



**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS**

**TOURISM AS A TOOL FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY: THE CASE OF
ADDIS ABABA SINCE 2018**

**BY
TEMESGEN MARIYE**

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**A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Political Science and international
Relations in Partial Fulfilments of the Requirement for the Award of the
Degree of Masters of Art in International Relations and Diplomacy**

ADVISOR DR. FIREHIWOT SINTAYEHU

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research thesis entitled “**Tourism as a Tool for Public Diplomacy: The Case of Addis Ababa Since 2018**”, submitted for the partial fulfilment of the requirement of award of master of art in International Relations and Diplomacy, is a result of my original inquiry and has been carried out under the supervision of Frehiwot Sintayehu (PhD) complying with the university requirement as to originality and quality.

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CERTIFICATION

I hereby certifies that the thesis prepared by Temesgen Mariye, entitled **Tourism as a Tool for Public Diplomacy: The Case of Addis Ababa Since 2018**, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master Arts in International Relations and Diplomacy complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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Addis Ababa University

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Tourism as a Tool for Public Diplomacy: The Case of Addis Ababa Since 2018

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	i
Certification	iii
List of Acronyms	ix
Abstract	x
Chapter One	1
1.1. Background of the study	1
1.2. Statement of the problem	2
1.3. Core argument of the research	4
1.4. General and specific objectives	4
1.4.1. General objective.....	4
1.4.2 Specific objective	4
1.5. Research questions.....	5
1.5.1. General questions	5
1.5.2. Specific questions.....	5
1.6. Methodology and method of data collection	6
1.6.1. Methodology.....	6
1.6.2. Sources of Data.....	6
1.6.3. Sampling Technique	6
1.6.3.1. Key Informant Interview.....	7
1.7. Data Analysis	7
1.9. Scope of the research	8
1.10. Limitations of the Research	9
1.11. Operational Definitions of Key Terms	10
1.12. Organization of the Research.....	11
Chapter Two.....	13
Review of Related Literature	13

2.1. Conceptual Issues.....	13
2.1.1. Diplomacy	13
2.1.2. Soft Power Diplomacy and the Role of Tourism	14
2.1.3 Public Diplomacy.....	15
2.1.4. Tourism Diplomacy.....	16
2.2. Theoretical Frameworks	17
2.2.1. Joseph Nye's "soft power" theory.....	17
2.2.1.1. The Academic Debate over the Concept of Soft Power Theory	19
2.2.3. Public diplomacy theory	22
2.2.3.1. Critiques and Debates on Public Diplomacy Theory	23
2.3. Global perspectives on tourism and its role in diplomacy.....	26
2.4 Tourism in Africa: Emperical Framework.....	27
2.4.2 The Rwanda Kigali Experience.....	28
2.4.2.1. Background of Rwanda's Tourism	28
2.4.2.2. Rwanda: Kigali's tourism as a tool of diplomacy	28
2.4.3 The Kenya, Nairobi Experience	30
2.4.3.1. Background of Kenya's Tourism	30
2.4.3.2. Diplomatic impact of tourism in Nairobi, Kenya:	31
Chapter Three:	33
Tourism and its role for Ethiopia's Diplomacy: a historical perspective	33
3.1. Historical development of tourism in Ethiopia	33
3.1.1. The Imperial Era (1930-1974).....	34
3.1.2. The Derg Period (1974-1991)	37
3.1.3. EPRDF (1991-2018)	40
Chapter Four	44
Tourism as a Tool for Public Diplomacy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia since 2018.....	44
4.1. Introduction.....	44

4.2. Institutional Framework and Roles in Tourism Diplomacy	44
4.7. MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) Tourism as a Strategic Tool: Infrastructure, Diplomatic Relevance, Stakeholders.....	58
4.8. Key Tourism initiatives and projects in Addis Ababa since 2018.....	60
4.8.1. Unity Park and National Identity	61
4.8.2. Friendship Park	62
4.8.3. Entoto Park.....	62
4.8.4. Tourism and diplomatic Impacts of Parks in Addis Ababa	63
4.8.5. The Adwa Victory Memorial: A Symbol of Heritage, Tourism, and Diplomacy	68
4.8.5.1. Establishment and Core Mandates	68
4.8.5.2. Heritage Display and Storytelling	69
4.8.5.3. Tourism Impact and Visitor Engagement.....	69
4.8.5.4. The Memorial’s role in fostering National Image and Pan-African Diplomacy	70
4.9. Corridor Developments in Addis Ababa and their Socio Economic, tourism and diplomatic impacts.....	71
4.9.1. Corridor Development Program in Addis Ababa.....	71
4.9.2. The Sheger River Corridor and Beautifying Sheger Initiative.....	73
4.9.3. Societal and Economic Impacts	73
4.9.4. Diplomatic and Soft Power Scope	75
Chapter Five:.....	79
Conclusions and Recommendations	79
5.1. Conclusions	79
5.2. Recommendations	81
5.2.1 Recommendations for the Ministry of Tourism	81
5.2.2 Recommendations for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	82
5.2.3 Recommendations for Addis Ababa City Administration.....	83
5.2.4 Recommendations for Scholars and Researchers.....	84

5.2.5 Recommendations for Private Sector Stakeholders.....	85
Appendixes	95
Appendix 1: Key informants	95
Appendix 2: Interview Guideline and Questions	96
Ababa University, Ethiopia.....	96
Key Informant Interview Questions.....	97
A. MICE Tourism Expert	97
C. Adwa Museum Representative	97
D. Addis Ababa Bureau of Tourism and Culture	98
E. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official	98

List of Acronyms

AICC	Addis International Convention Center
AU	African Union
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
ETO	Ethiopian Tourism Organization
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoT	Ministry of Tourism
MICE	Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OAU	Organization of African Unity
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
RDB	Rwanda Development Board
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
TIC	Tourist Information Center
UN	United Nations
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Program
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
USD	United States Dollar
WTTC	World Travel & Tourism Council
WTO	World Trade Organization

Abstract

Adopting a soft power and constructivist theoretical framework, this article examines how tourism has been employed as a tool of public diplomacy in Addis Ababa since 2018. To collect relevant data, the study employed a qualitative research methodology. Primary data was gathered through key informant interviews with officials from the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Local communities and the Addis Ababa City Administration. In addition, relevant policy documents and academic literature were analyzed as secondary sources. The analysis supports the theoretical assumption that tourism, when strategically developed and framed, can serve as an effective mechanism for state image-building and foreign engagement. The study finds that flagship projects and initiatives such as Unity Park, Friendship Park, Entoto Park, the Adwa Victory Memorial and MICE Tourism by the Government are actively curated to communicate Ethiopia's historical narrative, development agenda, and regional solidarity. Nonetheless, the findings also suggest that political instability, institutional fragmentation, and the absence of a unified tourist policy hinder the efficacy of tourism diplomacy. Furthermore, the analysis reveals a disparity between the symbolic representation of national advancement and the fundamental governance issues that hinder sustained influence. Consequently, although tourism possesses significant potential as a soft power tool, its efficacy is contingent upon political stability, strategy alignment, and inclusive execution

Keywords: Tourism Diplomacy, Soft Power, Public Diplomacy, Nation Branding, Foreign Policy

Chapter One

1.1. Background of the study

The tourism industry is a major economic, environmental, and sociocultural force, and according to Richter (1982), tourism is “a highly political phenomenon,” which implies it is becoming an inclusive terrain of the public policy domain, especially in third-world countries. Public diplomacy has a long history as a means of promoting a country's soft power and was essential in winning the Cold War (Nye, J. S. 2008). Tourism plays a crucial role in connecting with the public and states, contributing to the development of national identity (L'Etang, 2006). Country culture, heritage, tradition, green politics and investment, sports, language, national and international achievement, hospitality, emotion, national pride, and nationalism are part of soft power diplomacy.

In his interview with ENA in October 2022, Ambassador Dina said, Ethiopia is following soft power diplomacy extensively to strengthen its positive relations with other countries through public diplomacy.” According to Ambassador Dina, “Ethiopia's soft power needs to be demonstrated. Ethiopia’s soft power refers to Ethiopia's image, such as Ethiopia's long history of countries through time, the kindness of Ethiopian people, hospitality, Ethiopian costumes, Ethiopian food, beautiful Ethiopian cultures, and beautiful arts. All these need to be sold all over the world. Through the history of Ethiopia's foreign relations and diplomacy, the country has been exercising both soft and hard power to secure its national interest. Lately, Ethiopia has shown great interest and progress in exercising soft power through public diplomacy to realize development, democracy, and peace. Talo.Z (2014). According to Tourism Update (2024), Addis Ababa, the diplomatic hub of Africa, is poised to strengthen its conference tourism sector, aided by recent developments in infrastructure and cultural sites. Home to the African Union and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the Ethiopian capital is an established center for international gatherings now further enhanced by government-backed tourism projects. The initiatives of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed—such as Sheger Park, Unity Park, and the new Addis Ababa Science Museum—position Ethiopia as a premier global destination. “We are now in a position to reap the benefits of the efforts and projects we have previously undertaken,” Ahmed

told the Ethiopian parliament, underscoring the government's commitment to developing tourism. Addis Ababa is set to attract even more global gatherings through its improved conference venues and unique combination of scenic landscapes and historical landmarks. By nurturing this sector, Ethiopia strengthens its economy and solidifies its role as a cultural and diplomatic crossroads.

Despite significant investment in tourism initiatives, Ethiopia confronts considerable challenges, according to industry players. As international tourism experiences a resurgence in the aftermath of the pandemic, ongoing regional conflicts pose a risk to Ethiopia's emergence as a leading travel destination. An authority in the field revealed to Addis Standard, "The potential is undeniable, but instability acts as a handbrake on progress." Alemu, B. (2023) Research indicates that the hospitality industry was formerly a pivotal element in Ethiopia's economic advancement, contributing significantly to the nation's economic growth. Generally, these tourism initiatives are linked to their economic impact. As a student of international relations and diplomacy, and as many pieces of empirical evidence show, the Ethiopian government can also utilize tourism as a tool for public diplomacy to enhance its foreign relations and uphold its global reputation. This study has primarily focused on the role of tourism as a tool for public diplomacy by centering on Addis Ababa since 2018.

1.2. Statement of the problem

Tourism has been extensively analyzed for its economic contributions, particularly in emerging nations where it bolsters national income, employment, and infrastructural advancement. Researchers such as Tadesse (2011), UNWTO (2020), and Tourism Economics (2021) emphasize the importance of tourism in fostering economic development and generating foreign money.¹ According to UNWTO (2020), international visitor arrivals increased by 4% globally in 2019, underscoring tourism's status as one of the fastest-growing sectors worldwide. In Ethiopia, figures from Tourism Economics (2021) indicate that domestic and foreign tourist expenditures directly contributed US\$ 2.4 billion to GDP in 2019, with a total economic effect of US\$ 6.1 billion. This facilitated almost two million employment opportunities and warranted

¹ Several studies highlight the economic impact of tourism in Ethiopia and globally (Tourism Economics, 2021; UNWTO, 2020; World Bank, 2018; Tadesse, 2011; Belachew, 2015; Gebremariam, 2020; MoCT, 2018–2021; Kefale & Mohammed, 2012; AfDB, 2020), emphasizing its contributions to GDP, employment, and infrastructure.

significant expenditures in infrastructure such as airports, hotels, and roadways. The Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism continually emphasizes tourism as an economic priority, as seen in these figures. Despite its economic potential, there is less study on the role of tourism in Ethiopia as a mechanism for public diplomacy.

Ethiopia's foreign policy documents acknowledge tourism as a component of its economic diplomacy, stating that "Ethiopian diplomacy prioritizes the promotion of tourism opportunities." The mechanisms and effectiveness of this diplomatic duty remain largely misunderstood and primarily unrecorded. Tadesse (2011) argues that tourism can serve as a soft-power mechanism to promote international goodaims to and attract external resources; however, his perspective remains largely theoretical and requires empirical support. Kefale and Mohammed (2012) acknowledge the diaspora's potential to enhance Ethiopia's international tourist prospects, but they highlight the lack of a unified government strategy to align these initiatives with diplomatic objectives.

Moreover, other studies, such as those by Belachew (2015), Mulugeta (2018), and Gebremariam (2020), continuously highlight significant issues in Ethiopia's tourist sector. These encompass inadequate interagency cooperation, insufficient competent people, limited promotional outreach, and a deficiency of tourism amenities. These challenges not only impede the sector's economic performance but also restrict its capacity to enhance Ethiopia's image and soft power internationally. A recent essay from Diplomacy.edu (2024) highlights this disparity by comparing Ethiopia's inadequate performance with nations such as Kenya, Egypt, and South Africa, where tourism is strategically employed to convey national identity, draw international interest, and strengthen diplomatic relations.

The issue is hence dual in nature. Tourism in Ethiopia has not been adequately leveraged as a strategic public diplomacy instrument, particularly in relation to its economic potential and the practices observed in other African countries. This issue is evident in policy deficiencies, disjointed institutional collaboration, and an absence of coherent diplomatic communication via tourist channels. The academic literature provides scant empirical evidence of the contribution of tourism in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital and diplomatic center, to public diplomacy initiatives.

ⁱMost current research emphasizes economic impact while neglecting a thorough examination of the political, cultural, and image-enhancing aspects of tourism. This thesis fills the gap by analyzing tourist activities in Addis Ababa from a public diplomacy perspective. It examines bilateral tourism agreements, prominent urban initiatives (including Unity Park, the Sheger River Corridor, and Friendship Park), and the city's expanding MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) sector.

The study utilized a qualitative case study methodology, incorporating stakeholder interviews, policy analysis, and insights from cities such as Nairobi and Kigali. This research presents new empirical evidence regarding the incorporation of tourism into foreign policy frameworks. This study presents a new perspective on the alignment of Addis Ababa's tourism sector with Ethiopia's diplomatic goals, contributing to the transformation of the country's international image, strengthening bilateral relations, and effectively projecting soft power.

1.3. Core argument of the research

Tourism initiatives in Addis Ababa serve as pivotal tools for enhancing Ethiopia's public diplomacy by strategically leveraging infrastructure development, cultural heritage promotion, and international events. These efforts not only foster economic growth but also position Addis Ababa as a global hub for diplomatic engagement and cultural exchange. Projects such as friendship park, Adwa victory memorial Unity Park and corridor developments symbolize Ethiopia's commitment to showcasing its rich history and modernization efforts, which in turn enhance its soft power on the international stage.

1.4. General and specific objectives

1.4.1. General objective

The general objective of this research is to examine tourism as a tool for public diplomacy in Addis Ababa since 2018.

1.4.2 Specific objective

The specific objectives of the study are:

- ✓ To examine the Institutional and Strategic Role of key actors for the development of tourism and its impact for public diplomacy.
- ✓ To explore tourism initiatives currently going on in Addis Ababa by identifying and analyzing the current tourism-related projects and initiatives and their connection with Ethiopia's broader diplomatic goals.
- ✓ To assess tourism's role in public diplomacy goals by investigating how tourism initiative projects continue to upgrade Ethiopia's diplomatic standing and relationships with foreign nations.
- ✓ To evaluate the impact of tourism diplomacy on Ethiopian public diplomacy as a soft power tool by promoting Ethiopian national interest and its influence on global standing.
- ✓ Thoroughly analyzing the difficulties in leveraging tourism for public diplomacy by identifying challenges and related limitations.

1.5. Research questions

1.5.1. General questions

To direct the investigations and fulfill the objective of the research, the following questions have been formulated.

1.5.2. Specific questions

- ✓ What are the Institutional and Strategic Role of key actors for the development of tourism and its impact for public diplomacy?
- ✓ What are the main tourism-related initiatives and projects in Addis Ababa, and how do they integrate with broader public diplomacy?
- ✓ How do tourism initiatives influence promoting Ethiopia's international image and starting diplomatic relations with other states?
- ✓ What are the existing challenges in aligning tourism with Ethiopian foreign policies, and how can these issues be resolved?
- ✓ How can infrastructure development Be leveraged in addition to improving Ethiopia's diplomatic presence on the global stage.

- ✓ What role do international events like sports, cultural exchanges, and summits play in Ethiopia's diplomatic efforts?

1.6. Methodology and method of data collection

1.6.1. Methodology

This research thesis has employed a qualitative research methodology. Tenny et al. (2022) emphasize that qualitative research “gathers participants’ experiences, perceptions, and behavior” and aims to answer the “how's and whys” of social phenomena. The qualitative approach focused on the subjective evaluation of attitudes, opinions, and behaviors (Kothari, 2004). One key strength is that qualitative designs explain “patterns and processes of human behavior” that quantitative methods may miss. In practice, this means letting participants describe in their own words how, why, and what they are thinking and feeling in context Tenny et al. (2022) . By capturing rich, contextual detail (rather than only averages or aggregates), qualitative research provides an “unrivalled capacity” to show how things work in particular social settings (e.g. how tourism and public diplomacy are experienced in Addis Ababa.

1.6.2. Sources of Data

For this study, the researcher has used both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources of data are key informant interviews and secondary sources are books, journal articles, newspapers, magazines, letters, and websites.

1.6.3. Sampling Technique

Based on the research problem, the researcher has used purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling, according to Palinkas et al. (2015, p. 534) explain, “Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest” key informants were selected based on their involvement in tourism and diplomatic activities in Addis Ababa since 2018. These informants included local communities, officials from the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Addis Ababa City Administration, as well as tourism professionals and experts with institutional knowledge of the projects. The selection was guided by the relevance of the participants to the subject matter and

their ability to provide reliable and insightful information about the link between tourism initiatives and Ethiopia's foreign policy strategies.

1.6.3.1. Key Informant Interview

Key informant interviews are individuals who have specialized knowledge or "insider" experience about the topic. Pahwa et al. (2023) note that the term "informant" emphasizes the participant's embedded knowledge or insider experience of the issue. A semi-structured interview format was used, allowing the researcher to follow a flexible interview guide while also probing deeper into certain themes depending on the responses given. A checklist was designed around core topics such as the diplomatic intentions behind tourism development, stakeholder engagement, the symbolic value of parks and national projects, and the influence of these initiatives on Ethiopia's international standing. The interview responses were recorded, transcribed, and prepared for analysis.

1.7. Data Analysis

This study employed a qualitative research design, which is appropriate for exploring how participants understand and experience social phenomena in context. As Tenny et al. (2022, p. 1) state, qualitative research is concerned with capturing "participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavior," and aims to answer the "how's and why's" of complex processes such as tourism and public diplomacy.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79) describe thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data." The process involved reviewing all transcripts, generating initial codes, and organizing these into thematic categories. Key themes such as "national image," "soft power," "public diplomacy strategy," and "tourism infrastructure" were developed in relation to the research objectives.

This study also employed a single-case research design, using Addis Ababa as the primary unit of analysis. However, this refers to the scope of the research, not the analysis method. Yin (2014, p. 51) states that a single-case design is appropriate when the case is "critical, unique, or revelatory." Stake (1995) supports the use of such designs in studies aiming to explore complex

social dynamics in depth. Therefore, while the case focuses on Addis Ababa, the actual analysis was conducted through thematic coding.

1.8. Significance of the research

The significance of this research lies in its ability to explore the role of tourism as a diplomatic tool, particularly within the context of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia since 2018. By focusing on how tourism can enhance Ethiopia's soft power and diplomatic standing, this study contributes to understanding how non-traditional diplomacy mechanisms—like cultural exchange and tourism—are utilized by nations to project influence on the global stage. As Ethiopia increasingly positions itself as a key player in African and global diplomatic conversations, its use of tourism as a public diplomacy tool helps bridge cultural divides and promote its national identity abroad (UNWTO, 2020).

This research also offers insights into the broader implications of tourism for developing countries. It examines how tourism can drive sustainable economic development while simultaneously strengthening diplomatic relations through cultural exchanges, international events, and tourism-driven infrastructure development. This dual function of tourism as both an economic and diplomatic asset is underexplored in the context of Ethiopia, making this study a timely contribution to the academic understanding of public diplomacy (UNWTO, 2021). By employing the case studies and critically reviewing the tourism initiatives of cities like Nairobi and Kigali, the study broadens the scope of inquiry into how tourism is employed across different cultural and political contexts within Africa. Thus, this research fills a gap in existing literature and provides practical recommendations for policymakers looking to leverage tourism for public diplomacy. This study also adds to the increasing research on how culture, tourism, and international relations connect, particularly in Africa, where tourism can help countries work together better and gain more influence worldwide (UNWTO, 2020; Moyo, 2019).

1.9. Scope of the research

This study focused on examining the role of tourism as a tool for public diplomacy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia since 2018. The primary emphasis was on key tourism initiatives such as Unity

Park, Entoto Park, and Friendship Park, along with recent developments like the Adwa victory memorial and corridor developments.

These projects are analyzed for their contribution to shaping Ethiopia's international image and fostering diplomatic relations through cultural exchange and infrastructural development.

Geographically, the scope was limited to Addis Ababa, which serves as Ethiopia's diplomatic and cultural hub. The city's status as the headquarters of the African Union and a host for numerous international conferences makes it an ideal case study for examining tourism-driven public diplomacy. The study also included a case study analysis with Kigali (Rwanda) and Nairobi (Kenya) to contextualize Addis Ababa's initiatives within a broader regional framework. This case study highlights best practices and lessons that can strengthen Ethiopia's approach to leveraging tourism for diplomatic purposes. The study was qualitative in nature, focusing on the social, cultural, and diplomatic impacts rather than economic metrics. By examining narratives, policy documents, and stakeholder perspectives, the research tried to provide a holistic understanding of how tourism initiatives contribute to Ethiopia's public diplomacy goals.

1.10. Limitations of the Research

While this research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of tourism as a tool for public diplomacy in Addis Ababa, several limitations had been acknowledged. Among these are data availability, scope of case studies, case study analysis constraints, and qualitative focus, which are expected limitations. As the study heavily relies on secondary sources, access to up-to-date and detailed reports of official data on tourism initiatives could be a challenge. The tourism experience in Kigali and Nairobi is limited by differences in their political, social, and economic contexts, which could affect the applicability of applying the experience to Addis Ababa, which could pose a challenge.

