"Different is not wrong, it's just an entry point for new knowledge"

Knowledge diplomacy as a two-way process: A case study of the South Africa Sweden University Forum (SASUF)

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Abstract

The significance and impact of IHERI on international relations is gaining recognition, yet this crucial aspect remains remarkably understudied. This study aims to explore the relations, processes and patterns of IHERI on bilateral relations and development cooperation between South Africa and Sweden. Primary quantitative and qualitative data was collected through a mixed methods approach encompassing an online survey followed by seven semi-structured follow-up interviews with South Africa Sweden University Forum (SASUF) members, and analyzed through the concept of Knowledge Diplomacy and Systems Theory. The findings show that IHERI facilitates the exchange of knowledge, expertise, and innovative ideas between and among South African and Swedish actors and partners. This contributes to the mutual development of capacities in both countries, which can facilitate joint strategies in addressing ongoing development challenges such as the SDGs. The application of systems theory reveals knowledge diplomacy as a two-way process is exercised through the five elements interacting within the system as well as the global system. Overall, cultural exchange plays a critical role in knowledge diplomacy as a two-way process, facilitating the contribution IHERI can make to strengthening IR and the role of IR in enhancing IHERI by bringing different actors and partners into horizontal collaborations.

Key words: SDG4, SDG17, knowledge diplomacy, IHERI, South Africa, Sweden, international relations

Word count: 14,934

Acronyms (as they appear in thesis)

International Relations	IR
South Africa Sweden University Forum	SASUF
International Higher Education, Research and Innovation	IHERI
Sustainable Development Goals	SDGs
Non-Governmental Organizations	NGOs
International Higher Education	IHE
Middle East and North Africa	MENA
South Africa National Research Foundation	NRF
Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education	STINT

Tusen Tack

This body of work marks the end of my LUMID journey. These past two (and a half) years have been filled with excitement, challenges, and adventure. Special thanks to program staff and management for their teaching and support. Above all, I am thankful for the friendships I have made and will continue to cherish as we embark on our own journeys ahead. The future is bright.

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Done is Good. MAYHWEIFD.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation for Study

Bilateral relations, throughout history and contemporary times, have consistently captured the focus of International Relations (IR) scholars and practitioners dealing with questions brought about by our ever-evolving and complex world. Yet, in the course of my research on bilateral relations and exposure to South Africa-Sweden relations, specifically through the South Africa Sweden University Forum (SASUF), my experiences were strikingly similar to (Ludwig, 2021, p. 1) in how, "it quickly struck me how little understanding of the driving forces, processes and effects of bilateral dynamics we nevertheless still have in IR". The inherent complexity of this subject matter and the interconnectedness between human global relations and global life overall is the first motivation for this study.

As an observer and participant in SASUF, this research strives to interpret and understand the complex environment in which South Africa and Sweden are inextricably interwoven. South Africa and Sweden are two countries with strong historical ties and broad points of contact. The partnership between these two countries has grown since the former's transition to democracy on April 27, 1994, progressing from Sweden's support towards the anti-apartheid struggle and traditional development cooperation to a partnership built on mutual interest and shared responsibility (Government Offices of Sweden, 2009). Further evidence of their partnership is illustrated by the Binational Commission created in 1999 and a total of 22 bilateral agreements between the two countries since (DIRCO, 2022 cited in Botha, 2023, p. 7). Despite this rich history and development, scholarly appetite on the subject of South Africa-Sweden relations remains scant and is largely concentrated on the pre-1994 relationship (Botha, 2023). The lack of more recent research on these two countries' relations is the second motivation for this study.

In addition to the milestones mentioned above, innovative initiatives have been established in areas of mutual concern. In particular SASUF, which seeks to strengthen ties between South Africa and Sweden and stimulate collaboration in higher education, research and innovation (SASUF, 2023). Furthermore, there is a lack of research on the intersection of international higher education, research and innovation (IHERI) and the increased complexities and

interconnectedness of the relationships between and among countries of the world (Knight, 2020). Therefore, the ability to contribute to this research gap utilizing South Africa and Sweden through SASUF is the third motivation for this study.

The final motivation stems from my positionality as a researcher and the connection to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As a third-party observer, I consistently found myself navigating the complexities of trying to understand the multifaceted histories, traditions, and power dynamics in the interactions unfolding before me, especially within a Global North-South context. In a similar vein, being able to witness SDG 4, quality education, and SDG 17, partnerships for the goals (United Nations, 2023), being implemented through this partnership built on higher education, research and innovation provides hope for the wellbeing of all. Overall, the experience of being a guest in both Sweden and South Africa is life changing and adds a unique and valuable perspective to this research endeavor.

1.2   Overview of SASUF

South Africa Sweden University Forum (SASUF) began in 2018 as a strategic internationalization project, originally running from 2018 to 2020, with the overall aim of strengthening ties between South Africa and Sweden in higher education, research and innovation (SASUF, 2023). At this time, the SASUF Student Network was formed aiming to bring together South African and Swedish students in research, education, and innovation to jointly engage in global challenges and the impact on society, especially youth. Following COVID-19, SASUF was granted further funding to continue the collaboration under the name of SASUF 2030. With the goal of including 40 universities in total, SASUF currently encompasses 26 universities from South Africa and 12 universities from Sweden as illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2. Additionally, SASUF has a variety of partners ranging from non-governmental organizations, research centers, industry organizations and companies (SASUF, 2023). While there is no exact number of SASUF participants, the SASUF administration, housed within Uppsala University, estimates a total of 4000 participants since the forum's inception. Overall, the forum and all of its diverse stakeholders and participants are working together to address the six thematic areas based on the clustering of the SDGs, which includes: climate change, education, social transformation, health, sustainable urbanization, and digital technologies.

Figure 1: SASUF partner universities in South Africa (SASUF, 2023).

Figure description: SASUF partner universities consist of twenty-six universities in South Africa spread across all nine provinces.

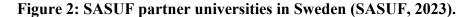**Figure 2: SASUF partner universities in Sweden (SASUF, 2023).**

Figure description: SASUF partner universities consist of fourteen universities (Gothenburg University not pictured) in Sweden spread across all three regions.

