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# From Cultural Diplomacy to Cultural Transnationalism

The Contribution of Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums to the  
Evolving Narratives of Culture and Histories.  
Final Report SSHRC/UKRI-AHRC

[Report]

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## KNOWLEDGE SYNTHESIS

### **From Cultural Diplomacy to Cultural Transnationalism: The Contribution of Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums to the Evolving Narratives of Culture and Histories**

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## Executive summary

Galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAM) are key institutions in shaping and articulating collective narratives of identity, culture, history, and society. A retrospective view of GLAM's global history reveals a wide range of dynamics, approaches, and ideas about their role in producing and communicating these narratives. Historically, GLAM institutions have been shaped by dominant powers and often served as vehicles for reinforcing prevailing cultural and societal narratives. However, they also act as platforms for alternative practices, fostering efforts to rebalance public discourse on culture, identity, and history.

This knowledge synthesis aimed to highlight the critical importance of GLAM institutions in fostering intercultural relationships. While significant literature addresses their involvement in cultural diplomacy—particularly their role in facilitating state-level diplomatic relationships through cultural exchange—this project sought to focus on five key objectives:

1. Provide clarity on the diverse ideas of international relations in social science literature and assess their influence on research programs and understandings of GLAM institutions' international activities.
2. Examine three key dimensions—cultural diplomacy, cultural transnationalism, and GLAM historiographies—to critically analyze how GLAMs' international histories are conceptualized and understood.
3. Investigate how GLAM institutions act as spaces for transnational relationships, fostering connections that transcend dominant narratives and empower minority groups to express their cultural identities
4. Explore the potential of transnationalism in shaping policy development and underscore the importance of GLAM institutions' institutional and professional autonomy in international cultural engagement.
5. Encourage further exploration of GLAMs' international activities by proposing new research questions and advancing the field's understanding of their global role.

### Key Takeaways

- Cultural diplomacy in GLAM literature reveals how narratives of culture and history are constructed through art and heritage activities. Key findings include GLAM's role in fostering bilateral relationships through traveling exhibits and collection loans, which often support nation branding in state-sponsored contexts. Events and exhibits act as symbols of collaboration and mutual interest, contributing to global narratives. Additionally, GLAM

institutions play an active role in nation branding and identity-building while retaining a degree of autonomy to independently support cultural diplomacy. Prominent institutions like the British Museum or the Louvre enhance nation-building efforts and lend legitimacy to emerging GLAM sectors, while the expertise of GLAM professionals fosters soft power through cultural transfer and narrative formation.

- A transnational lens on GLAM emphasizes the historical circulation of collections and their disputes, guided by frameworks like Lowry's *Displaced Archival Heritage* (2017) and *Disputed Archival Heritage* (2023). This perspective highlights global networks and their histories, focusing on collectors, GLAM professionals, artists, migrants, and diasporic communities who influence institutional development, exhibits, and collections. While the state remains central to analysis, transnationalism brings attention to non-state actors and their significant roles in shaping GLAM institutions, fostering a deeper understanding of international collection practices and exhibition development.
- Historiographies shed light on how GLAM institutions are understood and engage internationally. They function as narratives of culture and history, attributing agency to key actors in shaping GLAM institutions. Comparative historiographies explore transnational discussions and institutional histories, aiming for inclusivity while occasionally overemphasizing Western contributions. The comparative history of collections emerges as a valuable approach for crafting global and inclusive historiographies, revealing how collections' histories move beyond Eurocentric narratives to reflect a broader, more diverse perspective.

## Implications

- The concept of cultural diplomacy underscores the central role of nation-states in directing intercultural and international activities, often fostering public-private partnerships. In contrast, cultural transnationalism highlights the autonomy of GLAM institutions as non-state actors, emphasizing their spontaneous interactions with civil society groups to create balanced cultural narratives. GLAM historiographies offer critical reflections on national memories and serve as comparative tools for global learning. Together, cultural diplomacy and transnationalism provide complementary frameworks for academic discussions, education, and policymaking, broadening the scope of cultural engagement.
- While cultural transnationalism complements cultural diplomacy, its mechanisms and impacts remain underexplored and underconceptualized. Individual case studies address these issues but lack the abstraction necessary for engaging a broad range of stakeholders. Rooted in political science and international relations, transnationalism, like soft power, holds significant promise for fostering interdisciplinary collaboration. Further conceptual development of transnationalism is crucial to enhancing its practical and academic relevance.
- Despite their recognized role in advancing nation-states' soft power agendas, GLAM institutions' expertise is insufficiently integrated into soft power and policy frameworks. GLAM professionals, practices, and values have historically facilitated cultural transfer,

yet their contributions are often overlooked in policy discourses. Limited communication channels and, in extreme cases, censorship, hinder GLAM's autonomy and ability to articulate their interests. To address this, greater integration of GLAM expertise into policymaking and stronger support for their autonomy in communicating cultures and histories are imperative.

## Background

Traditions, families, communities, political institutions, cultural organizations, and the Humanities and sciences all play critical roles in producing, preserving, and transmitting narratives of culture, history, and collective identity. These narratives, however, are not static; they evolve over time as communities grow and reimagine their social fabric. New societies and institutions emerge, contributing to the articulation of fresh narratives that provide meaning and foster a sense of belonging. Similarly, disciplines like History and Anthropology have illuminated key historical and cultural phenomena, prompting reconsiderations of our relationship to time and cultural identity. What we now refer to as "heritage" occupies a central place in the construction of these collective narratives—whether at the local, regional, national, or global level. Communities create and sustain memory through practices of remembrance, commemoration, collection, and exhibition. Galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAM) — and their precursors in collecting traditions worldwide — are pivotal in producing and transmitting narratives of culture and history. These institutions serve as spaces where such narratives are presented, preserved, challenged, and, at times, redefined.

GLAM institutions are integral to the articulation of collective narratives about identity, culture, history, and society. Retrospective analyses of their global history over the past centuries reveal a diversity of approaches and ideas concerning their roles (Poulot, 1997; Crane, 1997; Robinson, 2012; Bennett, 2013). In one of the most comprehensive syntheses of GLAM history, *Museum, a Global History* (Pomian, 2020), Krzysztof Pomian traces the origins of such institutions to early systematic collections in Chinese antiquity and late Roman Europe. This foundational focus on collections remains a defining feature of GLAM institutions (Pearce, 1994; Poulot, 2005; Roued-Cunliffe, 2017).

Over time, GLAM institutions transitioned from being private collections to public entities in service of scholarship, education, and intellectual pursuits. By the late 18th century, these institutions were established as spaces for researchers, artists, and intellectuals to engage with collections. Museums, libraries, and archives, for example, supported the development of disciplines such as archaeology, ethnography, geology, and biology, while gallery spaces contributed to the progress of artistic academies (Barringer and Flynn, 2012; Bennett, 2004).

These institutions also shaped discourses on truth and universal knowledge. Galleries helped define aesthetic standards, while museums, libraries, and archives sought to uncover universal narratives about the earth, the natural world, and human history (Yengoyan, 1997; Conway, 2010; van Dyke, 2019). This mission remains central to the identity and ethos of GLAM institutions today.

