic harmony while simultaneously enhancing the country's international engagement and humanitarian cooperation.

2. Public Diplomacy as a Mechanism for Social Cohesion and Cultural Dialogue.

The findings of this study indicate that one of the most distinctive features of Uzbekistan's contemporary public diplomacy is its close integration with domestic policies aimed at strengthening social cohesion through cultural dialogue. Unlike conventional approaches that primarily associate public diplomacy with external communication, the Uzbek model demonstrates that cultural diplomacy may simultaneously function as an internal governance instrument promoting peaceful coexistence among ethnically diverse communities.

The empirical evidence shows that cultural diversity has been institutionalized as an important element of national development policy. Government support for linguistic diversity, preservation of cultural heritage, and promotion of intercultural dialogue reflects an understanding that ethnic plurality constitutes a strategic social resource rather than a potential source of instability. Consequently, the institutional framework of public diplomacy extends beyond international engagement by actively contributing to the formation of an inclusive civic identity based on equality, mutual respect, and shared citizenship. [10,19].

A central component of this institutional framework is the network of 157 national cultural centres, which represent one of the most comprehensive systems of ethnic cultural organizations in Central Asia. These centres perform functions that considerably exceed the preservation of ethnic traditions. Their activities encompass educational programmes, language instruction, cultural festivals, artistic initiatives, youth engagement, and cooperation with public authorities and civil society organizations. Through these multidimensional activities, national cultural centres facilitate continuous intercultural interaction while strengthening mutual understanding among representatives of different ethnic communities.

The analysis further demonstrates that linguistic policy constitutes another significant dimension of Uzbekistan's public diplomacy. The preservation and promotion of linguistic diversity are viewed not merely as instruments of cultural protection but also as mechanisms for fostering trust, intercultural communication, and civic inclusion. Broadcasting in twelve languages, publishing newspapers and journals in fourteen languages, and providing multilingual education in public schools illustrate a comprehensive state policy aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for representatives of various ethnic

communities. Such measures strengthen social integration while simultaneously preserving the cultural identity of individual groups.

The study also identifies public commemorative events as effective instruments of cultural diplomacy. The annual Day of Friendship of Peoples, celebrated on 30 July, together with the Week of Tolerance, represents institutional mechanisms designed to reinforce intercultural dialogue, mutual respect, and civic solidarity. Unlike symbolic cultural events, these initiatives form part of a broader state strategy promoting peaceful coexistence and strengthening public awareness of the country's multicultural heritage. Their regular implementation contributes to the institutionalization of tolerance as a fundamental social value rather than a temporary political initiative. [12].

An important finding concerns the relationship between domestic cultural policy and international humanitarian cooperation. Educational exchanges, cultural exhibitions, friendship festivals, and joint international events organized with neighbouring countries demonstrate that public diplomacy operates simultaneously at national and international levels. The organization of bilateral cultural events with Kazakhstan, dedicated to language, culture, and traditional heritage, illustrates how cultural diplomacy contributes to strengthening regional cooperation while enhancing interpersonal trust between neighbouring societies.

The research further indicates that Uzbekistan's cultural diplomacy is founded upon a normative principle of inclusive multiculturalism rather than cultural assimilation. Representatives of different ethnic communities actively preserve their native languages, traditions, and historical heritage while participating fully in the country's political, social, educational, and cultural life. This institutional arrangement allows ethnic diversity to coexist with a common civic identity, thereby reducing social fragmentation and strengthening national unity. In this respect, Uzbekistan's experience corresponds with contemporary theories of multicultural governance, which regard cultural recognition as an essential prerequisite for sustainable social cohesion. [18,19].

Another important observation concerns the role of education in strengthening intercultural dialogue. Educational institutions, language programmes, academic exchanges, and youth initiatives create long-term opportunities for interaction among representatives of different ethnic communities. These mechanisms facilitate not only the transmission of cultural knowledge but also the development of intercultural competence, tolerance, and civic responsibility among younger generations. Consequently, education becomes an integral component of both public diplomacy and national integration policy.

The analysis demonstrates that cultural diplomacy in Uzbekistan should not be interpreted merely as a collection of cultural events or symbolic initiatives. Rather, it represents a comprehensive institutional mechanism that integrates educational policy, language preservation, cultural heritage, civil society participation, and international humanitarian cooperation into a unified framework for strengthening social cohesion.

