

Butterfly Effect on Preserving African Culture: Activities at the African Culture House and Handicraft Market and the Touch of a First Lady in Cultural Diplomacy

Esra Tüylüoğlu

Ministry of Culture and Tourism
Email: dresratuyluoglu@gmail.com

Abstract

Throughout history, states have always made substantial efforts to sustain their existence. Thanks to globalization, cultural diplomacy and related networks have been changing, and in the digital era, it is getting more and more difficult to read the cultural codes. In the current state of things, it is even more crucial for countries to introduce themselves correctly to other countries by benefiting from cultural diplomacy and create a positive effect on those countries. Many countries around the world have started attaching more importance to “first lady diplomacy” since it is acknowledged as an essential component of cultural diplomacy. What led to this importance is the attention paid by today’s states to the increasing impact and role of first ladies in achieving foreign policy objectives through diplomatic methods. It is possible to state that cultural diplomacy is among the diplomatic methods Türkiye has been actively using in its relationship with Africa, which it had paused for a long time and has focused on over the last 20 years. The most prominent project Türkiye is carrying out with regards to African Cultural Diplomacy is the African Culture House and Handicraft Market, which opened its doors to the public in 2016 as a result of the First Lady of the Republic of Türkiye Emine Erdoğan’s interest in and affinity for the local women and became an association in 2022. This study focuses on the activities conducted by the African Culture House and Handicraft Market within the context of first lady diplomacy by making use of the theory of “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power” that is developed by Joseph S. Nye Jr. The project is noteworthy as a successful one in terms of cultural diplomacy, being extremely original. It is led by a first lady from outside Africa with the aim of preserving the cultures on another continent, and it differentiates itself from conventional cultural diplomacy in this aspect.

Keywords: Cultural diplomacy, first lady diplomacy, African Culture House and Handicraft Market, Emine Erdoğan, Türkiye.

1. Introduction

Africa, a continent that was pushed aside after the colonial period and the epitome of poverty and slavery, has found an opportunity to play a more active role than ever in history due to new actors on the continent. Both developed and developing countries show an interest in Africa and its countries for several reasons. These reasons primarily include the wish to invest in African countries, the fact that African countries are among the leading countries in the world with regards to their youth population, the rapidly growing market and cities in Africa, and its prospering areas of economy thanks to both its underground and aboveground sources. The mentioned potential especially in the Sub-Saharan African countries has boosted the attention of developed countries towards Africa day by day and created a context that allows Africa to extend its areas of action. By this means, Sub-Saharan countries have found a chance to collaborate with not only developed but also other countries. Türkiye is one of these countriesⁱ

Türkiye's actions in its foreign policy regarding Africa are relatively new, and the 1998 Action Plan for Opening to Africa and 2005 Year of Africa are considered as the initial steps of these actions. Owing to the Türkiye-Africa Summits which both African Union and African countries attended, the relations and collaboration between Türkiye and African countries have been strengthened. Newly-opened intercountry embassies, the strong interaction between public institutions and Africa, humanitarian aid and the attention paid by media to the relationship between Türkiye and Africa can be counted among the developments that reinforced the collaboration between the two. On the other hand, Türkiye's interest in African countries is not confined to the mentioned actions. Türkiye took noticeable action to improve individual relations with the leaders of African countries, as well. Turkish leaders have visited Africa quite open, especially in the last 15 years. These visits by presidents, ministers and other offices are indicative of the importance attached by Türkiye to solidify its relationship with Africaⁱ. Within this framework, Türkiye has developed extensive relationships with Sub-Saharan countries on the continent. One of the foremost contributors to the development of such relationships is Emine Erdoğan in connection with first lady diplomacy. Emine Erdoğan, the First Lady of the Republic of Türkiye, has been contributing significantly to the cultural diplomacy through regional visits and numerous humanitarian diplomacy activities.

This qualitative study benefits from the theory of "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power" that is developed by Joseph S. Nye Jr. within this scope, and its aim is to evaluate First Lady Emine Erdoğan's approach toward Africa with respect to cultural diplomacy studies via African Culture House and Handicraft Market.

According to the concept of "soft power", which is developed by Joseph S. Nye Jr. towards the end of the 20th centuryⁱⁱ, the practice of measuring state power, especially in the Post Cold War era, solely by economic or military capacity cannot fully explain the power relations in international politics. Keohane and Nyeⁱⁱⁱ claim that power is an actor's ability to make other actors take actions that they cannot take on their own. However, according to the theory, this ability should not be confined to economic, diplomatic and military instruments of oppression. Due to the rapid progress especially in ICT, the values that states represent and maintain, and building a general acceptance for the legitimacy of their internationally attractive cultural and

historical heritage, their potential to create new cultural elements and their actions in foreign politics have also gained importance. Soft power, which is extremely difficult to measure in physical terms, is based on global actors' skill to convince others and the actor's relevant credibility and ability to represent that are regarded as fundamental if they intend to utilize soft power as a global political tool^{iv}.

From this point of view, along with displaying the activities arranged by the African Culture House and Handicraft Market, this study also discusses first lady diplomacy, which is seen as a subbranch of cultural diplomacy as soft power, by the example of Emine Erdoğan and the extent of her impact on the relationships between Türkiye and Sub-Saharan African countries.

