

# Moroccan Cultural Diplomacy: Challenges, Opportunities and Levers of a New Model of Influence and Soft Power

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**Abstract:** Cultural Diplomacy has emerged as a vector of influence and a potent tool for soft power in international relations. Nowadays, the realm of cultural diplomacy has become fiercely competitive. It leveraged by many countries aware of its pivotal role in increasing their soft power and expanding their sphere of influence. Morocco, a secular kingdom and one of the oldest States in the world, is also keen on investing in the field of cultural diplomacy to bolster its soft power, increase its influence and assert its position as a regional and continental leader in this area. This paper presents a new conceptual model of a Moroccan Diplomacy which takes into account the extremely rich and distinctive cultural heritage of the Kingdom of Morocco, the various achievements in this cultural field. This model is designed to be more integrated, synergistic, well-governed in order to address internal and external challenges and capitalize on the strengths and new opportunities. The paper identifies the main challenges facing Moroccan Cultural Diplomacy that impact its proficiency, including in particular the lack of a global and integrated strategic vision and thinking, limited financial resources, lack of coordination between the different stakeholders and, weak involvement of the private sector and weak culture of assessment and performance measurement. However, the paper also identifies great opportunities, such as its impressively rich cultural heritage, characterized by its multidimensional cultural diversity, which requires a new and innovative approach based on a global and integrated strategic vision. The proposed Model is designed as a new framework based on a benchmark of international best practices of several pioneering countries in the field of cultural diplomacy and combined with a documentary approach and the results of interviews carried out with professionals, managers and experts in this field. It focused on several levers of influence and counter-influence that emphasizes the importance of a global and strategic vision, strong governance standards and structures involving Regions, Cities, Non-Governmental Organizations, Moroccan Diaspora. It focused also on enhanced evaluation and measurement, and a more proactive and innovative approach to promoting Moroccan soft power by investing cultural marketing, Public-Private Partnerships, digitalization and new technologies for networking, cultural creativity and strategic cultural partnerships. The paper argues that a renewed and more strategic approach to cultural diplomacy should be guided and steered by a specialized national agency that would perform the various functions of study, research, monitoring, influence, coordination, policy convergence, control and evaluation at national and international level. Thus, by institutionalizing this strategic, synergistic and holistic approach, we can lay the foundation of a new and innovative model that could help Morocco strengthen its soft power and promote its rich and unique cultural assets and values on the global stage in a more effective manner, and strengthen so its international reputation and influence.

**Keywords:** Cultural diplomacy, Challenges, Opportunities, New model, Influence, Soft power

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## 1. Introduction

Culture is defined by UNESCO “as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature, but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (UNESCO, 2001). Indeed, Culture has become a major issue, a key lever for development and an essential instrument at the service of the diplomacy of influence. States are increasingly making use of culture to extend their power and influence over States and peoples through cultural actions and cultural diplomacy to seduce, influence, convince, brand their image and position themselves on the international stage.

For Aguilar, Cultural Diplomacy is “the way in which a government presents its country to the people of another country with the aim of achieving certain foreign policy objectives” (Aguilar, 1996). Cultural diplomacy can be defined also, according to Milton C. Cummings, as being “The exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding which can also be more of a one-way street than a two-way exchange, as when one nation concentrates its efforts on promoting the national language, explaining its policies and point of view, or “telling its story” to the rest of the world» (Cummings, 2013). It should also be noted in this context that although Cultural Diplomacy is most often mentioned in terms of dissemination, influence, even exchanges or cooperation, it always has a tacit objective of influence. This is what Joseph Nye (1990) called soft power or “cultural attraction”. Nye considers that “Hard power is push; soft power is pull.’ Or to extend a common metaphor, hard power is like brandishing carrots or sticks; soft power is more like “a magnet” (Nye, 2021).

Cultural diplomacy does not necessarily involve formal exchanges (Dines, 2020). In its book entitled "How to win hearts and minds" Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) considers that in cultural diplomacy, unlike traditional diplomacy, there are no immediate expected results. As Akami said, "Cultural diplomacy aims to introduce social and political ideas, values and norms to the host country in an accessible and enjoyable way so that they may take root and flourish over time. Cultural diplomacy initiatives have the added advantage of being accessible to young people and to non-elite groups. Cultural diplomacy may foster mutual understanding among nations, bolster other diplomatic initiatives, improve overall public opinion and engender goodwill between nations. This in turn generally results in greater economic cooperation, reduces chances of violent conflict and forges stronger political ties." (Akami, 2008).