Overall, the findings suggest that the effectiveness of Uzbekistan's public diplomacy derives from its ability to combine constitutional guarantees, institutional support, cultural diversity, and civic participation within a coherent governance model. This integrated approach contributes not only to preserving interethnic harmony domestically but also to enhancing Uzbekistan's international reputation as a state committed to intercultural dialogue, peaceful coexistence, and humanitarian cooperation.

3. International Humanitarian Cooperation and the Institutionalization of Public Diplomacy within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

One of the principal findings of this study is that Uzbekistan has significantly expanded the functional scope of public diplomacy by integrating it into the country's broader strategy of regional cooperation and international humanitarian engagement. Unlike traditional diplomatic institutions, whose activities are primarily directed toward interstate political dialogue, the contemporary Uzbek model increasingly emphasizes people-to-people contacts, academic exchanges, cultural interaction, and civil society partnerships as complementary instruments of foreign policy.

A major milestone in this institutional development was the establishment of the SCO Public Diplomacy Centre in Uzbekistan in 2018. The creation of the Centre represented a significant shift in the conceptual understanding of diplomacy within the country. Rather than serving solely as an auxiliary institution supporting official diplomatic activities, the Centre was designed as a specialized platform

facilitating humanitarian cooperation among the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Its mandate encompasses the promotion of intercultural dialogue, scientific collaboration, educational partnerships, youth exchanges, expert interaction, and public engagement aimed at strengthening mutual trust and regional stability [9].

The empirical findings demonstrate that the activities of the SCO Public Diplomacy Centre reflect the broader evolution of diplomacy from state-centred communication toward a multi-level governance model involving governmental institutions, universities, research organisations, non-governmental associations, cultural institutions, and individual citizens. This institutional transformation corresponds with contemporary international theories of public diplomacy, which emphasize that sustainable international cooperation depends upon continuous interaction among societies rather than exclusively upon formal interstate negotiations. [2], [4].

An important characteristic of Uzbekistan's approach lies in the integration of domestic interethnic policy with regional humanitarian cooperation. The institutional mechanisms responsible for promoting intercultural dialogue inside the country—national cultural centres, friendship societies, educational institutions, and civil society organisations—also participate actively in international humanitarian initiatives. Such interaction creates a continuous institutional linkage between domestic multicultural governance and regional diplomacy, thereby reinforcing both national cohesion and international cooperation.

The study further reveals that the network of friendship societies and compatriot organisations abroad constitutes an essential component of Uzbekistan's public diplomacy architecture. These institutions facilitate cultural exchange, educational cooperation, preservation of national heritage, and communication with Uzbek communities residing outside the country. Unlike traditional diaspora policies aimed primarily at maintaining ethnic identity, Uzbekistan's institutional model encourages compatriot organisations to function as mediators of intercultural dialogue and humanitarian cooperation between societies. Through this mechanism, cultural identity becomes an instrument for strengthening international partnerships rather than a source of social separation.

Particular significance should be attributed to humanitarian cooperation within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. While economic and security issues remain central to the Organisation's agenda, humanitarian interaction has increasingly become one of its strategic priorities. Academic mobility, cultural festivals, joint scientific research, educational programmes, youth initiatives, and expert forums create sustainable channels of communication that strengthen mutual understanding among the peoples of the SCO member states. The Uzbek experience demonstrates that these humanitarian mechanisms complement traditional diplomatic negotiations by generating long-term interpersonal trust and expanding opportunities for regional cooperation. [9]

The analysis also indicates that Uzbekistan has successfully incorporated public diplomacy into its broader foreign policy strategy aimed at enhancing the country's international reputation. Rather than relying exclusively on strategic communication or image-building campaigns, the Uzbek model promotes a favourable international image through tangible humanitarian initiatives, cultural exchanges, educational cooperation, and support for intercultural dialogue. This approach corresponds with the concept of soft power, whereby a state's attractiveness is determined primarily by its cultural values, institutional credibility, educational achievements, and capacity for peaceful international engagement. [6, 7].