Sub-Saharan Countries

The region that falls outside the part of Africa that includes the five Arabic countries, that is, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, is called "Sub-Saharan African Region"^v. By this definition, the list published by the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs^{vi} counts 48 Sub-Saharan countries in total. The continent is fighting with numerous problems because of its geographical conditions, as well as socioeconomic and political reasons. In this regard, considering the mentioned struggle, what first comes to mind when we hear the word "Africa" is Sub-Saharan countries rather than those that are located in the north of the continent^v. Indeed, Northern African and Sub-Saharan countries differ in regard to geopolitics and politics, as well as their populations. In fact, countries of the Sub-Saharan region display a heterogeneity in their socioeconomic and macroeconomic levels. Countries such as South Africa and Nigeria are in the foreground in Africa and among all countries with respect to their high GNPs, whereas countries like Guinea-Bissau and Gambia are among the countries with the lowest GNPs both in Sub-Saharan Africa and around the world^{vii}. According to the report by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 2023^{viii}, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Djibouti, Chad, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, South Sudan, The Comoros, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, The Central African Republic, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somali, Sudan, The United Republic of Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and the countries in the Sub-Saharan region are among the forty five countries with the lowest levels of development in the world. The World Bank supports Sub-Saharan African economies to fight their current political, social and economic problems. A financial support of \$385M is handed over to Sub-Saharan countries for them to adapt to the challenges caused by rising temperatures, floods and drought which have a huge effect on the area^v.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimates that by 2050, the population in Africa will have reached approximately two and a half billions. Considering the increasing growth rates of African countries, it is expected to witness important economic developments all over the continent in a short time. Taking such facts into consideration, it is possible to say that Sub-Saharan African countries may especially make use of their cultural potential in the near future, make a great move, and that the powerful countries in the region may take their place among developed countries in timeⁱ.

Today, Africa is, as it has always been in history, one of the most interesting places for global politics thanks to its growing economy, rich aboveground and underground sources, young population and cultural elements. The rise of African countries can be linked to many different factors, and the chief one is probably their young population. Additionally, rich underground and aboveground sources of these countries are remarkable. The interest in Africa in general is obvious in the economic indicators, too. Among the fastest growing ten economies of the world in the first decade of the 21st century, six are from Africa^{ix}. Following the “African Economic Outlook-2017” report prepared and published by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Africa is stated to be the second fastest growing economic region after Asia^x. In this period, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) changed its outlook on Africa from “hopeless continent” to “promising continent”^{xi}, and the United Nations underlined that Sub-Saharan countries kept on growing at a constant speed despite occasional economic crises throughout the world^{xii}. In the face of all these developments, Africa is still miles apart from the success it desires to achieve. Its share in global commerce is very little, albeit with its population of almost 1.200.000.000 people^{xiii}. Out of the least developed 48 countries with a daily income less than a dollar, 34 are in Africa, and this gives an idea about the way the continent needs to goⁱ.

United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights^{xiv} states in Article 27 paragraph 2 that “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits”. Accordingly, we can state that the cultural diversity in African countries fosters their national identities. Cultural, religious and ethnic elements play a crucial role in determining the level of importance of culture and people. Africa is a very rich continent regarding its cultural elements such as traditions, languages, religions, arts and economy. Although English and French, which were introduced to the continent in the colonial period, are widely spoken across the continent, it is stated that there are around two thousand local languages in Africa^{xv}. Only this example is enough to describe the cultural richness of the continent.

Despite this richness of culture on the continent, the fact that its trade and related economy are unsatisfactory may be explained by the inability to utilize that richness. Consequently, African countries seriously need to ameliorate their relations with non-African countries. Türkiye recently stands out amidst these countries with its relations in the last quarter century.

The ties between Sub-Saharan African countries and Türkiye can be divided into three in broad terms: the period that starts with the Ottoman Empire and lasts till the foundation of the Republic of Türkiye, between 1923 and 1998, and after the 1998 Action Plan for Opening to Africa^{xvi}.

Even though Turkish-African relations date back to the ninth century, relations with Sub-Saharan countries started in the 16th century. These relations experienced a stagnation period in the beginning of the 20th century with the fall of the Ottoman Empire, foundation of the Turkish Republic, world wars and the Cold War. During this period, Turkish-Sub-Saharan relations receded to a minimum level^{xvii}.

The third period that focuses on the relations with the southern part of Africa starts with the Action Plan for Opening to Africa in 1998. Justice and Development Party (AKP) came into power in 2002 and dealt with important issues such as the European Union, the Cyprus problem and the Iraq War in its first years of power. These years also witnessed a social change including economic and political structures, and the inward-looking political structure of Türkiye changed^{xviii}.

Türkiye has highlighted concepts such as multifaceted politics, proactive foreign policy and system-building and started to search for ways of using its soft power more actively in diplomatic settings. In this context, Türkiye declared 2005 “the Year of Africa” and relationships between African countries and Türkiye gained momentum. The value attached to Africa was displayed as such, and diplomatic, economic and political preparations began^{xix}. In time, Türkiye has also turned to the strategy of utilizing cultural diplomacy so as to use its soft power more efficiently. This study concentrates on the African Culture House and Handicraft Market which was founded under the leadership of a first lady from outside Africa to promote African cultures in Türkiye, rather than the cultural diplomacy activities Türkiye is carrying out in Sub-Saharan countries. It is important to understand what cultural diplomacy is before diving into the activities of the abovementioned culture house.

Cultural Diplomacy

To reach the standards of developed countries regarding economic growth and cultural progress, African countries have been fighting against various challenges such as food shortages, increased unemployment rates among the youth, political instabilities, wars to attain sources and infrastructure inadequacies. It seems to be the case that Africa’s fate as a continent is determined by the challenges it has been facing^{xx}. For these reasons, African leaders are hoping to maintain a balance between the demands of various groups and expressing similarly legitimate needs while at the same time trying to look after certain national interests. It is, likewise, necessary for them to work on their relations with neighbors, international interests and foreign investments.