From the mid-19th century onwards, GLAM institutions increasingly embraced broader missions, incorporating public engagement as a central focus. Museums, for instance, were tasked with constructing national and imperial narratives. In 19th-century Western Europe and the Americas, they were instrumental in fostering national identity in emerging nation-states, using collections to produce cohesive national stories (Ndiaye, 2019). At the same time, GLAM institutions played roles in legitimizing colonial conquests, serving as repositories of knowledge and archives for metropolitan elites studying distant lands (Namhila, 2016; Sternberg, 1991; Fitzpatrick, 2008; Warren and Matthews, 2019).

Following the Second World War, new ideas about inclusivity and social purpose began reshaping GLAM institutions (Paquette, 2016). Concepts like new museology, the ecomuseum movement, cultural mediation, open access, cultural democratization, and cultural democracy emerged as catalysts for rethinking these institutions' relationships with their audiences (Gordon-Walker, 2016; Sweeney and Avery, 2021; Lawrenson and O'Reilly, 2023).

GLAM institutions are thus simultaneously shaped by dominant power structures and capable of providing platforms for alternative narratives. They can challenge established discourses on culture, identity, and history, promoting inclusivity and intercultural dialogue (Smith, 2006). This knowledge synthesis seeks to highlight the role of GLAM institutions in fostering intercultural relationships. While much of the existing literature focuses on GLAM's involvement in cultural diplomacy—facilitating diplomatic relations between states and promoting narratives of shared ventures—this synthesis emphasizes their potential as spaces for transnational relationships. Such relationships transcend state-driven narratives and empower minority groups through the expression of their cultural identities. Exploring transnationalism within GLAM institutions can inform policy development and underscore the importance of their institutional and professional autonomy. By fostering creativity at the local level, GLAM institutions not only achieve cultural policy goals but also empower marginalized groups, supporting their cultural initiatives and reinforcing their identities.

Recent global transformations, such as globalization, migration, and dialogues on colonial history, have significantly impacted how heritage professionals and institutions operate. Technological advancements, social media, and climate change also present both challenges and opportunities for preserving and communicating heritage. In this context, *how can cultural institutions—including galleries, libraries, archives, and museums—support the flourishing of diverse cultural perspectives and practices?*

In December 2023, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), in collaboration with the UK Research and Innovation's Arts and Humanities Research Council (UKRI-AHRC), invited research teams to reflect on and engage with recent scholarship on the evolving narratives of culture and history. This knowledge synthesis focuses on GLAM institutions' role in international relations, particularly their influence on collections and communication activities—two essential functions in shaping narratives of culture and history.

## Objectives

How GLAM institutions contribute to narratives of culture and history is a fundamental question that touches the core of these institutions' identity. Galleries, libraries, museums, and archives have developed around collections and collecting practices. Over time, these institutions have also devised various strategies to communicate histories and collaborate with other institutions to better understand history and culture. GLAM institutions are not only collecting institutions dedicated to preserving art and heritage; they are also communicational institutions, engaging with diverse audiences through different parameters, and research institutions, investigating their collections to uncover new explanations and insights into past and present societies.

In this knowledge synthesis, we aim to document how international activities shape GLAM institutions in their work and their capacity to articulate narratives of culture and history. What does the literature developed over the last decade reveal about GLAM institutions from a global perspective?

1. **The first objective of this synthesis** is to provide greater clarity about the various ideas related to international relations present in the social science literature and assess the extent to which this literature has influenced research programs and understandings of GLAMs' international activities. There is a diversity of ideas and conceptual approaches, and these need to be systematically unpacked. We hope this work will contribute to this process.
2. **The second objective of this review** is to take a tri-dimensional approach by examining how cultural diplomacy and cultural transnationalism (transnationalism) can provide insight into the questions surrounding GLAMs' international engagement. In addition to cultural diplomacy and cultural transnationalism, we will explore a third dimension: historiographies of GLAM institutions. These historiographies, published over the last decade, offer a critical view of how the field envisions GLAMs' international histories.
3. **The third objective of this knowledge synthesis** is to contribute to the development of new research questions for the field and to encourage further exploration of GLAMs' international activities.

## Methods

How are GLAM institutions contributing to the evolving narratives of culture and history? This general question can be addressed simply by first considering GLAM institutions' core mandates. GLAMs are institutions that work for the public good, collecting, exhibiting, and researching arts and heritage. Shaping narratives of culture and history is embedded in their artistic and scientific missions.

However, this question becomes more complex and demands further research when we examine GLAMs' practices—how these practices have been understood, performed, and transformed over time. For instance, while GLAMs continue to collect, they do so differently today compared to the 1930s. The same applies to exhibitions and how these institutions conceptualize and interact with their users. Thus, exploring how GLAMs engage at a global level can provide insights into how

these interactions influence their core functions, including their storytelling role in developing narratives of culture and history.

A broader and more systematic exploration of GLAM literature related to international relations over the last decade would likely have resulted in a descriptive analysis. While this inductive approach has merits, it risks veering away from the overarching question. To maintain focus, we approached this knowledge synthesis selectively and from a theoretical perspective. Additionally, this synthesis crosses interdisciplinary boundaries. First, while GLAM institutions share historical roots, they operate across distinct disciplinary frameworks. Second, the concepts under investigation are "conceptual nomads," moving between the Social Sciences and the Humanities. Finally, while striving for systematicity in our review, we had to account for the methodological diversity inherent in knowledge production across the Humanities.

We began by analyzing cultural diplomacy literature published between 2014 and 2024 in both English and French. Within this body of work, we focused on case studies, identifying 49 English-language and 25 French-language case studies. This emphasis on case studies allowed us to explore GLAMs' participation in cultural diplomacy through empirical data and fieldwork. Material was collected from institutional databases and managed collaboratively using citation management software. Although we initially considered advanced bibliometric tools, these were deemed less suitable due to the relatively limited literature available and their inadequate support for French-language publications.

The second analysis focused on the concept of transnationalism within GLAM research. Using general keywords, we retrieved material and verified that the concept was circulating within the field, particularly in theoretical publications from the last decade. However, the literature on transnationalism in GLAM remains relatively scarce. The term appears to be gaining traction, but it is not yet sufficiently established to generate extensive case studies or robust metadata for analysis. To address this gap, we examined transnational principles by exploring specific GLAM-related topics that demonstrated evidence of transnational thinking.

Finally, we examined GLAM historiography, focusing on books published over the last decade. This analysis included both general historiographies and works that provided regional perspectives on GLAM institutions. To qualify, books needed to address GLAM history while incorporating an international lens. This approach allowed us to explore how the field's historiography reflects its engagement with global contexts.