Another significant finding concerns the increasing participation of academic institutions in public diplomacy. Universities, research centres, expert communities, and scientific conferences have become important platforms for international dialogue, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and professional expertise among scholars from different countries. Such academic diplomacy contributes to the formation of epistemic communities capable of supporting evidence-based policymaking while simultaneously strengthening regional scientific cooperation. This tendency reflects the growing role of higher education as an integral component of contemporary humanitarian diplomacy. [4].

The empirical evidence further demonstrates that the institutionalization of humanitarian cooperation within the SCO has strengthened Uzbekistan's position as an active regional actor promoting dialogue, inclusiveness, and peaceful coexistence. Public diplomacy therefore performs a dual function:

externally, it enhances regional cooperation and international humanitarian engagement; internally, it reinforces the principles of intercultural dialogue, civic solidarity, and social cohesion that underpin the country's multicultural development model.

Overall, the findings presented in this section suggest that Uzbekistan has developed a comprehensive model of regional public diplomacy in which humanitarian cooperation functions not as a supplementary activity but as an independent strategic pillar of foreign policy. By integrating governmental institutions, civil society organisations, educational institutions, cultural actors, friendship societies, and international partners into a unified system of humanitarian engagement, Uzbekistan has significantly expanded the practical scope of public diplomacy within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and beyond.

Discussion

Towards an Integrated Institutional Model of Public Diplomacy in Uzbekistan

The findings of the present study demonstrate that public diplomacy in Uzbekistan has evolved beyond its conventional understanding as an instrument of international communication. The institutional reforms implemented during the past decade indicate the emergence of a comprehensive governance model in which public diplomacy simultaneously performs domestic and external functions. This dual character distinguishes Uzbekistan's experience from many existing conceptualizations of public diplomacy, which continue to focus predominantly on strategic communication with foreign audiences.

Unlike classical interpretations proposed by [6], [2] and [4], where public diplomacy primarily serves as an instrument of external influence and international image-building, the Uzbek model demonstrates that public diplomacy may also operate as an internal institutional mechanism for strengthening interethnic harmony, civic identity, and social cohesion. In this respect, Uzbekistan expands the theoretical understanding of public diplomacy by integrating constitutional development, multicultural governance, civil society participation, and humanitarian cooperation into a unified institutional framework.

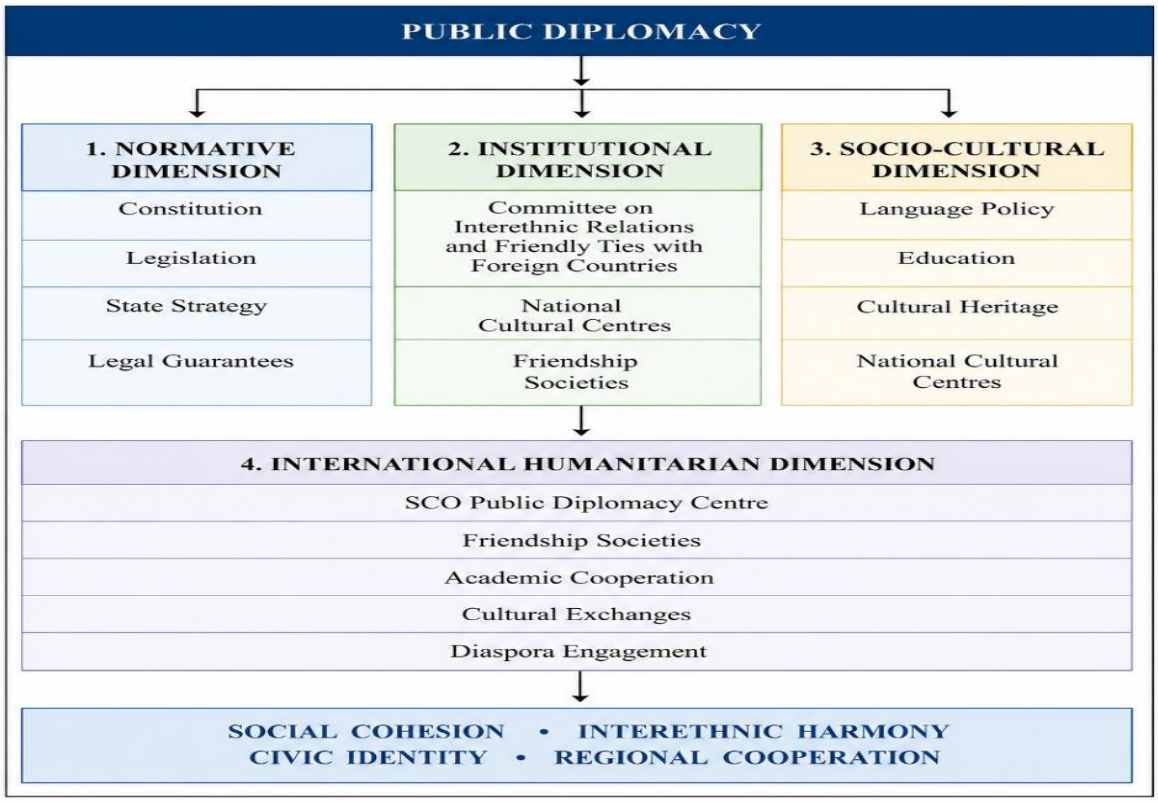
The empirical analysis conducted in this research allows the author to propose an Integrated Institutional Model of Public Diplomacy, consisting of four interrelated dimensions (Table 1).