During the mentioned period, diplomacy is one of the important methods that governments and leaders use to achieve state goals^{xxi}. With respect to this, cultural diplomacy, being a subbranch of diplomacy, can be regarded as a fundamental foundation for state systems^{xxii}. To better grasp the concept, it is required to review the description of culture.

The Online Dictionary of the Social Sciences defines culture as “the total customs, traditions, habits, beliefs and actions that shape an individual’s or community’s lifestyle”^{xxiii}. Tylor^{xxiv} owns the first definition of culture, which is “a structure that encompasses the beliefs, habits, morals, knowledge, law and art of a human who has the status of a community member”. Lastly, Ellwood claims that culture partly consists of tangible elements such as clothes, weapons, industrial systems and accommodation and partly intangible ones such as literature, language, religion, law, ethics and administration^{xxv}. Keeping these in mind, it is possible to say that African culture emphasizes intangible concepts of art and religion and tangible concepts of weapons and clothing.

Culture is used in public diplomacy by actors who wish to have a say in the international arena as a tool of advertising their national, that is, local culture, sharing public opinion with other international actors and increasing credibility and integration through cultural exchange.

“Public diplomacy” is the entire policy of states to introduce themselves to other countries for different strategic ends. To achieve these ends, one of the essential tools that public diplomacy turns to is cultural diplomacy^{xxvi}.

In other words, cultural diplomacy, as a technique in public diplomacy, is the vital leg of “soft power” strategy in building trust between countries. Cultural diplomacy includes the act of promoting a country in the international arena via its history, cultural variety, traditions, belief system, language and natural heritage in a way that arouses interest in other countries. Hence, not only governments but also individuals and non-governmental organizations who engage in artistic and cultural endeavors are active stakeholders of cultural diplomacy, and they contribute considerably to the country’s foreign policy^{xxvi}.

Cultural diplomacy is important for public diplomacy because it creates a global opinion and brings forth societal transformation. When global opinion is secured through cultural diplomacy, the first gain is regional power^{xxvi}.

Cultural exchange between communities and states not only creates partnerships between countries but also helps individuals get to know, understand and empathize with each other. In addition, it gives individuals and states the chance to meet to solve problems and exchange ideas to create solutions. Cultural interactions lay the groundwork for mending strained or broken ties between states through unofficial contact and meetings^{xxvii}.

Cultural diplomacy, which is appraised as universal and flexible, is a feasible tool for countries to approach other countries with which they have strained or no diplomatic relations, and thus, may contribute to the progress of civil society, as well^{xxviii}.

When governments take action to spread their cultures abroad, it is likely to mark a distinction between high cultures like education, art and literature that appeal to distinguished individuals and popular culture that revolves around mass entertainmentⁱⁱ. Eventually, cultural diplomacy intends to exercise power over various individual types or groups that live abroad, use the accumulated power as an “honorable reserve” and find political support in the near future thanks to this reserve.

Lenczowski^{xxix} provides a general definition for cultural diplomacy on this basis as the use of cultural elements to motivate the citizens of the target country to form positive attitudes or actions towards the source country and mentions three basic strategies in relation to cultural diplomacy:

1. To work to create good impressions on foreign individuals about the culture, image and political image of the country that employs cultural diplomacy tools by using effective methods of displaying the desired aspect

2. To attract the attention of institutions or individuals in the target country that employs a comprehensive cultural diplomacy with the aim of collaborating with this country on the basis of goodwill

3. Cultural diplomacy elements include all aspects of culture such as education, art, views, science, history, medicine, trade, religion, sports, traditions and language.

In brief, cultural diplomacy is an easily applicable approach and does not have only one way of application. It is necessary to develop various and complex contents to have an effective cultural diplomacy. Exactly because of this variety, a long-term plan is required in an effective cultural diplomacy to win the hearts and minds of individuals in the target country^{xxx}. From this aspect, heads of state, prime ministers and officers in high offices have an important part to play in employing cultural diplomacy.

Considered in this light, it is crucial for African countries to utilize their cultural richness as a political tool. It is not realistic to state that Africa is conducting a successful public diplomacy in relation to cultural diplomacy. Nonetheless, albeit few, there are still cultural diplomacy activities being performed in Africa. One of these activities is taking place between the Republic of South Africa and Norway.

Music in the Republic of South Africa is the primary tool of official collaboration between Norway and the Republic of South Africa. There has been a collaboration between South African and Norwegian institutions and musicians to exchange people and promote joint learning since 2000. “MMINO”, a software created by this collaboration, was introduced in Rikskonsertene (Concerts Norway) in Oslo, the Norwegian capital, as a program that covers Norwegian and South African music and education services. Norway budgeted 12 million Norwegian kroners during a period covering three years to fund the mentioned project. The project was also supported by the National Arts Council of South Africa with three million South Africa rands. The project can be said to pave the way for productive partnerships and exchange in music education, which is praiseworthy, since the role of learning, information and skills exchange is considered highly important in improving cultural diplomacy. This project, thus, contributes to the progress in South Africa^{xx}. Cultural diplomacy has recently started to become an important component of Africa’s historical, social and political relations. Within this framework, Türkiye has taken actions to improve its cultural relations with African countries in the last years, as well. 1998 Action Plan for Opening to Africa and 2005 Year of Africa are important steps to improve relationships in this period.

Along with such developments, it is observed that first ladies have also contributed substantially to the cultural diplomacy activities between Türkiye and African countries lately. This fact can be explained via first lady diplomacy.