Thus, Cultural Diplomacy is understood as a tool for sharing, for dialogue between civilizations, for disseminating the values of peace and tolerance that each State is called upon to promote for mutual international understanding. As Akami said (2008) "If each country could make its own culture and civilization understood, this will promote international understanding strongly. The government will coordinate official and private efforts, and equip them with appropriate external and domestic institutions".

Like other countries worldwide, Morocco pays particular attention to its culture and cultural diplomacy as levers of Moroccan soft power. Indeed, culture is one of the strategic choices proposed by the Moroccan Special Commission on the Development Model (SCDM) which considers that "culture in Morocco is destined to become a multidimensional lever of economic prosperity, inclusive social ties and geopolitical soft power: it is a matter of national unity in connection with the demand for meaning and historical and identity markers; culture also offers a source of growth, investment and employment closest to the territories and local needs; Morocco's historical depth is an asset to be leveraged as a source of regional stability, cultural influence and coexistence" (SCDM, 2021). The SCDM emphasized in its strategic orientations on the levers of Moroccan soft power. It has formulated strategic orientations as a framework for initiatives for all stakeholders to work collectively to achieve objectives in the field of culture. The Moroccan cultural potential as a powerful vector of Morocco's soft power plays a key role in the influence of the Kingdom and the success of the New Development Model. In this context, the SCDM considers that "The mobilization of the soft power of the Kingdom resulting from its millennial history, its culture, its fundamental choices and its institutions would contribute to the success of the New Model of Development, to the influence of Morocco, and respect for its specificity, sovereignty and territorial integrity" (SCDM, 2021).

However, the current Moroccan model of cultural diplomacy faces several challenges. A global, integrated, coherent and engaged approach is missing, which has a significant impact on the proficiency and capacity of Moroccan Cultural Diplomacy. In this context, several questions arise: how to overcome the weaknesses identified in Moroccan cultural diplomacy and capitalize on its strengths? How to ensure coordination and consultation between the different Stakeholders? Towards what kind of Cultural Diplomacy model can we evolve to ensure the influence of Morocco, strengthen its cultural soft power, and defend the Nation's highest interests?

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology**

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

This paper presents main findings based on Nye's theoretical framework focusing on the concept of influence and soft power of Joseph Nye (1990), used to analyze the capacities of influence and persuasion of States in the context of cultural diplomacy. This paper tries to explore how cultural diplomacy can be used, understood and assessed through the dimensions of soft power, cultural attraction, and building a nation branding (Nye, 1990). These dimensions are based on the diversity, quality and relevance of a country's culture, traditions, language, arts and institutions, as well as many other cultural expressions.

We have also mobilized the Stakeholders Theory in the sense and spirit of Freeman (1984). This theory enabled a detailed understanding of the dynamics of stakeholders and their impact on the multifaceted and multilevel processes, procedures, programs and activities of cultural diplomacy. This theoretical framework allowed us to analyze the different challenges and opportunities and to get a holistic view of the ecosystem of cultural diplomacy, considering the different interests, expectations and power dynamics of the stakeholders involved (Countries, national entities, international organizations, practitioners, target audiences, etc.). This theoretical perspective allowed us to identify potential synergies, as well as collaborative and co-construction efforts between stakeholders, thus facilitating the development of synergistic and mutually beneficial initiatives. Through recognizing the diverse needs and aspirations of stakeholders, the proposed new model of Moroccan

cultural diplomacy can better leverage partnerships, enhance cultural exchanges and strengthen international ties.

## 2.2 Research Methodology

This qualitative research, carried out in the field of Moroccan Cultural Diplomacy, has been completed according to an integrating conceptual model based on a documentary approach combined with the results of interviews with professionals, managers and experts in this cultural field. We have also used the benchmark approach of the best practices carried out by other pioneering countries in the field of cultural diplomacy.

Our research has allowed us to create a global and synthetic map of the major challenges and key opportunities of Moroccan cultural diplomacy. In light of the main results, we derive the levers of a new influence model and Moroccan cultural soft power. It makes a strategic and managerial contribution, drawing a panorama of the diversity of actors, the diversity of actions and the need to create a synergistic convergence between all stakeholders in the cultural diplomacy ecosystem. Therefore, we have concluded our paper with a conceptual model presenting the main levers of what we can call the renewed and innovative model of Cultural Diplomacy 4.0.