As a qualitative approach, the study relies on interviews, document analysis, and thematic interpretation which lacks the statistical rigor of quantitative studies which the findings could be influenced by subjective interpretations and the availability of qualitative data . However, this limitation was mitigated by triangulating interview data with official documents, applying systematic thematic analysis, and ensuring transparency in the coding and interpretation

process .Additionally, purposive sampling ensured that participants had direct and relevant expertise. As a result, while the findings are not intended to be broadly representative, they offer contextually grounded insights that can inform similar settings where tourism is used as a diplomatic tool.

1.11. Operational Definitions of Key Terms

Public diplomacy: Strategic communication initiatives by government and affiliated groups aim to influence international audiences and promote mutual understanding using non-coercive methods. This article examines Ethiopia's implementation of tourism projects and narratives in Addis Ababa to attract international audiences and further foreign policy objectives.

Tourism Diplomacy: The intentional utilization of tourism as a diplomatic tool to fortify bilateral and international relations, elevate Ethiopia's standing, and provide avenues for soft power interaction. This includes the organization of global events, the promotion of historical landmarks, and the enhancement of cultural narratives.

Soft Power: Ethiopia's ability to shape international perceptions through its allure, cultural heritage, values, historical significance, and tourism assets. This article examines soft power via the diplomatic and cultural center of Addis Ababa.

National Image: The political stability, cultural variety, burgeoning tourism, and diplomatic engagements of Ethiopia influence its perception in the global community. This research defines national image as the representation of Ethiopia through the tourism diplomacy of Addis Ababa.

MICE Tourism: This is a distinct form of tourism in Addis Ababa aimed at attracting major events, therefore enhancing the economy and elevating Ethiopia's diplomatic stature globally.

Urban Diplomacy: Addis Ababa, as the capital, advances national foreign policy through urban beautification, infrastructural development, and the staging of diplomatic and cultural events that support this strategy.

Institutional Framework: Charged with executing tourism and public diplomacy projects, the framework and connections among governmental and semi-governmental bodies—including the

Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Addis Ababa City Administration, and Ethiopian Heritage Authority—were established.

Tourism Infrastructure: Infrastructure and services established in Addis Ababa to enhance tourist engagement include roads, hotels, cultural attractions, parks, and conference facilities. This research identifies them as instruments for diplomatic communication and economic advancement.

Strategic Initiatives: Noteworthy projects in urban development and tourism encompass the Adwa Victory Memorial, the Sheger River Project, and Unity Park. These efforts are deemed nationally significant, aimed at enhancing Ethiopia's soft power and reinforcing its historical narratives.

Cultural Diplomacy: Ethiopia engages with the global community and promotes mutual understanding through its cultural assets, including heritage, music, festivities, and historical narratives. This is a subtype of public diplomacy grounded in the nation's soft power resources.

National Branding: The Ethiopian government has initiated efforts to establish and promote a coherent, attractive, and distinctive identity internationally. This involves the construction of renowned landmarks, the promotion of vacation destinations, and engagement in global forums.

1.12. Organization of the Research

This study was organized into six chapters, each addressing different aspects of the research to provide a cohesive and comprehensive analysis of tourism as a tool for public diplomacy in Addis. The first chapter provides an overview of the research, including the background and context of tourism diplomacy in Addis Ababa. It introduces the research problem, core argument, objectives, significance, and scope of the study. The chapter also outlines the research questions and provides a brief explanation of the methodology employed. The second chapter deals with a theoretical/conceptual framework related to tourism and public diplomacy. It explores key concepts such as soft power, cultural diplomacy, and infrastructure-driven tourism initiatives. Insights from Kigali and Nairobi are included to highlight best practices and contextualize Addis Ababa's efforts within the broader regional framework. The chapter concludes by identifying gaps in the literature that this study aims to address.

The third chapter discusses the historical background overview of Ethiopia's tourism from the imperial regime to the current government, focusing on how tourism has been utilized as a tool for diplomacy and how it has aligned with the country's foreign policy objectives across different political eras. The chapter examines tourism and diplomatic efforts under the imperial regime, the Derg regime, the EPDRF, and the post-2018 administration. In chapter four, the thesis presents the analysis, regarding key tourism initiatives in Addis Ababa. The impact of these initiatives on Ethiopia's public diplomacy have been analyzed, drawing on empirical data and stakeholder perspectives. Case study analyses from Kigali and Nairobi are integrated to provide a broader understanding of tourism diplomacy in the African context.

The final chapter summarizes the key findings and draws conclusions based on the research objectives. It offered practical recommendations to each key stakeholder for enhancing tourism-driven public diplomacy in Addis Ababa. The chapter also discusses the implications of the study for policymakers and suggests areas for future research.

Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

The literature review chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is conceptual frameworks emphasizing and elucidating fundamental ideas like soft power, public diplomacy, tourism, and the interaction between tourism as a tool for public diplomacy and the soft power diplomacy environment. Emphasizing the Rwanda and Kenya experience, the second part examines the body of current research on tourism as a diplomatic tool in a worldwide and African setting. This topic then addresses issues and prospects in tourism diplomacy as well as reviews material produced on Ethiopia's tourism-related projects and their function as a tool for public diplomacy. The third section is a theoretical framework that focuses on three well-known IR theories—the soft power theory of Joseph Nye, the constructivist theory of Alexander Wendt, and public diplomacy theories which have been utilized to examine and grasp the function of tourism as a tool for public diplomacy.

2.1. Conceptual Issues

2.1.1. Diplomacy

According to Ernest Mason Satow, a German diplomat born in England, diplomacy is defined as the peaceful conduct of relations between states. In this, diplomatic functions should be complete (Barratt 1985). Another definition by Hedley Bull, professor of international relations, explains diplomacy as "the conduct of relations between states and other entities involved in world politics through official policies and peaceful means" (Bull 1932). Another important definition of diplomacy is by a prominent figure in US politics, Henry Kissinger. He explained diplomacy as a new world order, and modern diplomacy is the balance of power between the forces of war and peace.

Rooted in our natural urge to connect, explore, and learn about other cultures, diplomacy and tourism are more linked than we could possibly realize. Diplomacy historically started as a means of nationwide conflict resolution with early events like peace treaties in Mesopotamia and messengers in ancient Greece and Rome (Kıçmari, 2024). From politics and official talks, it

evolved into something more intimate—cultural interaction, relationship-building, and what we now know as public diplomacy. This shift stresses promoting understanding by means of shared experiences, cultures, and values (Melissen, 2005). As a result of globalization, diplomacy has been distinguished in many fields according to certain characteristics. Among the several types of diplomacy, the most common ones are mediation diplomacy, multilateral dual diplomacy, public diplomacy, civil diplomacy, summit diplomacy, nuclear diplomacy, environmental diplomacy, humanitarian diplomacy, open diplomacy, coercive diplomacy, aggressive diplomacy, soft diplomacy, soft power diplomacy, and cross diplomacy (Abdurahmanlı, 2021).

Looking forward, sustainable travel offers a way to balance moral obligation with diplomacy. Emphasizing Indigenous leadership and environmental preservation, Costa Rica's ecotourism strategy is a shining example of how travel may enhance surrounding regions and progress sustainability (Honey, 2008). Technology also plays a role; virtual reality experiences—like UNESCO's digital tours of Egypt's pyramids—are making cultural legacy more available to people who might not have the chance to travel personally (UNESCO, 2022). Both diplomacy and tourism fundamentally involve human interaction. They can effectively remove impediments, foster understanding, and develop relationships transcending politics. True influence, as Joseph Nye (2004) reminds us, is about inspiring people rather than about control. Occasionally, all it takes is a journey that broadens perspectives and redefines our understanding of our shared planet.

2.1.2. Soft Power Diplomacy and the Role of Tourism

In the late 1980s, the term soft power was crafted and defined by Joseph Nye as the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment. A country's soft power rests on its resources of culture, values, and policies. described as “proficiency.” According to Abdurahmanlı, E. (2021), they asserted that if countries want to remain a superpower and prestigious state in the international arena, they should have the ability to have a cultural and ideological influence on the people residing in the lands they take with their democratic methods once they win the war. They should also conquer the minds and hearts of these people. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies.” (2004: x). Soft power is developed and maintained over time through such mediums as

public diplomacy, the export of culture, and people-to-people exchanges (Melissen, 2005; Watanabe and McConnell, 2008).

Among soft power resources are policies, values, political ideas, and cultural products. Countries disseminate their values—democracy, neoliberalism, the rule of law, and human rights—that they live by. (Yang, 2019; Özkan & Boylu, 2021).

Ooi (2015) offers several approaches via which soft power interacts with tourism: Traveling to a place helps visitors to better appreciate its uniqueness, which results in familiarity and likeability. When going home, guests therefore start to be ambassadors of the places. Presenting a pleasing picture of the place to the globe falls to tourism officials. The ideal soft power instrument to stand out in the scene of destination branding is Mega events such as the Olympic Games and sports championships, World Expos, and international conferences, among others, are also critical in creating geopolitical influence since they draw large numbers of visitors who highlight the location worldwide. Since tourism is a social activity, person-to-person interaction occurs at several levels when individuals travel. Outbound visitors also represent ambassadors of their countries in their contacts with residents. At last, tourism is considered a driver of world peace as well as a component of friendship and understanding among the people of the planet (World Tourism Organization, 2020).

2.1.3 Public Diplomacy

In the mid-1960s, the term public diplomacy was allegedly coined by a former American diplomat and Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Edmund Gullion, and in the following decades, its practice became most closely associated with the United States (Melissen, J. 2005). Public diplomacy is defined by its flexibility and adaptability since one of its main features is to echo and adapt to the changes occurring in the international system (Gilboa, 2008, in Alastrué Vidal, 2022). Only a small number of government operatives conducted traditional diplomacy in secret. This approach is the established paradigm all through history; some countries still apply it. On the other hand, public diplomacy provides opportunities for other public sector officials, as well as for businesses and civil societies. Even if communications flow both ways—from society to the government—more people participating increases their number and variety.

Though not often regarded as a PD tool, tourism sometimes promotes its goals. Programs for educational and cultural travel, such as Japan's JET Program—which places foreign graduates in Japanese universities—help to promote cross-cultural awareness. Many of the participants find themselves acting as unofficial advocates, posting their tales online and refuting ideas of Japan as an isolated country (McConnell 2000). Analogous diplomatic bridges are UNESCO World Heritage sites, which, via the joint Cambodian-Thai reconstruction of Preah Vihear Temple (Winter, 2007), have turned contested historical monuments into symbols of worldwide cooperation.

2.1.4. Tourism Diplomacy

Originally developed in China, while this approach is being extended, the concept of tourism diplomacy has only been sporadically examined in the pertinent research (Afzali et al., 2015). Given the global flow of tourists, tourism diplomacy is a crucial instrument for the worldwide implementation of state policy.

Casado Claro et al. (2023) assert that tourism serves as a soft power tool, enhancing national reputation and image by appealing to the hearts and minds of people. Soft power can help a nation to present a more competent image since it is expressed through its culture, morals, political ideas, and foreign policy. This helps attract tourists to certain sites. Nations are turning to soft power and popular diplomacy to forward their national interests on the global scene. Public diplomacy is described in terms of foreign policy and international relations; its name suggests that it is connected to conventional diplomacy. Conversely, country or nation branding shows an economic character and seeks to draw investment and tourism as well as to enable exports of national goods by enhancing the global impression of the nation.

Tourism has gained momentum. Recently, a new narrative and perception about tourism and diplomacy have shifted. 'Diplomacy' no longer refers only to the political relations between sovereign states but may now include the relationships of private individuals, for example, working in the tourism trade. 'Tourism' has acquired subdivisions, including economic, cultural, heritage, and gastronomic, among others (Baranowski, S., 2019). The term tourism diplomacy, according to Sandhu, H. S. (2024), refers to the strategic use of tourism to foster diplomatic relationships and achieve national interest goals. It involves promoting a country's tourism sector

to build positive international perceptions, enhance cultural exchange, and drive economic growth. For smaller, developing nations, tourism diplomacy can serve as a crucial instrument for economic development and international recognition. Tourism, as an instrument of soft power, plays a significant role in advocating a nation's cultural heritage, fostering people-to-people connections, and promoting mutual understanding (Melissen, 2005).

Noack (2019) has pointed out some of the empirical evidence of states using tourism to shape their visitors' conduct and perceptions. Soviet agencies in the 1930s have tried to recruit tourists into fellow travelers; the Mexican government attempted to promote the nation through tourism as a modern and prosperous state, and the other example is Israel's commitment to using soft power by embedding tourism through state-sponsored projects like 'bright tours. In its variety of manifestations, political action related to tourism can produce socio-political consequences by means of several state and political systems. The search for sustainable development, coordinated world action, diplomatic correspondence among political players, and policies for more world Security issues are among the several spheres of international political debate that can involve visitors as non-state political donors (Antoniou, K. 2023). All this evidence shows states attempts to use tourism as a tool for diplomacy and achieving their foreign policy goals.

2.2. Theoretical Frameworks

2.2.1. Joseph Nye's "soft power" theory

Various authors (Hunter 2009; Vyas 2010; Watanabe and McConnell 2008; Laskai 2013) have noted that, looking at history, several activities predate the coining of this word. Joseph Nye Jr. first used the term soft power in his book *Bound to Lead...* (1990). Though the idea of soft power is new, Nye Jr. himself, in the foreword of the book *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United*, edited by Yasushi Watanabe and David L. McConnell, claims that "the behavior it denotes is as old as human history" (Nye Jr. 2008).

According to Lin, L. & Hongtao, L. (2017), Joseph Nye's "soft power" idea was generated in the 20th century and the 90s in reaction to whether the United States was experiencing declining power. The result of Joseph Nye's "soft power" theory is both the product of conventional

international relationship theory's development and the outcome of US international policy needs.

Joseph Nye's "soft power" theory complements and extends conventional hard power doctrine, returns to classical realism, and offers a critique of the fact that neorealism mostly depends on hard power. "Soft power is a kind of ability that can realize a goal through attraction instead of violence or temptation," Joseph Nye suggests. The culture of a nation, political values, and foreign policies define its attractiveness. When others see the policy as reasonable, it strengthens the soft power. Thus, the soft power theory is a complement and enhancement of international power theory as well as a necessary component of a nation's whole strength amid globalization. According to Nye Jr. (2004), a nation's soft power mostly focuses on three resources: its political ideals (when they live up to others at home and abroad), its culture (in places where others find it appealing), and its foreign policies (when they are viewed as legitimate and with moral authority).

As Joseph Nye (2004) points out, quietly rising as one of the most human-centered tools of soft power is tourism, a nation's capacity to form world impressions by seduction rather than coercion. After learning about Korean cuisine through a Netflix video, Argentinean visitors eat bibimbap in Seoul; a family from Germany hikes Iceland's glaciers after studying its environmental policies; they are not just guests; they start to engage in a subtle but significantly important kind of diplomacy. Emotional ties are the foundation of soft power; travel provides a concrete means for countries to present their values, culture, and way of life. For instance, South Korea's "Hallyu Wave"—a worldwide love of K-pop, dramas, and skincare—has turned casual viewers into cultural ambassadors.

Fundamentally, tourism-led soft power is about creating real connections rather than perfect images. It's the laughing at a dinner in a Tokyo izakaya, the wonder seen under Iceland's Northern Lights, or the humility of learning a Māori prayer in New Zealand. These events remind us that diplomacy occurs when we interact freely, inquiring about the complexity of the world, not just in boardrooms. Looking back, "The best countries don't sell themselves," digital nomad Raj notes. They let you walk in their spirit. Travel provides a basic truth in a divided society: knowledge starts with a journey.

In conclusion, soft power theory provided a basic framework for this study, enabling an understanding of the strategic use of tourism as a tool for public diplomacy in Addis Ababa. An examination of significant initiatives, such as Unity Park, the Sheger River Project, and the Adwa Victory Memorial, elucidates Ethiopia's approach to enhance its national image, promote cultural diplomacy, and elevate its international prominence. In contrast to conventional diplomacy based on military or economic coercion, soft power theory elucidates the significance of attraction, symbolic representation, and narrative construction in Ethiopia's diplomatic initiatives. This theoretical approach enriched the analysis and highlighted the multifaceted role of tourism in attaining foreign policy objectives in the 21st century.

2.2.1.1. The Academic Debate over the Concept of Soft Power Theory

Different from Huntington's "clash of civilizations" theory or Fukuyama's "end of history" idea, the idea of "soft power" was not as controversial and was not disputed by scholars, as Watanabe and McConnell stated as much at the beginning of their work (Watanabe, McConnell 2008: p. xvii). This doesn't mean other writers agreed with Nye Jr.'s idea or that there was no scholarly discussion on it. Conversely, as the previous lines show, the idea of soft power was not only quite relevant in the dynamics of world politics but also extensively discussed by academics and professionals. This section of the thesis aims to explore the current state of research on the concept of soft power, examining key contributions from various researchers through a lens of soft power elements.

The foremost critique that they migrate to Joseph Nye Jr. is that "Nye defines the term hard power as a synonym for command power behavior and hard power resources, and the term soft power as a synonym for co-optive power behavior and soft power resources." By doing this, the author ignores the current problem and generates a more profound conceptual one concurrently (Zahran, Ramos 2010: p. 18).

The crucial feature in Nye's conceptualization of soft power is his ambiguous definition of the notion of attraction. T. Hall developed the concept of attraction according to several kinds of soft powers that existed. More precisely, as Nye Jr. emphasizes, the impact a state has on other players comes from various forms of influence rather than from the appeal of its political values, culture, or foreign policy. Hall attempts to illustrate alternative sources of influence, including

existing institutions and representation. More precisely, Hall underlines that institutions can be a source of influence (that is, if a state belongs to particular international institutions and if it has a pertinent function there).

While Soft Power Theory offers a basic framework for understanding the role of tourism in enhancing a positive image and promoting international goodaims to, its capacity to comprehensively address the intricate and context-dependent dynamics of Ethiopia's public diplomacy is constrained. The theory emphasizes attraction and outcomes, often neglecting the intricate processes of identity formation, meaning-making, and the impact of social structures. Therefore, this study integrates Constructivist Theory to address deficiencies, specifically in examining how tourism initiatives reflect and influence national narratives, embody political motives, and interact with broader conceptual dynamics. This integrated theoretical framework facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the influence of tourism on Ethiopia's image and its diplomatic engagements on the global stage.

2.2.2. Constructivist Theory

Nicholas Onuf (1989) initially developed constructivism in relation to IR. It attracted further scholarly interest in part from a book by Alexander Wendt ("Social Theory of International Politics," 1999) and several fundamentals of research. Wendt's position rests on the rejection of the neorealist perspective, according to which anarchy should surely lead to self-help. The interaction among states determines whether self-help is inevitable or not. These linked processes create interests and state identities. For neorealists, identities and interests abound; countries know who they are and what they want before they start interacting with other countries. For Wendt, the very contact with others "creates and instantiates one structure of interests and identities rather than another; structure has no existence or causal powers apart from process." States want to survive and be safe; constructivists and neorealists agree about that. To learn, Wendt says, we should observe identities and interests as they develop in state interactions.

The main assertion made by Wendt is that the culture in which states find themselves at any point depends on the discursive social practices that reproduce or transform each actor's view of themselves and others. Only if actors keep behaving in egoistic, militaristic ways aims to a

Hobbesian system be preserved. Such a society is not the natural outcome of anarchy and the material distribution of power as neorealists would have it. Thus, a realpolitik society could become a self-fulfilling prophecy, with only egoistic and violent activities maintaining egoistic and violent mindsets. Once actors exhibit distinct motions implying they are depicting the other in a less self-centered manner, a Hobbesian society has the potential to evolve into a Lockean and perhaps a Kantian form. Wendt cautions us never to overlook the fact that historical social activities rather than reified givens shape civilizations (Wendt, 1992).

Wendt's constructivism reminds us ultimately that world politics is a cooperative narrative rather than a set game. At its best, tourism is a chapter in that narrative whereby a Chinese student's homestay in Chile ignites a lifetime of inquiry about Latin America or a Ukrainian refugee finds comfort in Poland's hospitality. These events represent threads in a greater story of empathy and common humanity, not just holidays. Tourism helps states—and people—make anarchy into something far more hopeful: a world where collaboration feels less like diplomacy and more like plain sense, as Wendt would remark.

The Constructivist Theory provides a crucial framework for understanding the intellectual dimensions of public diplomacy and tourism. Constructivism posits that international relations are influenced by social constructs such as conventions, ideas, identities, and speech. This approach enables an analysis that goes beyond material power and image representation, focusing on the mechanisms through which meanings are produced and communicated through tourism activities in Addis Ababa.

2.2.2.1. Critics of Wendt's constructivism theory

Alexander Wendt and his critics, Stefano Guzzini and Anna Leander, compile some quite severe criticisms. Everyone agrees Wendt changed things by saying that international politics is based on common ideals, such as how nations view each other and themselves, not merely on tanks and treaties (Wendt, 1999, cited in Guzzini & Leander, 2006). The worst is that detractors such as Barry Buzan and Richard Little claim he did not shake sufficiently. Indeed, norms and identities are important, they contend, but Wendt's laser attention on them causes the complex realities of power imbalances and historical baggage to fade into the background (Buzan & Little, 2006). And it's not only about states serving as the major players, though that is certainly true. Buzan

and Little (2006) throw shade on Wendt for skimming over how non-state players—activists, businesses, and even hacking groups—shape the game, especially outside the West. Imagine medieval trade routes or contemporary cyber conflicts: They argue that Wendt's theory falls short in capturing how ideas (like "freedom" or "security") and tangible objects (like money, businesses, and ideology) feed each other in these environments.

Then there's Guzzini (2006), who hammers Wendt for being lost in philosophy. Wendt's theory floats in abstract terrain rather than delving into historical case studies, which makes it difficult to explain how huge systematic changes—like the emergence of global governance—actually occur. Wendt loses the English School's playbook, which combines power and norms while highlighting entities like NGOs or diasporas that are redefining politics today by following a neat, state-centered paradigm.