First Lady Diplomacy

“First lady” is an unofficial term used for the spouses of male presidents. This term is also used to express that these ladies are successful in a branch of art or profession^{xxxi}. When we look at the etymology of the term, it can be said to derive from Old English or Anglo-Saxon English,

and it was first used for Martha Washington, wife of George Washington, the first president of the United States^{xxxii}. First ladies have long been significant faces in the protocol and accompanied their husbands in their visits abroad, summits and official ceremonies^{xxxii}.

First ladies mostly act like vice presidents in diplomatic occasions. As such, they have a supportive mission and they can soften the image accepted by a state via their speeches, actions and approaches. Huang^{xxxiii} emphasizes that harmony and love between the head of state and the first lady contributes greatly to the image of both the leader and the country. Similarly, a first lady's attendance in diplomatic events can bring foreign politicians and their families closer in case of disagreements^{xxxiii}.

First ladies can function as a propaganda maker and a bridge between governments and societies. As Giles and Blair^{xxxiv} also state, first ladies of the US contributed a lot to public and philanthropic activities between 1789-1920. First ladies perform as a mother and run social campaigns such as protecting children, as well. The study by Marczuk^{xxxv} puts forth that a first lady's impact on diplomacy correlates with her professional and educational experience to a certain extent, and the diplomatic events she attends align with her husband's political goals directly.

One of the impactful people in this diplomatic process in recent years is Emine Erdoğan, the Republic of Türkiye's first lady. Emine Erdoğan has held the title of "First Lady" since August 28, 2014, as the wife of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the 12th president of the Republic of Türkiye. Among many diplomatic actions the First Lady is taking, Sub-Saharan countries occupy the first place. She expresses how Africa impressed her the most while she was accompanying President Erdoğan in his foreign visits by these words in her work titled "Africa: My Trips"^{xxxvi}:

I try my best to accompany my husband Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in his trips abroad. Some countries are especially appealing to me. The top place among these belong to African countries. I specifically focus on the problems of African children and women and desire to remedy their open wounds at least to a certain extent.

Since she became First Lady, Emine Erdoğan has been to nearly thirty African countries^{xxxvii}. As a result of these trips, First Lady has, in a way, "internalized" the issues in the region. She has conducted activities addressing these issues to the best of her ability and drawn international attention as an example of first lady diplomacy as a result of these activities, which she describes as "paving a way from one heart to another". In her interview by Duran^{xxxviii}, First Lady uses these words to talk about the situation:

...All my trips to Africa have been extremely important for me, so that I managed to compile memoirs out of what I have seen and witnessed. I have not seen anywhere else where pain intensified this much. If cruelty has a history of its own, I believe it is written in Africa.

...What is called desperateness is somehow the dominant climate in Africa. Seeing famine, hunger, scarcity and children who are about to die in place changes the person to the bone.

...Of course, we had some beautiful moments that proved we have touched hearts, as well. For instance, in 2017, an event called Fashion for Development (F4D) was organized for the opening of the United Nations 72nd General Assembly. There, world known model Iman Mohammed Abdulmajid gave an acceptance speech and thanked me in care of Türkiye for all its endeavors in Africa before the invited spouses of heads of state and heads of government. It is possible to say that what is done has received praise from all walks of life.

Emine Erdoğan regularly gave speeches touching on Africa's chronic problems in the meetings she attended including United Nations meetings. Inspired by the vision "African solutions for Africa", she has been involved in efforts that support Türkiye's opening to Africa since 2005. First Lady Erdoğan prepared an article on Africa for Al Jazeera in September 2018 and explained her point of view on the continent in connection with the close bonds between Türkiye and many African countries. The article is titled "To Solve Africa's Problems Give Women A Chance" (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Emine Erdoğan's speech for Al Jazeera in September 2018

The US Council of Muslim Organizations (USCMO) organized a ceremony in New York in 2022. At this ceremony, First Lady Emine Erdoğan received the “International Achievement and Contribution to Society Award” which is distributed to Muslim women who work in the areas of humanitarian aid, education, environment and social projects. In her acceptance speech, she talked about the activities in the African Culture House and Handicraft Market and underlined the fact that they were creating projects with the aim of offering children a happy and healthy life, along with empowering women economically. The African Culture House and Handicraft Market, she stated, was a most precious example among such projects^{xxxix}.

In relation to what has been explained so far, this study concentrates on cultural diplomacy activities in the African Culture House and Handicraft Market in particular, an example of First Lady Emine Erdoğan’s projects concerning Sub-Saharan African countries. The project is the first of its kind by virtue of being opened by a first lady for other countries to introduce their cultures. The study is significant in that it focuses on the contribution of this association (African Culture House), which transformed into a non-governmental organization in time, on allowing people from all over the world to experience African culture via the activities it performs to spread their cultures.

A First in Cultural Diplomacy: African Culture House and Handicraft Market

First Lady Emine Erdoğan visited a jewelry workshop in 2015 during her visit to Ethiopia and learned that the jewels there were made by women who worked for only one dollar per day. First Lady stated these jewels were sold for very high prices in the shops in Western countries and came back from this trip with the idea to set up an African handicraft workshop. This project materialized in May 25, 2016 and the African House opened its doors to the public in the Hamamönü district of Ankara in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and under the auspices of First Lady Emine Erdoğan. Many African first ladies attended the opening. Handicraft made by African women are sold for reasonable prices in the African Culture House and Handicraft Market and the sum that is earned is sent back to these women. Owing to this, the project is a symbol of social aid on a global scale for the people in the world^{xl}. The mentioned venue, which is an important example of cultural diplomacy in the world, performs its activities concerning Africa in coordination with institutions such as the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK), Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) and Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB). Since the day it opened, it has been one of the must-go places that African state leaders stop by when they visit Türkiye. Lefebvre^{xli} defines culture as being “both in the center of life as a base for the production of social relations and produced by these relations”. In accordance with this, we can state that the venue is an important center for comprehending, perceiving and experiencing culture^{xl}.