## Results

### Cultural Diplomacy

The notion of cultural diplomacy is closely tied to the concept of "soft power." While culture has always served as a resource for diplomatic action and intervention, the idea of soft power has significantly influenced both how cultural diplomacy is conceptualized as an academic subject and how it is practiced. In many ways, the notions of "soft power" or diplomacy of influence have also

shaped contemporary perspectives on diplomatic practices (Chaubet et al., 2024). Coined in the post-Cold War era of the 1990s, soft power emerged as a framework for reconsidering the role of military power in international relations (Nye, 1990). Contrasting with "hard power," which relies on coercion or force, soft power emphasizes the capacity to influence through attraction, persuasion, and cultural appeal (Nye, 2004; 2008a). These ideas have profoundly influenced international relations theory, reshaping how diplomacy is understood and how its institutions, instruments, and agents are conceptualized.

Similarly, the notion of public diplomacy aligns closely with soft power practices. As defined by Nye, public diplomacy is "an instrument that governments use to mobilize these resources to communicate with and attract the publics of other countries, rather than merely their governments. Public diplomacy tries to attract by drawing attention to these potential resources through broadcasting, subsidizing cultural exports, arranging exchanges, and so forth" (Nye, 2008b: 95). Following this definition, cultural diplomacy is often viewed in the literature as a specific form of public diplomacy (Schneider, 2009; Grincheva, 2010; Ang et al., 2018; Zhu and Wyszomirski, 2022; Grincheva, 2023a). It is also considered to borrow principles from public diplomacy and soft power more broadly (Faucher, 2016; Zamorano, 2016; Schneider, 2006; Clarke, 2020). However, as Goff (2020) and Grincheva (2024) note, the term "cultural diplomacy" often lacks semantic clarity and is sometimes narrowed to refer to specific practices, such as arts diplomacy, language diplomacy (Chaubet, 2004), or museum diplomacy.

Over the past few years, cultural diplomacy has gained increasing attention in both academic and professional contexts. Grincheva (2024) observed a significant rise in publications on the subject, noting that only 30% of related works were published before 2010. Since 2019, approximately 100 to 200 publications per year with "cultural diplomacy" as a keyword have been indexed in Scopus (p. 174). Initially constructed to explore the role of culture in international relations, cultural diplomacy has evolved into a widely referenced concept in practice and policy (Nisbett, 2013). Definitions range from "the international exchange of ideas and other aspects of culture to foster mutual understanding" (Cummings, 2003) to "the management of international environments through cultural activities" (Cull, 2008). This definitional diversity reflects the varied interests of cultural diplomacy stakeholders. Nation-states have practiced cultural diplomacy for over a century, with notable examples including the Institut Français (1907), British Council (1934), Fulbright Program (1946), and Goethe-Institut (1951). These programs were developed to address post-war issues, educate citizens abroad, and advance global ambitions (Tournès, 2002). Beyond these major institutions, the literature also explores the role of GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums) in cultural diplomacy.

Interdisciplinary research on GLAM and cultural diplomacy has highlighted diverse aspects of the practice. Much of the literature focuses on nationalism, propaganda, and their intersections with cultural diplomacy during the Cold War (Dubosclard, 2001; Marteau, 2003). Exhibitions, in particular, are studied as platforms for nation-states to showcase cultural heritage and achievements, reinforcing national identity while enabling cross-cultural appreciation (Martin and Chaubet, 2011; Gordon-Walker, 2016; Berryman, 2013). Beyond exhibitions (Tobelem, 2007), library and archive collections, as well as scientific collaborations (e.g., residencies), are also examined for their role in cultural diplomacy, particularly due to their connections to language, information policies, and cultural policies (Maack, 2001). These practices have been linked to

broader themes in cultural policy research, such as cultural mediation (Stamoudi, 2009). However, debates surrounding colonialism and the dominance of official narratives complicate the role of national libraries and archives in fostering international collaboration (Fitzpatrick, 2008; Robinson, 2012).

Despite the growing literature on GLAM and cultural diplomacy, comprehensive and comparative works remain scarce. Notable exceptions include Chaubet et al.'s (2024) *Histoire(s) de la diplomatie culturelle française*, which provides an encyclopedic overview of France's cultural diplomacy, with significant case studies involving GLAM. Natalia Grincheva's works, including *Global Trends in Museum Diplomacy* (2019) and *Museum Diplomacy in the Digital Age* (2020a), offer comparative insights into museum diplomacy. Smith and Prieue's (2023) *Museum Diplomacy* frames museums and galleries as active agents of cultural diplomacy. However, most general monographs on GLAM cultural diplomacy focus primarily on galleries and museums.

Considerable attention is given to GLAM diplomacy by major powers such as China (Paquette, 2015; Wang, 2018; Beattie et al., 2019; Huang and Lee, 2019; Kong, 2021; Huang, 2021; Grincheva, 2023b), the United States (Grincheva, 2015; Cho, 2022), and France (Faucher and Lane, 2014; Grincheva, 2020b; Peyre, 2020; Corral-Regourd and Peyre, 2021; Paquette, 2021; Mairesse, 2024; Guéraiche, 2024). South Korea's cultural diplomacy has also received significant interest, particularly due to the global success of Korean popular culture and its interconnectedness with cultural diplomacy (Jang, 2016; Lin, 2016; Huang and Lee, 2019; Kong, 2018; Yoon and Zamorano, 2023; Kim, 2024). The rise of cultural diplomacy in the Persian Gulf (Lazar, 2013; Kazerouni, 2015) and the use of GLAM by Taiwan (Chey, 2014; Wei, 2017), Canada (Brisson and Jessup, 2024), the United Kingdom (Scott, 2019), and Japan (Kinoshita, 2021) are also prominent themes. China's prominence in the literature reflects its early 2010s policy to reshape its domestic cultural sector and global soft power. South Korea's focus aligns with the global success of its cultural industries, while France's literature explores the global circulation of its museum "brands", and collaborations, notably with Gulf states.

A thematic analysis of 49 English-language case studies provided a nuanced understanding of GLAM institutions' role in cultural diplomacy. These case studies, often grounded in empirical data and fieldwork, offer insights into GLAM's functions, practices, and contributions to global narratives of culture and history. Table 1.1 provides an overview of the English-language case studies on GLAM and cultural diplomacy.

**Table 1.1 – English-language case studies (2014-2024): Thematic analysis**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Museum &amp; Gallery (27 cases)</b>	<b>Library &amp; Archive (14 cases)</b>	<b>Multi-institutional (8 cases)</b>
Identit* (Identity, identities)	22	10	8
Memor* (memory, memories)	16	11	8
Diploma*(diplomacy, diplomatic)	18	10	4
Image OR brand*	19	7	7
Touris* (tourism, tourist)	12	4	3

Diversity	9	4	5
Nationali* (nationalism, nationalist)	6	7	1
Imperialis* (imperialism, imperialist)	10	6	3
Indigenous	6	3	2

When examining cultural diplomacy and GLAM institutions, four key themes emerge as most salient: identity (identities), memory (memories), diplomacy (diplomatic), and image or brand. These themes are central to the analyzed case studies, which highlight the role of GLAM institutions as extensions or tools of state diplomacy. From this perspective, GLAM institutions are often framed as contributors to diplomacy, either as state-funded organizations enabling public policy and diplomatic initiatives or as private or not-for-profit entities supporting state activities and contributing to overarching diplomatic goals. Through the case studies, GLAM cultural diplomacy is generally seen as aligned with state-oriented activities. However, this literature also makes space for critiques of imperialism, considerations of diversity, and Indigenous aspirations.