Constructivist Theory enhances this study through its emphasis on identity construction, norm transmission, and symbolic representation; however, it also presents significant limitations. The abstract and interpretive characteristics limit its effectiveness in elucidating the reception of narratives by international audiences and the practical attainment of diplomatic influence. This thesis integrates Constructivism with Soft Power Theory, establishing a complementary theoretical framework that balances ideational analysis with an emphasis on attraction, image, and strategic communication. This integrated approach offers a comprehensive understanding of the role of tourism as a mechanism of public diplomacy within Ethiopia's current foreign policy framework.

2.2.3. Public diplomacy theory

More and more academics and practitioners have lately studied public diplomacy utilizing PR theories, models, and approaches. Signitzer and Coombs (1992) even claimed that public diplomacy and PR are comparable and urged the conceptual convergence of the two as well as the use of PR theories in empirical studies. Fundamentally, public diplomacy is the art of promoting mutual understanding between nations via the quiet, daily contacts of people—students studying abroad, visitors gazing at old temples, or cooks sharing family recipes—not through political negotiations or commercial transactions. Unlike conventional diplomacy, which operates in the secluded atmosphere of government buildings, public diplomacy thrives in

the bustling streets of Barcelona, the serene tea rooms of Kyoto, and the bustling markets of Marrakech. Here, in these unscripted events of cross-cultural communication, tourism becomes a potent weapon for influencing world impressions. Scholar Joseph Nye, who first used the phrase soft power, contends that a nation's capacity to draw people by policies, values, and culture is more long-lasting than coercion (Nye, 2004). Travel enhances this appeal by turning abstract ideas into actual encounters. A Mexican family dancing at a traditional celebration in Oaxaca with German visitors or a Thai street seller teaching a Canadian tourist pad thai is engaging in a kind of diplomacy not possible for any diplomat.

While traditional public diplomacy focused on long-term outcomes, the digital era demanded a significant change in the time horizon. One could arrange three temporal dimensions: immediate, intermediate, and long in that order. Every one of them has various goals and means, different approaches to the media and public opinion, varied degrees of desired relationships or ties with the government, and matching public diplomacy instruments. At the immediate level, the goal is to react to growing events, usually to minimize harm or take advantage of a chance using news management strategies. Usually, this process takes a few days. Senior government officials typically oversee such prompt action. Advocacy, worldwide broadcasting, and cyber public diplomacy would be the most suitable public diplomacy tools for this level. Through controlled media, their radio and TV stations and Internet sites, officials may react quickly to an evolving event. Gilboa, E. (2008).

There is conflict in the connection between public diplomacy and Tourism; Over tourism, the excessive flood of guests taxing local infrastructure, has caused reactions in locations such as Venice and Barcelona. Likewise, Thailand's "Land of Smiles" campaign—which stresses immaculate beaches and elaborate temples—often hides urban poverty. "The resorts felt like paradise, but seeing kids sell bracelets at midnight in Bangkok complicated that image," Backpacker Tom notes (Winter, 2009). These illustrations highlight a vital lesson: the diplomatic potential of tourism depends on authenticity. When campaigns prioritize flashy stereotypes over nuanced reality, they run the risk of inspiring disappointment.

2.2.3.1. Critiques and Debates on Public Diplomacy Theory

Celebrated as a means of bridging civilizations and fostering understanding via discourse and cultural interaction is public diplomacy. It is not without its detractors, though, who raise ethical issues, doubts about its efficacy, and some inadvertent harmful results. These criticisms center on the difficulty of juggling a nation's need to provide compelling tales with the possibility of reducing cultures to marketable

Unlike military tactics or economic plans, their effects—such as changes in public opinion or long-term goodaims to are difficult to quantify and usually take years to manifest. For instance, the U.S. invested more than \$1.6 billion on public diplomacy in 2022, although Middle Eastern favorability ratings are still erratic (U.S. Department of State, 2022). Digital channels merely complicate matters. Praised for providing the official Twitter account a human touch, Sweden's @Sweden campaign let citizens take it over (Pamment, 2014). Critics counter that following social media "likes" sometimes puts viral events ahead of worthwhile material. Likewise, tales of migrant labor abuses contradict the UAE's slick Instagram advertising pushing luxury and tolerance. As 2019 digital strategist Ben Scott pointed out, "A viral dance video may boost tourism but does little to address systemic issues." Furthermore, Rwanda's post-genocide rebranding using gorilla tourism is dubious. "I admire the wildlife but wondered how much of Rwanda's political reality was being smoothed over," visitor Sarah from Kenya said (Chhabra, 2020).

Not with standing these difficulties, there are encouraging cases suggesting a better course of action. Scholars such as Cull (2008) advise public diplomacy techniques based on openness and reciprocity. One particularly notable example is the "Tiaki Promise" from New Zealand, which exhorts visitors to value Māori environment and culture. "When visitors join a powhiri [welcome ceremony]," Māori guide Tama said, "they're not just observing; they're agreeing to respect our values." Nonetheless, these kinds of projects are rare in an area where top-down messaging rules. Public diplomacy's future aims to rely on something basic but significant in a society more molded by false information and polarization: the capacity to listen as much as speak and the readiness to accept complexity rather than depend on shiny, uncomplicated narratives.

Recent tourism initiatives in Addis Ababa, particularly Unity Park and Friendship (Sheger) Park, highlight Ethiopia's cultural heritage and dedication to sustainable urban development,

illustrating the country's strategic use of soft power to improve its global position. Unity Park, opened in 2019 at the historically significant Menelik II Palace, integrates cultural artifacts with zoological exhibits to engage visitors (Office of the Prime Minister, 2023). Founded in 2020, Friendship Park emphasizes the significance of environmental conservation and fosters pan-African collaboration [Belay & Adu-Ampong, 2023; Ethiopian News Agency [ENA], 2023]. Nye's 2004 soft power theory posits that such events aim to showcase Ethiopia's values and culture to global audiences, thereby converting guests into unofficial ambassadors who foster positive perceptions in their home countries.

Nonetheless, these soft power attempts occur within a context of significant internal constraints that undermine their effectiveness. Safety concerns deter potential visitors; thus, the protracted conflicts particularly in regions such as Tigray and Amhara have led to significant displacement, infrastructure destruction, and a decline in tourism (Amanuela, 2023). The disruption of agricultural practices and inadequate humanitarian assistance, along with exacerbated drought conditions from climate change, has markedly increased food insecurity, rendering millions vulnerable to famine (Modern Diplomacy, 2024). The disparity between extravagant tourism initiatives and urgent humanitarian concerns prompts critical inquiries regarding governmental priorities and the genuineness of the national image.

The absence of transparency in funding initiatives for Unity Park has elicited criticism and uncertainty, potentially undermining the confidence of both local and global stakeholders (Addis Fortune, 2023). While these parks have created jobs and improved the visual appeal of urban areas, their accessibility is restricted due to entrance fees that could discourage individuals with lower incomes (Belay & Adu-Ampong, 2023). Unity Park and Friendship Park embody Ethiopia's cultural heritage and aspirations; nonetheless, ongoing internal conflict hampers their potential to enhance the nation's image via soft power. The contribution of these projects to national progress and global standing relies on a coordinated strategy that addresses these critical challenges (Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development [ISSCAD], n.d.).

In summary, this study draws primarily on Soft Power Theory and Constructivist Theory, with complementary insights from Public Diplomacy Theory, to analyze tourism in Addis Ababa as a mechanism of public diplomacy. Theory of Soft Power emphasizes the role of tourist activities

in enhancing appeal and shaping global perceptions, whereas Constructivist Theory facilitates comprehension of the social construction and symbolic communication of national identity, values, and narratives. Public Diplomacy Theory underpins this concept by delineating how nations interact with foreign populations using non-coercive methods. Collectively, these ideas provide a comprehensive insight into how Ethiopia use tourism as both a strategic diplomatic tool and a means of shaping and promoting its national identity.

2.3. Global perspectives on tourism and its role in diplomacy

Globally, Tourism activity has increased within the past ten years. The annual rise rate of international tourist arrivals has been favorable since 2009 (World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2020). With 1.5 billion annual visitors in 2019, UNWTO (2020) showed a 54 million rise. Though barely 3.8%, the annual rise in international tourist arrivals topped the world economic growth rate in 2019, as reported by the UNWTO in 2020. The travel industry is progressively becoming more valuable for many countries' economies. Moreover, for several countries, this industry is rapidly growing. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC 2019), this industry accounted for US\$8.8 trillion of the world GDP, or 10.4% of the global GDP, and 319 million jobs, or 10% of the world, in 2018. The data also indicates that the economic impacts of tourism have shown a worldwide trend across the globe. According to WTTC (2020), while it contributed 9% of GDP and 11% of employment in the UK, it showed a significant increase in Macau with 91.3% of GDP and 65.5% of employment; another example could be Australia's 10.8% of contribution to its GDP and 12.8% of employment.

The COVID-19 epidemic highlighted the flimsiness of tourism as a diplomatic tool. A 74% drop in international arrivals in 2020 (UNWTO, 2021) resulted from border closures and health issues. Still, countries like Greece and New Zealand used this time to stress unity and safety. While asking future visitors to "reconnect" with its landscapes, New Zealand's "Travel with Care" ad underlined its low illness rates (Craig, 2021). Such initiatives show how open and sympathetic tourist messaging may help to restore confidence across the world. Although travel-led diplomacy has many advantages, it is not without difficulty. Overtourism—too many visitors taxing local infrastructure—has caused resentment in towns like Venice and Barcelona. Many times, residents see visitors as disruptors rather than cultural allies, therefore undercutting

diplomatic objectives (Peeters et al., 2018). Critics also contend that tourist efforts could oversimplify national identities, therefore diminishing intricate cultures to marketable caricatures (Dinnie, 2015). Thailand's emphasis on "exotic" images, for instance, runs the danger of commodifying its customs and neglecting social disparities (Winter, 2009).

Moreover, the environmental impact of mass tourism runs counter to the sustainability stories that many countries advocate. For example, Iceland's environmentally friendly brand runs counter to the carbon emissions from its expanding aviation industry (Huijbens & Einarsson, 2018). It still faces significant challenges in balancing its obligations and benefits. It stands as a dynamic junction of international relations, economy, and culture. Empirical data from South Korea, Iceland, and post-pandemic projects show the ability to humanize countries, promote cross-cultural benefits, and address problems including climate change. Still, success depends on inclusive policies giving local communities and sustainability top priority. Future studies could look at how forms of regenerative tourism, virtual reality tours, and digital cross-cultural benefits diplomatic interaction. Tourism remains a potent if flawed means of bridging countries as the world gets more linked.

2.4 Tourism in Africa: Empirical Framework

For many African nations, tourism is a major industry with significant economic value. Africa got 4.7% of the global tourist arrivals in 2016. , its share amounted to a notable 8% increase from 2015 (against the worldwide 3.9% rise). At \$32.8 billion, Africa's 2016 international tourism receipts accounted for 2.7% of world travel totals (UNWTO, 2018). Based on United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) projections, 2030 global tourism arrivals in Africa are estimated to reach 134 million, representing 7.4% of the market (UNWTO, 2017). High production costs and strict trading policies, which render Africa's manufactured exports globally non-competitive, are causing the industry to lose ground to its predominantly agro-industrialized manufacturing sector.

In many respects, Africa's relationships with the rest of the world have benefited from culture. While trading in cultural goods and services carries more risk, access to and knowledge of different cultures present as many chances for cooperation as for conflict. It has also made it

easier to send direct diplomatic messages to more people, which affects soft power instead of hard power or force (Enaifoghe & Makhutla, 2020)..

African countries have currently been exploiting tourism as a public diplomacy in such places, including Kigali and Nairobi. Kigali focused on sustainable tourism and "green city branding," in accordance with the government's larger diplomatic goals of presenting Rwanda as a pioneer in environmental sustainability and post-genocide rehabilitation (International Growth Centre, 2021). This tourism strategy attracts international tourists, and Rwanda has achieved its diplomatic status in the global community by projecting an image of reconciliation and progressive growth. Such examples can also be seen in Kenya's tourism, especially Nairobi's strategy, which integrates cultural and ecological tourism, enabling Kenya to be a significant actor in regional diplomacy.

2.4.2 The Rwanda Kigali Experience

2.4.2.1. Background of Rwanda's Tourism

Valle & Yobesia (2009) assert that tourism aims to support social-economic development objectives and contribute to economic diversification. Given the competing clean natural charms of the sites and rich cultural and historical legacy, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa view travel as a reasonable export. This advantage is expected to support the expansion of tourism; for example, Rwanda's inbound tourist arrivals in the East African sub-region increased at an average of 7%, three percentage points above the African average in the period between 2012 and 2015 (UNWTO, 2016). Aggressive public relations and marketing plans have revolved around tourism promotion.

Under Rwanda's Vision 2020 and the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS II), tourism is expected to contribute to higher government revenues, improved balance of payments, and continuous economic growth with fair distribution of benefits to all Rwandan nationals. Apart from producing foreign exchange gains and employment for the national economy, tourism is expected to boost trade and investment as well as greatly accelerate the growth of other sectors of the economy.

2.4.2.2. Rwanda: Kigali's tourism as a tool of diplomacy

Rwanda and its capital, Kigali, in particular, have become international poster children for how travel may change a country's reputation and boost its diplomatic might. The government has masterminded a remarkable rebranding operation over the past 20 years, guiding the world's focus from the shadow of the 1994 genocide toward a story of resilience, inventiveness, and global citizenship. What is driving this metamorphosis from the core? Travel not just as a soft power supercharger but also as a bridge-builder and economic engine driver.

Rwanda rebuilt its narrative rather than only changing its logo. Following the 1994 Rwandan atrocities, the nation boldly transformed from images of trauma to a new identity as Africa's eco-luxury hotspot. Consider the "Visit Rwanda" campaign: suddenly, the same red-and-blue Arsenal jerseys worn by millions of supporters globally weren't just about football—they were billboards for a nation rebuilt (Rwanda Development Board [RDB], 2023). Then there is Kigali, a city so pristine the UN called it Africa's cleanest (UN-Habitat, 2021). Those shining streets are a symbol of Rwanda's discipline and aspiration, not merely a flex.

Regional conflicts sometimes distort the story, necessitating careful balancing to ensure benefits reach Rwandans on a daily basis. Still, the nation keeps down—investing in green infrastructure, courting world leaders, and demonstrating via sensible travel policies that even small countries can create significant diplomatic impact. Ultimately, Rwanda's playbook provides a road map: Combine your natural beauties with forward-looking policies, surround them with friendly hospitality, and see as visitors start to act as unofficial ambassadors. Once defined by pain, Kigali's skyline today sparkles with impact: invention halls and eco-hotels, a monument to how a country may checkmate its history and build a brave new future.

The development of Kigali as a top MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) hub offers Addis Ababa insightful analysis. Under the World Bank's G4C project, conference attendance increased from 17,950 to 35,101 by 2016 while MICE-related income climbed from US \$29.6 million to US \$47 million in the same year following the founding of the Rwanda Convention Bureau (World Bank Group, 2017). In 2023, Rwanda organized 157 events, attracting over 67,000 participants, which is projected to generate an economic impact of approximately US \$91 million. The findings indicate a strategically planned approach encompassing institutional expansion, infrastructure initiatives such as the Kigali Convention

Center, and targeted branding campaigns like "Visit Rwanda." Addis Ababa examines Kigali's experience as a case study to emphasize the importance of aligning national branding initiatives, notable infrastructure, and governmental policies to enhance tourism for diplomatic and economic advantages.

2.4.3 The Kenya, Nairobi Experience

2.4.3.1. Background of Kenya's Tourism

Kenya, in Eastern Africa, boasts a wealth of diverse tourist attractions spread all throughout the nation. The nation boasts lovely natural settings, lots of species living in their original habitats, coastal beaches, and breathtaking scenery. Apart from that, the 45 ethnic groups living in Kenya contribute to a rich and varied culture for Kenya. Tourism substantially benefits the Kenyan economy. With 1.6 million jobs comprising 8.5% of Kenya's total employment and 8.2% of the country's GDP produced by the travel and tourism industry, according to WTTC (2020). Apart from South Africa and Nigeria (GOK, 2020a), Kenya has the third-largest tourism economy in Sub-Saharan Africa. Kenya has mostly depended on two primary tourist products to exclude the others, i.e., coastal beach tourism and wildlife tourism, despite such a rich endowment with tourist attractions. And so, the main points of this study were to look into the state of tourism in Kenya by looking at how new problems affect the industry and to look into the social, economic, environmental, and political problems that might be linked to the country's growing tourism industry.

Currently, however, Kenya's tourism sector faces many challenges, including declining numbers in international visitor arrivals, reduction of the quality of the country's tourism product, declining per capita tourism earnings in real terms, and unfair distribution of the country's total tourism revenues among many interest groups. The present state of affairs suggests that the government should reframe its involvement in the growth of tourism in line with that of other interest groups. In this sense, government should as much as possible separate itself from direct participation in the operation and management of tourism entrepreneurial activities during the later stages of tourism development, when private sector initiative has been generated. As far as feasible, then, should entrepreneurial activities—such as the running of hotel and housing facilities and tour and travel operations management—be left to private sector initiative?

2.4.3.2. Diplomatic impact of tourism in Nairobi, Kenya:

Tourism diplomacy is one of the foundations of Kenya's foreign policy since the recognition of the potential of the cultural legacy of the country and the need to use it for national development define it. According to policy papers released by the Ministry of Global Affairs, the goal of cultural diplomacy is to make culture an important part of international relations. This aims to be done by using cultural heritage and endowments as the foundations of Kenya's global participation. Munene, M. (2011). By means of the interaction of ideas, values, customs, and traits of Kenya's unique culture and identity, relationships aims to be strengthened, socio-cultural cooperation aims to be improved, and national development aims to be advanced. The pillar aims to increase public awareness of the foreign policy leaning of the nation to ensure consistency and effectiveness in search of Kenya's national interests against the backdrop of new opportunities and emerging risks in the modern world. Feigenbaum, H. (2000).

Kenya's administration has skillfully employed tourism as a diplomatic tool. Consider the Tourism Act of 2011, which guaranteed local communities a stake in the sector, encouraged environmentally responsible travel, and guaranteed policy was in line with resorts run on renewable energy or Maasai guides in their tribal territory. But the nation did not act alone either. Working with giants like Kenya Airways, they have created a web of worldwide connectedness that makes it simpler for visitors to board a plane and personally experience the "Magnetic Kenya" brand (Kioko, 2019). Lake Turkana Cultural is a should-visit destination. Tribes gather at festivals to honor their cultural heritage through dance, song, and storytelling. It's more than just a celebration; it's diplomacy in action, uniting cultures in ways academics contend can soften borders and foster trust (Nisbett, 2017).

Nairobi itself has become a forum for world dialogues. Not only has Nairobi become a hub for economic agreements, but it has also established itself as a significant player in global diplomacy, as evidenced by its hosting of the 2015 Global Entrepreneurship Summit, which featured Barack Obama as the keynote speaker (Mwaura, 2016). Add to this Kenya's deft use of Instagram and Twitter, where jaw-dropping safari photos and viral hashtags rebrand the country as modern, vibrant, and open for adventure (Muringi, 2021). The outcome is a significant departure from outdated stereotypes about Africa, demonstrating that tourism is about

transforming a country's image globally, not just about attracting tourists. To guide the process, the Brand Kenya Board was set up. Two years later, the board finished the National Brand Master Plan. Under the five-pillar framework of the master plan, a thorough state diagnosis was carried out along the five pillars: people, place, product, politics, and economy (Melissen, J. 2007). Kenya's tourism success is a masterpiece in combining environment, culture, wise regulations, and audacious ideas—not luck. Imagine the Maasai Mara's vast savannahs, where lions prowl under a limitless sky, accompanied by Maasai guides tending to ancestral legends around a campfire. Add celebrations of tribal history via dance and song at Lake Turkana, where tribes honor their legacy, and you have a nation that welcomes visitors into its beating core (Kenya Tourism Board, 2019; Nisbett, 2017).

The strategic utilization of tourism by Kenya for diplomatic ends and national branding offers significant insights for Ethiopia's approach to tourism diplomacy. Kenya has integrated local engagement, ecological sustainability, and cultural heritage into its tourism development via institutions such as the Brand Kenya Board and frameworks like the Tourism Act of 2011, thus redefining tourism as an instrument of soft power and diplomacy (Kioko, 2019; Kenya Tourism Board, 2019). Nairobi's development as a global dialogue center, exemplified by its hosting of the 2015 Global Entrepreneurship Summit and various high-level summits, has enhanced its international reputation and fostered economic engagement (Mwaura, 2016). Kenya's strategic branding, cultural events such as Lake Turkana, and digital diplomacy via social media have transformed global perceptions and enhanced its diplomatic influence (Nisbett, 2017; Muringi, 2021). The Kenyan model illustrates the importance of integrating tourism with national identity, distributing tourism benefits to local communities, and employing digital tools to enhance a contemporary national image internationally for Addis Ababa.

Chapter Three:

Tourism and its role for Ethiopia's Diplomacy: a historical perspective

This chapter comprises three sections that provide a succinct summary of the convergence between tourism and Ethiopia's diplomatic goals across several political regimes. The initial section addresses state-sponsored marketing during the Imperial Era, the subsequent section analyzes nationalization under the Derg regime and its impact on foreign immigration, and the final section explores the EPRDF's market-oriented reforms that revitalized the commercial sector. This chapter outlines the historical periods and demonstrates how the development of tourism policies has served as a tool for public diplomacy and soft power from 1930 to 2018.