1.3 Specific Aim and Research Questions

Jane Knight's concept of knowledge diplomacy provides a structured and organized foundation for understanding, analyzing, and interpreting the various components and relationships within this case study. Furthermore, this concept bridges international higher education, research and innovation with international relations ensuring the research is well-structured, theoretically grounded, and logically developed. Additionally, systems theory as an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach, will further aid the understanding of the various components and relationships in relation to the larger global system. While this research uses SASUF as a case study, it is not an evaluation of SASUF[1]. Additionally, this research is not assessing the similarities and differences between science diplomacy and knowledge diplomacy even though science diplomacy is one of the multitude of terms used to understand the role of IHERI in IR (Knight, 2022). Additionally, according to Cerroni (2020), knowledge diplomacy encompasses science diplomacy but is more comprehensive.

As illustrated above, this study is driven by four motivating factors: the complex challenge of studying bilateral relations, a research gap on contemporary Sweden and South Africa relations, the role international higher education, research and innovation plays in this space, and the connection to SDG 4 and 17. Not only are these factors an opportunity to contribute novel research, they act as a foundation upon which to build. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to provide a different perspective on bilateral relations in the IR field in addition to exploring international higher education, research and innovation exchange between the two countries. The aim is, thus, twofold, which also lay the basis for the formulations of the following research questions:

1. How can we understand the role of IHERI in advancing international (bilateral) development cooperation between South Africa and Sweden?

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[1] An evaluation of SASUF 2018-2020 was conducted externally by ASKing, a Swedish consultancy firm, on behalf of Uppsala University and the Swedish Partner Universities in the steering committee from 2017 to 2021. To access the report, visit: https://www.sasuf.org/new-page.

2. How is knowledge diplomacy as a two-way process exercised in the international higher education, research and innovation (IHERI) relations between and among South Africa and Sweden?

1.4   Significance of the Study

The significance and impact of IHERI on international relations is gaining recognition, yet this crucial aspect remains remarkably understudied. We live in a highly interconnected and interdependent world where higher education is a conduit for the cross-border flow and exchange of people and knowledge (Knight, 2020). IHERI traditionally encompasses scholarships, student/scholar mobility, bilateral agreements, and projects, however there are new developments which need to be considered and examined within relations between and among countries (Knight, 2022). These new developments include the development of education cities (Shaked, 2014), international research networks and forums (Uddin, Khan and Baur, 2015), knowledge hubs (Sturzeis 2014), regional centers of excellence (Fekadu et al., 2021), international joint universities (Wilkins, 2016), multilateral thematic and disciplinary research networks (such as SASUF), international private-public partnerships, regional-based universities (Knight and Zhang, 2022), [and] international satellite campuses (Knight, 2022; He and Wilkins, 2020). This study on knowledge diplomacy marks a pivotal stride in delving deeper into the conceptualization of this phenomenon and identifying areas that demand additional scrutiny. Additionally, this study uses an interdisciplinary approach to examine and illuminate the questions, complexities, and issues related to the role and contribution of international higher education, research, and innovation in international relations between South Africa and Sweden using a knowledge diplomacy approach complemented by systems theory.

1.5   Outline of Thesis

The thesis is organized into eight chapters. Chapter one, above, provides the motivations and significance of study, an overview of SASUF, and presents the study's aim and research questions. In chapter two, the study is further situated by informing readers of the changes in contemporary diplomacy and IHERI and are introduced to the concepts of international research networks and forums and knowledge diplomacy. This is followed by a comprehensive literature review in chapter three and a presentation of the conceptual and theoretical framework

underpinning the research and guiding the interpretation of results in chapter four. Chapter five outlines the methodological approach of the study including research design, methods and sampling processes, data analysis, and a reflection of the author's positionality and limitations of the research. Chapters six and seven delve into the research analysis and discussion guided by the conceptual and theoretical framework. Lastly, chapter 8 summarizes the main conclusions of the study and provides recommendations for future research.

2 Situating the Study

In order to situate the study further, this section provides contextualization of the changes in contemporary diplomacy, the changing landscape of IHERI and an overview of international research networks and forums.

2.1 Changes in Contemporary Diplomacy

The understanding and meaning of contemporary diplomacy is a contested concept and is generally described as a window to making sense of the relationship between countries engaged in the international system (Pigman, 2010). Widely considered to be the father of diplomatic studies, Nicholson in the 1930s defined diplomacy as "the management of international relations by negotiation" (Nicholson, 1963 p. 4). Negotiation is the key term in this definition of diplomacy as it is one of the approaches in knowledge diplomacy. This is followed by Watson's definition in the 1980s as "the dialogue between states" (Watson, 1991). However, more recent scholars (Knight, 2022; Cooper, Heine and Thakur, 2013) argue that Watson's definition is vague, failing to specify whether dialogue should be understood as a mode and/or an approach, and further not indicating what type of actors are considered "states". Additionally, "between states" does not specify what actors are involved. More recent definitions refer to diplomacy as the process of communication between countries and other international actors, the management of relations between states and between states and other actors, and a peaceful approach to managing international relations that relies on two-way communications, negotiations, and compromises between states and actors (Klavins, 2011; Barston, 2019; Opeoluwa, 2021). While all three of these definitions illustrate the multiple interpretations of diplomacy, they all acknowledge diplomacy as an exposed process in that the environment and actors are constantly

changing alongside the context (Klavins, 2011; Barston, 2019; Opeoluwa, 2021). Overall, diplomacy is fluid and uses negotiation as a method but is also a process that is constantly moderated by the parties involved.

2.2   The Changing Landscape of IHERI

An examination of the major changes, trends and challenges will take place in order to contextualize the study further. Firstly, one of the major changes occurring are the growing number of new actors, specifically non-governmental actors such as those from the higher education, research and innovation sectors, civil society organizations, and multinational companies, playing a central role in diplomacy. Secondly, the changing role of diplomats in which their role increasingly focuses on coordinating, managing and facilitating in complex processes (Hocking et al., 2012). New social media technologies are the third major change. Lastly, the increase in issue-specific diplomacies such as climate diplomacy (Hsu et al., 2015), health diplomacy (Katz et al., 2011) and cyber diplomacy (Attatfa, Renaud and De Paoli, 2020).