The African Culture House, a first in the world as an example of first lady diplomacy, became an association in 2022 to keep on contributing to Turkish-African relations as an institution and has continued its activities under the name of “African Culture House and Handicraft Market”^{xlii}. The association has organized numerous activities that brought Turkish and African cultures closer.

In 2022, African Culture House attended the 4th Nomad Games in İznik, Bursa, which 102 countries attended and whose motto was “We Are One from Tradition to the Future”. Within the scope of this organization in which activities in gastronomy, traditional sports, children’s games and handicraft were carried out, the African Culture House and Handicraft Market made presentations about subjects such as various traditional handworks, traditional folk dances and coffee^{xliii}.

During the meetings of United Nations 78th General Assembly dated September 19, 2023 in New York, USA, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the African Culture House and Handicraft Market and the African Union. This memorandum was signed by the chairwoman of the African Culture House and Handicraft Market, Zeliha Sağlam, and the Commissioner for Trade and Industry of the African Union Commission, Ambassador Albert Muchanga (Figure 2)^{xliv}. The memorandum between the African Culture House and Handicraft Market and an international organization can also be regarded as an extremely important step for the association to introduce itself and, consequently, to contribute to cultural diplomacy.



Figure 2. The memorandum between the African Culture House and Handicraft Market and the African Union

The African Culture House opened a stand at the fourth Türkiye-Africa Economic and Business Forum on October 12-13, 2023 and displayed products made by African local women. This is yet another example in terms of the contribution to cultural diplomacy (Figure 3).



Figure 3. African Culture House stand at the Türkiye-Africa Economic and Business Forum

The third Antalya Diplomacy Forum, where people exchanged views about both international and regional subjects, took place on March 1-3, 2024 in Antalya with approximately 4700 participants from 148 countries. The African Culture House and Handicraft Market opened a stand in this organization, too, informed the participants about their projects and contributed to cultural diplomacy (Figure 4)^{xlv}.



Figure 4. The African Culture House and Handicraft Market at the 3rd Antalya Diplomacy Forum

African Coffee House inside The African Culture House and Handicraft Market is open every day from 10am to 7pm and serves coffee whose beans come from Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania to its visitors. The house gives information about coffee beans from different regions in Africa, coffee production, infusion methods, storing conditions and fine details of African coffee, as well as the history of coffee. Thanks to such activities, the African Culture House has become a venue where Africans residing in our country can feel somewhat at home and African university students meet for their get togethers^{xlvi}.

The African Culture House also has a representation table that presents Africa’s rich culture (Figure 5). This table displays items about 24 different African countries for the visitors.



Figure 5. The African Culture House and Handicraft Market representation table

It is possible to see by browsing through their Instagram account that the association started to use it actively in May 2016, and after becoming an association in 2022, they share posts about their activities on this platform. The activities of the association from then on till September 2024 are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. African Culture House and Handicraft Market activities

Activity No	Date	Activity Name	Activity Type	Activity by
1	08.10.2022	Photography in Africa through the Lens of a Woman	Interview	Sevde Sevan Usak Saita

2	15.10.2022	Africa Notes of a Documentarist	Interview	Abdullah Kibritçi
3	19.10.2022	Braiding Culture in Africa	Workshop	African Culture House and Handicraft Market
4	22.10.2022	African Coffee Worshop and Tasting of African Coffee Types	Workshop	African Culture House and Handicraft Market
5	26.11.2022	Braiding in Africa Workshop	Workshop	African Culture House and Handicraft Market
6	10.12.2022	African Coffees Workshop	Workshop	African Culture House and Handicraft Market
7	09.01.2023	Türkiye-Africa Relations	Seminar	Nur Sağman-Ambassador of Türkiye to Senegal
8	28.01.2023	Ceramic Painting Workshop	Workshop	African Culture House and Handicraft Market
9	06.05.2023	Voluntary Work during Natural Disasters	Interview	Mustafa Ndiaye
10	20.05.2023	The History of Africa and Its Transformation in the Global System	Seminar	Assoc.Prof. Mürsel Bayram
11	10.06.2023	Handmade Notebook Workshop	Workshop	African Culture House and Handicraft Market
12	29.07.2023	African Cinema	Seminar	Assist. Prof. Yunus Namaz
13	27.09.2023	Coffee and Tasting Workshop	Workshop	African Culture House and Handicraft Market
14	30.09.2023	Ottoman-African Relations	Seminar	Hatice Uğur
15	27.10.2023	Languages of Africa The Attitude of the African Union towards the	Seminar	Prof. Murat Özcan
16	11.11.2023	Relationship between Migration and Development in Africa	Seminar	Kaan Devecioğlu
17	25.11.2023	Natural Candle Workshop	Workshop	African Culture House and Handicraft Market
18	03.02.2024	Turkish-African Relations from a Humanitarian Perspective	Seminar	Selman Aktaş
19	27.04.2024	Story Narration	Workshop	Nurdan Albamyâ İnce

As seen in Table 1, regular interviews and workshops within the association play a big role in disseminating African culture and handing it down to the next generations, and thus, both the Africa that people want to “see” and the Africa that people want to “show” are presented.

Accordingly, the seminar titled “Türkiye-Africa Relations” by Nur Sağman, Ambassador of Türkiye to Senegal, on January 9, 2023 became the activity with the highest engagement rate on social media. The ambassador shared information about Türkiye-Africa relations, Africa’s

importance in the global system and Africa's changing geopolitics in this academic seminar. By this means, she raised awareness of these subjects and contributed to the culture (Figure 6).