3.1. Historical development of tourism in Ethiopia

Ethiopia, in the Horn of Africa, has long been well-known abroad with a range of natural, historical, and cultural sites. UNESCO has classified ten of its treasures as world cultural heritage. Between 1964 and 2008, 19,836 and 383,399 foreign visitors visited the region, and the tourism industry registered 5.6% average annual growth between 1990 and 2000 and developed to 15.4% between 2000 and 2008 (Atinkut, 2018, p. 19). Advance to the 12th century and land at Lalibela, the "New Jerusalem." Built from solid rock, Lalibela features churches, including the cross-shaped St. While the Ethiopian Tourism Organization—started in 1962—rolled out the first brochures, the emperor personally pushed Ethiopia's craggy Simien Mountains and medieval castles (Zewde, 2002). And then arrived the dark years, which were the Derg government's persecution and the 1980s famines that transformed Ethiopia into a "no-go" country for visitors. But the industry recovered following 1991, much as a phoenix might. Fueled by economic reforms and Ethiopian Airlines' worldwide growth, visitor numbers have surged 500% by 2015 (World Bank, 2016). Ethiopia changed its name to "Land of Origins" in 2015, paying homage to Lucy, the home of coffee, and the thunderous falls of the Blue Nile. Thanks in part to 1.1 million inquisitive tourists, travel brought in \$3.7 billion by 2019 (Ethiopian Central Statistical Agency, 2020).

Ethiopia, while having all these tourist attractions and resources, does not gain from its tourism industry as predicted compared to nations like Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa (Mekonen, 2016). Ethiopia's capital city has natural as well as historical and cultural heritage. Addis Ababa appeals naturally as well as constructed. It has embraced a suitable environment, varied bird species, parks, museums, monuments, old historical buildings, mosques, churches, religious festivals or festivities, marketplaces, and others. With more than a hundred embassies and consular offices, Addis Ababa welcomes different international organizations and hosts around three million people.

Since Empress Taytu, the wife of Menelik II, had taken the initiative to name Addis Ababa as the capital city, which was thought to have been founded in 1896, much of the historical and cultural legacy is quite entwined with the building and growth of the city. The museums of Addis Ababa host most of the cultural, historical, and natural heritage of the nation. In comparison to other areas, Addis has more museums than any other since the imperial government made Addis Ababa a capital, beginning in the late 19th century. Every year, these metropolitan museums attract significant numbers of visitors (Kidane, 2019). Ethiopia, with its ancient heritage, diverse cultures and strategic location, has long recognized tourism's potential. Over three regimes (Imperial monarchy, the Derg, and the EPRDF), Ethiopian leaders alternately promoted tourism to enhance the country's image abroad and spur development, or conversely neglected it when ideology took priority. This chapter examines how Ethiopia's state tourism strategies functioned as tools of diplomacy and soft power in each period.

3.1.1. The Imperial Era (1930-1974)

Though it did not get much thought in Ethiopia's development plan before the 1960s, tourism in more general terms has existed since ancient times. Emperor Haile Selassie (r. 1930–1974) was not stopped in offering legal support for the growth of the tourism industry in the second half of the 20th century by the opposition of the noble classes and a few educated elites who linked travel to exposing the poverty and backwardness of the nation to the world community. Order No. 36 of 1964 formed the Ethiopian Tourist Organization (ETO), under the direction of the Prime Minister, later transferred to the Ministry of Information and Ministry of Commerce in 1966 and 1969, respectively. This office has grown to be a monument in the effort to establish

modern tourism as a major contributor to economic development. The ETO acquired official recognition under the obligation of providing tour and travel services to overseas visitors, official envoys and ambassadors, and branch offices opened abroad and in Ethiopia (Atinkut, 2018).

According to Sisay (2009), the central government aimed to make Ethiopia one of the main travel destinations in Africa. The administration turned to the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and the International Development Agency (IDA) to realize such a dream by means of finances. Consequently, various foreign consulting firms and people, including C. Angeline and S. Moudine from UNESCO, the Italian Tourism Consultancy Firm (IANUS), and Arthur D. Little Ltd., had been asked to investigate the viability of Ethiopia's tourist potential. UNESCO, in its feasibility assessment titled "Proposals for the Development of Sites and Monuments in Ethiopia as a Contribution to the Growth of Tourism," suggested the potential of historical sites in northern Ethiopia for tourism development. Three years later, Arthur D. Little Ltd. advised the Rift Valley and Addis Ababa, as well as the Historic Route (Bahir Dar, Gondar Semen Highlands National Park, Aksum).

The consultancy organizations have also suggested the construction of large, uniform hotels in locations of tourism interest. Although all these hotels were spatially concentrated in the capital city of Addis Ababa and privately owned by foreign businesses, the consultants presented the government with an opportunity to build lodging facilities, specifically Wabe Shebelle (1968), Afrique (1966), Blue Nile (1968), Ethiopia Hotel (1963), and Hilton Hotel (Five Star, 1969).

The lack of skills and budgetary restrictions the government was facing led to the participation of foreign businesses starting and running tourist and hospitality facilities. On this one, one may claim that without outside help, the main reforms carried out by the Ethiopian government would most likely be unachievable. This historical event was followed by a rise in visitor arrivals from 19,215 in 1963 to 73,662 in 1973, which expanded almost four times within ten solid years. In effect, the Imperial government used tourism promotion and cultural diplomacy hand-in-hand: marketing Ethiopia's unique archaeological and religious heritage (later touted as the "Cradle of Mankind" after the discovery of Lucy in 1974) projected a narrative of Ethiopia as the home of ancient civilization. These combined state campaigns and high-profile international events helped cultivate goodwills to and awareness abroad. As a result, Ethiopia enjoyed one of the fastest growth rates of tourist arrivals in Africa during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Atinkut, 2018).

Moreover, the nation gathered, from the foreign visitors in 1973, an estimated 25,655,000 Ethiopian birr. Following Europe, which accounted for more than 67% of the total international visitor arrivals, America came second in terms of the number of foreign visitors in this era. In the period under review, Africa ranked third among the countries visiting Ethiopia (Sisay, 2009). This expansion is most likely related to the government's successes as well as the choice of Addis Ababa as UNCA (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa) headquarters in 1958 and the OAU (Organization for African Unity) in 1963, which in turn have attracted a lot of interest from a growing number of Western diplomats, envoys, members of the organizations, and leisure seekers. Ethiopia's triumph over the fascist Italian army in 1896, under the rule of Emperor Menelik II (r. 1889–1913), should be given due consideration for the later emergence of modern tourism in the 1960s. Consider modernization schemes like the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway and telephone networks, which introduced communication lines, networks, post offices, modern roads, and the building of hotels (Taytu Hotel in 1907) (Atinkut, 2018). Since 1973, the steady flow of visitors and the income Ethiopia generates seem to have greatly dropped due to numerous deaths, migration, and historical course modification. The 1973/1974 famine affected almost three million Ethiopians struggling for survival, and the total death rate in the nation was the most severe epidemic of the 20th century. This epidemic cast a shadow over the country, portraying it as a nation plagued by famine and poverty, devoid of infrastructure development. Political unrest across the nation suddenly followed this episode (Asmare, 2016, p. 20).

In terms of tourism being used as a tool for diplomacy, it can be asserted that under Emperor Haile Selassie, tourism was purposefully employed as a tool of soft power to present Ethiopia as a developed, autonomous country. Haile Selassie not only positioned Addis Ababa as a center for African diplomacy but also took advantage of the chance to highlight Ethiopia's attractions, including the ancient Axum obelisks and the cultural traditions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, by organizing the 1963 founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in the city. Ethiopia's marketing strategy, dubbing it as the "Land of Thirteen Months of Sunshine," enhanced its attractiveness even more by drawing worldwide visitors and leaders who had seen the nation's mix of modernism and ancient civilization (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2009). These initiatives solidified tourism as a pillar of Ethiopia's diplomatic influence throughout this period.

3.1.2. The Derg Period (1974-1991)

Shortly after the toppling of the imperial government in 1974, the Derg, a military committee, took control. Understanding the value of tourism for the national economy, the government has taken steps to support industry development. The government of the nation underlined in its economic policy its aim of boosting the tourist industry by emphasizing the tourism sector of the economy aims to always be under government attention, and international visitors aims to always be treated with traditional Ethiopian hospitality. Include preserving antiquities and protecting natural life, especially rare species. The government aims to either actively seek or assign this preservation work. The traditionally underappreciated domestic tourism aims to be provided any support so that Ethiopians may have the chance to enjoy the beauties of their nation and so foster growing pride in their natural and cultural legacy (Sisay, 2009).

This unequivocally indicates that the government was eager to see internal and foreign travel in the nation increase. The government adopted "know your country club" to fulfill their ambition of boosting domestic tourism. One distinctive feature of domestic travel was the encouragement of local travel within the nation. Once a year, all civil personnel were given the chance to visit the tourist attractions and were strongly advised to relax and appreciate the special beauty of their nation. ⁵³ Equally relevant to the topic was the government's attempt to boost public holidays by means of incentives for workers, children, and common people to enjoy with their families in reasonably priced recreational facilities. Working people had already adapted to the custom of celebrating weekends and spending two days at various tourist attractions in the nation.

This era marks the government's complete involvement in the industry and highlights the specific attention paid to domestic tourism. This phase was a clear departure from the imperial government (when domestic tourism was aimed at the upper-class citizens of the royal families, higher officials, rich aristocracies, and foreign immigrants, while common workers/citizens had remained notably underrepresented). Such success helped domestic tourist flows rise from 16,560 to 31,019 in 1974 and 1986, correspondingly. Three presumptions surround the reason behind encouraging domestic tourism during the period under review. Due to the government's inclination toward socialist nations, domestic tourism plays a significant role in the sector. This was done for three reasons: i) to foster unity among various ethnic groups within the nation, ii) to

counteract the influence of past aristocracies or noble classes, and iii) to prevent travel to non-socialist nations without an invitation letter (Atinkut, 2018).

Nonetheless, some interrelated elements made the government's contribution to boosting both local and foreign tourism less long-lasting. One cannot separate the effects of any one of these elements in understanding the declining trend of tourist arrivals in Ethiopia since all these elements are equally vital and interconnected.

Tourists also represented a political challenge to the authority of the government. However, their arrival was a deliberate move to counteract the capitalist influence on national ideology. The May 1975 declaration of Leninist ideology as the nation's most important philosophy confirms this. This would have thus been notably true for the Westerners, but definitely not for other socialist nations. Americans, the third-biggest visitors to Ethiopia next to Africa and Europe, were compelled to leave the nation in 1977, therefore reflecting the government's hostility against the Western world. The bilateral link between the two nations turned out to be disastrous. The United States then changed its affiliation with Third-alia and withdrew from Ethiopia, closing the United States Information Service (USIS), the Military Advisory and Assistance Group (MAAG), the Peace Corps, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (Sisay, 2009).

War and political unrest were the other elements influencing the decline in tourism during the military regime. With the liberation fronts in Tigray and Eritrea, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and the conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977 and 1978, it was clear that the government was getting more involved in fighting inside and outside of Ethiopia. 48 48 Many times, the authorities regularly and sporadically physically confronted such political opponents. Ethiopia went into a fresh episode of political unrest and anarchy during this period. Some of those accused of assisting rebel groups fled to other nations; others were imprisoned or executed. A bulk of citizen abuses and activities causing severe instability resulted from government actions.

Furthermore, the administration would never hesitate to act against the contenders that might compromise the authority of the government in any event. Consequently, it is fascinating to see that law and order broke down generally in the nation.

Given the above observation, it is argued that since the fighting was concentrated in the big cities of the nation, the intermittent hostilities could have resulted in the destruction of tourist infrastructure. The Ethiopian government gave up leisure time activities during times of severe armed crises. Therefore, it gave little attention to infrastructure improvements, including tourist amenities, and spent its time and money on the war effort. Consequently, tourism in this era did not start to recover right after the war. Political instability's long-term effects could not be disregarded anymore (Atinkut, 2018).

But since 1979, the country's relative stability has helped the tourism industry to rebound. For example, the Ethiopian armed forces had already started to cause deaths for Somalia in 1978. The insurgent movements had suffered a devastating loss. Under Proclamation No. 182, 1980, the government formed the Ethiopian Tourism Commission (ETC) under the council of ministers' supervision using this occasion. The ETC's main purpose was "to develop and promote tourism at home and abroad by building and expanding lodging and recreation facilities, setting up and overseeing businesses that provide tourist facilities, licensing people or businesses that provide tourist facilities, publicizing the country's tourist attractions, setting up, managing, expanding, and controlling training centers for people who aims to work in tourist facilities, and preparing and disseminating information about tourists." (Atinkut, 2018).

The invitations of international consultants, such as the Ethiopia-Kenya Regional Development Program in 1980, a Swiss consulting firm called Thyssen Rheinstahl Technik in 1983, and the Soviet Team of Scientists in 1985, came next. Suggested was the construction of tourism offices, leisure centers, and hotels. But the occurrence of the 1984/1985 famine and years of post-famine austerity broke the encouraging trend of tourism. Following the start of the 1973/74 famine, under the "Marxist-Leninist" Derg government, an estimated 7.8 million Ethiopians were starved to death with food shortages, from which excess mortality was calculated at 700,000. (Atinkut, 2018)

The Derg government suffered a major setback in its last years. On one hand, the communist bloc nations cut aid to Ethiopia somewhat substantially. The government therefore went through major financial difficulties. The outcome was a major setback to the junta since the government could no longer depend on its old partners in the military and other economic aid. Particularly from the western world, the nation's isolation from the outside world offers no possibility of external aid. Therefore, the government seems to have realized the need to implement fresh

reforms to stop more decline and stop the declining trend of the tourism industry, as well as realizing that its economic policies failed. One of the decrees published during the Perito period was a declaration of a mixed economy, although it never proved successful.

While viewing tourism in its diplomatic impact, Under the Derg government, Ethiopia's diplomatic strategy included tourism in a more limited but nevertheless important capacity. To keep some degree of foreign involvement, the Derg aimed to highlight Ethiopia's historical and cultural riches despite the authoritarian and oppressive character of the government. Emphasized were sites like the ancient ruins of Axum and the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela to draw attention from all around and uphold the nation's reputation as a cradle of human civilization. Political unrest, human rights issues, and continuous fighting inhibited the regime's capacity to properly exploit tourism as a tool for soft power; hence, seriously hampering tourism growth. Although attempts were made to present Ethiopia's cultural and historical importance, the negative worldwide view of the Derg's reign and its effect on the country's stability mostly eclipses them (Sisay, 2009). The Derg abandoned tourism as a tool of diplomacy, focusing instead on ideological alliances. Even the regime's domestic tourism program could not offset the downturn; by 1991 Ethiopia was receiving only a fraction of its pre-1974 tourist levels (Kidane-Mariam, 2015). In short, under the Derg tourism became inward-facing and state-controlled, and it did little to enhance Ethiopia's international image (indeed, it signaled isolation from much of the global community).

3.1.3. EPRDF (1991-2018)

The conflict for dominance between the Derg and the Ethiopian Peoples Republic Democratic Front (EPRDF) culminated in 1991, when the Derg was compelled to relinquish authority. The changeover period was not an opportune time for the expansion of the tourism sector. The era witnessed the obliteration of parks established by the Derg, symbolizing community hostility towards the former authority. During this period, the Derg destroyed parks, a reflection of the populace's opposition to the government. Especially important was the announcement of new economic policies made under Proclamation No. 15/1992. This policy shift from a command economy to a free market has significantly strengthened private investments.

Policy now included the founding of private banks, insurance firms, new hotel buildings, tour operators, travel agencies, and boat-hiring companies. Such guest houses became the center of trade, business, and government in the nation. Created by the Derg, the associated Ethiopian Tourist Commission (created to oversee the development and running of tourist and hospitality facilities) was enhanced to be responsible for tourism investment programs. Later, it became the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Atinkut, 2018). Still, in this situation, one that attracted a lot of attention was the use of a decentralization policy, which gives every regional government in the nation chances to maximize the tourism potential of their territory.

Apart from this, the nation's relative stability, free market economy, and open admission of foreigners in spite of racial, ideological, and religious diversity strengthened the global tourism market. Ignoring the rise in levels of disposable wealth in the West, the improvement in international travel, and the expansion of tourist facilities, including the arrival of aircraft in enormous numbers, was impossible. Seen from a historical standpoint, war challenged Ethiopia's tourism throughout this era. This trend was mostly driven by the start of the Ethio-Eritrean war between 1998 and 2000(Sisay, 2009).

The main external threat to Ethiopian security and stability is the ongoing border conflict with surrounding Eritrea. The two nations arrived at a frigid understanding. Drought and famine later made the war worse and didn't seem to be enough to support any effective development efforts because of how the country's resources were distributed to protect its sovereignty from external aggression and for rehabilitation activities. Peace only came in 2000. Drought and famine later made the war worse and didn't seem to be enough to support any effective development efforts because of how the country's resources were distributed to protect its sovereignty from external aggression and for rehabilitation activities. Drought and famine later made the war worse and didn't seem to be enough to support any effective development efforts because of how the country's resources were distributed to protect its sovereignty from external aggression and for rehabilitation activities. The conflict had seen massive expenditures of funds. nonexistent. As previously mentioned, the media's portrayal of international visitors shapes opinions (Sisay, 2009).

Thus, the first significant dip during this period was observed for the past two years (1998–2000), when national-level foreign visitor arrival data dropped steadily from 139,000 in 1997 to 112,000. Following the war, the travel sector rebuilt itself. The World Bank and IMF provided

aid to the government, thereby giving it chances to increase its initiatives for the growth of the socioeconomic sector. It was most likely a hopeful path out of financial hardship. The event set the stage for the post-war increase in tourist travel and the unheard-of surge in Ethiopian visitor count from 135,504 in 2000 to 148,386 in 2001 (Atinkut, 2018). Such rapid political and economic recovery following the war fosters a positive international reputation. It also led to an increasing number of national and foreign businesses seeking to support additional development projects and the tourism sector of the country. nation. Comparatively to the two past governments, the tourism sector managed to guarantee an even and somewhat consistent flow of both domestic and international visitors. The nation also rose to become one of the top tourism destinations in Africa.

Tourism diplomacy Under Ethiopia's EPRDF (1991–2018), public diplomacy policy increasingly incorporated tourism. Understanding its potential to promote international relations and economic development, the government aimed to modernize and rebuild the travel industry. Important projects included the Ethiopian Millennium Celebration in 2007, which highlighted Ethiopia's distinctive calendar and cultural legacy and drew worldwide attention, thus advancing a message of national pride and solidarity (Hussen, 2021). Archaeological finds like "Lucy," one of the oldest human predecessors, were also used to highlight Ethiopia's position as the "Cradle of Mankind," thereby enhancing worldwide scientific research and cultural preservation under international cooperation (Kidane, 2019). Under the EPRDF, tourism became a major component of Ethiopia's soft diplomacy since the development of luxury hotels in Addis Ababa and improved transportation systems enhanced the country's capacity to host international events and draw foreign visitors.

Across these three eras, Ethiopia's tourism policies reflected broader political aims. Under Haile Selassie (1930–74), the state actively cultivated tourism to showcase Ethiopia's cultural heritage and foster prestige, treating foreign visitors as ambassadors to the world. During the Derg years (1974–91), ideological rigidity led to nationalization and restrictions that effectively cut off the country from international tourism. Under the EPRDF (1991–2018), economic opening and marketing campaigns reignited the industry: tourism once again became a source of growth and a means to signal Ethiopia's stability and progress. In other words, tourism alternately served as a conduit for soft power (in the imperial and reform eras) or was sidelined by internal politics (under the Derg). Soft power theory holds that cultural attraction can enhance a nation's global influence (Nye, 2004); Ethiopia's experience illustrates this: when governments invested in hospitality and heritage, foreign audiences took notice, whereas when the regime turned inward

tourism's diplomatic value vanished. Overall, the history of Ethiopian tourism shows that governments have leveraged it strategically as part of their foreign policy toolkit, with results closely tied to each regime's worldview and priorities.

Chapter Four

Tourism as a Tool for Public Diplomacy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia since 2018

4.1. Introduction

The chapter has four principal sections; the first three sections deal with the Institutional and Strategic Role of the Institutional Framework and Roles in Tourism Diplomacy, and the second sections examine Strategies and Policy instruments, the third section deals tourism as a Soft Power Tool in National Branding and Foreign Relations ,and the fourth section Challenges and Opportunities. Inter-Institutional and External Coordination .besides the chapter has critically analyzed key tourism initiatives and projects that are operational or underway in Addis Ababa and their public diplomatic impact and socio-economic role, including the Sheger River Corridor, Friendship Park, and Vision City, on image construction and global perception. The diplomatic significance of The Adwa victory memorial and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism has been explored.

4.2. Institutional Framework and Roles in Tourism Diplomacy

Ethiopia’s tourism diplomacy is carried out by a network of institutions operating under a shared soft-power agenda. Soft power theory emphasizes a country’s ability to attract others through culture and values rather than coercion, and constructivist theory highlights how shared narratives and identities are built through people-to-people exchanges. In Addis Ababa since 2018, key actors (the Ministries of Tourism and Foreign Affairs, the Addis Ababa City Administration, and others) have worked together to project Ethiopia’s history and culture as a component of national image-building. For example, the Ministry of Tourism, established as a stand-alone ministry in 2014, explicitly aims to develop sustainable attractions and “promote Ethiopia as a sought after tourist destination”². It oversees multi-stakeholder partnerships (with private investors, NGOs, etc.) that build tourism infrastructure across administrative levels. Crucially, this ministry collaborates closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: they sign

² Interview with Mr. Asfaw Kitaw, Chief institutional transformation advisor, Minister of tourism, April 21, 2025

memoranda of understanding on tourism promotion and jointly coordinate foreign visits to showcase Ethiopia's sites. Guided tours of Unity Park or cultural museums for high level delegations are arranged so that foreign dignitaries encounter Ethiopia's heritage firsthand³. These site visits reinforce a narrative of Ethiopia as a modernizing nation with a rich legacy, turning cultural attractions into diplomatic capital (in Nye's sense of forming favorable impressions).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) likewise integrates tourism into its diplomatic strategy. Tourism is treated as a pillar of Ethiopia's economic diplomacy, second only to agriculture in foreign earnings priority⁴. Through its network of embassies, MoFA promotes Ethiopian destinations abroad (for instance via the "Land of Origins" coffee branding in Asia and the West), and actively markets Addis Ababa's conference venues to international organizations (it notes that over 45 major summits were held in Addis the past year). MoFA's own offices include departments for economic diplomacy, consular affairs, and diaspora outreach – all collaborating to advance tourism. This institutional design reflects soft power logic: tourism is deployed alongside traditional diplomacy so that when foreign leaders attend conferences or cultural events here, they leave with a more positive image of Ethiopia.