One of the challenges occurring in contemporary diplomacy is managing the first major change described above. The shift from a state-based approach to a multi-actor approach characterizes the new world of diplomacy (Hocking et al., 2012). Additionally, new actors are introduced into these complex processes and traditional emphasis on confidentiality and secrecy is challenged by nondiplomatic actors (Knight, 2022). This coupled with rapid technological changes in the form of social media and communication further expands the reach and accessibility of actors and partners (Knight, 2022). As this is one of the objectives of the study, these new developments need to be analyzed and understood in terms of potential benefits and risks to strengthening relations between and among South Africa and Sweden. Therefore, the growing emphasis on IHERI and more specifically, research networks within IHERI as a means of addressing global challenges, garners further exploration.

2.3   International Research Networks and Forums

Bilateral research agreements between countries and universities have a long tradition, being enshrined in governmental agreements and memoranda of understanding. This is especially

evident today as the number of theme-based and interdisciplinary research networks and forums has increased in the last decade to the point that there is no current data on the number, theme and distribution of research networks globally (Uddin, Khan and Baur, 2015). A considerable amount of literature illustrates the rise of research networks and forums, both regional and international, in a variety of fields and how new collaboration patterns are changing the global balance of research activity and knowledge flow (Adams, 2012; Vogel et al., 2019; Fitzgerald, Ojanperä and O'Clery, 2021). This change occurring globally lends itself to the ongoing discussion of SDG 17, partnerships for the goals and specifically target 17.6, which calls for the improvement of:

> North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhanced knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved coordination among existing mechanisms (The Global Goals, 2023).

Not only does this target speak to the diversity of research networks, it places emphasis on mutuality, a key aspect of knowledge diplomacy. While the Global North has historically dominated the research ecosystem, there have been calls for a more equitable exchange between North-South to help inculcate a culture of collaboration for better knowledge production (Barasa, Jang and Zhang 2023; Nature Index, 2023). Overall, research networks and all of its nuances provide an opportunity to investigate their significance in higher education, research and innovation in relation to the emerging concept of knowledge diplomacy.

3   Literature Review

A literature review was conducted using a systematic and comprehensive exploration of existing scholarly works related to the research questions. The following section primarily focuses on literature related to the concept of knowledge diplomacy, providing a review of existing research as well as the methods utilized.

The precise origins of the concept of knowledge diplomacy remain unclear; however, one of its earliest references can be traced back to Ryan's (1998) work in which he discusses the issues,

politics, and diplomacy of balancing intellectual property rights with the public's right of access. In 2012, Johnston, then Governor General of Canada, referred to the concept of the "diplomacy of knowledge" as the ability and willingness to work together, across disciplines and borders, to exchange knowledge, expertise and resources to improve our lives. A review of the literature reveals that a majority of the studies employ a qualitative analysis or case study design, with many utilizing a mixed methods approach. Another notable observation is the absence of a systematic exploration of the foundational elements of Knight's knowledge diplomacy in the literature reviewed. Instead, studies exhibit a tendency to engage with knowledge diplomacy as a concept and not a process, which does not mean they are dismissing its foundational elements but rather discussing the concept as a whole. Four main themes emerge from the literature review: (1) knowledge diplomacy as soft power; (2) knowledge diplomacy and higher education; (3) knowledge diplomacy as a means of increasing and complimenting cultural diplomacy; and (4) the importance of non-traditional diplomacy actors with an emphasis on higher education institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

As highlighted by Wojciuk (2018 cited in Knight, 2022), knowledge diplomacy as a gateway to deepening relationships between countries is not a notion shared by all scholars. Joseph Nye (2004 cited in Knight, 2022, p. 3) introduced the concept of soft power, defining it "as the ability to influence others and achieve national self-interest through attraction and persuasion, rather than through military force or economic sanctions–commonly known as hard power". Nye's introduction of soft power has significantly influenced the conceptualization of the expanding role of International Higher Education (IHE) in diplomacy as illustrated by the following studies. Svenson (2016) describes how IHE can become an instrument for soft power and can be leveraged by groups to strategically position themselves to negotiate beyond the confines of their conventional power bases. In other words, by leveraging educational initiatives, these groups aim to strategically position themselves on the global stage and engage in negotiations or collaborations that extend beyond their usual spheres of influence. In a similar vein, Gultekin (2021) claims knowledge diplomacy subscribes to a more Western normative and idealist perspective and likens the term 'sharp powers' as a more blatant version of soft power. Furthermore, the observation that knowledge diplomacy is influenced by Western norms and ideals suggests a more nuanced comparison between knowledge diplomacy and 'sharp

powers,' highlighting the potential overlaps or similarities between the two, particularly in terms of the explicitness of their influence.

A majority of literature discusses knowledge diplomacy in higher education cases ranging from internationalization in education (Wu, 2018), scholarships for international students (Varpahovskis, 2021), study abroad programs (Gońda, Nowosielski and Jóźwiak, 2023; Asada, 2019), university alliances (Chou and Demiryol, 2023), and consortia as an effective way of promoting the rate of students' participation in education abroad (Huang and Liu, 2023). Within this theme, knowledge diplomacy is frequently used as a means to an end, including but not limited to increasing abroad student participation; increasing personal development, transforming international alumni engagement; as way to guarantee the sustainability of enduring partnerships and to establish a framework for reasoned, mutually enriching debates (Brajkovic, Helms and Rumbley, 2019); and to facilitate constructive engagement in addressing national and cultural differences.

The meaning of cultural diplomacy as a concept and a practice has never been agreed upon by scholars due to the diversity and complexity of the concept, its dimensions, and stakeholders at all levels (Gienow-Hecht and Donfried, 2010; Goff 2020). Knowledge diplomacy is discussed as a complementary alternative to a 'narrow' cultural diplomacy (Kim, 2012). In a different vein, cultural diplomacy is described as a byproduct of knowledge diplomacy, when there are claims that it should be perceived as the core interest (Lin and Ju Chan, 2023). Knight (2022, p. 19) states cultural diplomacy "refers to using culture as a means to an end not an issue unto itself". This will be further explored in the context of knowledge diplomacy as a two-way process in the analysis and discussion. Regardless of the waxing and waning of this concept and practice as well as the ongoing debate on cultural diplomacy or cultural relations depending on the type of actors, cultural diplomacy will be defined as cultural exchange for this study as this was the term used in the research methods.