Figure 6. The seminar titled “Türkiye-Africa Relations” by Nur Sağman, Ambassador of Türkiye to Senegal

Mustafa Ndiaye came, and adapted to, Türkiye from Senegal to study the aftermath of the earthquake centered Kahramanmaraş on February 6, 2023, which was called “The Disaster of the Century”, and relief works. His seminar “Voluntary Work during Natural Disasters” touching on these subjects became the association's second most popular activity on Instagram. Ndiaye talked about the fight against the challenges in this period regardless of religion, language or ethnicity, which, in a way, built “a bridge between hearts” (Figure 7).



Figure 7. The seminar titled “Voluntary Work during Natural Disasters” by Mustafa Ndiaye

During their visits to the African Culture House and Handicraft Market, African bureaucrats, artists and locals expressed their views about the institution which clearly underline the importance of its mission. During an interview with the African Culture House and Handicraft Market's chairwoman Zeliha Sağlam on August 22, 2024, she mentioned that a significant party of the African musicians and artists who visited our country and Ankara for “Culture Route Festivals”, which have been organized by the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and

Tourism since 2021, also visited The African Culture House and Handicraft Market. She added that a musician from Senegal commented “This is a store on humanity,” upon exploring the house, and Gambian Ambassador to Ankara Alkali Fanka Conteh stated “This is exactly how I would like to be remembered by the world”. The African Culture House and Handicraft Market contributes to African cultural diplomacy by showing the Africa that people want to “show” from Türkiye to the world. The African Culture House and Handicraft Market is the first of its kind via its presentation of the cultural values of a different continent, which has fought with disadvantageous situations like poverty and slavery, in a different country, in Türkiye to the world and its preservation of these values.

Organizations such as the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) and the Turkish Maarif Foundation have also been organizing activities to introduce African culture, along with the African Culture House and Handicraft Market which has an essential mission in this process. TİKA conducts various projects across Africa addressing different subjects. As a result of these projects by TİKA, Turkish investment rate in the continent has increased. With Turkish Airlines getting involved in the process, new routes from Türkiye to 36 destinations in 25 African countries started in December, 2013^{xlvi}. This number has reached 62 destinations in 42 countries in 2023, and thus, the distances between the continent and Türkiye got shorter^{xlvi}.

The Turkish Maarif Foundation establishes, runs and takes over formal and non-formal educational institutions abroad authorized by the Law No. 6721. The educational institutions abroad established by the foundation are paid institutions that are founded by international texts. Diplomas conferred by them are valid both in relevant countries and Türkiye. The foundation has been in diplomatic contact with 106 countries as of August, 2023, and services students in 447 educational institutions in total, with 421 international schools at pre, primary and middle levels, one higher education institution and 25 education centers, in 51 countries across the Balkans, Africa, Asia and Europe^{xlix}.

Another significant development in cultural diplomacy took place in education. Türkiye, which comes eighth among the countries young Africans prefer for education, was preferred by about 28000 students in 2020, and this number rose up to almost 61000 in 2023^l. The mentioned institutions serve to introduce Africa while contributing significantly to cultural diplomacy at the same time. The African Culture House and Handicraft Market is quite an original project since it was opened under the leadership of a first lady from outside the continent to preserve the cultures of another continent. From this perspective, it is a success in cultural diplomacy and differentiates itself from all the other institutions from Türkiye that work on cultural diplomacy in Africa.

2. Conclusion

In the process of utilizing cultural diplomacy, there can be activities varying according to the foreign policy priorities and goals of utilizing state about the target country.

It can be observed that cultural diplomacy has become prominent in time for practices in public diplomacy between Türkiye and especially Sub-Saharan countries since 2005, which is declared “The Year of Africa” and acknowledged by Türkiye as the start of its African policy in a sense. Soft power, defined by Nye, is observed to be in the foreground in such cultural diplomacy practices and First Lady Emine Erdoğan of Türkiye is one of the leading actors of these practices.

Erdoğan has visited around 30 African countries since she received the title of First Lady and become the voice of those nations’ social problems in both national and international spheres many times. In addition, she has led many projects aiming to draw attention to and solve the problems of African nations in coordination with various institutions and organizations ((The Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK), Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) and Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB)).

The African Culture House and Handicraft Market, which is the focus of this study, was founded under the auspices of Emine Erdoğan as a civil society initiative in 2016 and got institutionalized in 2022. Its mission is to build bridges between hearts with an awareness of the rooted historical Turkish-African relationships. The mentioned project supports the welfare of both Turkish and African women and adds to the empowerment of women in society and, therefore, to the development of societies. Alongside, the house organizes activities to preserve and hand down the cultural heritage of societies and for the youth to learn about and preserve culture. Africa, where approximately 2000 languages are spoken and numerous local beliefs, religions, customs and traditions exist, has a very rich cultural history with its 54 countries. Nonetheless, as a consequence of the advances in technology, African societies have started to lose their memories, and following this, their continuity and fundamental values that form a society are at risk of getting lost. The African Culture House and Handicraft Market, and association thereafter, highlight the significance of handing down the mentioned values to the next generations through its cultural activities. It is invaluable to introduce to the world, and thus preserve, the cultural values of a continent that has experienced negative conditions such as poverty and slavery for a long time. Both national and international public opinion acknowledges the great value of the steps taken by Emine Erdoğan as the First Lady of the Republic of Türkiye so far.