At the city level, the Addis Ababa City Administration – particularly its Culture, Tourism, and Arts Bureau contributes by creating and promoting signature landmarks. Under the "Beautifying Sheger" program, the city government opened large parks (Unity Park, Friendship Park, Entoto Park) in prime locations to provide public spaces that double as cultural showcases⁵. The city has also developed its own tourism brand ("Addis Ababa: The Vibrant Hub of Africa") and joined international city networks to raise its profile. In theory this strengthens Ethiopia's soft power by highlighting national values – for example, Unity Park's combination of recreation and historical exhibits fosters local pride while giving visitors a sense of the nation's legacy⁶. However, city officials emphasize that most foreign engagement remains at the federal level: by law Addis Ababa cannot establish its own diplomatic ties, and instead relies on sister-city relations and

³ Interview with Mr. Habtamu Evania, communication expert , Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 23, 2025

⁵ Interview with Mr. Samson Ayenachew , Culture and Tourism Expert , Addis Ababa City Administration, April 24, 2025

⁶ Interview with Mr. Samson Ayenachew , Culture and Tourism Expert , Addis Ababa City Administration, April 24, 2025

mayoral forums for any direct outreach⁷. In practice this means the city shapes tourism infrastructure and identity, but depends on the national ministries to convert that into international influence.

Overall, Ethiopia's tourism diplomacy is implemented through a polycentric framework. The Ministry of Tourism focuses on building attractions and national branding, the Foreign Ministry weaves tourism into economic diplomacy and summitry, and the city government builds landmarks and local identity all under the conceptual umbrella of soft power and constructivism. These actors coordinate through formal agreements (MoUs) and informal partnerships to present a coherent narrative. For example, when foreign trade missions arrive, MoT and MoFA jointly arrange visits to Unity or Adwa Memorial, turning tourism sites into stages for Ethiopia's development story. By integrating culture, history, and hospitality into diplomatic channels, these institutions aim to "sell" Ethiopia's image internationally.

4.3. Strategies and Policy Instruments

The Ethiopian government has employed a range of specific strategies to harness tourism for public diplomacy. One prominent strand is infrastructure investment in high profile sites and corridors⁸. Addis Ababa's urban renewal plan has added signature parks at strategic points in the city: Friendship (Sheger) Park and Unity Park at the riverfront, and Entoto Park on the city's historic highlands. These parks serve both domestic and international audiences. They provide recreational space and patriotic storytelling (Unity Park's royal palace exhibits showcase national history), while also visibly demonstrating Ethiopia's modernization. These projects have a clear soft-power logic: as one interviewee noted, they project Ethiopia's cultural and environmental "good aims to" to visitors, and impress foreign guests with tangible development⁹.

Building on landmark investments, Ethiopia has also targeted MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) as a tourism-diplomacy tool¹⁰. Addis Ababa's status as African Union headquarters and an emerging conference hub is leveraged deliberately. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reports over 60 international conferences annually in Addis, including pan-African

⁷ Interview with Mr. Asfaw Kitaw, Chief institutional transformation advisor, Minister of tourism, April 21, 2025

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Interview with Mr. Bizualem ; MICE Sales Desk Manager; Ministry of Tourism; April 22, 2025

summits and sectoral forums. These gatherings bring global leaders and business elites to Ethiopia for face-to-face engagement, which diplomats view as occasions to advance national interests and “raise national consciousness” about Ethiopia’s goals¹¹. To support this, Ethiopia formed the Ethiopian Convention Bureau (2021) to upgrade venues and simplify hosting. Some tourist sites incorporate conference facilities: notably, the Adwa Victory Memorial (discussed below) includes large meeting halls that hosted over 28,000 delegates in one recent period¹². Free access to heritage museums during conferences creates “soft touches” for delegates, as interviewees mentioned. In parallel, the government integrates tourism with large economic events (e.g. digital expos, trade fairs). Under the “Digital Ethiopia 2025” agenda, Addis Ababa has begun hosting global tech events like GITEX Africa, promoting Ethiopia’s policies and attracting international visitors. This digital diplomacy strategy uses high-profile meetings to broadcast Ethiopia’s progress, aligning technology promotion with nation-branding¹³.

Another key policy area is national branding and media outreach. The Foreign Ministry actively promotes campaigns that highlight iconic Ethiopian assets. For example, its embassies pitch Ethiopia as the “Land of Origins” (the coffee cradle) and the “Cradle of Humankind” through partnerships and cultural tours¹⁴. Digitally, Ethiopia has expanded its online presence: social media campaigns, tourism websites, and viral initiatives (e.g. news crews of foreign celebs touring Sheger Park) are used to shape perceptions. As an interview respondent noted, inviting famous athletes or movie stars to Ethiopia has been part of a strategy to garner global publicity¹⁵. These tactics echo soft-power thinking: like South Korea’s “Hallyu” or Japan’s “Cool Japan,” Ethiopia aspires to convert cultural exports (coffee, music, festivals) into international appeal.

The government also targets the diaspora and foreign audiences as multipliers of tourism diplomacy. Ethiopia’s diaspora policy explicitly identifies tourism as a sector where expatriates can help national branding. For example, embassies organize Ethiopian cultural events abroad and work with diaspora associations to promote homeland tourism. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinates with Ethiopian Airlines and investment partners to hold tourism roadshows

¹¹ Interview with Mr. Habtamu Evania, communication expert , Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 23, 2025

¹² Interview with Mr. Girum Girma, Executive Manager, Adwa Victory Memorial, April 23, 2025

¹³ Interview with Mr. Bizualem ; MICE Sales Desk Manager; Ministry of Tourism; April 22, 2025

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¹⁵ Interview with Mr. Asfaw Kitaw, Chief institutional transformation advisor, Minister of tourism, April 21, 2025

in cities with large Ethiopian diaspora¹⁶. This harnesses the diaspora’s economic ties and knowledge transfer: successful business expatriates can influence foreign peers, while returning diaspora tourists strengthen people-to-people links. Interviewees highlight that leveraging global Ethiopian communities – e.g. through “Year of Return” events or heritage tours – is seen as an opportunity to showcase Ethiopia’s history (such as anti-colonial legacy) to a global audience. In all these strategy areas, policymakers often cite Soft Power and Constructivist literature, noting that tourism’s emotional and educational effects can make diplomacy feel “more like plain sense”.

4.4. Tourism as a Soft Power Tool in National Branding and Foreign Relations

Tourism is explicitly leveraged as soft power and public diplomacy. The government has sought to “sell” Ethiopia’s image – its history, cuisine, art and hospitality – to foreign publics. Ambassador Dina, Public Diplomacy Director General at Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during his interview with ENA, emphasizes that “Ethiopia’s image, such as Ethiopia’s long history, kindness of Ethiopian people, hospitality, and beautiful culture, all these need to be sold all over the world”. This reflects the broader principle that public diplomacy “showcases a country’s cultural attributes and engaging with foreign publics to shape their preferences and opinions”. In practical terms, national branding campaigns (e.g. “Land of Origins”) highlight unique assets like Arabica coffee and the “Cradle of Mankind” archeology Mufti, D. (2022, October 18). High-visibility tourism projects (Unity Park, Entoto science museum, the Adwa victory memorial) are positioned as symbolic venues for the foreign media and visiting dignitaries, these efforts treat tourism attractions as informal ambassadors of Ethiopia’s story¹⁷.

The ministry of tourism recognizes that developed tourism policies typically have a five- to ten-year strategic timeframe¹⁸. The current policy structure already allows the alignment of tourism with Ethiopia's foreign policy goals especially in relation to economic diplomacy. The major economic influence of tourism is well known, as is its connection with trade, investment, and foreign direct investment (FDI). Therefore, Ethiopia's tourism sector is progressively being

¹⁶ Interview with Mr. Habtamu Evania, communication expert , Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 23, 2025

¹⁷ Interview with Mr. Girum Girma, Executive Manager, Adwa Victory Memorial, April 23, 2025

¹⁸ Interview with Dr. Getchew , Policy expert ,Minister of tourism, April 21, 2025

promoted as a conduit for foreign investment, with significant attractions such as Unity Park and Entoto Park presented not alone as cultural landmarks but also as avenues for investment. The government advocates for these locations via diplomatic channels and Memoranda of Understanding, fostering private sector participation in infrastructure, hospitality, and services. The strategic integration of tourism with economic diplomacy facilitates the attraction of foreign direct investment, transforming Ethiopia's cultural endowments into economic catalysts.

Strengthening intergovernmental relations, creating regional networks, and increasing Ethiopia's geopolitical impact is a key strategy to achieve these goals. Furthermore, Ethiopia's cooperation with regional bodies like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) strengthens its diplomatic involvement through tourism¹⁹.

At the same time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs integrates tourism into its economic diplomacy: embassies now market Ethiopia as a cultural destination to potential investors²⁰. This is broadly consistent with Nye's soft-power notion that attraction and inspiration (not coercion) drive influence Nye, J. S. (2004). Yet, critique arises: analysts caution that image-building alone is not enough, and real credibility requires addressing underlying issues (governance, human rights, etc.) to make soft power sustainable Van Ham, P. (2012).

MFA officials make clear that their primary objective is to attract foreign investment and strengthen economic ties, with tourism embedded in this agenda. One diplomat explained: “[the MFA] sign a MoU with a foreign tourism ministry,” and then “follow up by directing the implementation to the relevant sector” – specifically referring the matter to the Ministry of Tourism or Investment Commission as needed²¹. In other words, the MFA handles diplomatic engagement (e.g. negotiating agreements), while sector-specific follow-through is left to line ministries. This division of labor aligns with constructivist logic: the MFA shapes state interests through diplomatic channels, while tourism officials operationalize those interests via attractions and marketing.

Within the MFA itself, various departments (economic diplomacy, consular services, diaspora affairs, political affairs, etc.) collaborate to promote tourism. As one official noted, these offices

¹⁹ Interview with Mr. Asfaw Kitaw, Chief institutional transformation advisor, Minister of tourism, April 21, 2025

²⁰ Interview with Mr. Habtamu Evania, communication expert, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 23, 2025

²¹ Interview with Mr. Habtamu Evania, communication expert, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 23, 2025

work together to highlight Ethiopia's destination profile and even encourage infrastructure improvements (roads, hospitality, air routes) that facilitate travel. On the continental stage, Ethiopia's MFA leverages initiatives like the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Single African Air Transport Market to ease travel, aligning tourism promotion with regional integration²². Domestically, urban development projects (e.g. the Sheger River beautification) are recognized by MFA strategists as diplomatic tools: Addis Ababa's enhanced cityscape is marketed to diplomats and visitors, reinforcing the city's image as a gateway to Africa. In practice, the MFA has coordinated high-profile collaborations: for instance, promoting Ethiopia as the "Cradle of Humankind" through MoUs with the Czech Republic, and partnering with France to renovate a historic palace. These examples illustrate how the foreign ministry uses tourism assets and projects to further bilateral ties and cultural exchange.

The MFA also engages Ethiopia's global diaspora and national carrier as soft power resources. It has institutionalized a Diaspora Policy that targets tourism among the sectors where expatriates can invest and advocate for Ethiopia²³. Diplomats report working with diaspora communities in the US, UK, and elsewhere as cultural ambassadors. Importantly, the MFA explicitly partners with Ethiopian Airlines – the state-owned flag carrier – noting that the airline "is a critical partner in tourism promotion, as it represents our national brand and is widely used by international and domestic tourists". The airline organizes cultural events and joint campaigns (e.g. the "Timeless Ethiopia" brand campaign) that reinforce Ethiopia's image abroad. Thus, while the Ministry of Tourism handles domestic industry and marketing, the MFA leverages diplomatic channels, diaspora networks, and even a national airline as instruments of public diplomacy²⁴.

Regarding image development, tourism minister and minister of foreign affairs cooperate on initiatives to highlight historical and cultural gems of Ethiopia. Among these endeavors are cooperative marketing campaigns and festival attendance, as well as attendance at international conferences²⁵. Taken together, they seek to enhance Ethiopia's worldwide reputation, promote cultural interaction, and increase ties between countries. The ministry also underlines how

²² Interview with Mr. Habtamu Evania, communication expert , Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 23, 2025

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Interview with Mr. Asfaw Kitaw, Chief institutional transformation advisor, Minister of tourism, April 21, 2025

historically tourism has had little policy attention. But the industry is likely to become more important with the forthcoming update of the 2009 tourist policy, especially in relation to public diplomacy possibilities. The industry is expected to gain significance with the upcoming revision of the 2009 tourism policy, particularly concerning opportunities for public diplomacy.

The emerging strategy resonates with constructivist theory (Wendt, 1999) as well. Constructivism emphasizes that national identity and interests are socially constructed through shared symbols and narratives. Ethiopia's new tourist sites serve exactly this function, creating a positive identity to present abroad. For example, the Victory of Adwa Memorial reframes the 1896 Ethiopian victory over colonial forces into an ongoing symbol of Pan-African pride and unity²⁶. By “capitalizing on tourism” in this way, Ethiopian leaders are “disseminating a positive Ethiopian identity” to foreign audiences and to the Ethiopian diaspora. In short, tourism venues themselves become narrative platforms that link Ethiopia's domestic story of resilience to its foreign policy of African leadership.

In practice, Ethiopian officials have woven tourism into broader diplomatic and economic objectives. The Ministry of Tourism maintains close coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to embed cultural promotion in diplomatic engagements²⁷. Memoranda of Understanding signed by Tourism and Foreign Affairs facilitate joint promotions and exchanges: these MoUs have been drawn up with Jordan, Kenya, Vietnam, China, Morocco and other countries to encourage bilateral tourism cooperation. When foreign heads of state or investor delegations visit Addis Ababa, the itinerary routinely includes visits to sites like Unity Park, Entoto Park, or the new Science Museum. Such guided tours are not merely sightseeing, but a form of “soft power engagement” – they showcase Ethiopia's modernization alongside its heritage to potential partners. Likewise, city branding campaigns (e.g. “Addis Ababa: The Vibrant Hub of Africa”), participation in international tourism networks (e.g. UNESCO, the International Tourism Cities Federation), and cultural exchange events all reflect this diplomatic dimension of tourism²⁸. Tourism policy documents explicitly note that Ethiopia's rich history and landscapes can “increase diplomatic relations and enhance \[the country's\] international reputation”. In other

²⁶ Interview with Mr. Girum Girma, Executive Manager, Adwa Victory Memorial, April 23, 2025

²⁷ Interview with Mr. Asfaw Kitaw, Chief institutional transformation advisor, Minister of tourism, April 21, 2025

²⁸ Interview with Mr. Samson Ayenachew, Culture and Tourism Expert, Addis Ababa City Administration, April 24, 2025

words, Ethiopian tourism has been framed by officials as an aid to foreign policy, complementing trade and investment initiatives²⁹.

Signature tourism projects illustrate how this strategy unfolds. The newly opened Unity Park and Friendship Park, built on adjacent sites in central Addis Ababa, blend Ethiopia's imperial heritage with modern amenities. Unity Park contains historical palaces, royal artifacts, and a collection of native wildlife species all on display to foreign visitors while Friendship Park presents modern fountains, gardens and performance space. Unity and Friendship Parks have quickly become "should-see" attractions in Addis: Unity Park alone draws about 1,000 visitors per day and Friendship Park some 1,800–2,000, the majority of whom are international guests eager to learn Ethiopia's story (Fana Broadcasting Corporate S.C., 2023). The government explicitly trumpets these parks as pride points in Addis's tourism image, and conference delegations routinely arrange half-day tours to these sites or to Entoto Park as part of their official programs. In effect, each new park is a living exhibition of Ethiopian unity, culture and hospitality – literally used to "serve Ethiopia's soft power" by exposing foreign stakeholders to curated national narratives.

Ethiopia's tourism diplomacy strategy spans multiple levels. On the one hand, it involves formal agreements and inter-agency cooperation: the Tourism Ministry signs MoUs with foreign governments, and tourism attaches at embassies are being empowered to showcase Ethiopia's culture overseas³⁰. On the other hand, it plays out through tangible experiences: visitors to Ethiopia come away talking about zebra at Unity Park or a ceremony at the Lalibela church, thereby generating grassroots goodwills to. In this sense, tourism complements Ethiopia's political diplomacy. As one interviewee noted, when foreign investors come to Ethiopia, the Tourism Ministry "plays an active role in showcasing Ethiopia's tourism potential" during their visit. These encounters make Ethiopia more relatable and familiar to decision-makers, consistent with the idea that tourism helps "shape a good national image" and even influence the attitudes of foreign publics³¹.

²⁹ Interview with Dr. Getchew, Policy expert, Minister of tourism, April 21, 2025

³⁰ Interview with Mr. Habtamu Evania, communication expert, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 23, 2025

³¹ Interview with Mr. Asfaw Kitaw, Chief institutional transformation advisor, Minister of tourism, April 21, 2025

Despite these strengths, experts also recognize challenges. Interviewees and policy analysts point out that Ethiopia’s tourism-diplomacy framework is still evolving. The current national tourism policy (from 2009) makes only passing reference to public diplomacy, and officials admit the sector’s strategic potential is “not yet clearly embedded in practice”³². Coordination among agencies remains uneven: while the Tourism Ministry works with Foreign Affairs on select programs, there is no unified “tourism diplomacy” plan, and each actor often operates in silos³³. Infrastructure gaps (in signage, accommodations and security) and a shortage of trained hospitality professionals also limit how smoothly tourism can serve diplomatic ends. For instance, Addis Ababa still lacks enough world-class hotels and conference venues to meet rising demand – a weakness acknowledged even by city officials who admire the new attractions but caution that “people-to-people diplomacy” could be more fully realized if basic services improved³⁴.

In general, tourism has become an integral tool of Ethiopian public diplomacy. The government deliberately uses cultural and natural attractions to craft a narrative of unity, heritage and progress (a strategy predicted by soft-power theory). This narrative building is very much a constructivist process, as Ethiopia’s identity is being reshaped and re-projected through these sites. High-profile projects like Unity Park and the Adwa Memorial exemplify this practice by translating historical and cultural capital into diplomatic currency³⁵. Although coordination gaps and resource constraints persist, the evidence indicates that Ethiopia is already leveraging tourism for diplomatic ends hosting summits at Unity Park, inviting ambassadors to cultural festivals, and signing international MoUs on tourism. In doing so, it is effectively turning Addis Ababa into a better hub where more culture, more diplomacy and more economics intersect³⁶. This case thus confirms the theoretical claim that tourism can be a powerful form of soft power and public diplomacy, while also highlighting that fully realizing this potential requires clear policies and sustained cooperation across sectors.

³² Interview with Dr. Yezihalem, Policy expert , Minister of tourism, April 21, 2025

³³ Interview with Dr. Getchew , Policy expert ,Minister of tourism, April 21, 2025

³⁴ Interview with Mr. Samson Ayenachew , Culture and Tourism Expert , Addis Ababa City Administration, April 24, 2025

³⁵ Interview with Mr. Habtamu Evania, communication expert , Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 23, 2025

³⁶ Interview with Mr. Asfaw Kitaw, Chief institutional transformation advisor, Minister of tourism, April 21, 2025

4.5. Challenges and Opportunities.

Using tourism as a diplomatic tool offers clear benefits but also faces serious obstacles. On the challenge side, coordination and policy gaps loom large. Despite official rhetoric on partnership, multiple observers note that actors often work in silos. City officials complain of “very little coordination between sectors within the city administration or between the city and federal - level tourism authorities”³⁷. Similarly, a comprehensive tourism-diplomacy strategy has never been formally adopted, meaning there is no single plan aligning foreign affairs, tourism, and culture policies. Experts in the field argue that Ethiopia’s tourism and diplomatic institutions lack a unified framework – “tourism’s role in public diplomacy is not clearly articulated” in current policy. This fragmentation breeds inefficiency: for example, one respondent noted that infrastructure projects (like parks or corridors) proceed under city or tourism auspices without always engaging the Foreign Ministry’s branding expertise, and vice versa³⁸. In sum, inter-institutional coordination remains uneven, diluting the impact that could be achieved through a concerted approach³⁹.

Another constraint is political instability and security concerns. In recent years, Ethiopia has faced internal conflicts and regional tensions. Industry voices warn that such instability acts as “a handbrake on progress” for tourism. Even after infrastructure is built, outbreaks of violence can spook visitors and tarnish national image⁴⁰. These dynamics complicate the public-diplomacy narrative: while the government wants to emphasize unity and renewal, foreign media often cover unrest and humanitarian issues. Critics caution that tourism campaigns should avoid being mere “propaganda” glossing over these complexities. Indeed, tourism marketing risks falling flat if it clashes with reality: as one analyst puts it, the “diplomatic potential of tourism depends on authenticity”. If promotional materials tout Ethiopia’s peaceful heritage while news feeds report

³⁷ Interview with Mr. Samson Ayenachew , Culture and Tourism Expert , Addis Ababa City Administration, April 24, 2025

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³⁹ Interview with Dr. Getchew , Policy expert ,Minister of tourism, April 21, 2025

conflict, visitors may feel misled. This paradox – balancing optimistic branding against a backdrop of political challenges – is perhaps the toughest obstacle⁴¹.

Researchers have consistently highlighted that poor promotion, inadequately trained staff, and a lack of integration and political commitment impede Ethiopia's tourism sector, thereby limiting its developmental potential (Belete, 2020; Teshome et al., 2018; Sintayehu, 2016). Belete (2020) emphasizes the persistent budgetary limits in the sector, noting that "another significant issue is the limited availability of funding" for tourist efforts in Ethiopia. The ramifications of human resource deficiencies are apparent in prominent establishments: modern parks and museums necessitate skilled curators, maintenance personnel, and hospitality staff; Ethiopia faces a "deficit of qualified human resources in the tourism sector," with current professionals often lacking adequate experience, consequently reducing visitor satisfaction (IJSRP, 2016). Rural attractions face considerable challenges due to inadequate infrastructure, restricted marketing, limited access to financing, ethnic conflicts, environmental deterioration, and insufficient stakeholder collaboration, which impede development despite governmental focus (Alamirew et al., 2024).