The concept of knowledge diplomacy has broadened the inclusivity of the actors and partners involved in the process and system in which the process is occurring. Non-traditional diplomacy actors are called upon to facilitate knowledge diplomacy as well as aid in its success. Chaban

and Headley (2023) call for the expansion of education systems beyond regional programs, while Vinet (2008) praises universities collaborating with NGOs and international organizations and believes these types of partnerships are the bedrock of knowledge diplomacy. Cauce, Flückiger and van der Zwaan (2022) take this a step further, describing universities as a "fifth power" and having the ability to heavily influence society. Lastly, knowledge diplomacy facilitates discussions taking place beyond nation-states and instead in interstices as seen in the climate change regime (Foyer and Kervan, 2023). Overall, the concept of knowledge diplomacy represents a paradigm shift towards a more inclusive engagement, involving a diverse range of actors and partners.

While not one of the key themes emerging from the literature review, a few studies touch upon an important aspect often overlooked—the potential negative consequences of knowledge diplomacy outside of the knowledge as power realm. Belarbi, El Refae and Aissani (2023) shed light on the brain drain paradox occurring in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as well as other developing countries. Hernandez (2021) points out the 'legitimacy gaps' of knowledge diplomacy in a climate change context such as the unintended reproduction of structural inequities due to structural imbalances that are systemic in nature and are therefore difficult to correct. In other words, certain contexts are already fixed, implying knowledge diplomacy may not be applicable and or would have to compensate for these systemic imbalances. Similarly, to Hernandez (2021), Gultekin (2021) and Chou and Demiryol (2023) highlight the importance of reflecting on the environment and context in which the concept of knowledge diplomacy is being applied as well as the perception between knowledge power and knowledge diplomacy.

Overall, the literature review has three key takeaways to keep in mind as we transition to the conceptual and theoretical framework. Firstly, the intersection between higher education and international relations is continuously evolving. Secondly, while cultural diplomacy and exchange is frequently seen as a byproduct of knowledge diplomacy, it can be equally salient in influencing relations. Lastly, knowledge diplomacy, while inherently good, intended and unintended effects may arise depending on the context, environment and perceptions of those involved.

4 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

In this section, I lay out a conceptual understanding of knowledge diplomacy and how the foundational elements were applied throughout the study. An overview of systems theory is also provided and discussed in relation to the concept of knowledge diplomacy.

4.1 Knowledge Diplomacy Framework

The proposed definition for knowledge diplomacy is "the process of building and strengthening relations between and among countries through international higher education, research and innovation" (Knight, 2021 cited in Knight, 2022, p. 4). While this definition is concise, it does not include specifics on actors, values or strategies. Additionally, diplomacy is intentionally framed as a process. To operationalize this term, we implemented a conceptual framework, which "are analytical tools to explore the meaning and deepen the understanding of a phenomenon" (Ravitch and Riggan, 2016, p. 104). Knight's proposed conceptual framework is oriented to the process of knowledge diplomacy and is not a policy or a theory of knowledge diplomacy. Additionally, knowledge diplomacy is neither a neutral nor a normative concept (Knight, 2022). The structure of the proposed conceptual framework, illustrated in Table 1, is based on five foundational elements:

1) intentions, purposes or driving rationales
2) multiple state actors and partners
3) underlying principles and values
4) primary modes or approaches used and
5) the activities or instruments (Knight, 2022, p.105).

Table 1: Conceptual framework for IHERI in a knowledge diplomacy approach (Knight, 2022, p. 105)

Intentions, Purpose, Rationales 1	Actors, Partners 2	Principles, Values 3	Modes, Approaches 4	Activities, Instruments 5
To build/ strengthen relations between and among countries through international higher education, research and innovation (IHERI) To use IHERI to help address global challenges and promote peace and prosperity To strengthen IHERI through enhanced relations between and among countries	Government departments and agencies related to education, science, technology, innovation at all levels Intergovernmental agencies related to IHERI NGOs related to IHERI HEIs Research centres Think Tanks Centres of Excellence Research Networks Foundations Innovation Centres Experts Private sector - Multi-national Corp	Reciprocity Mutuality Cooperation Common ground Exchange Commonality Partnership Common good Inter-disciplinary Multi-sector Transparency	Negotiation Communication Representation Conflict Resolution Compromise Collaboration Mediation Conciliation Building trust Dialogue	*Generic*: Networks Joint projects Conferences Summits Coalitions Track Two Agreements Working Groups Institution building *IHERI specific*: Intl joint universities Student/scholar exchanges Research networks Education/ Knowledge Hubs Scholarships ODA projects Twinning and Joint Degree Programs

Table description: The five foundational elements of knowledge diplomacy accompanied with examples related to IHERI.

The following subsections discuss each foundational element that the knowledge diplomacy framework encompasses. These foundational elements also helped guide the research methodology as questions in the survey and follow-up interviews were aimed at assessing each element.

4.1.1 Intentions, Purposes and Rationales

A central notion of knowledge diplomacy is the collaboration between diverse groups working towards achieving both self and shared interests. As self and shared interests both overlap and diverge, these interactions either contribute or inhibit relations between countries (Knight, 2022). Furthermore, a diverse network of groups and partners from various backgrounds being

brought together to solve common challenges means actors will have unique intentions, purposes and rationales at play. Inevitably, tensions and conflicts will arise calling for these differences to be respected and negotiated in order to ensure opportunities for all are optimized. This is achieved through a horizontal collaborative type of relationship where mutuality is prioritized (Knight, 2022). In contrast to vertical collaborations, where there is a clear hierarchy or power dynamic, horizontal collaborations involve cooperation among peers, equals, or entities with similar levels of authority and responsibility. This type of relationship is characterized by shared decision-making, mutual respect, and a collaborative effort towards common goals.

Survey questions 5 through 8 assess participants' intentions, purpose and rationales of SASUF and their respective participation in SASUF as a member. Two scale questions specifically targeted the extent to which SASUF builds/strengthens relations between and among countries through IHERI and the extent to which IHERI helps address global challenges.

4.1.2 *Actors and Partners*

Numerous actors and partners are actively involved in international relations, undergoing constant changes that parallel the dynamic nature of the international landscape. The adoption of a multi-actor approach stands out in the evolving landscape of contemporary diplomacy as global issues require different approaches (Hocking et al., 2012). Particular to this case study, South African and Swedish universities and all of their respective members and partners are key players in knowledge diplomacy. The study tried to capture this diversity by including all types of actors and members during data collection. In many cases, IHERI actors are working with other sectors and disciplines at national, regional and international levels.