The first dimension—the Normative Dimension—forms the legal foundation of public diplomacy. Constitutional guarantees of equality, freedom of religion, protection of cultural diversity, and respect for linguistic rights create the institutional environment necessary for peaceful coexistence among different ethnic communities. Unlike many post-Soviet states, where ethnic policy often remains reactive, Uzbekistan has established a proactive legislative framework that places intercultural dialogue among the strategic priorities of national development. [10]

The second component—the Institutional Dimension—includes specialized governmental bodies together with civil society organizations responsible for implementing public diplomacy in practice. The Committee on Interethnic Relations and Friendly Ties with Foreign Countries, national cultural centres, friendship societies, and compatriot organizations constitute an interconnected institutional network rather than isolated organizations. Their interaction ensures policy continuity while facilitating communication between governmental authorities and society. The findings indicate that this institutional coordination represents one of the principal strengths of Uzbekistan's public diplomacy system. [10]

The third dimension—the Socio-Cultural Dimension—demonstrates that public diplomacy increasingly relies upon educational policy, multilingualism, preservation of cultural heritage, youth engagement, and intercultural communication. In contrast to assimilation-oriented approaches observed in some multicultural societies, Uzbekistan promotes an inclusive model of civic integration in which ethnic identities are preserved while simultaneously contributing to the formation of a common civic identity. This finding is consistent with contemporary theories of multicultural governance emphasizing recognition, participation, and cultural inclusion as prerequisites for sustainable social cohesion. [18, 19].

Table 1. Intergrated Institutional Model of Diplomacy in Uzbekistan



Finally, the International Humanitarian Dimension reflects the external projection of domestic institutional capacities. The activities of the SCO Public Diplomacy Centre, friendship societies, universities, research institutions, and cultural organizations demonstrate that humanitarian cooperation has become an independent direction of Uzbekistan's foreign policy. Rather than functioning solely as an auxiliary component of traditional diplomacy, humanitarian engagement has evolved into an institutional mechanism for strengthening regional trust, promoting intercultural dialogue, and expanding educational and scientific cooperation. [9].

The interaction among these four dimensions generates a cumulative institutional effect. Constitutional guarantees establish the normative basis for equality and diversity; specialized institutions implement these principles through coordinated public policies; socio-cultural initiatives strengthen civic solidarity and intercultural competence; and international humanitarian cooperation extends these achievements into the regional and global arena. Consequently, public diplomacy functions not merely as an instrument of foreign policy but as a comprehensive governance mechanism connecting domestic development with international engagement. Another important implication concerns the relationship between public diplomacy and national resilience. Contemporary international scholarship increasingly recognizes that sustainable security depends not only upon military capabilities but also upon social trust, inclusive institutions, and effective communication among diverse communities. The Uzbek experience supports this perspective by demonstrating that institutionalized intercultural dialogue contributes simultaneously to conflict prevention, democratic stability, and international credibility.