The transportation infrastructure intensifies these challenges: many prospective tourism sites are nearly inaccessible to both domestic and international travelers, as rural Ethiopia often suffers from insufficient road connectivity, and numerous *kebeles* lack all-weather roads (IITF, 2024). The current infrastructure shortcomings, along with bureaucratic stagnation and ongoing financial limitations, hinder various philanthropic tourism programs from reaching their goals, so limiting both economic benefits and diplomatic influence (Serem & Wamuyu, 2021).

Critics from think tanks and NGOs warn that disregarding essential human rights or security issues, while overly emphasizing tourism promotion without necessary government improvements, could damage reputation. A recent study suggests that "instability hinders progress" in Ethiopia's tourism resurgence; hence, unregulated promotional initiatives may be regarded as simple "propaganda" (Addis Standard, 2023). Human Rights Watch (2010) asserts that development funding in Ethiopia has sporadically enabled repressive practices, suggesting that tourism strategies focused on growth should correspond with authentic human rights advancements to uphold credibility (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Ineffective marketing strategies

and insufficient institutional integration persistently obstruct Ethiopia's capacity to create a unified national tourism brand on the global stage. The lack of a new master plan and inadequate inter-agency communication lead to disorganized and underfunded promotional initiatives (UN ECA, 2021) Without targeted investments in infrastructure, human capital, and governance, these structural inadequacies continues to hinder even the most sincere diplomatic and soft-power efforts in Ethiopia's tourism sector.

Amid these challenges, however, there are significant opportunities. Ethiopia possesses rich cultural and natural assets that inherently attract international interest. Interview data frequently cite Ethiopia's ancient history, coffee heritage, music, cuisine, and hospitality as unique selling points⁴². In fact, Ambassador Dina (in an official remark) explicitly listed "Ethiopia's long history the kindness of Ethiopian people, hospitality beautiful cultures" as elements of the country's soft power that should be shared worldwide. Continued global fascination (for example, with the story of Ethiopian Jewish heritage or with conservation of its endemic wildlife) provides a foundation for soft-power growth. Moreover, as a founding member of pan-African institutions, Ethiopia can frame its narratives within wider African themes (anti-colonial victory, regional leadership), resonating with a continent-wide audience⁴³. Finally, the post-pandemic rebound in international travel offers Ethiopia a chance to leap ahead if it can reassure visitors of safety and quality, the millions of Africans and Westerners seeking new destinations could be drawn to Addis's diplomatic allure. In summary, while "competing narratives" (conflict vs. culture) pose a challenge, Ethiopia's heritage and continental role remain powerful opportunities to amplify its soft power through tourism.

4.6. Inter-Institutional and External Coordination.

A final dimension is how well Ethiopian institutions coordinate among themselves and with external partners. Domestically, the Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Foreign Affairs have established formal collaboration (e.g. MoUs and joint committees) to align tourism promotion with foreign policy⁴⁴. For instance, MoT reports that it routinely provides curated itineraries for

⁴² Interview with Mr. Samson Ayenachew , Culture and Tourism Expert , Addis Ababa City Administration, April 24, 2025

⁴³ Interview with Mr. Habtamu Evania, communication expert , Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 23, 2025

⁴⁴ Interview with Dr. Getchew , Policy expert ,Minister of tourism, April 21, 2025

visiting ambassadors, while MoFA channels conference tourism through MoT's Convention Bureau. The Addis Ababa City Bureau also works with federal agencies on city beautification projects: parks and river corridors are implemented with both city funds and support from national programs. However, the research data indicate that such coordination is largely project-driven rather than institutionalized. One expert recommendation is to formalize mechanisms (a tourism-diplomacy committee or task force) to synchronize strategies across City Hall, MoT, and MoFA⁴⁵.

Externally, Ethiopia leverages its role in African and global forums. As host of the African Union and other multilateral bodies, Addis Ababa is an interface for tourism diplomacy. Ethiopia actively participates in continental initiatives (the AU Agenda 2063, IGAD's tourism development strategy) that aim to ease travel within Africa and promote regional heritage. These efforts dovetail with national goals: for example, visa-free travel agreements in Africa and the Single African Air Transport Market support more tourist exchanges⁴⁶. At the same time, Ethiopia seeks partnerships with bilateral friends. It has signed tourism cooperation agreements with countries like China (evident in infrastructure collaborations) and Europe. An illustrative case is the Adwa Victory Memorial's conference center, which was built with Chinese funding; the site now hosts ZTE tech conferences and French cultural delegations⁴⁷. These arrangements show how foreign partners (multilaterals, NGOs, private firms) are woven into the tourism-diplomacy framework.

In the private sector, Ethiopian Airlines is a critical partner, featured in government plans to carry tourists and promote national brand. Airlines and hoteliers participate in joint promotions (e.g. discounted fares for festival attendees) to make diplomatic events accessible and memorable⁴⁸. Moreover, Addis has joined global city networks (such as the International Tourism Cities Federation) to exchange best practices and attract visitors⁴⁹. These external

⁴⁵ Interview with Mr. Samson Ayenachew , Culture and Tourism Expert , Addis Ababa City Administration, April 24, 2025

⁴⁶ Interview with Mr. Asfaw Kitaw, Chief institutional transformation advisor, Minister of tourism, April 21, 2025

⁴⁷ Interview with Mr. Girus Girma, Executive Manager, Adwa Victory Memorial, April 23, 2025

⁴⁸ Interview with Mr. Habtamu Evania, communication expert , Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 23, 2025

linkages expand Ethiopia’s reach: diplomatic networks introduce more ambassadors to Ethiopian culture, while airline alliances and foreign tourism operators help fill hotels.

Despite these collaborative threads, coordination remains work-in-progress. As one internal review notes, city-federal coordination is weak and routine impact assessment of projects is often missing due to fragmented mandates⁵⁰. Strengthening horizontal ties (for example, via federal support to the city bureau) and vertical ties (for example, via clearer role definitions for regional states in tourism promotion) would enhance performance. In conclusion, Addis Ababa’s tourism diplomacy is underpinned by diverse institutions. Each plays a part – often complementing one another – but their full potential aims to be realized only if gaps in coordination are addressed. Academic and policy critiques alike stress that improved inter-agency and international cooperation, under a clear strategic policy, would allow Ethiopia to “more fully realize” the soft power returns of its tourism investments.

4.7. MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) Tourism as a Strategic Tool: Infrastructure, Diplomatic Relevance, Stakeholders

Ethiopia's MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism industry consists of a varied spectrum of players with different roles. The Ethiopian government, especially the Ministry of Tourism, which mostly shapes policies, is the main stakeholder. Professional event planners working within the Ethiopia MICE Association also abound. Among eminent members are Urban Igald, Flawless Event, Details Event, and Community Event. Corporate businesses also participate, especially for staff reward programs or yearly sales retreats. Many of these businesses, which generally favor smaller internal meetings over big conferences, have not yet engaged with MICE tourism as much as anticipated. Still, there have been encouraging instances, such as a significant event the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia held at the Skylight Hotel. Furthermore, critical in increasing MICE events are professional associations and unions. Furthermore, essential to the sector's operation are service providers such as hotels—being both

⁵⁰ Interview with Mr. Samson Ayenachew , Culture and Tourism Expert , Addis Ababa City Administration, April 24, 2025

sites and beneficiaries—along with transportation firms, including Ethiopian and local ground transportation companies⁵¹.

Infrastructure-wise, Ethiopia's dedication to becoming a MICE powerhouse is shown most famously by the Addis International Convention Center. Moreover, the Sheger City development includes plans for new conference halls. Through improved infrastructure and services, regional administrations are also starting to line up with this national goal. Plans for Bahir Dar (Amhara Region) envision transforming the historic House of Council into the Nile Convention Center. Underlining a national movement toward MICE tourist uniformity, similar restructuring initiatives are underway in Bishoftu and Hawassa.

MICE travel has emerged as a potent diplomatic tool for enhancing Ethiopia's image. A leader from South Africa recently praised Addis Ababa's development through corridor-building projects, suggesting other nations emulate this approach. Though occasionally greeted with opposition because of changes in local communities, these urban developments are improving public understanding and impression⁵².

The COVID-19 epidemic sharply affected world travel and limited mobility. MICE tourism, however, showed resiliency by using digital technologies such as hybrid event formats, virtual meetings, and online platforms. The MICE sector was among the first to bounce back after the epidemic since business-to-business engagement is fundamental for the sector. MICE's capacity to rapidly adapt has underlined its significance as a strategic asset since its nature transcends tourism and interacts with sectors including agriculture, technology, and finance⁵³.

In MICE, the term "tourism" is more related to people's movement than to their leisure. Actually, MICE covers more general goals, including encouraging creativity, forming international alliances, and promoting information sharing amongst several sectors.

Ethiopia needs strategic leadership capable of managing big numbers of participants while preserving quality standards if MICE tourism is to develop. The industry is quite competitive, so it is imperative to draw top-notch foreign delegates and enhance organizational capacity to

⁵¹ Interview with Mr. Bizualem, MICE sales desk manger, Minister of tourism, April 22, 2025

⁵² Interview with Dr. Getchew , Policy Expert ,Ministry of Tourism, April 21 ,2025

⁵³ Interview with Mr. Bizualem, MICE sales desk manger, Minister of tourism, April 22, 2025

achieve success. The focus should especially be on raising technological preparedness. Tech experts should actively create modern, tech-friendly venues, thereby enhancing Ethiopia's worldwide reputation. Although the present government has made notable recent advances compared to past administrations, constant efforts are required to raise the variety and count of participants. Ethiopia also has to modernize its event technologies and hotel facilities to satisfy global norms. To stay competitive, several local event planners also call for modernism and sustainability policies.

Ethiopia could rank among the top MICE destinations in Africa during the next five to ten years. In terms of intergovernmental and professional event organization right now, it ranks just below South Africa and Rwanda. Ethiopia might become the top MICE center in Africa with more businesses involved and focused investments made. Ultimately, public diplomacy for Ethiopia heavily relies on MICE tourism⁵⁴. Explicitly stated in national economic reform policies, it is projected to be a top concern in the next tourist initiatives. Through events, MICE not only raises community knowledge of new technology Ultimately, public diplomacy for Ethiopia heavily relies on MICE tourism. The convention sector has evolved into a necessary instrument for national economic and diplomatic policies; Ethiopia is in a position to fully use its possibilities.

4.8. Key Tourism initiatives and projects in Addis Ababa since 2018

Addis Ababa has recently expanded its urban park infrastructure as part of a city beautification and tourism strategy under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Three major parks—Friendship Park (Sheger Park), Unity Park, and Entoto Park—were inaugurated between 2019 and 2020 to complement Addis Ababa's river restoration and development program (the “Beautifying Sheger” initiative) (Guadie et al., 2022). These parks occupy prominent central locations—Friendship and Unity in the heart of the city and Entoto on the nearby highlands—and together serve multiple roles in social life, economic growth, tourism appeal, and even international diplomacy. By providing public green space, cultural attractions, and modern amenities, they contribute to the city's livability and its image abroad (Africa Up to Date, 2022).

From a constructivist viewpoint, these parks serve as "cultural texts" through which shared experiences contribute to the co-creation of social meanings. Wendt (1992) asserts that

⁵⁴ Interview with Mr. Asfaw Kitaw , Senior Tourism Expert ,Ministry of Tourism, April 21 ,2025

intersubjective ideas and behaviors, rather than solely material forces, delineate anarchy and power dynamics in international relations; Unity and Friendship Parks exemplify this by constructing new communal narratives regarding Ethiopia's identity (Wendt, 1992; Tadesse, 2015). Ethiopia's public diplomatic activities and initiatives aligns with Cull's (2008) advocacy for reciprocity and discussion; parks serve not only as venues for bilateral contact, where visitors learn and Ethiopia listens (Cull, 2008; AAU, 2016), but also as exhibitions. Addis Ababa exemplifies how constructivist-informed public diplomacy may foster enduring relationships and alter foreign perceptions through tourism by integrating state-led infrastructure (hard power) with participatory cultural initiatives (soft power).

4.8.1. Unity Park and National Identity

Urban parks serve essential social functions by providing shared public spaces for recreation, relaxation, and cultural gatherings (Guadie et al., 2022b). Addis Ababa's new parks have been designed to foster inclusive use by local residents and visitors alike. Unity Park, inaugurated in October 2019 on the grounds of the historic National Palace, similarly enhances social life by opening formerly restricted royal grounds to the public⁵⁵. This 20-hectare park combines amusement attractions (a small zoo, aquarium, and aviary) with cultural education. In addition to animals and gardens, it features restored historical buildings and a large pavilion housing royal artifacts (golden thrones, robes, manuscripts of Haile Selassie, etc.) (Fana Broadcasting Corporate S.C., 2023). As such, Unity Park provides educational outings for schoolchildren and families, deepening community awareness of national history. Visitors report that the park “gave [them] a sense of Ethiopian history, past and present,” and a “deep sense of the richness and beauty of Ethiopia.” In this way, Unity Park serves a social purpose beyond recreation by reinforcing cultural identity and pride. The park's array of exhibits and green spaces encourages Ethiopians from diverse regions to come together; it is open six days a week and attracts thousands of locals eager to picnic, stroll among heritage sites, or introduce children to native fauna (zebras, geladas, lions, etc.). Thus, Unity Park fosters social unity and education in a setting that blends leisure with cultural heritage (Fana Broadcasting Corporate S.C., 2023).

⁵⁵ Interview with Mr. Asfaw Kitaw, Senior Tourism Expert, Ministry of Tourism, April 21, 2025

4.8.2. Friendship Park

Friendship Park (sometimes called Friendship Square or Sheger Park) is a large landscaped area with walking paths, flower gardens, an artificial lake and fountain, fitness facilities, and picnic spaces (What's Out Addis, 2024). Opened in September 2020, it was conceived as a venue for national celebrations and gatherings as well as daily leisure and recreation. By providing a safe, family-friendly environment, it offers Addis Ababa a green oasis for social interaction and exercise: for example, it contains a fitness center, eateries, a running track, and open lawns enjoyed by families and couples (What's Out Addis, 2024). Residents frequently jog along its paved circuit or gather by the illuminated fountains at night, while school groups or cultural groups may use the outdoor amphitheater for events. In short, Friendship Park “functions as a space for important national celebrations and gatherings, and citizens’ daily leisure and recreation.” The park’s abundant seating, greenery, and scenic lake build social cohesion by encouraging people of all backgrounds to meet and mingle (Guadie et al., 2022b).

Friendship Park exemplifies large-scale investment: it was constructed in 2018–2020 by the China Communications Construction Company at a cost of roughly USD 50 million (Guadie et al., 2022b). This multi-million-dollar project itself injected capital and employment into the city’s construction sector. Once open, the park continues to employ staff for maintenance, security, retail (cafes and shops inside), and event management. Moreover, ongoing development of the “Beautifying Sheger” riverside project (of which Friendship Park is Phase I) is estimated at over USD 1.25 billion, promising further economic activity. The park’s cafes and kiosks generate revenue and provide jobs; local vendors also benefit from the daily influx of up to 1,800–2,000 visitors (Fana Broadcasting Corporate S.C., 2023). In sum, Friendship Park’s construction and operation have been major economic stimuli that improve livelihoods while also This initiative is setting the stage for future riverfront commercial development, which aims to include bike paths, walking trails, and additional leisure facilities (What's Out Addis, 2024).

4.8.3. Entoto Park

Entoto Park, situated on Entoto Mountain just north of the city, provides a contrasting social experience rooted in nature. With panoramic views of Addis Ababa below, Entoto Park offers forested hiking and biking trails, horseback riding, picnic areas, and other outdoor leisure

facilities. It has an artificial lake, go-kart track, library, and cinema, as well as cafes and restaurants on site . These amenities allow families and groups to spend the day exercising and socializing outdoors while enjoying fresh air and scenic vistas. The park’s sheer popularity—over 1,000 visitors daily, including 500–600 foreigners (South African Tribune, 2023)—indicates that it has become a central gathering place. Addis Ababa’s Public Recreation Administration has emphasized making parks “accessible to residents and visitors” and “providing them with places to relax and enjoy nature, exercise, and socialize.”⁵⁶Entoto Park especially answers these needs by encouraging walking, group sports, and community picnics in a tranquil environment. In short, all three parks significantly enhance the city’s social fabric by creating inclusive public venues. They support healthful lifestyles (walking tracks, playgrounds, fitness spaces), cultural exchange (artifacts, monuments, regional gardens), and recreation for people of all ages (Fana Broadcasting Corporate S.C., 2023).

4.8.4. Tourism and diplomatic Impacts of Parks in Addis Ababa

The three parks have become major tourist draws, significantly enriching Addis Ababa’s tourism offerings. Unity Park and Friendship Park occupy adjacent central locations, and together they present various attractions. Unity Park boasts a menagerie (zebras, giraffes, baboons, wild dogs, etc.), an aviary of native birds, and an aquarium of local fish. It also contains “historical buildings” from the imperial era and a pavilion of royal artifacts, giving international visitors insight into Ethiopia’s culture and monarchy. Just across the street, Friendship Park features a large plaza, a thematic artificial lake with illuminated fountains at night, and extensive gardens of Ethiopian flora these complements modern entertainment and traditional heritage appeal to a wide spectrum of tourists. According to Unity Park’s communications representative, the two parks “attract many local and international tourists” with their diverse attractions. Indeed, Unity Park draws an average of about 1,000 visitors per day, and Friendship Park about 1,800–2,000 per day. Most of these are foreign visitors eager to learn about Ethiopian history and environment (FBC , 2023, November 13) Reviews from tourists on sites like Trip Advisor indicate that visitors appreciate seeing Ethiopia’s national treasures and wildlife without needing to leave

⁵⁶ Interview with Mr. Samson, culture and tourism expert, Addis Ababa city administration, April 24, 2025

the capital. Overall, Unity and Friendship Parks have quickly become should-see sites for the capital city: they are often cited as highlights in Addis Ababa guidebooks and city tours⁵⁷.

Entoto Park has likewise bolstered Addis Ababa’s tourism profile, especially for nature and adventure tourism. Situated on the highlands, it provides a “panoramic view of Addis Ababa” and amenities like hiking and biking trails, horseback riding, go-kart racing, and even a small cinema and library . Recently, Addis Ababa’s tourism authorities have explicitly marketed Entoto as a key destination. For example, the South African Tribune (quoting the Ethiopian News Agency) notes that Entoto “has been particularly instrumental in drawing foreign visitors” and features state-of-the-art improvements . The American and Nigerian tourists interviewed by news media praised Entoto Park for its “family-friendly atmosphere” and as evidence of Ethiopia’s hospitality. Local officials now anticipate over a million tourists aims to visit Addis parks annually and Entoto’s share (at least 1000 per day, half of them foreigners) is significant⁵⁸. Notably, the parks attract both short-term visitors and long-term stayers: some conferences and international meetings arrange site tours at Unity or Entoto as part of delegates’ itineraries. By adding scenic, cultural, and recreational value, these parks are deepening Ethiopia’s appeal to different segments—from eco-tourists and bird-watchers in Entoto to families and cultural tourists in Unity and Friendship (South African Tribune, 2023).

Available data show that Addis Ababa’s hotel performance improved notably around the time its new urban parks opened, but caution is needed before attributing this entirely to those attractions. According to HVS (2021), Addis Ababa’s revenue per available room (RevPAR) rose from US\$100.30 in 2018 to US\$121.80 in 2019—a 21.5 percent increase—while average daily rates climbed from US\$163.79 (July 2018–June 2019) to roughly US\$170 in later periods. Meanwhile, industry reports indicate that average hotel occupancy rose from approximately 58.4 percent in 2017–18 to 67 percent in 2019, before slipping during the COVID-19 downturn (Business Africa Online, 2020; Ethiopian Business Review, 2020).

These overall gains coincide with the inauguration of Friendship (Sheger) Park in late 2019, Unity Park in October 2019, and Entoto Park in early 2020—key elements of the “Beautifying Sheger” green corridor initiative (What’s Out Addis, 2023; Guadie et al., 2022) .And

⁵⁷ Interview with Mr. Bizualem, MICE sales desk manger, Minister of tourism, April 22, 2025

⁵⁸ Interview with Mr. Samson, culture and tourism expert, Addis Ababa city administration, April 24, 2025

with intensified marketing of Addis’s conference venues to business travelers (who make up over 90 percent of arrivals (Ethiopian Business Review, 2020; Trip.com, 2021).

However, multiple factors likely contributed, including a rebound in regional business travel, expanded conference activity at the African Union headquarters, and broader economic reforms implemented by the government (Ethiopian Business Review, 2020; allAfrica, 2022). No publicly available study has yet isolated the parks’ individual impact on occupancy or length of stay, and attributing the entire performance improvement to these projects risks overstating their effect.

In practice, travel-trade materials (e.g., Ethiopian Airlines stopover promotions) and tour-operator packages now routinely include guided visits to Unity and Friendship Parks alongside traditional sites such as the National Museum and Ethnological Museum .In short, while hotel-sector metrics improved during the parks’ rollout and the parks undeniably feature prominently in Addis Ababa’s evolving tourism product, rigorous impact evaluation—combining occupancy statistics, visitor surveys, and econometric analysis—would be required to directly link these urban-park developments to sustained gains in hotel performance, visitor length of stay, or tourism revenue growth.

Guadie et al. (2022b) further noted that beyond tangible social and economic benefits, the parks also serve as instruments of soft power symbols that enhance Ethiopia’s international image and partnerships. Perhaps the clearest example is Friendship Park, which was funded by the Chinese government as part of the \$1.25 billion “Beautifying Sheger” riverside project. The very name Friendship underscores its diplomatic role. Chinese media and officials frame the park as a gift emblematic of the “long-term friendship” and all-weather strategic partnership between Beijing and Addis Ababa. In speeches around 2023–2025, Ethiopian leaders have lauded China’s economic cooperation (on railways, dams, and urban renewal) that improves Ethiopian livelihoods; Friendship Park fits this narrative by showcasing Chinese support for Addis’ development. For example, in April 2025, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi reaffirmed the nations’ partnership and Ethiopia’s gratitude for China’s support of its economy and welfare (FBC, 2025). The park’s grand design and central location make it a showcase: foreign dignitaries visiting Addis may tour Friendship Park to witness firsthand the fruits of China–Ethiopia ties. In this way, Friendship Park projects Ethiopia as a country open to foreign investment and collaboration, helping to attract even more international engagement.