The analysis of 25 French-language case studies, summarized in Table 1.2, reflects a focused approach. This restricted sample size is explained by the narrow criteria applied—specifically, the emphasis on case studies explicitly referring to cultural diplomacy during the given period. As expected, themes of diplomacy and relationships are central to these case studies, further situating cultural diplomacy within the realm of state-oriented and state-sponsored activities. According to researchers studying GLAM’s contributions to cultural diplomacy, these institutions act as implementers of foreign policy or, at the very least, as enablers of official state-sponsored agendas. GLAM institutions support cultural diplomacy through special exhibits, collections, and loans. The historical role of certain collections in fostering cultural relations also receives significant attention, particularly in fields like history and information sciences. A distinct feature of the French-language literature is its emphasis on technology, especially the role of social media platforms such as Instagram and Weibo in cultural diplomacy. This reflects a growing interest in the digital strategies used by GLAM institutions to amplify their reach and influence. Another notable focus is the organizational level of analysis, with significant attention paid to strategy and branding. French-language case studies often explore the circulation of French museum “brands” and the continued global appeal of France’s cultural prestige, particularly in the Arabian Peninsula. This topic intersects with both cultural diplomacy and broader considerations about cultural organization management.

**Table 1.2- French-language literature (2014-2024): Thematic Analysis**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Museums and Galleries (18)</b>	<b>Libraries and archives (4)</b>	<b>and Multi-institutional (3)</b>
Diploma* ( <i>diplomatie, diplomatique, + ambassadeurs</i> )	16	4	3
Relations ( <i>culturelles, bilatérales</i> )	14	4	3

Collections	7	4	2
Strategy (stratégies, marques)	7	0	0
Technology	4	0	0
Colonialism (colonialisme, colonisation)	4	0	0

### Narratives of culture and histories: Insights from case studies

How are GLAM institutions problematized or understood in the literature on cultural diplomacy over the last decade? And what does research reveal about GLAM's contributions to narratives of culture and history through cultural diplomacy? To address these questions, we aim to present some of the key findings on why and how GLAM institutions contribute to global narratives, drawing on evocative case studies.

One of the first findings concerns the intersection of soft power, reputation for excellence, and professional practices. The role of GLAM institutions in soft power strategies often hinges on the global circulation and adoption of norms. These norms, in turn, influence how culture is organized, shaping practices for collecting, presenting, and making collections accessible. Through this lens, GLAM institutions are not only custodians of heritage but also active participants in shaping cultural diplomacy by establishing and disseminating professional standards and best practices.

- Harris and Thaler's (2020) research on the influence of American librarianship in Japan exemplifies how cultural diplomacy operates within libraries. They note, "*While Japanese libraries took a more embracing approach to the soft power imposed by the American occupation, regulated archives in Japan have been either more negligent or more inefficient, resulting in ineffective strategies that are just now on the verge of international standardization*" (Harris & Thaler, 2021, p. 45).
- While professionals play a pivotal role in advancing cultural diplomacy, the reputation and "brands" of institutions are equally significant in shaping narratives of culture and history. William Guéraiche's (2017) work illustrates how the global circulation of museum brands can simultaneously address diverse cultural diplomacy objectives. The case of the Louvre Abu Dhabi exemplifies this dynamic: it not only underscores French cultural excellence but also aligns with Emirati cultural aspirations, reflecting their global ambitions. The institutions, their collaborations, and the processes involved in exhibit development collectively introduce new dimensions to the production of global narratives of culture and history.

In certain instances, GLAM institutions devise their own strategies and methodologies to establish collaborations with embassies and foreign affairs departments. Through these efforts, they offer material culture and collections that align with the image a nation seeks to project. As a result, GLAM institutions play a supportive role in articulating and advancing nation-branding efforts.

- In her case study of MoMA, Hyojung Cho documented how certain practices initially emerged as formal and closely tied to governmental activities before evolving into

initiatives proactively undertaken by the museum itself. *“Among MoMA’s early international programs, the Art in Embassies program (AIE) is an interesting case, as it was a museum program that had come to be a federal cultural diplomacy program. [...] it assembled forty loan collections for the residences of US ambassadors in thirty countries, the US Ambassador to the United Nations, and the headquarters building of the US Mission to the United Nations for ten years”* (Cho 2022: 389).

International exhibitions continue to serve as significant catalysts for the production of narratives of culture and history. Traveling exhibitions, in particular, function as tools to promote identities and project specific ideas about a nation or culture. These exhibitions are meticulously prepared with the intention of representing culture for a foreign audience. This process is both selective—highlighting certain aspects of culture and history—and communicational, aiming to convey specific narratives. Within the context of cultural diplomacy, the reception of such exhibitions often symbolizes expressions of bilateral or multilateral friendship between the institutions and nations involved in the official, often state-sponsored, tour.

- Davidson and Castellanos (2023), in their historical analysis, emphasize the significant impact that certain exhibitions have had on the international representation of cultures and on curatorial practices. Regarding Mexico: *“Art Mexicain du Précolombien à nos jours was presented at the Musée National d’Art Moderne in Paris, [...] between 1952 and 1953 before traveling to eleven European countries, [it was] arguably the first true “blockbuster, [...] it was also considered instrumental in achieving a number of foreign policy goals for the Mexican government.* (Davidson and Castellanos 2023: 36-37).
- Bleiker and Butler (2016) examined the integration of Indigenous art into Australian traveling exhibitions during the 1940s. They argue that in two prominent international exhibitions, the inclusion of Indigenous art played a pivotal role in advancing Australia's cultural diplomacy efforts abroad. Specifically, with regard to the exhibition held in the United States: *“The inclusion of Aboriginal art had much more to do with the careful orchestration of a diplomatic narrative focusing on a tacit bond between Australia and the United States through shared settler and frontier origins* (Bleiker and Butler 2016: 61). From an aesthetic and from an identity building perspective, Bleiker and Butler argue that *“Aboriginal art thus provided a distinctive mark in an Australian art tradition that was otherwise considered conservative and derivative of British influence”* (p. 61)

Although cultural diplomacy often focuses on constructing an idealized representation of a nation through its collections, the process is not always unilateral. In fact, the creation of international exhibitions within the context of cultural diplomacy may involve more dialogue than is typically assumed. This is particularly evident in cases where international teams are formed, and collections are curated from multiple institutions.

- Sang-hoon Jang’s (2016) examination of the archives from South Korea’s first overseas exhibitions in the United States in 1957 and 1959 provides a valuable perspective on the narrative dynamics involved in the creation of traveling exhibitions. According to Jang: *“An interesting point here is that the American curators were more active and determined to find things genuinely Korean than the Korean committee members were. However, they were*

*overlooking the fact that the Koreans had considered Chinese civilisation as their important standard, even if they had transformed it and created things in Korean ways* (Jang 2016: 461). These exhibitions reveal how omissions and reinterpretations were influenced by the Cold War-era foreign policy, which played a significant role in shaping the American curator's portrayal of Korean culture. This influence ultimately directed the collaborative efforts, steering them in a particular direction.