The results also suggest that Uzbekistan's experience may have broader relevance for other multicultural societies. Although institutional arrangements inevitably reflect national historical and political contexts, the principles underlying the Uzbek model—constitutional equality, institutional inclusiveness, civil society participation, cultural recognition, and humanitarian cooperation—are consistent with internationally recognized standards of multicultural governance and sustainable development. Consequently, the conceptual framework proposed in this article may serve as a useful analytical model for comparative research on public diplomacy in other ethnically diverse states.

Overall, this study argues that public diplomacy should no longer be interpreted exclusively as an external communication strategy. The institutional experience of Uzbekistan demonstrates that public diplomacy can simultaneously strengthen domestic interethnic harmony, reinforce civic identity, promote regional cooperation, and enhance a country's international standing. This broader understanding significantly expands existing theoretical approaches and contributes to the ongoing development of public diplomacy as an interdisciplinary field of research.

Conclusion

This study examined the institutional development of public diplomacy as a mechanism for strengthening interethnic harmony in the Republic of Uzbekistan within the broader context of national development and international humanitarian cooperation. The research demonstrates that public diplomacy has evolved from a supplementary instrument of foreign policy into a comprehensive institutional system that simultaneously contributes to domestic social cohesion and international engagement.

The analysis confirms that the effectiveness of Uzbekistan's public diplomacy is closely associated with the country's consistent constitutional, legislative, and institutional reforms. The adoption of strategic policy documents, the establishment of specialized state institutions, the expansion of national cultural centres, the development of friendship societies, and the promotion of humanitarian cooperation have collectively created an integrated governance framework aimed at preserving interethnic harmony while strengthening civic identity and social stability. [8, 10, 11].

One of the principal conclusions of this research is that Uzbekistan has developed a distinctive institutional model of public diplomacy that integrates constitutional principles, public administration, civil society participation, cultural diplomacy, and international humanitarian cooperation into a coherent system of multicultural governance. Unlike conventional approaches that primarily associate public diplomacy with external communication and image-building, the Uzbek experience demonstrates that public diplomacy can also function as an effective domestic policy instrument for strengthening social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and peaceful coexistence among ethnically diverse communities.

The study further indicates that national cultural centres, friendship societies, educational institutions, and humanitarian organizations perform a strategic role in supporting intercultural communication and civic participation. Their coordinated interaction with governmental institutions contributes not only to preserving linguistic and cultural diversity but also to reinforcing a shared civic identity based on equality, mutual respect, and constitutional values. These institutional mechanisms have enabled Uzbekistan to transform cultural diversity into an important resource for sustainable national development rather than a source of social fragmentation. [10]

Another significant finding concerns the growing role of humanitarian cooperation in Uzbekistan's regional diplomacy. The institutional activities of the SCO Public Diplomacy Centre, together with expanding academic, cultural, and educational exchanges, illustrate the transition from traditional diplomacy toward a more inclusive model of international engagement based on dialogue among societies rather than exclusively among governments. This development corresponds with contemporary international trends emphasizing people-to-people diplomacy as an important component of regional peace, mutual trust, and long-term cooperation. [9]

The principal scientific contribution of this article lies in the development of an Integrated Institutional Model of Public Diplomacy, which conceptualizes public diplomacy as a multidimensional governance mechanism consisting of four interdependent dimensions: the normative-legal, institutional, socio-cultural, and international humanitarian dimensions. The proposed model expands existing theoretical approaches by demonstrating that public diplomacy simultaneously performs internal functions related to social integration and external functions associated with international humanitarian cooperation.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this research may contribute to the further improvement of public policies aimed at strengthening interethnic harmony, supporting multicultural governance, and expanding regional humanitarian cooperation. The institutional experience of Uzbekistan may also provide useful analytical insights for other multinational states seeking to develop effective mechanisms for promoting intercultural dialogue, civic cohesion, and sustainable peace.

The present study is subject to several limitations. It focuses primarily on the institutional and legal dimensions of public diplomacy within the national context of Uzbekistan and therefore does not include comparative empirical analysis with other Central Asian countries. Future research could employ comparative methodologies to examine similarities and differences between public diplomacy models across the region. Additional empirical studies based on interviews, surveys, and network analysis could further deepen understanding of the practical effectiveness of public diplomacy initiatives and their long-term impact on social cohesion and international cooperation.