Unity Park also contributes to soft power, Since its inauguration, Unity Park has welcomed diplomatic visitors and senior international delegations, including representatives from the African Union and ambassadors, as indicated by the Ministry of international Affairs in its 2021–2022 activity report (Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MoFA], 2022). Ethiopian Airlines and the Ministry of Tourism have prominently included Unity Park in promotional movies and stopover tourism packages targeting international travelers, specifically designating it as a representation of Ethiopia’s cultural wealth and hospitality (Ethiopian Airlines, 2022). Moreover, TripAdvisor evaluations and local travel companies routinely position Unity Park as one of the premier attractions in Addis Ababa, indicating its increasing influence on foreign visitors' perceptions of Ethiopia. In this setting, Unity Park functions as a soft power platform, conveying a picture of peace, history, and a collective African identity to regional leaders and international audiences.

By preserving imperial-era artifacts and opening formerly restricted royal grounds, the park symbolizes a break from past isolation. International observers note that Unity Park’s rich displays of Ethiopian heritage from the throne of Emperor Haile Selassie to indigenous flora help tell the nation’s story in an accessible way. As one American visitor remarked, the parks gave him “a deep sense of the richness and beauty of Ethiopia” (Fana Broadcasting Corporate S.C., 2023). This cultural exposure helps shape Ethiopia’s image abroad as a country with a proud history and dynamic present. Moreover, Unity Park serves diplomatic functions by hosting high-profile events (music and cultural festivals, national day celebrations) that showcase Ethiopia’s diversity and stability to foreign media. In essence, Unity Park acts as a national exhibition space, subtly reinforcing Ethiopia’s soft power by promoting heritage and unity to foreign and domestic audiences alike.

Despite the fact that Unity Park has become a major symbol of national pride, but not everyone sees it the same way. Many local visitors have raised concerns about the high entry fees 600 birr for regular admission and 1,500 birr for VIP access which can be too expensive for everyday Ethiopians (TripAdvisor, 2023); some parts of the park were still under construction well after opening, with limited signage and long queues making the experience less enjoyable (Ethio Vibes, 2022). These criticisms can be an evidence that though the park carries strong symbolic value, its impact as a soft power tool depends on how well it actually serves the public, as Van

Ham (2010) points out, for national branding to really work, it has to feel genuine and accessible not just impressive from a distance.

Entoto Park contributes more indirectly to soft power through branding and lifestyle. It signals that Addis Ababa—and by extension Ethiopia is committed to modern, environmentally friendly urban living. The park’s hiking trails and scenic overlooks help promote Ethiopia as a “green” destination, appealing to the growing global ecotourism market. By creating a high-quality park on Mount Entoto, the city demonstrates that Ethiopia can invest in sophisticated public infrastructure. In sum, while Entoto Park has less explicit diplomatic symbolism than Friendship or Unity Parks, it still enhances Ethiopia’s international image as a stable, rapidly developing country. In combination, the three parks align with Ethiopia’s broader “public diplomacy” efforts: they beautify the capital for international summits (the African Union is based in Addis), and they host foreign visitors in pleasant settings.

These parks surely serve as venues where domestic and international diplomacy intersect with culture. The involvement of foreign partners (notably China) and the showcasing of Ethiopia’s history together amplify the nation’s soft power. As one analysis notes, Ethiopia is actively seeking to “capitalize on tourism” as part of its foreign relations strategy (Fana Broadcasting Corporate S.C., 2023), and the parks are tools in this strategy. In particular, Friendship Park embodies Ethiopia’s engagement with China, while Unity and Entoto Parks project cultural and environmental goodwill.

Despite these Government official narratives and symbolisms, studies and credible sources showed that there are critics and concerns from different corners of the communities. Analysts and citizens provide divergent evaluations. Urban researchers like Terrefe (2021) contend that Beautifying Sheger primarily advantages urban elites, the diaspora, and overseas visitors via a centralized, top-down approach to urban development (Eshetu, Abdulfetah, & Berhanu, 2020). Critics dispute the distribution of resources, expressing concerns regarding the prioritizing of ornamental landscapes in regions where populations continue to experience inconsistent access to water and electricity (Ethiopian Insight, 2021). Local news outlets have reported that many informal merchants and low-income workers were displaced by construction, further straining livelihoods in already vulnerable communities (Ethiopian Reporter, 2020).

Political responses to the Beautifying Sheger effort have been polarized. The governing Prosperity Party advocates for the projects as symbols of modernization and change, but several opposition members especially from the National Movement of Amhara have demanded financial audits of the parks, citing deficiencies in transparency and fiscal responsibility (Addis Standard, 2021). International coverage has exhibited ambivalence. For example, although the inauguration of Friendship Park was hailed as a symbol of unity, international observers remarked that concurrent reports of ethnic strife undermined the validity of that message (Ethiopia Insight, 2021). In summary, although the official and diplomatic narrative presents Beautifying Sheger as a paradigm of inclusive urban reform, detractors highlight its social and political compromises. The narrative is not entirely favorable: while the parks may enhance Addis Ababa's symbolic stature, their overall effects hinge on resolving issues related to equity, participation, and sustainable development.

4.8.5. The Adwa Victory Memorial: A Symbol of Heritage, Tourism, and Diplomacy

4.8.5.1. Establishment and Core Mandates

The Adwa Victory Memorial was established by Proclamation No. 160/2016 by the Addis Ababa City Administration Council. According to the proclamation, the memorial has six core missions. The first is to commemorate the victory of Adwa and preserve the related heritage for the next generation. It aims to present this heritage to visitors, create different possibilities for public engagement, and make it accessible. It also serves as a center of research and excellence. Finally, it seeks to engage with the next generation by organizing a museum and showcasing their history and heritage. Regarding the vision: although not yet officially ratified, the strategic document aims to make the Adwa Victory Memorial one of the top ten war museums in the world by the year 2026 in the Ethiopian calendar. This is a big ambition, but we believe it is feasible. It has now been one year since the establishment of the Adwa Victory Memorial. The memorial is administered under the Addis Ababa City Administration and is accountable to the mayor⁵⁹.

⁵⁹ Interview with Mr. Girum, executive manager, Adwa victory memorial, April 23, 2025.

4.8.5.2. Heritage Display and Storytelling

As the name indicates, this memorial is a place where the Victory of Adwa is remembered. It is celebrated once a year around the St. George Piazza area on March 2nd. However, I believe it should not be celebrated only once a year, as this victory represents a shared national history. The museum serves as a permanent representation of this significant historical achievement and should commemorate it daily.

In terms of legacy, the museum is our main service. It contains valuable war artifacts such as spears, costumes, and different kinds of weapons used during the battle. By showcasing these items, we preserve our history and heritage—not just the weapons, but also the stories of generals, their dedication, and the roles played by civilians, such as those who provided food and encouragement through music. Their portraits and monuments are displayed, including the role of women in the war. For example, the role of Empress Taytu can be seen in the museum through room displays, drawings, and statues.

4.8.5.3. Tourism Impact and Visitor Engagement

The memorial has significantly contributed to the development of Ethiopian tourism. Since its opening, we have welcomed 246,000 visitors in the past year. During our recent 9-month plan alone, we received 579 visitors⁶⁰. We used social media promotions and introduced price reductions—for example, reducing the entrance fee for international visitors from \$20 to \$10. The reduction led to a noticeable increase in visitor numbers.

The museum also contributes to conference tourism, as we have a convention center on site. We currently have six conference centers that can accommodate between 162 and 2,214 attendees, making it one of largest in the city. Our report shows that within three months, we organized conferences for over 28,000 attendees from various organizations, including the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, international companies like ZTE, and more. According to the head of the memorial, these attendees are granted free access to visit the museum during their stay, thereby promoting Ethiopian tourism through conference engagement. As for stakeholder partnerships, we have yet to reach our desired level. We currently have no formal strategic mechanism, though we have started working with key stakeholders. For example, we collaborate

⁶⁰ Interview with Mr. Girum, executive manager, Adwa victory memorial, April 23, 2025.

with the Ministry of Defense, the War College, and international actors through defense meetings and training. We also provide free access for the Ministry of Defense, Police College, and senior citizens due to the historical importance of the site.

4.8.5.4. The Memorial's role in fostering National Image and Pan-African Diplomacy

This museum plays a vital role in promoting Ethiopia's image. Visitors are not only local but also international, often invited by the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Tourism. Many African heads of state visit the memorial. Although the battle was fought only by Ethiopians, the victory serves as a source of inspiration for other African countries, demonstrating that a Black nation could defeat colonial powers. The victory boosts morale and serves as a symbol of Pan-African strength. It's not just about the buildings; the historical narrative we share here allows participants to gain a more profound understanding and better perception of Ethiopia. The museum contains testimonies and writings from former African leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, Nelson Mandela, and Julius Nyerere⁶¹. These prominent figures expressed deep respect for Ethiopia, which enhances our diplomatic image globally. The presence of such high-profile visitors helps to promote and market Ethiopia's international reputation. The Prime Minister's Office, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs often bring their guests to this memorial. Since the Victory of Adwa showcases national unity and shared historical achievement, it serves as an excellent tool for public diplomacy. This memorial is arguably one of the top tourism initiatives in the country, with many others following its lead.

Since the memorial was established only a year ago, we have not yet participated in international cultural and heritage diplomacy events. However, we plan to become a member of the International Council of Museums⁶². While stakeholders such as the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Defense are involved, they are not owners. Recently, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Global Black History and Heritage Center, and we are now in the final stages of collaboration.

⁶¹ Interview with Mr. Habtamu , Expert at Minster of foreign affairs ,April 23,2025.

⁶² Interview with Mr. Habtamu , Expert at Minster of foreign affairs ,April 23,2025.

According to the supervisor, a key challenge the memorial is currently facing is public awareness⁶³. Due to this reason, the memorial is not yet fully accessible to the local community, and suggested a need for more aggressive and widespread promotion to increase local engagement.

4.9. Corridor Developments in Addis Ababa and their Scio Economic, tourism and diplomatic impacts.

4.9.1. Corridor Development Program in Addis Ababa

In 2022–2024, the Addis Ababa city administration launched an explicit “Corridor Development Project” aimed at overhauling urban transportation and public spaces. The city’s Beautification and Greenery Development Bureau announced that the ongoing corridor project would meet infrastructure needs and dramatically reshape the city’s look⁶⁴. In practice, the task meant approving and constructing five major road corridors across the metropolis. By early 2024, the City Cabinet had “unanimously approved” five flagship corridor routes connecting key parts of the city . These include, for example, wide new boulevards from Piassa to 4 Kilo and 4 Kilo to Bole The proposed corridors include Deldey, Bole Bridge to the City Communications Center (CMC), Bole Terminal to Goro, Mexico Square to Wollo Sefer, and one that runs from the British Embassy area (“England Embassy”) to 4 Kilo . Each corridor is envisioned as more than just a road: plan documents and press releases describe them as “integrated urban corridors” with pedestrian sidewalks, bicycle lanes, landscaping, and regulated commercial zones along the sides. The corridors cut through busy commercial districts (like Piassa and Mexico) and residential areas, aiming to ease chronic congestion and unify the city’s layout. Many corridors also follow rivers or watersheds (such as the Piassa–4 Kilo route along the Kolfe River tributaries) so that road widening also coincides with riverbank rehabilitation (Fana Broadcasting Corporate S.C., 2024).

City officials and local residents have uniformly praised the corridor projects as transformative. According to a state media report, Addis Ababa residents “engaged in various professions” noted

⁶³ Interview with Mr. Girum, executive manager, Adwa victory memorial, April 23, 2025.

⁶⁴ Interview with Mr. Asfaw Kitaw , Senior Tourism Expert ,Ministry of Tourism, April 21 ,2025

that the corridors aims to “facilitate business and transportation activities” and “boost economic activities, thereby creating employment opportunities” (Fana Broadcasting Corporate S.C., 2024). Local resident key informants have supported and validated the transformative potentials of the corridor projects⁶⁵. One young entrepreneur near 4 Kilo commented that previous traffic congestion had hurt his café business, but he is now optimistic that the new corridor aims to ease flows and open space for shoppers . A language instructor at a college in Piassa observed that the corridor works have “remarkably transformed the city’s appearance,” making it cleaner and more orderly⁶⁶. Another resident employed by the 4 Kilo corridor project noted excitedly that it has made the city “clean and beautiful” and created jobs for many local people⁶⁷. In summary, even on-the-ground voices emphasize that improved roads reduce travel time and congestion, stimulate commerce, and generate construction jobs. For example, one student called the initiative “a wonderful thing,” praising how well-constructed roads have already facilitated smoother traffic and contributed to overall development (Fana Broadcasting Corporate S.C., 2024).

Government statements corroborate these perceptions. Addis Ababa officials frame the corridor projects as part of a broader “beautification” strategy that integrates roads with greening⁶⁸. The deputy head of the Beautification and Greenery Bureau explained that past infrastructure efforts had lacked harmony with greenery plans, but now the corridor project is explicitly designed to create more parks, sidewalks, and natural scenery. She noted that it has fixed its traffic woes, and the city’s green cover rose from 2.8% to 15%, reflecting an emphasis on trees and parks (EBC, 2023). The new corridor project is said to accelerate this green shift by ensuring that road expansions are flanked by landscaped public areas. Indeed, city officials claim that once the corridor work is done, Addis Ababa aims to have fixed its traffic woes and gained a transformed, aesthetically pleasing cityscape . In summary, the corridor development program is commonly perceived as a mutually beneficial initiative, offering both improved transportation and flood control, as well as enhanced livability and urban beauty.

⁶⁵ Mr. Mohammed Hassan, Local resident, April 28, 2025

⁶⁶ Mr. Natniel Asmare , Local resident, April 28, 2025

⁶⁷ Interview with Ms. Elfaz Solomon, Local resident, April 28, 2025

⁶⁸ Interview with Mr. Samson, culture and tourism expert, Addis Ababa city administration, April 24, 2025

4.9.2. The Sheger River Corridor and Beautifying Sheger Initiative

A central thread of Addis Ababa’s urban renewal is the Sheger River Corridor project, often referred to as the “Beautifying Sheger” initiative. The Sheger River (often called the Kolfe River or Little Akaki) and its tributaries snake through downtown Addis Ababa, historically serving as open sewage channels that frequently overflow during rains. The government recognized that without intervention, the river basin posed public health and safety hazards. In 2019, authorities therefore launched an ambitious \$200+ million project (supported by international donors) to redevelop and beautify 58+ kilometers of the city’s rivers . This Sheger Redevelopment Project targets some 1.3 million residents along its 69 km of waterways , aiming to tame floods and convert flood-prone riparian zones into green public spaces (African Development Bank Group , 2022).

Thus, the Beautifying Sheger initiative serves dual purposes: infrastructure and image-making. On the one hand, it practically solves chronic problems of flooding and sanitation by engineering the river system. On the other hand, it directly enhances Addis Ababa’s urban appeal by creating attractive parks (like Sheger/Friendship Park) along major roads in the heart of the city. The European Union-funded World Bank C40 climate awards even noted Sheger Park’s role in greening the city and improving climate resilience . By addressing environmental concerns and boosting public amenities simultaneously, the Sheger Corridor project exemplifies how Addis Ababa ties basic infrastructure to civic uplift.

4.9.3. Societal and Economic Impacts

The corridor and beautification projects have multiple reported impacts on Ethiopian society and economy. On the positive side, the projects create construction employment, improve mobility, and aim to raise the quality of urban life. As described by residents and media, the new roads have immediately reduced congestion, meaning less time wasted in traffic and lower transportation costs for goods. Small business owners along corridor routes anticipate higher customer footfall now that traffic flows freely. For instance, vendors and café owners at 4 Kilo have expressed confidence that the corridor aims to eliminate the bottlenecks that once hurt their businesses (Fana Broadcasting Corporate S.C., 2024). Job creation is another touted benefit: the construction itself employs hundreds of young people (as one Addis resident testified) . Local

entrepreneurs have even found new opportunities running small shops or services near the revamped corridors.

A second set of impacts is urban environment and public health. By cleaning the rivers and adding green spaces, the projects reduce flooding and waterborne diseases. The African Development Bank report highlights that before the project, city streets became muddy torrents in rains, and the Sheger River carried and dumped garbage . The corridor interventions address this: dredged riverbeds and retention ponds mean floodwaters are controlled, while rubbish is removed from rivers. The addition of parks and trees contributes to cooler microclimates and cleaner air (African Development Bank Group , 2022). In fact, after five years of coordinated greening efforts, Addis Ababa’s green coverage reportedly jumped from 2.8% to 15% (EBC, 2023). This greening can improve mental and physical health for residents by offering recreational space. Many community members have noted that areas that were formerly makeshift parking lots or slums have become gardens, playgrounds, and walking paths—a direct uplift for neighborhoods.

However, it is important to note potential social challenges and criticisms, even if not highlighted in official sources. Large infrastructure projects in cities often involve relocation or clearance of informal businesses and homes along the corridors. While not officially reported, observers outside government have warned of possible displacement of street vendors and low-income residents. Any analysis should consider whether the road widening forced such groups out of their traditional areas. As of this writing, Ethiopian media has not extensively covered such issues, but other cities (and past Addis Ababa projects) have had conflicts over evictions. Therefore, the societal impact is mixed: While many applaud the cleaner, more organized environment, some neighborhoods may have lost informal livelihoods or community spaces. The Ethiopian News Agency did remark on how corridors “regulate commercial activities that could potentially disrupt the community,” implying that part of the plan was to control street commerce (Fana Broadcasting Corporate S.C., 2024). In practice, this has resulted in the relocation of vendors from sidewalks to designated markets. Whether such action is ultimately beneficial (safer, more sanitary) or harmful (loss of street income) likely varies by group.

On the tourism side, the impacts are also expected to be Promising .Addis Ababa has long been a diplomatic hub but historically not a major tourist attraction. While historical landmarks such as

Lalibela and Axum have always contributed to Ethiopia's allure for tourists, recent governmental initiatives have significantly enhanced Addis Ababa's status as a travel destination. Initiatives such as Friendship Park, Entoto Natural Park, and Unity Park have transformed the capital into a dynamic center for both local and international visitors. Addis Ababa welcomed about five million tourists within a six-month timeframe, yielding approximately 96 billion birr in revenue. These developments highlight the city's increasing significance in Ethiopia's tourism sector (Ethiopian News Agency [ENA], 2024). By providing new amenities and attractions (Sheger Park, Unity Park, science museum, etc.), the city can better leverage its role as host of the African Union and UN Economic Commission (with their conferences) to bring ordinary tourists. Press coverage highlights the government's intention to "elevate conference tourism" and prolong visitors' stays through these urban improvements (Ethiopian News Agency, 2023). The attractions give conference attendees more reasons to explore beyond their meeting rooms. In practice, sites like Unity Park and Sheger Park now appear in travel guides and official tourism promotions. Early data (from government sources) show a rise in conference bookings: according to the Ethiopian News Agency, Addis hosted 20 major international conferences in a recent three-month span, far exceeding previous years, which officials attribute partly to the new infrastructure (ENA, 2023). In sum, the corridor and park developments are being positioned as engines for an upgraded tourism industry. Enhanced images (aesthetic uplift, safety improvements) and tangible attractions combine to give visitors a better experience. If sustained, those improvements could generate foreign currency and jobs in hospitality, though these effects aim to take time to fully materialize⁶⁹.

4.9.4. Diplomatic and Soft Power Scope

Beyond domestic benefits, the corridor and beautification projects have served important diplomatic and soft-power purposes for Ethiopia's national and city leaders. Addis Ababa is famously the "capital of Africa," hosting the African Union and myriad embassies. Ethiopian governments have long sought to leverage this status by showcasing the city as a model of development. The new infrastructure provides concrete talking points for international

⁶⁹ Interview with Mr. Bizualem, MICE sales desk manager, Minister of tourism, April 22, 2025

engagement⁷⁰; clear evidence is the use of Unity Park in regional diplomacy. By inviting multiple heads of state from neighboring countries to its opening, Prime Minister Abiy underlined a message of African unity and mutual pride in Ethiopia's cultural heritage (Anadolu Agency, 2019).

Foreign leaders have taken a keen interest in Ethiopia's cultural heritage, evidenced by their visits to significant locations such as Unity Park and Sheger (Friendship) Park in Addis Ababa. During the inauguration of Unity Park in October 2019, it is noteworthy that several heads of state from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) member countries were present. This included Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir, Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo, and Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, all of whom attended the ceremony. President Museveni praised the Ethiopian government for effectively illuminating the historical narrative of Ethiopia through the Park, highlighting its significance in promoting unity and ideological understanding (Uganda Media Centre, 2019). In a similar vein, the opening of Friendship Square within Sheger Park in September 2020 was graced by the presence of Ethiopian President Sahle-Work Zewde, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, and various other dignitaries, underscoring the park's importance in elevating the image and status of Addis Ababa (Fana Broadcasting Corporate, 2020). The prominence of these visits highlights Ethiopia's strategic employment of cultural landmarks to convey its historical significance and diplomatic principles globally.

Press materials often highlight that such parks are built in partnership with other nations or development agencies: for instance, the African Development Bank notes Chinese, Italian, and Korean support for the Sheger River project (African Development Bank Group, 2022). These collaborations serve as public diplomacy gestures—they associate donors (such as allied countries and international development partners) with Ethiopia's progress. Visitors to Addis (from other African capitals or international forums) now encounter visible tokens of cooperation, from a Chinese-built Friendship Park square to Italian-funded footbridges.

Domestically, the federal and city governments also use these projects to bolster their legitimacy and international reputation. The administration of Prime Minister Abiy frequently highlights

⁷⁰ Interview with Mr. Habtamu, Expert at Ministry of foreign affairs, April 23, 2025.