## Key takeaways

Bell and Kennan (2022) note that while the International Relations and GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums) literature has addressed the role of museums, archives, and galleries in cultural diplomacy and soft power, libraries remain underexplored. They argue that this oversight is evident in the academic focus, which tends to prioritize museums and galleries, potentially leaving libraries and archives less represented. However, this disparity could stem not only from a lack of research but also from the reality that libraries and archives may engage less actively in cultural diplomacy or that their international activities differ significantly from those of museums and galleries.

Cultural diplomacy, as explored in GLAM literature, influences how narratives of culture and history are constructed, primarily through art and heritage communication activities. Key findings from this literature review include:

1. **Bilateral Support:** GLAM exhibits and events often support bilateral relationships, with traveling exhibits and collection loans playing a role in nation branding, especially during state-sponsored events.
2. **Diplomatic Symbols:** Special events and exhibits in GLAM institutions act as symbols of mutual interest, collaboration, and friendship, contributing to emerging global narratives.
3. **Nation Branding and Identity:** GLAM institutions actively engage in cultural diplomacy to promote nation-branding and identity-building.
4. **Agency in Cultural Diplomacy:** GLAM institutions, while responding to policy demands, retain a degree of autonomy and may independently develop resources to support cultural diplomacy.
5. **Institutional Branding:** Prominent GLAM institutions like the British Museum or the Louvre serve as tools for nation-building and lend legitimacy to developing GLAM sectors.
6. **Soft Power through Expertise:** The expertise of GLAM professionals contributes to a nation's soft power, facilitating cultural transfer and shaping narratives of culture and history.

One underexplored area in the literature is the potential influence of states, including foreign governments, on routine GLAM activities. While cultural diplomacy is often associated with cooperation, there is limited academic focus on instances of censorship or foreign interference in GLAM institutions, suggesting a need for further research in this area.

## Cultural Transnationalism

The past decade (2014–2024) has seen a significant rise in scholarship addressing the relationship between GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums) institutions and colonialism. While this is not a new topic, previous decades of work in Museum Studies, Art History, and Information Sciences have developed robust research programs documenting the ways colonial practices have shaped heritage institutions, influenced collections, and constructed representations of society and culture that reflect racism, discrimination, and inequality (e.g., Jones 1993; Gaugue 1999; Turgeon and Dubuc 2002; Aldrich 2004; Bennett 2004; Barringer and Flynn 2012; Edward et al., 2006). This body of critical literature has contributed to the emergence of new perspectives on GLAM institutions and their roles on the global stage.

GLAM institutions engage internationally with a range of agents in diverse ways, necessitating a rethinking of traditional concepts like cultural diplomacy. While cultural diplomacy, as defined in International Studies and Political Science, remains a useful framework for understanding international practices, alternative notions like transnationalism may also provide valuable insights.

In contrast to the state-centric notion of cultural diplomacy, transnationalism emphasizes informal and spontaneous intercultural or international relationships that develop outside formal diplomatic channels. Emerging as a critique of state-centric approaches in the 1970s (Nye and Keohane 1971; Keohane and Nye 1972; Strange 1976), transnationalism gained renewed attention in the 1990s, following the dissolution of the USSR and the end of the Cold War. This second wave of transnational studies, marked by Thomas Risse's 1995 publication *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In*, highlighted the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and their expertise in shaping international relations through the formation of epistemic communities. These communities facilitated knowledge exchange and redefined global challenges, demonstrating the significant influence of non-state actors in shaping formal international relationships and political processes.

Despite this progress, the specific contributions of cultural institutions like GLAM in fostering cross-national relationships, dismantling knowledge monopolies, and influencing bottom-up policy changes remain underexplored. In recent years, research on topics like climate change activism, migration, and Indigenous engagement has highlighted the importance of transnationalism, demonstrating how grassroots efforts and diasporic relationships influence domestic and international policies. Similarly, in cultural fields, GLAM institutions have initiated projects in collaboration with global diasporas, communities of practice, and Indigenous leaders. These efforts, which often diverge from traditional diplomatic protocols, exemplify cultural transnationalism—a concept that extends beyond national interests and emphasizes professional and institutional autonomy.

Cultural transnationalism, as outlined by Ang, Isar, and Mar (2018), describes initiatives driven by GLAM institutions and professionals in partnership with formal or informal civil society groups. Through such collaborations, GLAM institutions facilitate the creation of new narratives via exhibitions, cultural events, and scientific and cultural initiatives.

To better understand the intersection of GLAM and transnationalism, a meta-analysis using keywords such as "museums," "libraries," "archives," "GLAM," and "transnational" was conducted. After cleaning the data and reviewing the material, 66 English-language articles were identified, with 14 focusing on case studies. The remaining works were either conceptual or covered diverse geographical and historical contexts. A complementary sample of French literature comprised 35 works, including 13 case studies. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 summarize the thematic coverage of these publications.

**Table 2.1 – GLAM transnationalism: Themes covered by English-language publications**

Themes	Works
Migration	24
Networks	18
Colonialism	23
Art market; artistic production	12
Exhibit development	18

**Table 2.2 - GLAM transnationalism: Themes covered by French-language publications**

Themes	Works
Colonialism	22
Dialogue (cooperation, participation)	7
Collections	9
Migration	7

The volume of published work on GLAM transnationalism remains relatively small, with a limited number of case studies available for deeper analysis. Nevertheless, the dominant themes in this literature highlight distinctions from the cultural diplomacy-focused body of work. One prominent theme concerns migration, positioning GLAM institutions as spaces that collect and display artifacts linked to global mobility and cultural diversity (Jame, 2023; Delaplace, 2022; Dine, 2024).

From a critical perspective, GLAM organizations facing postcolonial critiques are seen as having the potential to reframe their narratives and foster inclusivity for migrants and diaspora communities (Delgado et al., 2023; Gouriévidis, 2014; Lukic, 2015; Johansson and Bevelander, 2017; Mears, 2019). Additionally, processes behind exhibit creation and models that encourage greater public participation at the international level feature prominently in the literature (Beurden, 2015; Possamai, 2021; Meyer and Savoy, 2014; Innocenti, 2016; Franco, 2023). Another recurring theme addresses transnational networks in art production and GLAM conservation and curation activities (Rodgers, 2012; Seo, 2014; Chambers, 2016; Gunter, 2019; Smith and Selch, 2021; Borea, 2021; Hegenbert, 2024). Moreover, significant reflections within the field delve into the colonial legacies of GLAM institutions and their enduring effects.

Despite the limited available work, transnationalism presents a valuable framework to understand GLAM activities and their role in creating and transforming cultural and historical narratives. The concept's interdisciplinary nature suggests that while it has deep roots in International Studies and

Political Science, its adoption in GLAM research has been gradual. Nonetheless, many principles of transnationalism—such as the capacity to engage diverse audiences and leverage transnational networks—are vital for understanding the global activities of GLAM institutions today. For instance, Bell and Kennan (2022) highlight the rise of international librarianship and its solidarities, which emphasize global social justice.

