



Science, higher education and diplomacy

Theory and practice

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Science diplomacy – what's in it ?

- The three strands of science diplomacy
 - Diplomacy for science – the use of diplomatic action to facilitate international scientific collaboration, e.g. by negotiating R&D agreements and exchange programmes or enabling the establishment of international research infrastructures
 - Science for diplomacy – the use of science as a soft power to advance diplomatic objectives, e.g. for building bridges between nations and creating good will on which diplomatic relations can be built
 - Science in diplomacy – the direct support of diplomatic processes through science, e.g. by providing scientific advice and evidence to inform and support decision-making in foreign and security policies
- EEAS: “Science diplomacy eludes an agreed definition”





Top priority in EU's international R&D policy

- Developing a European Science Diplomacy agenda is an explicit objective
 - Revised global R&D policy framework
 - Action lines for the (new) ERA
 - Growing emphasis on values and how to deal with authoritarian states and other actors involved in unwanted foreign direct interference (Marseille Declaration)

More than re-packaging existing actions?

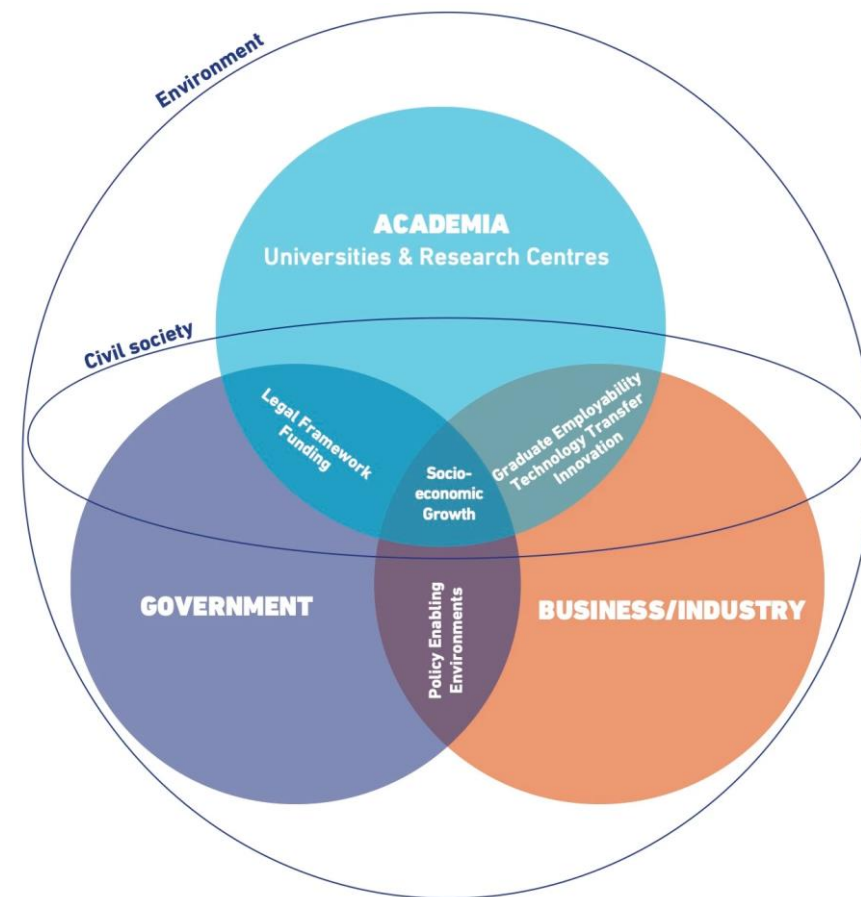
- Concept has been successfully branded over the last 15 years
- Used for many heterogeneous goals
 - Attracting FDI and foreign students
 - Joining forces to develop costly science (infrastructure) projects
 - Marketing R&D assets and institutes
 - Science as soft power (winning souls by image-building and influencing)
 - Tackling worldwide challenges (SDG)
 - Projecting coherence against other powers in a multi-polar world
- “The inflationary use of science diplomacy will kick it into the long grass, i.e. the more it gets applied, the more it will dissolve into an anything-goes formula, mainly serving political window-dressing activities” (Tim Flink, *Taking the pulse of science diplomacy and developing practices of valuation*, Science and Public Policy, 2022)

Some personal observations - 1

- Developing a separate science diplomacy agenda
 - risks to be highly artificial, bringing topics together in a new policy chapter that used to be treated in the international paragraphs of chapters on research and higher education, or the science paragraphs of chapters on foreign policy;
 - can be highly beneficial in drawing and pooling resources from different policy domains.
- Seen from a university perspective, research and higher education are so closely intertwined, that one could question the adequacy of the term “science diplomacy” (holistic approach, as advocated by the Marseille declaration)

Some personal observations - 2

- Diplomacy is no longer the exclusive remit of governments, as many new diplomatic actors have emerged, including regions, cities and universities
- Developing a “science diplomacy” agenda, as foreseen in the (new) ERA, should take all actors of the quintuple innovation helix (university, industry, government, public, environment) into account



Knowledge diplomacy in practice - 1

- Some examples from a sub-state actor
- Active involvement of higher education institutes in outgoing official missions
 - Outgoing royal state missions: promotion and visibility of academic assets
 - Outgoing economic trade missions:
 - focus on prospection of new partnership opportunities, new cooperation agreements, reinforcing and deepening existing ties, promotion of academic assets, attraction of students and staff, networking with alumni
 - participation in mission-wide group events, as well as bilateral contacts

Knowledge diplomacy in action - 2

- Fayat fellowship programme
 - For Flemish students wishing to pursue their studies at a top university abroad (based on the QS ranking)
 - Students are expected to integrate in existing local networks and to serve as public ambassadors for their region
- Diplomatic academy
 - Sharing of relevant state-of-the-art academic knowledge with regional diplomats and diplomats-to-be (ministry of foreign affairs, foreign trade agency, tourism agency)



Knowledge diplomacy in action - 3

- International branding of the region
 - Phase 1: cultural icons of the past – Flemish Masters (Breughel, Van Eyck, Rubens)
 - Phase 2: modern masters (gastronomy, design, fashion, ...)
 - Phase 3 (under development): scientific masters





Knowledge diplomacy in action - Flanders

- Strong focus on values
 - Bottom-up initiatives by universities
 - Human rights assessment tool (2019)
 - Guidelines for researchers on dual use and misuse of research
 - Mind the GAP training tool on scientific integrity
 - Contributing to host threatened scholars by working with Scholars at Risk
 - Call to action for government actors: make sure that universities receive quick and validated strategic intelligence on foreign partners they wish to work with, enabling them to make a thorough risk assessment



Thank you !

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