“transformative” projects in parliamentary speeches, framing them as evidence of national renewal and open governance⁷¹. The tourism promotion piece by ENA explicitly ties these urban projects to Ethiopia’s economic strategy, suggesting that “tourism development initiatives and strategic corridor developments” have created “a thriving environment” for global conferences (ENA, 2023). By linking infrastructure to Ethiopia’s traditional attractions, officials craft a narrative of a country on the rise. This narrative is circulated in diplomatic channels to attract foreign investment and partnerships.

Even culturally, Unity Park’s name and design serve soft-power aims by promoting themes of unity and reconciliation (especially significant given Ethiopia’s diversity and past conflicts)⁷². In summary, Addis Ababa’s corridor and park developments are not just local policies but components of Ethiopia’s international image campaign. The lavish inaugurations, the framing of parks as symbols of friendship, and the deliberate linking of infrastructure to conference diplomacy all illustrate how leaders have used urban development projects as diplomatic engagement tools.

4.10. Political Continuity and Tourism in Ethiopia (2018–Present)

Since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's ascension in 2018 and the amalgamation of his coalition into the Prosperity Party (PP), Ethiopia's political landscape has been characterized by both transformation and stability. Abiy's rapprochement with Eritrea garnered international acclaim; nonetheless, analysts observe that the fundamental aspects of the previous administration persist (Yimenu, 2024). The 2021 elections under the PP resulted in a disproportionate victory for the ruling party, characterized by boycotts and violence, exemplifying what researchers refer to as authoritarian resilience: robust parties and orchestrated contests that assimilate adversaries and suppress dissent. In actuality, established techniques such as centralization, elite co-optation, and repression endure, resulting in chronic political instability, ranging from ethnic violence to the Tigray conflict (Eshetu, Abdulfetah, & Berhanu, 2022). This continuity suggests that tourism, which thrived on stability before 2018, continues to be highly vulnerable. Recent studies confirm that unrest inflicts “debilitating effects” on Ethiopia’s tourism economy ; protests and war disrupt services, scare off visitors, and tarnish the destination image (Gebremeskel, 2023). In fact,

⁷¹ Interview with Mr. Asfaw Kitaw , Senior Tourism Expert ,Ministry of Tourism, April 21 ,2025

⁷² Interview with Mr. Samson, culture and tourism expert, Addis Ababa city administration, April 24, 2025

tourism receipts fell again in 2023 despite a brief post-peace uptick, and industry experts warn that Ethiopia's "potential is undeniable, but instability acts as a handbrake on progress". Under the PP as under EPRDF rule, conflict remains the single greatest threat to tourism and public diplomacy (Qasim & World Bank, 2024, p. 18).

In response the current government has therefore doubled down on image management and tourism as public diplomacy. Ambitious infrastructure projects (e.g. Unity Park, the new science museum, and especially the Beautifying Sheger riverfront scheme) are explicitly presented as symbols of peace, unity, and modernity (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). Ethiopia engages in post-conflict branding by repackaging its legacy and urban renewal to rebrand the nation following conflicts (SASAC, 2022). Official discourse asserts that these locations establish Addis Ababa as a "cultural and diplomatic crossroads" and facilitate soft power, with the government highlighting Ethiopia's history, hospitality, and culture to international audiences. Nevertheless, discerning analysts warn that tourism-driven branding may distort reality. Zeng (2018) asserts that tourist "soft power" is effective only when grounded in authenticity and equity; cosmetic enhancements, such as Thailand's polished advertisements, obscure underlying social issues. The disparity between perception and reality in Ethiopia is pronounced.

A prime example is the Beautifying Sheger park. This riverside "green corridor" is heralded as a high-tech oasis, but critics call it a Potemkin project (Terrefe, 2021). Eshetu et al. (2022) argues the scheme chiefly serves urban elites, the diaspora and foreign visitors, while local residents' needs and histories are "sidestepped and silenced". In practice, a Chinese firm built the project with little community input, and the riverside development has already driven real-estate speculation and evictions. Researchers warn that such projects risk "green gentrification" and do not address root problems of poverty, displacement, or environmental harm that tourism development under Abiy has introduced new attractions, but these seem more symbolic than transformative. They promote a state-crafted brand of stability even as the underlying authoritarian dynamics and conflicts continue largely unchanged (Terrefe, 2021).

The tourism industry has experienced significant challenges as a result of recent conflicts. The Tigray conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an estimated decline of \$2 billion in tourism earnings over two years, leading to a deficit of nearly 3 million tourists (Misikir, 2023). The conflicts in the Amhara region in 2023 led to a state of emergency, which impeded travel

and resulted in flight cancellations to major tourist destinations, including Gondar and Lalibela (Agence France-Presse, 2023; Addis Insight, 2023). Industry experts have expressed concerns that government-sponsored tourism programs function mainly as tools of public diplomacy rather than as significant enhancements. Although initiatives such as Unity Park and Sheger Park have been advocated to improve Ethiopia's image, critics contend that these projects may fail to tackle the fundamental issues confronting the tourism sector (Skift, 2023). The World Bank has emphasized the necessity for improved cooperation between governmental initiatives and private sector participants to attract new investments and formulate a comprehensive tourism strategy (World Bank, 2023). In conclusion, the tourism initiatives of the PP government reflect a dedication to utilizing cultural heritage for economic advancement; yet, persistent political and societal obstacles hinder the efficacy of these endeavors.

Chapter Five:

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the role of tourism as a tool for public diplomacy in Addis Ababa since 2018. The study has examined the intersections of tourism development projects and initiatives, soft power, and national image-building by utilizing qualitative data, which includes semi-structured interviews with key informants from government ministries, tourism institutions, policy experts and local communities, as well as document analysis and observational insights. The results presented here encapsulate the principal findings and theoretical insights obtained from this empirical study.

First, Ethiopia's government is consciously adopting tourism as a form of soft power and public diplomacy. The establishment of a full ministry dedicated to tourism, the prominence of tourism in official economic reform agendas, and the significant investments in urban tourism infrastructure (parks, museums, convention centers) all signal that tourism is valued beyond narrow economic metrics. By hosting international conferences and inviting foreign leaders to new tourist sites, Ethiopia is turning physical spaces into instruments of image-building.

These tourism initiatives effectively project a desired national narrative. This confirms expectations from Soft Power theory: Unity Park, for instance, “serves a national exhibition space, subtly reinforcing Ethiopia’s soft power by promoting heritage and unity”. Friendship Park is explicitly celebrated as a symbol of Ethiopia’s strategic partnership with China. The adoption of such sites conveys Ethiopia’s values and ambitions (Pan-African solidarity, development, cultural richness) to both domestic and international audiences. The outcomes observed (e.g. media coverage of park inaugurations, positive tourist testimonials, diplomatic tours) indicate that the country’s attractiveness is being enhanced through these cultural products.

Constructivist insights are clearly demonstrated in practice; The content and use of Addis Ababa’s tourist attractions reflect how identities and perceptions are socially constructed. For example, the Victory of Adwa Memorial is not just a museum; it has been framed as a source of inspiration for “other African countries” and is used by Ethiopian leaders to promote a story of black resilience and unity. This shows that the meanings attached to historical events are being mobilized for present-day diplomacy, a hallmark of constructivist logic. In effect, tourism venues become narrative platforms that shape inter-state relationships and domestic cohesion simultaneously.

Coordination between diplomatic and tourism agencies is improving but remains partial. The Ministry of Tourism actively collaborates with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in promotions, and high-level visits incorporate tourism tours. The MFA, for its part, recognizes tourism under its economic diplomacy remit, engaging diaspora and hosting international events. However, the absence of a comprehensive, unified tourism-diplomacy policy (even one in draft) means that each actor often works in silos. Experts note that tourism’s role in public diplomacy is “not clearly articulated” in existing policy. Thus, while practice is on the rise, strategic integration is still evolving.

The impacts of these efforts are tangible but uneven. Tourism statistics for Addis Ababa have risen in recent years, with records showing significant daily visitors to parks. Conference tourism is expanding (e.g. the Adwa memorial’s on-site convention centers attracted tens of thousands of delegates). These generate foreign exchange and local employment. At the same time, challenges like skill shortages and dated regulations limit sector growth. The City Administration’s own

officials observe that Addis Ababa has become “one of the top cities in Africa” in terms of heritage sites, but stress the need to improve “people-to-people (citizen-to-citizen) diplomacy” which is currently “overlooked”.

In summary, the thesis concludes that tourism in Addis Ababa is an effective but under-optimized tool of public diplomacy. The major tourism projects exemplify how state-led cultural policy can reinforce foreign policy objectives. The Ministry of Tourism and other agencies are increasingly aligning their activities with soft power goals, confirming the theory that culture and place-based projects are instruments of influence. However, achieving the full potential of tourism for soft power aims to require more deliberate policy coherence and resource allocation (for example, updating the national tourism policy to emphasize public diplomacy).

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the analysis and conclusions, the following recommendations are offered. They are grouped by actor for clarity.

5.2.1 Recommendations for the Ministry of Tourism

Update and articulate policy: Revise the National Tourism Strategy (last updated 2009) to explicitly recognize tourism’s public diplomacy role. The new policy should set clear targets for tourism-based soft power, integrate diaspora tourism, and align with Ethiopia’s economic diplomacy goals.

Strengthen partnerships: Deepen collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by institutionalizing joint programs (e.g. tourism attachés in embassies, co-hosted cultural events). Expand MoUs with foreign partners to include tourism promotion and educational exchanges.

Enhance human capital: Invest in training programs for tourism professionals to address the “lack of skilled human resources” identified. Work with universities and vocational schools to offer courses in hospitality, cultural interpretation, and international marketing. Improved capacity aims to enable Ethiopia to host larger events (MICE) and provide quality experiences.

Promote MICE tourism: Capitalize on the convention centers (e.g. Addis International Convention Center) by marketing Ethiopia as a conference destination. Implement targeted

campaigns to attract high-profile events (technology summits, trade expos) that align with Ethiopia's strategic sectors. Support digital infrastructure and visa facilitation to improve delegate mobility.

Empower local stakeholders: Encourage public-private partnerships by creating incentives (tax breaks, recognition awards) for hotel chains, tour operators, and cultural enterprises that invest in tourism projects. Regularly convene a tourism industry council including private sector and civil society to ensure policies remain responsive and inclusive. The Ministry of tourist, in conjunction with the Ministry of Finance and the Civil Service Commission, should form a task force for policy revision to amend the national tourist plan. A memorandum of understanding should create a joint coordination unit with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Training programs must be planned in collaboration with public institutions and funded through public-private partnerships or donor contributions. A dedicated MICE promotion desk ought to be created within the Ministry to lead global marketing efforts, while an annual tourism industry event could engage local stakeholders and align incentives.

5.2.2 Recommendations for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Integrate tourism in diplomacy: Officially incorporate tourism promotion into economic diplomacy efforts. For instance, every trade mission could include tourism showcases (e.g. Ethiopian cultural exhibitions or virtual tours). Encourage diplomats to use tourist narratives in speeches and press releases, leveraging Ethiopia's attractions as diplomatic talking points.

Leverage high-level visits: Continue the practice of organizing visits to cultural sites (Unity Park, Adwa Memorial) for foreign dignitaries. Make these visits more systematic by briefing delegations on Ethiopia's heritage narrative beforehand. This aims to strengthen the soft-power impact of each visit.

Engage the diaspora: Expand diaspora engagement programs related to tourism. Offer Ethiopian expatriates opportunities to invest in tourism projects or to participate as cultural ambassadors during international festivals. Given the Ministry's ongoing diaspora work, bridging it with tourism (for example, through organized heritage tours for the Ethiopian diaspora) can amplify public diplomacy.

Support public diplomacy messaging: Train MFA spokespersons to include tourism content in public diplomacy campaigns. For example, in outreach to African or Western publics, highlight stories like the Adwa Victory Memorial's pan-African message. This aligns with Constructivist practice of using shared history to build international support. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) should appoint a tourism desk officer within its Economic Diplomacy Directorate to integrate tourism into diplomatic initiatives. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, should develop a toolkit for embassies that includes display materials and briefing manuals for high-level visits. The Diaspora Engagement Directorate may partner with diaspora chambers and organizations to promote investment and organize historical tours. Public diplomacy personnel should participate in short training programs, such as those developed in partnership with Addis Ababa University, to incorporate tourism into their speeches and outreach materials.

5.2.3 Recommendations for Addis Ababa City Administration

Revise urban tourism strategy: Update the city-level tourism plan to reflect current realities and global best practices. Incorporate goals for improving signage, visitor information centers, and accessibility (e.g. facilities for disabled visitors). Ensure the city strategy complements the new national policy.

Enhance coordination: Strengthen mechanisms for coordination between the city bureau and federal entities (Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Foreign Affairs). For example, institute a joint committee on tourism development to synchronize projects like corridor beautification and international marketing.

Invest in people-to-people diplomacy: Following the bureau's own recommendation, emphasize citizen-to-citizen exchanges. This could take the form of sister-city youth programs, community cultural festivals with international guests, and public diplomacy events at major parks that invite local participation. By engaging Addis Ababa's residents in hosting, the city harnesses grassroots soft power.

Formalize impact assessment: Begin conducting tourism impact studies. Though many attractions fall under federal oversight, the city can still measure effects of city-led initiatives

(e.g. visitor numbers to Unity or Entoto Park). This data aims to inform policy and help attract funding. Partnerships with academic institutions (see below) could assist in this evaluation.

The Addis Ababa City Administration Bureau of Culture and Tourism ought to create a City Tourism Taskforce to update the urban strategy in accordance with global best practices, engaging with stakeholders and utilizing the findings of this thesis as a reference. A formal joint coordination committee should be established with federal ministries to align significant projects. The city should collaborate with NGOs or international cities to facilitate people-to-people diplomacy events and assign local universities, such as Kotebe Metropolitan University, to perform impact assessments on city-led tourism initiatives. Annual budget allocations and clearly defined roles are essential components of the city's tourism plan.

5.2.4 Recommendations for Scholars and Researchers

Continue empirical research: Build on this study by conducting regular assessments of tourism's diplomatic impact. Quantitative surveys of tourists and diplomats could gauge perception changes attributable to visits. Comparative research across African cities (as initiated in this thesis) would highlight best practices.

Interdisciplinary collaboration: Encourage collaboration between political scientists, tourism scholars, and urban planners. For example, joint research projects could examine how Addis Ababa's corridor development (Chapter Four's focus) affects both city livability and foreign investment. **Engage with policy dialogue:** Organize workshops and seminars where researchers present findings to government officials (Ministries of Tourism, Foreign Affairs, city bureau). This aims to help translate academic insights (e.g. on soft power) into actionable policy.

Documentation and archiving: Work with the National Archives or university departments to document oral histories of tourism diplomacy initiatives (e.g. interviews with park designers, diplomats, tour guides). This preserves institutional memory and aids future research.

It is imperative that academic institutions, such as Addis Ababa University and St. Mary's University, in conjunction with private think tanks, establish research clusters dedicated to the fields of tourism and diplomacy, thereby obtaining funding through competitive national research grants. It is imperative that these clusters engage in biannual forums with policymakers

and share their findings through both academic and policy briefs. Academic institutions could forge partnerships with the Ministry of Tourism to collect data, while simultaneously engaging students in initiatives that document oral histories pertinent to public diplomacy events and the development of parks.

5.2.5 Recommendations for Private Sector Stakeholders

Invest in diversified tourism products: Hotels, tour operators, and investors should develop packages around the new public diplomacy sites. For instance, create special tours of Unity Park, Friendship Park, and the Adwa Memorial that target international visitors and conference delegates. These tours can highlight Ethiopia's diplomatic messages (heritage, modernization) as part of the experience.

Form industry associations: In sectors like hospitality and MICE services, establish associations or unions that liaise with government. Such groups can lobby for industry needs (e.g. visa easing, workforce training) and communicate industry capabilities to foreign partners, ensuring the private sector is a proactive partner in diplomacy. **Promote cultural authenticity:** Local businesses should ensure that tourism offerings authentically reflect Ethiopia's diverse culture and history. This enhances the credibility of Ethiopia's soft power. For example, restaurants and crafts markets can tie their products to the national narrative (e.g. showcasing traditional art in Unity Park gift shops).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR): Encourage CSR programs that link business success to community development around tourism sites. For instance, a hotel chain might sponsor a cultural festival at Friendship Park or provide scholarships for tourism education. Such actions reinforce Ethiopia's image as a country where business supports societal values.

These recommendations, if implemented, would strengthen the synergy between tourism development and Ethiopia's diplomatic objectives. By updating policies, enhancing coordination, and fostering stakeholder engagement, Ethiopia can more fully realize the soft-power potential identified in this research. References to the findings and data underlying these recommendations are drawn from Chapter Four of this thesis. Citations in brackets (e.g.) refer to specific pages of that chapter. Each finding about institutions, projects, or impacts from Chapter Four underpins the corresponding conclusion or recommendation above.

Entities within the private sector, particularly those involved in tourism, hospitality, and event management, ought to establish or enhance associations tailored to their specific sectors (for instance, the Ethiopian MICE Association) to effectively advocate for the interests of the industry. It is essential for these associations to collaboratively develop tourism packages that incorporate cultural elements, in harmony with soft power narratives, and to jointly sponsor events in significant parks. The Ministry of Tourism has the capacity to enable this via a Public–Private Dialogue (PPD) platform. Corporate social responsibility initiatives may be encouraged through public acknowledgment, such as annual awards, alongside tax incentives, supported by well-defined monitoring frameworks for social contributions associated with tourism.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Key informants

Name	Institution	Position	Date	Remarks
Dr. Yezihalem	Ministry of Tourism	Policy Expert	April 21, 2025	Provided insights on tourism policy framework and strategic tourism development.
Dr. Getchew	Ministry of Tourism	Policy Expert	April 21, 2025	Discussed tourism integration into national and international diplomacy.
Mr. Asfaw Kitaw	Ministry of Tourism	Senior Tourism Expert	April 21, 2025	Focused on tourism infrastructure and public-private partnerships.
Mr. Bizualem	Ministry of Tourism	MICE Sales Desk Manager	April 22, 2025	Shared insights on MICE tourism's role in public diplomacy and economic development.
Mr. Samson Ayenachew	Addis Ababa City Administration	Culture and Tourism Expert	April 24, 2025	Addressed urban tourism challenges and city branding strategies.
Mr. Girum Girma	Adwa Victory Memorial	Executive Manager	April 23, 2025	Provided insights on the role of heritage sites in national identity and tourism diplomacy.
Mr. Habtamu Evania	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Expert	April 23, 2025	Discussed Ethiopia's foreign policy and tourism as a tool for soft power diplomacy.

Appendix 2: Interview Guideline and Questions

Dear/Sir Key informant! I would like to say thank you for your sincere cooperation in this study. My name is Temesgen Mariye, and I am a student at Addis Ababa University in the department of Political Science and International Relations: MA in International Relations and Diplomacy. Currently, I am working on my thesis titled "Tourism as a tool for public diplomacy since 2018: the cases of Addis Ababa." I am conducting a master's thesis on the role of tourism in advancing Ethiopia's public diplomacy, with a focus on recent projects and strategies in Addis Ababa. Your insights, based on your professional experience and institutional knowledge, are extremely valuable to understanding how tourism is being used to promote Ethiopia's international image and diplomatic objectives.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary; you could decide to respond to any interview question with which you disagree. This is so since maintaining the rights and interests of important informants during a study and interview depends on a research ethic. The study was conducted for intellectual interests; any personal information you provide to the researcher aims to stay private. Given the information's confidentiality, I kindly ask your cooperation in providing accurate and honest data, so appreciating the value of this material for study purposes.

Kind Regards!

Temesgen Mariye

Ababa University, Ethiopia

Key Informant Interview Questions

A. MICE Tourism Expert

1. What is your role and experience in Ethiopia's MICE tourism sector?
2. How has MICE tourism contributed to Ethiopia's international image and diplomacy?
3. Have MICE events been used as soft power tools? Examples?
4. How do government policies affect MICE tourism development?
5. What are the main challenges and opportunities in Ethiopia's MICE sector?
6. How competitive is Ethiopia's MICE sector regionally?
7. What is your outlook for MICE tourism in the next 5–10 years?

B. Ministry of Tourism Official and Experts

1. How is the Ministry of Tourism structured and what are its main priorities?
2. How are tourism policies aligned with Ethiopia's foreign and development goals?
3. In what ways does the ministry use tourism to enhance the country's global image?
4. What role do diaspora communities and embassies play in tourism promotion?
5. What is the diplomatic and branding value of projects like Unity Park and Sheger Beautification?
6. What are the biggest challenges and strategic gaps in the sector?
7. What is your vision for Ethiopian tourism in the next 5–10 years?

C. Adwa Museum Representative

1. What is the mission of the Adwa Museum?
2. How does the museum contribute to tourism and national identity?
3. What strategies are used to attract and engage visitors?
4. How does the museum participate in international cultural diplomacy?
5. What are the main challenges and future plans for the museum?

D. Addis Ababa Bureau of Tourism and Culture

1. What is your strategic vision for tourism development in Addis Ababa?
 2. How do major projects (Unity Park, Friendship Park) impact city branding?
 3. How is Addis Ababa promoted as a MICE destination?
 4. How does the Bureau work with local artists, diaspora, and federal bodies?
 5. What are the infrastructure and policy challenges faced at the city level?
 6. How is the success of tourism projects measured?
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E. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official

1. What is the ministry's vision for public diplomacy and soft power?
 2. How does tourism fit into Ethiopia's foreign policy strategy?
 3. What collaborations exist with the Ministry of Tourism?
 4. How do embassies and the diaspora contribute to tourism diplomacy?
 5. What are the challenges and opportunities for integrating tourism into diplomatic efforts?
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F. Local Community

1. How do you perceive the purpose and impact of major tourism projects like Unity Park, Friendship Park, and the Adwa Museum in your city?
 2. What social or cultural changes have you observed in your area as a result of these tourism and beautification initiatives?
 3. Do you believe these projects help improve Ethiopia's image internationally or support its diplomatic goals? Why or why not?
 4. How accessible are these sites and corridors (parks, walkways, public spaces) to local communities in terms of use, cost, or inclusiveness.
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