Theoretical contributions can also provide a deeper understanding of innovations within the field. While early appropriations of transnationalism in GLAM studies are limited, important works like Meyer and Savoy (2013) offer foundational insights. Meyer and Savoy note that transnationalism has long been employed in disciplines such as Anthropology, Economics, and Political Science to describe cross-border activities, including the networks formed by migrants or commercial enterprises. They argue that transnationalism in the Humanities—particularly in GLAM studies—borders concepts like “entangled history” and “global history,” offering new levels of analysis for understanding dependencies, exchanges, and cross-boundary transmissions.

Transnationalism, as conceptualized by Meyer and Savoy, transcends state actors, focusing instead on flows of people, ideas, products, and processes. The framework acknowledges the enduring relevance of nation-states while emphasizing the variable intensity of cross-boundary exchanges over time. Additionally, related concepts such as “transculturalism” (Falser and Junega, 2013) highlight the importance of multiple voices and cultural participation in shaping art, heritage, and identity.

In the Social Sciences, transnationalism is associated with global processes and the circulation of ideas, techniques, and material culture (Green, 2017; Go and Krause, 2016). However, systematic literature reviews may struggle to capture the interdisciplinary and evolving nature of this concept within the GLAM field. Transnationalism is a relatively new framework for GLAM research and remains in the early stages of development.

To advance this discussion, scholars might explore themes that exemplify transnational principles in GLAM institutions, such as the restitution of cultural artifacts. This specific area of research offers valuable insights into how GLAM institutions operate within transnational regimes, revealing their role in shaping international relationships and cultural narratives.

### **Restitution as ideal-typical of GLAM transnationalism**

The literature on restitution published over the last decade is arguably the closest to exemplifying the ideal-typical nature of GLAM actions from a transnational perspective. The discourse surrounding GLAM and the restitution of cultural goods (art and artifacts) has a long and multifaceted history, with its origins traceable to Western Antiquity. Over time, this discourse has been enriched by numerous disciplines, including philosophy, Classical Studies, and history. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, legal scholars significantly contributed to the literature, offering insights into the moral and legal dimensions of cultural property ownership. Art history has further advanced the debate, particularly in technical areas such as provenance research.

The cultural and institutional impacts of major historical events, such as the Napoleonic Wars (Boyer, 1964; Siegel, 2010; Loire, 2020), the Second World War, and the Holocaust, on public

and private collections have been extensively documented and analyzed (Cotler, 2001; Diner, 2003; Gaudenzi and Swenson, 2017; Krzyzanowski, 2021; Subotic, 2023).

In recent decades, numerous countries—particularly those from the "Global South"—have expressed growing interest in recovering cultural artifacts that were stolen, looted, or otherwise acquired illegitimately during the colonial period (Tythacott and Arvanitis, 2016; Sarr and Savoy, 2018; Soro, 2020; Losson, 2021a; Savoy, 2023). These restitution efforts are not solely state-driven; they are frequently supported by migrant communities and various forms of collective action. Indigenous populations in countries such as Canada (Conaty, 2015; Breske, 2018; Dekker, 2018), Australia (Fforde et al., 2020; Berryman, 2020), New Zealand (Jean-Nabbache, 2022), and nations across the Pacific and South America (Losson, 2021b; 2022) have also been prominent advocates for restitution.

Over the past decade, this body of literature has increasingly addressed the intersection of restitution and international relations, reflecting evolving orientations and expectations for GLAM institutions in shaping narratives of culture and history. A recurring theme is the emphasis on legality and morality regarding both private and public collections (Dehouck, 2019; Christofoletti, 2023; Snowball et al., 2022; Lambrecht, 2023). Beyond this shared focus, the literature explores additional dimensions, including:

- The transnational circulation of material culture (artifacts, books, documents), as well as the transnational circulation of ideas and the influence of certain knowledge regimes (Ndiaye 2019; Monroe 2019; Laely 2020; Ken 2023).
- Social mobilization, collective actions, and social movements, along with their demands directed towards GLAM organizations (Joffe and Shepherd 2020). Restitution processes are sometimes associated with the creation of new narratives centered on justice and fairness, while at other times, they intersect with broader political objectives, such as calls for reparations (Paquette 2023).
- Intellectuals (Subotic 2013), professionals (Paquette 2020; Ohene-Asah 2022; Lowry 2017; 2023), and members of diverse diasporic communities (Ouali 2020; Cousin et al., 2023).
- Skepticism towards cultural diplomacy, and preference for intercultural dialogue (Sarr and Savoy 2018).

The debate over the restitution of cultural goods offers a compelling framework for narrating culture and history for several reasons. First, researchers engage with the demands of professionals and social actors, producing detailed studies on the displacement and dispersion of cultural goods. These histories of collections, while often contentious, serve as opportunities to encounter and engage with culture and history. Second, examining the circulation of material culture and collections raises questions about the transnational networks that facilitated their movement and the influence these networks and associated ideas had on various cultures. Third, restitutions themselves embody stories waiting to be told. GLAM institutions play a critical role in narrating

the ideals and values underlying the restitution of cultural goods, documenting not only the history of those interested in these objects over time but also the voices of those who seek to articulate their own narratives through the restitution process. From an analytical perspective, restitution efforts highlight the role of international networks, contrasting with cultural diplomacy by positioning the state as one actor among many in these processes.

### **Key takeaways**

While the concept of transnationalism is present in GLAM literature, explicit references to it remain limited. Capturing its presence within the field remains challenging, particularly when relying on keyword and metadata-based searches. Nevertheless, renowned scholars (e.g., Meyer and Savoy, 2013; Falser and Juneja, 2013) have significantly contributed to conceptualizing transnationalism to approach GLAM institutions' international dimensions from alternative angles and with diverse sources. Despite the limited scope of existing literature, several key characteristics of transnationalism within GLAM studies can be identified:

- From a transnational perspective, the historical study of collections is vital for understanding their long-term circulation and significance.
- Two key approaches guide research in this area—analyzing the global displacement of cultural goods and analyzing disputes surrounding them. These approaches are directly informed by Lowry's *Displaced Archival Heritage* (2017) and *Disputed Archival Heritage* (2023), which encapsulate the analytical frameworks used to explore GLAM's international relations through a transnational lens.
- Transnationalism emphasizes the importance of global networks and their histories in understanding collection development and exhibition practices.
- While the state remains a subject of analysis, transnational perspectives highlight the roles of collectors, GLAM professionals, artists, migrants, and members of diasporic communities. These actors significantly influence the development of GLAM institutions, shaping their exhibits and collections.

## **Fabric of GLAM institutions and international relations: institutional definitions and historiography**

In the fields of Museum Studies, Library Sciences, Information Sciences, Arts Management, and Cultural Policy Research, there is a long-standing tradition of examining the structural and institutional fabric of cultural organizations. This interdisciplinary body of work not only informs academic inquiry but also plays a crucial role in shaping educational programs and training professionals in these fields. The ongoing effort to define GLAM institutions and their functions is evident in professional discourse and institutional practices. For instance, the successive iterations of the International Council of Museums' (ICOM) definition of the museum highlight an attempt to establish a shared understanding of museums' roles and values. Similar efforts exist for libraries and archives.