Survey questions 9 through 12 assess what groups SASUF members interact and partner alongside. The answers to these questions showcase the diverse array of individuals, communities, governmental bodies, and groups engaged in SASUF. The diverse interactions both within and among SASUF, highlight the multifaceted relationships and collaborations that contribute to the forum's dynamic and impactful initiatives.

4.1.3   Principles and Values

Principles and values constitute integral elements of diplomacy (Rathbun, 2014) and foreign policy (Srinivasan, Mayall and Pulipaka., 2019 cited in Gupta, 2019) and thus are core to understanding knowledge diplomacy. Within knowledge diplomacy, the values of cooperation, reciprocity and mutuality are fundamental (Knight, 2022). More specifically, mutuality of benefits does not mean that all actors/countries involved benefit equally but that everyone involved receives some benefit of the output produced. These and other principles and values listed in column 3 of Table 1 are made explicit through the conceptual framework. With this in mind, whether or not these principles and values are interpreted to be good or bad are determined by the actors and partners and are dependent on the desired outcomes (Knight, 2022).

Survey question 13 uses Knight's principles and values illustrated in column 3 of Table 1 to explore which principles and values are upheld by SASUF. Building off this ranking question, space is provided in question 14 for further elaboration as needed.

4.1.4   Modes and Approaches

As stated above, knowledge diplomacy is based on horizontal relationships between and among actors and partners at varying levels and focuses on mutuality to ensure that the goals are met and everyone benefits to some extent. While differences are inevitable, knowledge diplomacy specifically relies on collaboration, negotiation and compromise (Knight, 2022). Instead of providing a list of modes and approaches in survey question 15, the researcher posed an open ended question exploring how participants describe relations between South Africa and Sweden through SASUF.

4.1.5   Activities and Instruments

Activities and instruments fall into two categories for this study, generic and IHERI specific. The activities generally associated with international relations and diplomacy include joint meetings, conferences, track two negotiations, summits and coalitions (Cooper, Heine and Thakur, 2013). Additional activities with international higher education, research and innovation at its core include "international joint universities, student/scholar exchanges, thematic research networks, education/knowledge hubs, regional centers of excellence, scholarships, development

cooperation projects, international branch campuses, alumni networks" etc. (Knight, 2022, p. 107). While these two categories exist separately, the researcher has firsthand experience of observing a blend of generic and IHERI specific activities and instruments within SASUF. Examples of this include joint projects stemming from the research network and working groups formed following scholar exchange.

The last foundational element of this concept is explored through survey questions 16 and 17. Participants are asked to share which SASUF activities they have or are currently participating in. While they click all activities that apply in the survey form, space is provided for activities that are not listed in order to be inclusive of both generic and IHERI specific activities and instruments as well as activities not known to the researcher.

4.2   Systems Theory

Systems theory is an interdisciplinary field based on the principle that the component parts of a system can best be understood in the context of the relationships with each other and with other systems, rather than in isolation. When tracing the origins of this theory we come across Köhler's, "Closed and Open Systems" (1938 cited in Wagemans, et al., 2012), von Bertalanffy's, "The Theory of Open Systems in Physics and Biology" (1950), Ashby's, "Self-Regulation and Requisite Variety" (1956), Ackoff's, "Systems, Organizations, and Interdisciplinary Research" (1960 cited in Introductory Literature on General Systems, 1963), and Katz and Kahn's "The social psychology of organizations" (1996). These diverse schools are united by two things. Firstly, their focus on understanding how factors are connected to each other in a system: a set of things working together as a complex whole and secondly by the concept of emergence, wherein interactions among the components of a system can give rise to emergent properties that transcend the understanding of each individual part in isolation.

Recognizing its wide applicability, the researcher aims to delineate its specific application to the case study at hand. According to Hamilton (2018), there is no single introduction to systems theory in international relations, which focuses on how the individual units in a *system* behave and interact. Building on this terminology, as defined by Friedman and Allen (2014) *inputs* are constituted by communication and information entering the system. All social systems receive

input from the environment, engage in process(es) and create *outputs* as illustrated in Figure 4. *Feedback* is the regulating process of the exchange of information between the system and its environment. According to Kast and Rosenzweig (1972), information concerning the outputs or the process of the system is fed back as an input into the system, which can cause changes in the process. Additionally, feedback is a method of evaluation used to determine whether the system's outputs align with the perceived goals of the system. Lastly, the *environment* speaks to an *open system* in systems theory. An open system interacts with both the internal and external environment. Thus, it influences and gets influenced by the external environment (Chick and Dow, 2011).

While there are many strengths to systems theory including but not limited to being an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach (Skytnner, 2001) and facilitating complex design modeling and multi-perspectivity (Jonas, 2014), weaknesses exist such as the need for more explicit patterns of relationships (Kast and Rosenzweig 1972), being too abstract (Goldstein, 1975) and encouraging a reductionist view (Donnelly, 2019). These criticisms highlight the need for a more nuanced and context-specific application of systems theory, which this study aims to fulfill through a case study design.

4.3   Knowledge Diplomacy as a Two-Way Process and Systems Theory

Knowledge diplomacy is conceptualized as a two-way process (Knight, 2022). First, the contribution that IHERI can make to strengthening relations between and among countries and second, the role of international relations in influencing IHERI as illustrated below in Figure 3 (Knight, 2022). In order to answer the research questions, the input, output, feedback and (the two-way) process of knowledge diplomacy will be used as illustrated in Figure 4. Knowledge diplomacy can be understood and analyzed through the lens of systems theory, which provides an additional framework for comprehending complex interactions, relationships and dynamics. The following builds on Figure 3 and elaborates on Figure 4, discussing how knowledge diplomacy maps onto systems theory.

Figure 3. Knowledge diplomacy as a two-way process (Knight, 2022, p. 108)
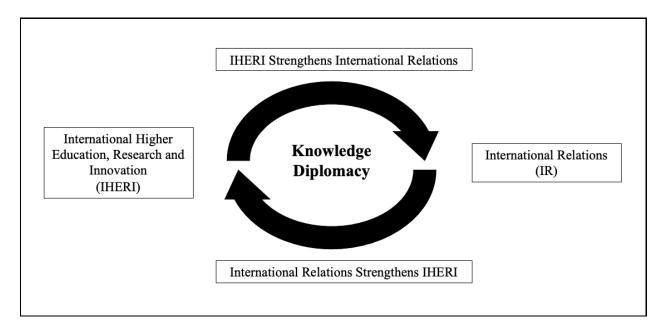

Figure description: The contribution IHERI can make to strengthening IR and the role of IR in enhancing IHERI.