## 3. The Main Challenges of Moroccan Cultural Diplomacy

The results of our research have allowed us to highlight the main challenges facing Moroccan Cultural Diplomacy which we can describe as follows:



**Figure 1: Main Challenges of Moroccan Cultural Diplomacy**

The first challenge is the lack of a clear, comprehensive, global and integrated strategic vision that involves all stakeholders and actors both in Morocco and abroad, and exploits the synergies that can be achieved between the different institutional and extra-institutional actors. Our research also revealed the lack of coordination between the various public actors, particularly those involved in Moroccan cultural diplomacy. These lacks have been pointed out by various Moroccan entities, including the Court of Auditors, which particularly raised the inadequacy of the coordination mechanisms between the institutional stakeholders in the cultural offer intended for Moroccans around the world, in addition to the absence of a global and strategic vision of the digitalization of the cultural offer. Various ministries, agencies, offices and foundations act within their statutory responsibilities and missions to promote cultural exchanges and dialogue between Morocco and other countries of the world, without pooling of resources and synergies of means and a real convergence of policies and strategies between the different public actors. Furthermore, we noted the limited financial resources. In fact, budget constraints effectively affect the implementation of various large-scale initiatives and actions of Moroccan cultural diplomacy. Since cultural diplomacy is essentially a budgetary expense, the lack of sufficient financial resources has a significant impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of Moroccan cultural diplomacy.

The third challenge is related to the weak involvement of the Moroccan private sector in the initiatives and programs of Moroccan Cultural Diplomacy. Despite significant endeavors by the General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprises (GCME) and the Moroccan Federation of Cultural and Creative Industries are making considerable efforts to promote Morocco and increase its cultural visibility, however, there is not really a strong involvement of the private sector.

The fourth major challenge revealed by our research is the weak culture of evaluation and performance measurement in the realm of cultural diplomacy. Moroccan cultural diplomacy is carried out in a scattered manner among various entities. This fragmented and divergent variety of policies, strategies, initiatives poses significant challenges in terms of evaluation and achievement assessment, and lacks organization and objectivity. This indicates a weak culture of evaluation and accountability.

The fifth challenge is the lack of sufficient, qualified and trained human resources in the specific field of cultural diplomacy able to increase the effectiveness of programs and initiatives. Furthermore, it is important to highlight the low use of new digital technologies, which limits their potential for Moroccan cultural diplomacy and complicates the media visibility and dissemination of cultural productions at international level. Another crucial challenge is the fierce competition between the different countries to export their cultural model. It is an extremely competitive field that mixes issues of cultural identity with all the economic and financial issues related to the contribution of cultural diplomacy to each country GDP (cultural cooperation programs, cultural economy, Cultural and Creative Industries, revenues from tourism and income from festivals, museums and other forms of cultural activities and initiatives). In addition, we can also mention the issues and challenges related to the protection, strengthening and preservation of Moroccan cultural heritage. This requires additional efforts to strengthen the Moroccan cultural heritage, an intelligent warning system to prevent any attempt at usurpation, appropriation of any elements of this heritage, spoliation of this Moroccan rich cultural heritage. Strengthening, protection and preservation systems are necessary to protect, strengthen and promote Moroccan culture on a continental and international scale.

#### 4. Key Opportunities of Moroccan Cultural Diplomacy

Despite the fact that there are many challenges to overcome, our research has also shown the existence of a multitude of opportunities to be seized. These include the following key opportunities:

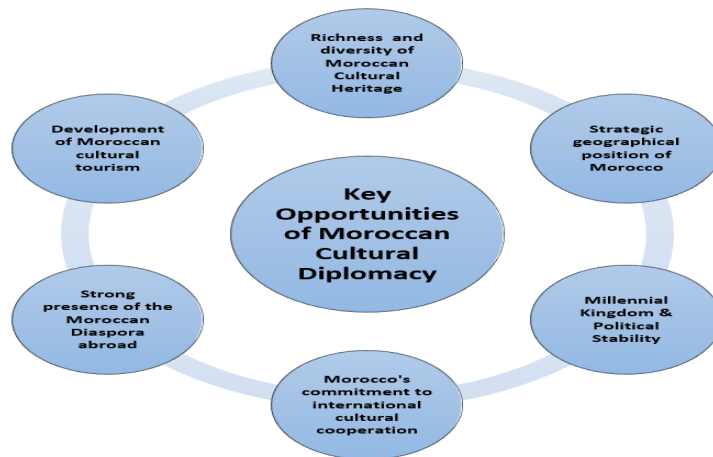


Figure 2: Key opportunities of Moroccan Cultural Diplomacy

The first opportunity to seize and highlight is the richness and diversity of Moroccan culture (CCDM, 2021). Morocco has an impressively rich cultural heritage that is characterized by its multidimensional diversity. It requires a new innovative approach, resulting from a global and integrated strategic vision, offering tremendous opportunities to share its history, crafts, traditions and arts with the rest of the world.

We can also note the strategic geographical position of Morocco and its fundamental specificity as the cradle of humanity, with the discovery of the World's oldest Homo sapiens fossils dating back to 300.000 years, found at a site in Jebel Irhoud in Morocco. It is also a millennial Kingdom among the oldest States in the world created since 791, politically stable, enjoying a shining image of a Country of tolerance, peace and brotherhood and a bridge between Africa, Europe and the Middle East. As enshrined in the country's Constitution, Morocco's distinctive feature is that "its unity is forged by the convergence of its Arab-Islamist, Amazigh and Saharan-

Hassanic components, nourished and enriched by its African, Andalusian, Hebraic and Mediterranean influences”. At this level, as a melting pot and unique blend of influences and diverse cultural backgrounds, Morocco can play a key role in fostering cultural cooperation particularly across Africa (SCDM, 2021).

One of the most stimulating opportunities is the increasing growth of cultural tourism in Morocco (Federico, 2020), mainly due to the growing popularity of the Moroccan destination, particularly after the sporting achievement of the national football team during the 2023 World Cup, arousing an unprecedented enthusiasm for the destination of Morocco. We have also noted a dynamic of cultural cooperation and collaboration with other countries. Furthermore, Morocco hosts a wide range of cultural festivals and events creating platforms for cultural exchange and diplomacy.

Another opportunity to seize is the important role of artistic and cultural exchanges with the Moroccan diaspora, which is deeply connected to its homeland and traditions. In addition to the substantial investments in cultural infrastructures, in particular museums, artistic centers and renowned festivals giving a new image of Morocco and consequently strengthen its soft power on the regional, continental and international levels.

### 5. Levers of a new Model of Moroccan Cultural Diplomacy

The conceptual model we recommend is an integrative, synergistic, agile and resilient framework. It arises from an informed forward-looking strategic vision, and is supported by a planning and visionary governance that will intelligently lay the groundwork for a new and innovative model of Moroccan Cultural Diplomacy.



Figure 3: Moroccan Cultural Diplomacy Framework Levers

It is a new model designed in an overall logic according to a long-term strategic vision with a focus on the enhancement and preservation of Moroccan heritage and cultural identity. It is also founded on the strengthening of partnerships and international collaborations, the use of digitalization and the use of emerging and innovative technologies and the mobilization of the necessary resources to promote and sustain programs, projects and various initiatives of Moroccan cultural diplomacy.

Indeed, it is crucial to have a solid, coherent and integrated cultural policy redesigned according to a global and forward-looking strategic vision. This cultural policy should be declined in a long-term strategic plan of cultural diplomacy which integrates the defined objectives and establishes performance indicators to measure the progress of Moroccan cultural diplomacy.

The second lever is related to new and solid governance based on the mobilization of the entire ecosystem of Moroccan cultural diplomacy by further involving of what Ang, Isar and Mar (2015) consider as third party actors, such as the private sector, the Regions and the Cities in the emergence of a rich Moroccan cultural offer well adapted to the countries. At this level, it is recommended to turn to the “agencification” of cultural diplomacy via the creation of a structure with national competence dedicated to Moroccan cultural diplomacy that oversees the alignment of cultural strategies and policies, collaboration among different parties, and the consolidation of resources and endeavors. Indeed, the creation of a Moroccan Agency for Cultural Diplomacy will provide the necessary leadership driven by a global, forward-looking and innovative strategic vision. This structure can also rely on departments contributing to the achievement of the expected objectives such as a cultural diplomacy observatory to monitor and evaluate the actions carried out, by providing data and analyzes to guide strategic decisions, marketing and communication department, strategy and forecasting.