Overall, the experience of Uzbekistan demonstrates that public diplomacy should be understood not merely as an instrument of foreign policy but as an integral component of contemporary governance capable of strengthening interethnic harmony, reinforcing civic identity, promoting regional cooperation, and supporting sustainable national development. In an increasingly interconnected and culturally diverse world, such institutional approaches may become one of the defining elements of effective public governance and international humanitarian engagement.

Ethical Commission Approval

This study did not require approval from an ethics committee as it did not involve human participants, animals, or sensitive personal data. All data used in this research were obtained from publicly available sources.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

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ӨЗБЕКСТАН РЕСПУБЛИКАСЫНДАҒЫ ЭТНОСАРАЛЫҚ ҚАТЫНАСТАРДЫ НЫҒАЙТУ ФАКТОРЫ РЕТІНДЕГІ ХАЛЫҚ ДИПЛОМАТИЯСЫ

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Аңдатпа. Мақалада Өзбекстан Республикасындағы этносаралық келісім мен қоғамдық бірлікті нығайтудың маңызды тетігі ретінде жария дипломатияның институционалдық дамуы қарастырылады. Зерттеудің мақсаты – этносаралық қатынастар саласындағы мемлекеттік саясаттың эволюциясын талдау, этносаралық келісімді қамтамасыз етудегі жария дипломатия институттарының рөлін айқындау және жария дипломатияның интеграцияланған институционалдық моделін әзірлеу. Зерттеуде институционалдық талдау, салыстырмалы-құқықтық әдіс, нормативтік-құқықтық актілерді талдау және мемлекеттік саясатты сапалық бағалау әдістері қолданылды. Зерттеу нәтижелері Өзбекстандағы жария дипломатияның қазіргі моделі конституциялық-құқықтық негіздерді, мемлекеттік институттарды, азаматтық қоғамды, мәдени ұйымдарды және халықаралық гуманитарлық ынтымақтастықты біріктіретін кешенді жүйе екенін көрсетті. Зерттеудің ғылыми жаңалығы – жария дипломатияның нормативтік, институционалдық, әлеуметтік-мәдени және халықаралық гуманитарлық өлшемдерін біріктіретін Integrated Institutional Model of Public Diplomacy атты авторлық тұжырымдаманың ұсынылуында. Ұсынылған модель этносаралық қатынастар саласындағы мемлекеттік саясатты жетілдіруде және халықаралық гуманитарлық ынтымақтастықты дамытуда қолданылуы мүмкін.

Түйін сөздер: жария дипломатия; халық дипломатиясы; этносаралық қатынастар; этносаралық келісім; қоғамдық бірлік; мәдени дипломатия; мемлекеттік саясат; Өзбекстан.

НАРОДНАЯ ДИПЛОМАТИЯ КАК ФАКТОР УКРЕПЛЕНИЯ МЕЖЭТНИЧЕСКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ В РЕСПУБЛИКЕ УЗБЕКИСТАН

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Аннотация. В статье исследуются институциональные основы развития публичной (народной) дипломатии как механизма укрепления межэтнического согласия и общественной сплоченности в Республике Узбекистан. Цель исследования заключается в анализе эволюции государственной политики в сфере межнациональных отношений, выявлении роли институтов публичной дипломатии в обеспечении межэтнической гармонии и разработке интегрированной институциональной модели публичной дипломатии. Методологическую основу исследования составили институциональный анализ, сравнительно-правовой метод, анализ нормативно-правовых документов и качественный анализ государственной политики. Результаты исследования показывают, что современная модель публичной дипломатии Узбекистана представляет собой комплексную систему, объединяющую конституционно-правовые основы, государственные институты, гражданское общество, культурные организации и международное гуманитарное сотрудничество. Научная новизна исследования заключается в разработке авторской Integrated Institutional Model of Public Diplomacy**,** объединяющей нормативное, институциональное, социокультурное и международное гуманитарное измерения публичной дипломатии. Практическая значимость исследования состоит в возможности использования предложенной модели при совершенствовании государственной политики в сфере межэтнических отношений и развитии гуманитарного сотрудничества.

Ключевые слова: публичная дипломатия; народная дипломатия; межэтнические отношения; межнациональное согласие; социальная сплоченность; культурная дипломатия; государственная политика; Узбекистан.