Systems theory and knowledge diplomacy are interconnected components. Firstly, systems theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of various components within a system. In the context of knowledge diplomacy, the key actors, institutions, and stakeholders involved form interconnected components as highlighted in section 4.1.2. Secondly, feedback loops are both present in the conceptual framework and theory. Systems theory highlights the importance of feedback loops in understanding how a system, such as SASUF, operates. In knowledge diplomacy, feedback mechanisms exist through continuous communication and information exchange between participating entities as well as the two-way process of IHERI and IR. This feedback informs decision-making processes and influences the direction of diplomatic initiatives in the realm of higher education, research, and innovation. Lastly, systems theory encourages a holistic perspective, considering the system as a whole rather than focusing solely on individual parts. Overall, knowledge diplomacy involves a comprehensive approach, considering the collective impact of higher educational, research, and innovation initiatives on international relations.

Furthermore, systems theory acknowledges the emergence of patterns and behaviors that arise from interactions among system components. In knowledge diplomacy, certain patterns may emerge from collaborative efforts, leading to the development of shared knowledge, the establishment of common goals, and the emergence of diplomatic practices conducive to international cooperation and development. Systems theory recognizes the adaptability of a system to undergo change. Knowledge diplomacy, as part of international relations, adapts to evolving global challenges and incorporates new information and insights based on the context and actors. It demonstrates the capacity to adjust strategies and approaches in response to emerging trends.

Additionally, systems theory involves delineating boundaries and understanding how a system interacts with its environment. In knowledge diplomacy, boundaries exist in terms of national policies, cultural contexts, and institutional structures. Effective knowledge diplomacy involves navigating these boundaries to foster meaningful international collaborations. Systems theory introduces the concept of equifinality, where different paths can lead to similar outcomes. Similarly, in knowledge diplomacy, various approaches and collaborations may contribute to similar overarching goals, emphasizing the flexibility and diversity of strategies within the system.

In summary, knowledge diplomacy aligns with systems theory by recognizing the interconnected, dynamic, and holistic nature of the international higher education, research, and innovation landscape. The changes that have emerged in contemporary diplomacy highlight Nicholson's conceptualization of diplomacy "as a process of change" reacting to and also being a catalyst for the ever-changing nature of the environment in which it is operating (Nicholson, 1963). Overall, applying systems theory provides a valuable perspective for understanding the complexities and interactions within the realm of knowledge diplomacy and will aid in the analysis and discussion of findings.

Figure 4. Knowledge diplomacy as process(es) in systems theory.

Figure description: The overlap between knowledge diplomacy (as a two-way process) and the components of an open system (environment) in systems theory (input, process, output, and feedback).

5 Methodology

This section will discuss the research design and the subsequent methodological choices made. First, an overview of the research design is provided, followed by the research methods and data including sampling, and the method of data processing. The last part will focus on ethical considerations, researcher reflexivity and positionality, and methodological limitations of the applied research design.

5.1   Research Design

The research methodology which informs this design uses a grounded theory approach to explore the conceptualization of the phenomenon of the role international higher education, research and innovation in international relations between South Africa and Sweden.

A case study design on SASUF was utilized as it allows for an intensive examination of a social phenomenon, specifically at a country level, organizational level and personal level (Bryman, 2015). Additionally, case studies have been found to be especially valuable in practice-oriented fields such as education (Starman, 2013). The research employs a mixed methods approach, including an online survey and semi-structured follow-up interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provide flexibility and emphasize how interviewees understand issues and identify what they deem as "important" (Bryman, 2015). A mixed methods approach will be utilized for multiple reasons. Firstly, a case study usually employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, tools, and modes of analysis (Bryman, 2015). Secondly, a mixed-methods approach allows for triangulation of data (Bryman, 2015). Lastly, as demonstrated by the literature review, past studies illustrate the applicability and appropriateness of a mixed methods case study approach.

5.2   Research Methods and Data

5.2.1   Informal Research

Various informal research methods were utilized to situate the study and develop avenues for formal sampling processes. Firstly, informal conversations took place throughout SASUF Student Network meetings, Lund University Africa Strategy Group meetings, SASUF Goes Digital 2022, and were held at the Research and Innovation Week in South Africa in March 2023. While the term "informal conversations" is referred to by various synonyms by social scientists, "natural conversation" (Swain and King, 2022, p. 3) best describes this method within this context. Conversations about the proposed research allowed for real time knowledge exchange and feedback. Additionally, these social interactions are a constituent part of participant observation and establishing trust and rapport with others (Swain and Spire, 2020, p. 5). As a member and participant of SASUF for two years, the researcher observed and interacted

both virtually and in person with various members and bodies of the forum, leading to a greater understanding of how SASUF was initiated, project growth since its inception, and how things work in this particular intercultural context. Overall, these informal conversations and observations were vital in informing the mixed methods approach and various sampling processes described below.

5.2.2   *Online Survey and Sampling Process*

An online survey was constructed using Microsoft Forms. Ease of access, editing, and shareability through Lund University's license motivated this decision. Participants were also able to complete the survey via desktop and phone, increasing participant user experience and accessibility. While the overall methodology utilized mixed methods, the online survey also shared this specific approach. The online survey consisted of eighteen total questions, with seven open-ended questions and eleven close-ended questions. The survey was administered from April 27, 2023 to June 9, 2023 to approximately 350 SASUF members in the database in waves using purposive sampling. As defined by Bryman (2015), this type of sampling is utilized with direct reference to the research questions being asked and ensures that there is a good deal of variety in the resulting sample, so that participants differ from each other in terms of key characteristics relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2015).

As a member of the SASUF Student Network, the survey was first sent to fellow members of the Student Network as well as the Lund University Africa Strategy Group in the hopes of gaining a high number of responses in a short amount of time due to participants familiarity with the researcher. Additionally, a snowball technique in the initial outreach to the Student Network resulted in the sampled participants proposing and encouraging other participants who have relevant experience and characteristics to take part in the research (Bryman, 2015). As seen in Appendix A, the last question asked participants to indicate their preference in a follow-up interview. Similar to the informal conversations providing a foundation for the research, the online survey created the possibility for meaningful follow-up with interested participants and decreased the need for further outreach and recruitment.