The third lever is the mobilization of sufficient and diversified financial resources: Cultural Diplomacy is essentially a budget-intensive activity and requires significant investment, and Morocco needs to provide

substantial financial support to ensure its influence. To promote Moroccan artistic creation and innovation, it is crucial to establish alternative and innovative mechanisms for funding artists and cultural professionals. To promote artistic creation and innovation in Morocco, it is crucial to establish alternative and innovative mechanisms for funding artists and cultural professionals.

At this level, it is proposed to promote public-private partnerships (PPP) in the realm of culture. Such partnerships would prove highly advantageous in facilitating an efficient, effective, and high-quality Moroccan cultural diplomacy. By leveraging the resources and expertise of both entities, large-scale cultural diplomacy endeavors can be realized. The public sector can benefit from the expertise, skills, financial resources and managerial efficiency of the private sector, resulting in greater Moroccan cultural diplomatic influence. An additional significant lever is the valorization and preservation of Morocco's tangible and intangible cultural heritage through a new comprehensive and integrated strategy to support and protect against the spoliation of symbols, arts, traditions, and all of Morocco's tangible and intangible cultural heritage. A strategy of influence and counter-influence is necessary at this level.

Moreover, the valorization and promotion of Cultural and Creative Industries can be achieved through the utilization of a vital and significant tool for the progress of the nation, which is economic diplomacy. The aim is to utilize the economic and financial advantages of cultural diplomacy to stimulate economic development, by encouraging trade in the cultural and creative sectors, such as cultural tourism, crafts and creative industries or what Howkins (2001) qualified by the creative economy. Promotion of cultural tourism is also an effective way of promoting tourism as cultural diplomacy can act as a strong tool for tourism promotion. It serves as a significant factor of differentiation and motivation that can lure international tourists and lead to favorable economic outcomes.

Our conceptual framework also focuses on training and capacity building of professionals and different stakeholders involved in Moroccan cultural diplomacy. It is highly recommended to allocate a significant amount of resources towards training and ongoing education, particularly in the fields of info-cultural management, intercultural management, project management, intercultural communication, cultural influence, cultural and territorial marketing, entrepreneurship culture, cultural start-upping, innovation and cultural design, and other relevant areas. This investment will lead to enhanced efficiency and a significant, enduring, and beneficial effect. An important aspect to highlight is the utilization of various forms of diplomacy, including gastronomic and sports diplomacy, as strategic tools for Moroccan cultural diplomacy. This can be achieved by hosting continental, particularly African, and global gastronomic and sporting initiatives and events, and by promoting traditional Moroccan cultural values, customs and traditions through gastronomy and sports. Such efforts can result in valuable and collaborative outcomes that project cultural identity, encourage intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding, and strengthen cultural diplomacy, collectively contributing to a Moroccan strong soft power image on the global stage.

We should also mention the importance of bilateral and multilateral cooperation and the crucial role of win-win new generation strategic partnerships with the pioneer States in Cultural Diplomacy through joint initiatives, programs and projects of common interest. In this context, it is recommended to strengthen strategic partnerships with target countries, and international institutions and organizations in the field of culture to enhance financial resources, complementary expertise and exchange emerging best practices and knowledge in various cultural fields such as culture, traditions, crafts, music, theatre, gastronomy, films and media collaborations, enhancement and preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and cultural mobility program. Additionally, it is equally pivotal to stress Morocco's position in international cultural bodies responsible for safeguarding the country's interests and influence.

The domain of cultural diplomacy requires significant cooperation and integration within exchange networks and global cooperation. It is essential to create networks of cultural diplomacy, the establishment of Networks of cultural diplomacy professionals and communities of artists and cultural professionals at regional, continental and international level to strengthen connections, simplify exchanges, and promote and reinforce national and international collaboration in this field. Such networks will prove invaluable in promoting the exchange of artists, creators and cultural experts to foster intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding and collaboration.

An additional approach to employ is enhancing and fortifying the diasporic contribution. A new strategy in order to mobilize the Moroccan diaspora to promote Moroccan culture abroad by establishing very dense and close links with Moroccan diaspora communities and by organizing cultural events. Moroccans worldwide serve as pivotal figures in disseminating Moroccan culture abroad, serving as cultural ambassadors and nurturing bonds with their homeland.