Academic research serves as another critical domain where the identity and ethos of GLAM institutions are continuously articulated and redefined. Over the past decade, numerous scholarly contributions have sought to document, theorize, and contextualize the essence of GLAM institutions, particularly in their engagement with international work and transnational networks. Among the most notable contributions in recent years is Krzysztof Pomian's *Le musée, une histoire mondiale* (*Museum, A Global History*), a monumental three-volume work published between 2020 and 2022. At first glance, Pomian's comprehensive history of museums may appear to follow the trajectory of earlier seminal works, such as Dominique Poulot's (1997) *Musée, Nation et Patrimoine* (*Museum, Nation, and Heritage*) or *Napoleon's Legacy: The Rise of National Museums in Europe* (Bergvelt et al., 2009). These earlier works largely focus on museums as sites for articulating national narratives, influenced by Benedict Anderson's (1983) groundbreaking work on imagined communities, nationalism, and their intersection with museums.

Pomian, while acknowledging the significance of nationalism in shaping museums—especially in his second volume, *L'ancrage européen, 1789–1850* (*The European Anchorages, 1789–1850*)—offers a broader perspective. His work moves beyond the nation-centric view to address the global and historical dimensions of museum development. By tracing the evolution of collections from cabinets of curiosities to modern museums, Pomian provides a global institutional history that highlights the contributions of diverse civilizations, including Roman and Chinese traditions, to the development of museums and galleries. He reveals that these institutions have been shaped not only by European ideals but also by dialogues with non-Western cultures. Additionally, his work explores contemporary forces that challenge traditional practices, including restitution movements and shifts in disciplinary priorities.

Other scholars, such as Andrea Meyer and Bénédicte Savoy in their edited volume *Towards a Transnational History of Museums* (2014), deliberately challenge the Eurocentric historiography of museums and galleries. They advocate for a broader perspective that recognizes the contributions of non-European societies to the conceptual and practical development of museums. By calling into question the dominant European narratives, Meyer and Savoy highlight the cross-cultural exchanges and mutual influences that have shaped museums as global institutions.

Revisiting the historiography of museums and galleries is essential for uncovering the diverse voices and contributions that have historically shaped these institutions. While critiques of museums as instruments of inequality, unethical cultural representations, and colonial exploitation are justified, the overemphasis on these critiques in literature may obscure the significant dialogues and contributions of non-Western scholars, artists, and professionals.

Recent publications further expand our understanding of museological traditions and their global commonalities. For example, *Museums in Arabia: Transnational Practices and Regional Processes* (Exell and Wakefield, 2016) examines how museums in the Arabian Peninsula are influenced by both Western forces and regional cultural dynamics. Similarly, *National Museums in Africa* (Silverman et al., 2022) highlights the active role of African intellectuals in shaping museum practices, debates on restitution, and the global discourse on heritage. Jonathan Paquette's (2022) *Museum-Making in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia* explores how local professionals and intellectuals have contributed to the development of museums in Southeast Asia, demonstrating

parallels with Western traditions while emphasizing regional distinctiveness. Paquette's work also sheds light on intercultural encounters, revealing that early 20th-century museological practices in Asia were often comparable to those in Europe.

In the field of Information Science, Friedrich's *The Birth of the Archive* (2018) offers a significant contribution by providing a comparative and global historiography of archives. Originally published in German in 2013, this work addresses the lack of comprehensive studies on archives' historical trajectories and aims to move beyond single-case analyses to a more holistic perspective. Furthermore, according to Friedrich:

Scholars' silence on the subject of archives is all the more striking if we cast a glance at the rapid proliferation of scholarly work on the two other major early modern institutions for collecting and preserving: libraries and museums, which in some sense are the fathers and brothers of archives, have long been the objects of intense and methodologically sophisticated research (Friedrich 2018: 21).

While global historiographies of archives remain a less common topic in the field, the past decade has witnessed several notable contributions aimed at enhancing our understanding of archival history at the international level. Friedrich, whose work primarily focuses on the evolution of archives in the West, emphasizes the importance of incorporating global archival histories from diverse cultures. He specifically highlights the need to explore archival practices in Asia, particularly in China and Korea (p. 31). To enable a broader and more inclusive history of archives and libraries, researchers have revisited the materiality and organization of archival systems. For instance, studies on tablets and epigraphy have expanded the scope of archival history. A striking example is the recovery of 40 tablets from Ebla, an ancient city-state in northern Syria, by Italian archaeologists. These findings illustrate how administrative archives existed thousands of years before the traditional starting points of archival history, which often focus on the Roman Empire or medieval Europe (Lidman, 2012: 7). These contributions from Information Sciences also highlight the shared ancestry among GLAM institutions. Archives, libraries, and museums all share foundational roots in the development and organization of collections, underscoring their interconnected histories and functions.

### **Key takeaways**

Over the past decade, the international dimension of GLAM institutions has been captured in several significant historiographies. These works are valuable not only for understanding the evolution of the field but also for examining its introspections and self-reflections. Historiographies provide insights into how researchers have developed a broader understanding of GLAM institutions over time. After analyzing nine such histories published in the last decade, several key elements emerge that illuminate both how GLAM institutions engage internationally and, more importantly, how the field conceptualizes itself.

- GLAM historiographies as narratives of culture and history: These works serve as narratives that highlight who the field credits for the development, shaping, and reshaping of GLAM institutions. This is particularly important as it reveals how the field attributes agency in constructing narratives of culture and history.

- Transnational perspectives in historiographies: All of these works attempt to comparatively analyze how GLAM institutions have emerged from transnational discussions. They highlight institutional histories in ways that aim to be more inclusive. However, even the most critical literature occasionally overemphasizes the contributions of European countries and the West to the global history of GLAM.
- The comparative history of collections: This approach offers a promising avenue for creating a more inclusive historiography of GLAM institutions. By examining collections' histories, researchers can accommodate a more global perspective that moves beyond Eurocentric narratives.

## Implications

### The terminologies and their uses

Our literature survey indicates that *cultural diplomacy* and *cultural transnationalism* are often employed to describe similar intercultural and international activities. However, the actors and objectives in these activities reveal subtle yet significant distinctions and implications. Choosing terminologies carefully according to specific research and policy contexts not only enhances academic rigor but also promotes inclusivity and diversity in policymaking processes. Hence, we advocate for embracing complexity to foster open discussions and imaginative thinking, rather reducing to a single expression for convenience.

Specifically, the concept of *cultural diplomacy* emphasizes the pivotal role of nation-states in facilitating and steering intercultural and international activities, potentially encouraging more public-private partnerships. In contrast, *cultural transnationalism* highlights the autonomy of GLAM as non-state actors, showcasing how their spontaneous actions and interactions with civil society groups can provide balanced narratives of cultures and histories. GLAM historiographies not only offer a critical lens for reflecting on national memories but also serve as a comparative tool to examine and learn from global practices. Therefore, we recognize the benefits of using both terms in academic discussions, education, and policymaking.