5.2.3 *Semi-structured Interviews and Sampling Process*

When conducting a mixed methods investigation involving both quantitative and qualitative research, the findings from a survey may be used as the basis for further purposive sampling (Bryman, 2015). Of the 100 respondents who replied to the online survey, 31 agreed to be interviewed. On the basis of their replies, 7 of the 31 respondents were interviewed via Zoom over the course of two weeks using a semi-structured interview approach, which allowed the researcher to build upon the survey and explore some guiding questions that help answer the two research questions. The 7 interviewees, illustrated in Appendix C, were selected to reflect the variety of groups that make up SASUF from both South Africa and Sweden. A full overview of study participants by category can be found in Table 2. Similar to Microsoft Forms, Lund University's license motivated this decision as it allowed for the researcher to easily administer meeting links and control the meeting settings, including privacy and security. Due to the semi-structured nature of interviews illustrated in Appendix B, conversations ranged from thirty minutes to an hour, with the average interview running approximately forty five minutes.

5.2.3.1 *Data Transcription*

Interview recordings were treated with confidentiality and uploaded to a Lund University Microsoft 365 secure student account for transcription (Scheyvens et al., 2014). Once all interviews were transcribed, the researcher went through each recording in relation to the transcription initially produced by Microsoft Word in order to ensure accuracy, completion and to remove any identifying markers. While transcription as a procedure is very time-consuming, there are many advantages as it corrects the natural limitations of our memories that we might place on what people say in interviews, allows for a more thorough examination of what was said and it allows the data to be reused (with permission) in other ways from those intended by the original researcher (Bryman, 2015). This necessary procedure helped facilitate the data analysis and presentation.

5.2.4 *Data Analysis and Presentation*

This study uses a grounded theory approach and thus relies on questioning and observation in order to discover and generate a rich and deep understanding of SASUF and all of its

components and actors. This is closely associated with qualitative methods of data collection, which took place in both the online survey and semi-structured interviews.

5.2.4.1   Online Survey

Quantitative data from the survey, including demographics, is reported below. Statistical analyses were not conducted on these demographics as these descriptive measures were gathered to provide information on South African and Swedish representation, type of participation and engagement in SASUF, actors and partners within and among SASUF (including state and non-state actors), and main motivation in participating in SASUF. Questions 7, 8 and 12 used a Likert scale to assess the extent to which SASUF performs on a variety of measurements. The survey data serves as the foundation for subsequent inquiries, guiding the semi-structured follow-up interviews and subsequent analysis within the framework of knowledge diplomacy and systems theory.

A total of 100 participants completed the online survey. Of the 100, 62 identified as women, 37 identified as men and 1 preferred not to say. While the participant age range is 18 to 65+, 33% of respondents fell into the 45-54 age range while only 3% of respondents fell into the 18-24 range, respectively. 54% of respondents reported representing a South African university or another South African organization, leaving 46% representation from a Swedish university or another Swedish organization. While this breakdown is representative of the larger South African university participation (in terms of number of universities) in comparison to Swedish university participation, the survey gathered more specific information on type of participant and is illustrated below in Table 2.

Table 2: Survey respondents reported SASUF participant type in descending frequency.

Participant Type	Number Reported (n=100)
A mid-career/senior researcher (more than 10 years after completion of PhD)	39
An emerging researcher (up to 10 years after completion of PhD or without PhD; current PhD student)	27
A representative of project or university administration	14
A staff member of an international office	7
A master's student	7
A bachelor's student	3
Associated Partner	2
Other (project manager and community liaison)	1

Table description: All participant types represented with a majority (66%) of survey respondents identifying as mid-career/senior researchers or emerging researchers.

The survey respondents mirror the diversity and expansive network inherent in SASUF[2]. Analyzing this data contributes valuable insights to the actors and participants segment of the knowledge diplomacy framework. Moreover, within the paradigm of systems theory, comprehending the component parts of a system is most effectively achieved by contextualizing their relationships both internally and externally, emphasizing the interconnectedness with other systems (Mele, Pels and Polese, 2010).

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[2] While a majority of people I came into contact with were originally from South Africa or Sweden, I met many people like myself who are from other countries but representing a South African or Swedish body. Some of these countries include Zimbabwe, Nigeria and the United States.

5.2.4.2 *Semi-structured Interviews*

Qualitative data from both the survey (seven open-ended questions) and follow-up interviews underwent grounded theory analysis, which uses open coding, coding the data for its major categories of information (Creswell, 2013). Building on the identified major categories, axial coding emerges, leading to the creation of key themes as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software licensed through Lund University, was utilized for data analysis and presentation. Within NVivo, the data was initially broken down into component parts using the knowledge diplomacy framework: intentions, purposes, rationales; actors, partners; principles, values; modes, approaches; and activities, instruments. From there, the researcher made connections between categories by linking codes to contexts, consequences, causes, and patterns of interaction using systems theory. Lastly, selective coding occurred in which the core categories were systematically analyzed using both the concept of knowledge diplomacy and systems theory, and are presented in section 7.

5.3   Limitations

While this study sought to maximize the time window, resources and assignment guidelines, various limitations still exist. Grounded theory uses detailed procedures for analysis, consisting of open, axial and selective coding (Creswell, 2013). As a "story" is built connecting the selective coding categories, the researcher is constantly using a comparative approach in an attempt to "saturate" the categories. Saturation was obtained for both the survey and semi-structured interviews and the researcher chose to close the survey at 100 respondents and only conduct seven interviews as the new information obtained did not provide further insight into the categories (Creswell, 2013). Although saturation occurred, the researcher would have preferred to conduct one additional interview to make representation even between South Africa (n=3) and Sweden (n=4) SASUF members. One potential reason for this difference was the timing of the research as South African universities are on a different school schedule than institutions in Sweden. Additionally, while all participants are SASUF members or partners, the research participants come from diverse backgrounds, which is only touched upon briefly in the study. Thus, it would be interesting to compare perspectives within these sampling groups in future studies. Any findings from the survey and semi-structured interviews can be generalized only to the population, SASUF, from which that sample was taken as probability sampling

occurred (Bryman, 2015). While these findings lack generalizability beyond SASUF, this is not a fault of the study as this research design facilitated an in depth look into various real-life phenomena, exploring people's perceptions and feelings, in addition to complimenting the survey portion of this study (Carminati, 2018). In the future, it would be interesting to apply this study design to other international forums and IHERI activities.