Emine Erdoğan successfully represents first lady diplomacy, which is regarded as a subbranch of cultural diplomacy within public diplomacy, and efficiently performs according to the theory of “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power” developed by Joseph S. Nye Jr., along with building “a link from one heart to another”. Lastly, the African Culture House and Handicraft Market is unique by virtue of being founded under the leadership of a first lady from outside the continent to preserve the cultures of another continent. Thus, it is a successful project within cultural diplomacy.

WORKS CITED

- ⁱ Baydemir, M. (2023). *Turkey's public diplomacy in Sub-Saharan Africa (2002-2018)*. PhD Thesis. Sakarya University, Institute of Social Sciences, Sakarya, p. 1
- ⁱⁱ Nye, J. S. (2008). Public diplomacy and soft power. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 616, 94–109. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25097996>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Keohane, R.O. & Nye, J.S. (2011). *Power and interdependence*. 4th ed. Glenview, IL: Pearson.
- ^{iv} Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
- ^v Aydın, A. (2024). *The effect of climate change on migration: A study of Sub-Saharan Africa*. Master's Thesis, Manisa Celal Bayar University Graduate School of Education, Manisa.
- ^{vi} Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2024). *Sub-Saharan Africa*. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sub.tr.mfa?12d61ad6-534f-4961-a432-f8b94b5c2cef>
- ^{vii} Ünal, U. (2018). *On the nature and causes of poverty in Sub-Saharan African countries*, Munich Personal RePEc Archive, https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/97730/1/MPRA_paper_97730.pdf
- ^{viii} United Nations Conference of Trade and Development-[UNCTAD] (2023). *Least developed countries report 2023*, <https://unctad.org/publication/least-developed-countries-report-2023>.
- ^{ix} The Economist. (2011). *Africa's impressive growth*. <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2011/01/06/africas-impressive-growth>
- ^x African Development Bank Group. (2017). *African economic Outlook 2017*. Paris: OECD Publishing. <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/document/african-economic-outlook-aeo-2017-95818>
- ^{xi} International Monetary Fund-[IMF]. (2010). *Regional economic outlook*. Sub Saharan Africa Resilience and Risk Report. IMF. Washington D.C.
- ^{xii} Africa Progress Report 2012. (2012) *Jobs, justice and equity, seizing opportunities in times of global change*. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/00031701-14b51160c4c3c4a100e8a69324daca79.pdf>
- ^{xiii} African Union. (2019). *African trade statistics yearbook 2018*. https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/37364-doc-af-trade_yearbook2019_a4_v6-web1.pdf.
- ^{xiv} Universal Declaration of Human Rights - [UDHR] (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/03/udhr.pdf>
- ^{xv} Kavak, G. (2023b). Afrika'nın en fazla konuşulan dillerinden Svahilice eğitimleri İstanbul'da yapılıyor- [Swahili, one of the most widely spoken languages in Africa, is being taught in Istanbul], *Anadolu Ajansı*, 02.12.2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/afrikanin-en-fazla-konusulan-dillerinden-svahilice-egitimleri-istanbulda-yapiliyor/3070973#:~:text=Afrika'da%20y%C3%BCzlerce%20yerel%20dil,Aramice%2C%20Svahili%20v e%20Zulu%20dilleri>.
- ^{xvi} Özkan, M. (2010). Turkey's African policy 2010. In (Duran, B., İnät, K. ve Ataman, M. Edt), *Turkish Foreign Policy Yearbook 2010*. (pp. 503-527). İstanbul.
- ^{xvii} Akyar, S. (2019). New era in Turkey-Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) relations, *International Journal of Afro-Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 8, pp. 63-79.
- ^{xviii} Wheeler, T. (2011). Ankara to Africa: Turkey's outreach since 2005. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 43-62. Doi: 10.1080/10220461.2011.564426.
- ^{xix} Uchegara, K. (2008). Continuity and change in Turkish Foreign Policy toward Africa. *Gazi Academic Overview*. Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 43-64.
- ^{xx} Chege, M. (2021). *Implementation of cultural diplomacy to boost Kenya's global perception*. Master's Thesis. Near East University, Institute Of Graduate Studies, Nicosia.
- ^{xxi} Rana, K. (2009). India's diaspora diplomacy. *The Hague Journal Of Diplomacy*, Vol. 4, No. 3, pp. 361-372.
- ^{xxii} Williams, P. D. (2010). *Enhancing civilian protection in peace operations: Insights from Africa* (No. 1). Government Printing Office, Washington D.C: National Defense University Press
- ^{xxiii} Online Dictionary of the Social Sciences (2024). *Culture*. <https://bitbucket.icaap.org/dict.pl>
- ^{xxiv} Tylor, E.B. (2016). *Primitive culture*. USA: Dover Publications
- ^{xxv} Kroeber, A. L., & Kluckhohn, C. (1952). *Culture: A critical review of concepts and definitions*. USA: Pantianos Classics.