Additionally, the literature underscores the diversity within the GLAM sector. While GLAM encompasses a range of cultural organizations, including galleries, libraries, archives, and museums, their contributions to cultural diplomacy and cultural transnationalism can differ significantly. For instance, museums and galleries differ greatly from libraries and archives in terms of audience engagement, revenue composition, operational contexts, and project cycles. These distinctions often make museums and galleries more prominent in national agendas and academic discussions. Conversely, the activities of libraries and archives may be less visible due to language barriers and the text-dominant format of their activities. Consequently, there is considerably less literature addressing the roles of libraries and archives in promoting national branding and image but focusing on their roles in cultivating a global network. As a result, GLAM institutions have developed distinct strategies to communicate cultures and histories, which hold significant implications for future research and policy development.

## **New research questions**

This synthesis has raised new research questions that are critical for achieving a comprehensive, global, and decolonized understanding of GLAM's contributions to shaping cultures and histories. These questions address gaps in current discourse and explore new possibilities for the coming decades.

We are particularly interested in the geographical shift in research focus. Why is there a growing interest in cultural diplomacy and soft power in the Middle East and Asia? Does this reflect changing international power dynamics and the unique strengths of GLAM institutions in shaping national images and establishing global presence? While case studies provide valuable insights, there is a need to zoom out for a broader perspective to understand and decode these shifts. Moreover, we note that scholarship on Middle Eastern and Asian countries remains uneven, with countries such as China, South Korea, UAE, and Saudi Arabia dominating the discourse. In contrast, GLAM institutions in less prominent nations struggle for representation in the literature.

We are also keen to explore the diverse range of actors involved in intercultural and international activities. Despite the growing body of research on GLAM's roles in cultural diplomacy and cultural transnationalism, there remains a significant gap in studies focusing on smaller, local GLAMs, especially in non-Western contexts. Most case studies in our database are based on empirical data from prominent GLAMs, such as museums with a global brand, which often have stronger state endorsement and contribute to national narratives. Expanding the research portfolio to include smaller, less visible GLAMs would enrich scholarly discussions. This entails collaborative work between researchers and smaller GLAM institutions to dismantle knowledge monopolies.

Furthermore, we see immense potential in cultural transnationalism. As a complement to cultural diplomacy, the mechanisms and impacts of cultural transnationalism are not yet fully understood or conceptualized. For example, how does the autonomy of GLAMs foster new forms of international cultural relationships beyond traditional diplomatic protocols? How do GLAMs engage with global diasporas and indigenous leaders to shape alternative cultural narratives? While individual case studies address these questions, they lack the level of abstraction observed in the discussion of cultural diplomacy, limiting accessibility and communication with diverse range of stakeholders. Transnationalism, a new concept in humanities, has a long history in political science and international relations. We argue that, similar to the concept of soft power, transnationalism holds the great potential for facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration.

## **Future practice**

For GLAMs, two key questions merit consideration for future practice: How does their work contribute to the narratives of culture and history? Equally important, how does engaging in cultural diplomacy or cultural transnationalism shape their institutional capacities and development? While these questions may appear broad for arts managers or professionals, evidence from this synthesis suggests they underpin many strategic and managerial decisions, such as curatorial choices and the selection of partners, sponsors, and touring destinations. These decisions profoundly influence the long-term development of GLAMs. Therefore, we emphasize

the need for discussions and research on these questions, led by GLAM professionals and for GLAMs.

### **Policy development**

It is paradoxical that, while GLAM institutions are widely recognized as instruments for advancing the soft power agendas of nation-states, their expertise is not fully integrated into soft power frameworks in many countries. GLAM professionals, practices, norms, and values have historically played a crucial role in cultural transfer, yet their contributions to local and international communities are often taken for granted in policy discourses. This is evident in the limited influence GLAMs have in their collaborations with governments. In some cases, this manifests as restricted communication channels for GLAM to articulate their interests, or even censorship in extreme cases, undermining GLAM's autonomy. Therefore, this synthesis advocates for integrating GLAM expertise more fully into policy development and supporting their autonomy in communicating cultures and histories.

## **Conclusion**

This knowledge synthesis unpacks the diverse ideas and conceptual approaches used to describe and analyze GLAM's international and intercultural activities and their role in shaping evolving narratives and cultures. Our analysis focused on three interconnected dimensions.

*Cultural diplomacy* shapes GLAM institutions' capacity to construct narratives of culture and history, primarily through the international communication and interpretation of arts and heritage, which often support bilateral relationships and nation-branding efforts. The literature highlights that GLAM institutions engaged in cultural diplomacy face the need to balance policy-driven initiatives with their own interests and autonomy. Additionally, scholars are particularly interested in prominent institutions with well-known brands, such as the British Museum and the Louvre, and how these institutions serve as tools for nation-branding and contribute to cultivating distinctive cultural and national identities. Moreover, GLAM expertise—including the professionals, practices, and norms—plays a critical role in shaping how nations collect and structure collections, thereby influencing how cultural narratives are organized and shared. However, it remains underexplored how the lack of autonomy, dominance of major GLAM brands, and insufficient representation of GLAM expertise in cultural diplomacy might impact the narratives of culture and history.

*Cultural transnationalism*, while less explicitly addressed in literature, offers a fresh perspective on GLAM's international and intercultural activities. It moves away from the state-centric view and refocuses on GLAMs as non-state actors working with civil society to shape cultural narratives. The literature emphasizes the unique role of history as materials for researchers in this area to understand the international circulation of collections, with attention to global displacement and disputes surrounding archival heritage. Restitution efforts of cultural goods, for example, exemplify GLAM transnationalism by fostering the transnational circulation of material culture,

engaging intellectuals, professionals, and diverse diasporic communities, and producing new narratives centered on justice and fairness.

*GLAM historiographies* have been instrumental in capturing the international and comparative dimensions of the field, offering insights into its evolution, self-reflection, and the development of a collective understanding of GLAM institutions. These historiographies themselves, serve as narratives of culture and history, shedding light on how GLAM institutions have emerged from and engaged in transnational discussions. The overemphasis of the West and European influence in current literature presents a strong rationale for developing more global and inclusive historiographies that better account for GLAM's diverse past and international engagements.

Finally, we discussed the implications of these findings for research, practice, and policy development. We highlighted the complementary nature and potential synergy between cultural diplomacy and cultural transnationalism, and emphasized their role in generating new research questions, advancing GLAM practices, and enriching policy discourse. We advocate for broader and ongoing conversations and collaborations among research and practice communities to document and understand GLAM's international and intercultural activities towards a global narrative of cultures and histories.

## Knowledge mobilization activities

This report will be presented publicly in Ottawa/Manchester on January 22 2025. Part of the conclusions will also be presented in Manchester in the Cultural Diplomacy Forum on December 9 2024. The report will also be further discussed in a joint session in French hosted by the Collège des chaires de recherche sur le monde francophone. The theoretical material will also be the basis for an online exhibit "Culture coréenne et monde francophone: catalogues et diplomatie culturelle/ Korean Culture and Francophone World: Catalogues and Cultural Diplomacy" hosted on Omeka platform.

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