One of the most important strategies recommended in this research is to boost and market Cultural and Creative Industries by placing greater emphasis on economic diplomacy. This involves leveraging the economic and financial benefits of cultural diplomacy to drive economic growth, while encouraging collaboration and exchange within the cultural and creative fields. This approach also involves promoting cultural tourism, as cultural diplomacy is a potent tool for attracting foreign visitors and generating significant economic advantages through differentiation and stimulation.

We have also identified an integrated marketing and communication strategy that will play a pivotal role in boosting Moroccan Cultural Diplomacy. To achieve this, we suggest implementing a global and comprehensive strategy that brings together all stakeholders and creates a cohesive approach. To ensure that the strategic objectives are met, it is essential to target specific populations and prioritize geographical areas as Africa and Asia. Organizing large-scale cultural events and missions abroad will be instrumental in showcasing Moroccan traditions and arts. This can be achieved through thematic festivals, international exhibitions, and intercultural forums that highlight the country's cultural heritage and present it to a global audience.

“The emergence of digital technologies has had a profound impact on the conduct and study of diplomacy” (Manor, 2018). Undoubtedly, in the age of digitalization, platforming and digital transformation, it is crucial to use digital technologies to strengthen Moroccan cultural diplomacy in terms of Manor 's four dimensions: institutions, practitioners, audiences and the conduct of diplomacy. Thus, in order to captivate the younger generations and to expand the reach by attracting a large international audience, it is advisable to use new, innovative and emerging technologies such as social networks, virtual reality and online platforms to strengthen the virtual presence over digital platforms dedicated to advertising Moroccan culture. Moreover, partnering with digital media from around the world is encouraged to increase media exposure and promote greater enthusiasm for Moroccan culture. Another lever that should be emphasized is the key role of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure the impact of cultural diplomacy initiatives, to monitor the economic impact, the media exposure, the partnerships established and the noticeable changes in the perception of Moroccan culture on the whole world. When evaluating, some powerful criteria need to be analyzed, such as Kleistra and van Willigen's (2010) four criteria, namely connectedness, responsiveness, timeliness and scope.

These aforementioned levers should help to maximize opportunities and overcome the above challenges and enhance Moroccan cultural soft power or what Nye qualified “cultural attraction”. It should be noted that the development of a new model cannot be achieved in isolation. Rather, it requires a collaborative and concerted effort involving all stakeholders. This process should be based on collective intelligence, fostering creativity and innovation, leading to the establishment of a robust and effective model that enhances Morocco's Nation Branding and increase its prominence in the realm of global cultural diplomacy.

Therefore, this proposed model can be operationalized through new strategic steering and good governance led by a National Agency of Cultural Diplomacy with a synergistic, global and integrative approach, and by taking advantage of all Moroccan cultural dimensions in their specificity, diversity and richness. It can be implemented also by relying on the fundamental role that can be played by the Moroccan Diaspora in all its diversity reflecting Morocco's cultural heritage as a blend of Arab, Amazigh, African, Mediterranean, and Jewish influences.

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper provides a strategic framework to reinforce the potential and effectiveness of Moroccan cultural diplomacy ecosystem and improve its capacity to address various challenges. The challenges highlighted by our research show that Cultural Diplomacy is a complex and constantly evolving field that requires an innovative, forward-looking, adaptive approach to tackle both intrinsic and extrinsic obstacles. Furthermore, we have identified several opportunities to increase Moroccan cultural influence and to fully exploit the potential of Moroccan culture in promoting mutual understanding, sharing Moroccan values and traditions and intensifying Morocco's global cultural impact and influence. The recommended Moroccan cultural model is based on a synergistic and integrative conceptual framework. It was designed through a global, integrated and forward-looking vision that we call Moroccan Cultural Diplomacy 4.0, with two driving forces, namely the policy of influence combined with the policy of counter-influence. It is a connected cultural diplomacy, agile and proactive, resilient and adapted to the local, regional and international environment. This framework facilitates the transition to a smart cultural diplomacy model by combining a strong foundation of good governance, an insightful strategic vision, synergies, integration, resilience and sustainability, and most importantly, in line with the strategic priorities, directions and guidelines of Morocco's foreign policy.

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