- xxvi Cengiz, Ş. (2024). *Cultural diplomacy as an instrument of public diplomacy: South Korea's Hallyu (Korean Wave) policy*. MA Thesis. Çukurova University, Institute of Social Sciences, Adana.
- xxvii Karagöz, S. (2016). *Public diplomacy as a strategic communication method and the role of media*. MA Thesis. Istanbul University, Institute of Social Sciences, İstanbul.
- xxviii Papaioannou, K. (2017). Cultural diplomacy in international relations, *IJASOS- International E-Journal of Advances in Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 9, pp. 942-944. doi: 10.18769/ijasos.367306.
- xxix Lenczowski, J. (2009). Cultural diplomacy, political influence, and integrated strategy. In (Waller, M.J., Ed.), *Strategic influence: Public diplomacy, counterpropaganda, and political warfare*. (pp. 74-99). USA: Crossbow Press.
- xxx U.S. Department of State (2005). *U.S. Department of State to launch diplomatic culinary partnership*. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/09/197375.htm>
- xxxi Collins Dictionary (2024). *First lady*. <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/first-lady>
- xxxii Güncü, Ş.B. (2016). *Clothing and Lifestyle Styles of the First Ladies of the Republic of Turkey and Their Relations with Fashion Trends in the Period They Lived*. Master Thesis. Beykent University, Institute of Social Sciences, İstanbul.
- xxxiii Huang, Y. (2023). The role of the First Lady in public diplomacy since the founding of the Republic of China. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 675-680. DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/4/2022291.
- xxxiv Giles, S.J. ve Blair, D.M. (2002) The rise of the rhetorical First Lady: Politics, gender ideology, and women's voice, 1789-2002. *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 565-599.
- xxxv Marczuk, K.P. (2022). The dynamics of 'First-Lady public diplomacy'. *East European Journal of Society and Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 128-148.
- xxvi Erdoğan, E. (2021). *Africa: My Travels*. İstanbul: Turkuvaz Communication and Publishing
- xxvii Erdoğan, E. (2019). *Emine Erdoğan: First Lady of the Republic of Turkey*. Ankara: Presidential Publications
- xxviii Duran, B. (2021). You cannot be just if you do not see humanity as your family. *Kriter Dergisi*, Vol. 6, No. 63, 10-15.
- xxix Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye (2022). *Emine Erdoğan, ABD'de "Uluslararası Müslüman Kadınlar Başarı ve Topluma Katkı Ödülü"nü aldı-[Emine Erdoğan received the 'International Muslim Women's Achievement and Contribution to Society Award' in the USA]*. <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/139683/emine-erdogan-abd-de-uluslararasi-musulman-kadınlar-basari-ve-topluma-katki-odulu-nu-aldi>
- xl Ersoy-Inci, P. (2024). African cultural house and African handicrafts in the context of cultural diplomacy. *Journal of Mediterranean Basin and African Civilisations*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 89-105.
- xli Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space*. USA: Blackwell Publishing
- xlii Eyrice Tepeciklioğlu, E. ve Bayram, M. (2023). *Africa Yearbook 2022*. Ankara: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities Research Publications Series.
- xliii African Culture House (2022). *Afrika El Sanatları ve Kültür Evi 4. Dünya Göçebe Oyunlarında-[African Handicrafts and Culture House at the 4th World Nomad Games]*, <https://afrikaevi.com/tr/afrika-el-sanatları-ve-kultur-evi-4-dunya-gocebe-oyunlarında/>
- xliv African Culture House (2023). *Afrika Kültür Evi Derneği ve Afrika Birliği arasında mutabakat zaptı imzalandı-[A memorandum of understanding was signed between the African Culture House Association and the African Union]*, <https://afrikaevi.com/tr/afrika-kultur-evi-derneği-ve-afrika-birliği-arasında-mutabakat-zaptı-imzalandı/>
- xlv African Culture House (2024). *III. Antalya Diplomasi Forumu 148 ülkeden yaklaşık 4700 katılımcıyla gerçekleşti. Bölgesel ve küresel konuların konuşulduğu Forumu Sn Hanımefendi Emine Erdoğan'ın kurduğu Afrika Kültür Evi de katıldı-[The 3rd Antalya Diplomacy Forum was held with approximately 4700 participants from 148 countries. The Forum, where regional and global issues were discussed, was also attended by the African Culture House established by Mrs Emine Erdoğan]*. <https://x.com/AfrikaKulturEvi/status/1765352666396254374>
- xlvi Sağlam, Z. (2023). African Culture House as an example of cultural diplomacy in Turkey's relations with Africa. In (Eyrice Tepeciklioğlu, E. & Bayram, M., eds.), *Africa Yearbook 2022*. (pp. 365-373). Ankara: Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture

Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities Research Publications Series.

- ^{xlvii} Eyriçe Tepeciklioğlu, E., Tepeciklioğlu, A.O. ve Aydoğan Ünal, B. (2018). Turkey's public diplomacy activities in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Aegean Academic Overview*, Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 605-618. Doi: 10.21121/eab.2018442990
- ^{xlviii} Alioğlu, M. (2024). THY, Afrika'da 42 ülkede 62 noktaya uçuş yapıyor!-[THY flies to 62 destinations in 42 countries in Africa!], *Ekohaber*, 25.04.2024, <https://www.ekohaber.com.tr/thy-afrikada-42-ulkede-62-noktaya-ucus-yapiyor#:~:text=D%C3%BCnyadaki%20193%20%C3%BClkenin%20129'undaki,havayolu%20%C5%9Firketin%20olma%20rekorunu%20da>
- ^{xlx} Akgün, B. (2023). Türkiye'nin yurt dışındaki eğitim politikasının taşıyıcısı olarak Türkiye Maarif Vakfı-[Turkey Maarif Foundation as the carrier of Turkey's education policy abroad], *Kriter*, 8(82), <https://kriterdergi.com/dosya-uluslararasi-egitim/turkiyenin-yurt-disindaki-egitim-politikasinin-tasiyicisi-olarak-turkiye-maarif-vakfi>
- ⁱ Kavak, G. (2023a). Binlerce Afrikalı genç eğitim için kıta dışı ülkeleri tercih ediyor-[Thousands of young Africans choose countries outside the continent for education], *Anadolu Ajansı*, 27.10.2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dosya-haber/binlerce-afrikali-genc-egitim-icin-kita-disi-ulkeleri-tercih-ediyor/3034243>