5.4   Ethical Considerations

In the pursuit of knowledge and discovery, the foundational cornerstone that elevates research from inquiry to integrity is the unwavering commitment to ethical conduct. The researcher has completed human research protection training both online and throughout her studies, which ensured understanding of human research protection, informed consent, protecting vulnerable populations and data confidentiality. This is reflected at the opening of the survey and the subsequent follow-up interview forms which included information on the study, consent, confidentiality, use of data, guiding interview questions and contact information of the researcher for any participant inquiries as seen in Appendix B. Research approval was obtained from relevant authorities including program director, advisor and SASUF administration. All participants who were given a respondent ID in the survey provided consent and those who opted in for the follow-up interviews provided additional verbal consent before the interview took place. Subsequently, any personal identifiable information was removed following the closure of the survey and completion of interview transcription.

Ensuring cultural sensitivity is a priority of this study as the researcher liaised and communicated with SASUF members and partners and took their opinions and feedback into account when designing and conducting the study. This action further contributed to the continuous process of self-reflection and learning and adapting the research design to best fit the context being studied. Additionally, the researcher went to great lengths in order to ensure North-South representation at all parts of the study as it is no secret that most development research is headed by researchers in the global north (Cummings and Hoebink, 2016). This was implemented by ensuring language and use accessibility for both the survey and follow-up interviews as well as partnering with a co-advisor at a South African institution. Additional effort was made in encouraging fellow SASUF Student Network representatives to participate as they are the next

generation of researchers that will sustain SASUF in the future. Within the contextualization and literature review, the author ensured representation of scholars from the continent of Africa and more specifically from South Africa by exploring a variety of South African journals including but not limited to the South African Journal of International Affairs. As ethical considerations form the moral compass guiding research endeavors, the seamless interconnection with research positionality and reflexivity becomes evident as they are both imperative in navigating the ethical landscape of inquiry.

5.5   Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

In the realm of scholarly inquiry, acknowledging the significance of research positionality and reflexivity is akin to understanding the nuanced interplay between the researcher, their subject, and the broader context. According to Rose (1997, p. 308), a "researcher's positionality in (terms of race, nationality, age, gender, social and economic status, etc.) influences the data collected and thus the information that becomes coded as knowledge". As a young Asian American woman and international student from the United States, I frequently found myself in the "in-between" as both an observer and participant in SASUF and guest in both South Africa and Sweden.

As a complete outsider to both countries and cultures, the researcher prioritized growing her knowledge base by conducting personal research, reading previous meeting notes from the Lund University Africa Strategy Group and SASUF Student Network, engaging with SASUF members and partners on a variety of online and in-person platforms, and immersing oneself by living in both countries for a stint. By doing so, the researcher gained awareness of the similarities between the United States and Sweden as well as the immense diversity South Africa contains, specifically in regards to the four major ethnic groups, varied geographical representation, religion, and the eleven official languages (not to exclude other dialects spoken but not officially recognized) (SAHO, 2014).

The researcher also observed similarities and differences between the United States, Sweden and South Africa such as differences in preferred communication, how Sweden and the United States are more dependent on time, and differences in formality when it comes to position hierarchy or

lack thereof. Being in this position also provided opportunities for cultural exchange and encouraged me to continually reflect on the interplay of myself, SASUF and the broader context, which frequently included discussions on North-South relations and knowledge construction and transfer (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). These and other personal reflections and feelings were recorded in a logbook throughout the entire research ideation, implementation and conclusion processes. Overall, the intricacies of research positionality and reflexivity exert a profound influence on the interpretation and analysis of data, shaping the lens through which researchers perceive, understand, and draw meaningful insights from their findings.

6 Analysis of Findings

In the following section, data is collated from both the online survey and semi-structured interviews in order to adresss the two research questions. In order to guide the reader through the findings, the data is organized and presented using the foundational elements of knowledge diplomacy. Systems theory is also applied in order to better understand the component parts of a system in the context of the relationships with each other and with other systems, rather than in isolation.

6.1 Intentions, Purposes and Rationales

Because knowledge diplomacy brings together a network of different stakeholders from various backgrounds, there will be different intentions and interests for the individual countries and actors involved (Knight, 2022). Within the context of SASUF, focused coding entails emphasizing the most common codes (Charmaz, 2006 cited in Bryman, 2015), which reveals that "collaboration", "network", "Global North", and "Global South" were the most mentioned words in relation to survey question 5 asking participants the meaning of SASUF. In order to elaborate on the most common codes, we turn to interview data. A participant provided an analogy of collaboration and network, sharing

> "Knowledge diplomacy is centered on higher education and higher education is a good bridge to the rest of the world…So I would say the longer the bridge the better. Because the longer the bridge, the more people it will connect. And as it's connecting people…it's

bringing people [onto] the same platform. So, this plan of collaboration [will definitely] help facilitate this bridge building" **(7/ID05)**[3].

Not only does this analogy capture one of the intentions of SASUF, it illustrates the role of IHERI in a knowledge diplomacy approach from the role of IHERI in a soft power approach. Firstly, through the intention of connecting people and secondly through connecting people and bringing them "onto the same platform", which implies a horizontal collaboration. Additionally, this quote mentions the international system (Pigman, 2010) at play in referencing "the world" as SASUF exists as a forum between South Africa and Sweden but it does not exist in a vacuum, which further illustrates an open system in systems theory.

The successful implementation of a horizontal collaboration does not mean challenges do not or will not arise throughout the establishment of the relationship and subsequent interactions. While the majority (70%) of participants illustrated in Appendix D(A) believe SASUF strengthens relations between and among South Africa and Sweden through IHERI to a large and very large extent and 87% perceive SASUF as helping address global challenges such as the SDGs as illustrated in Appendix D(B), differences still exist between the two countries, further informing country and participant intentions and purposes. As expressed by one of the interviewees, "between South Africa and Sweden, there is the obvious resource imbalance because Sweden is part of the Global North, which historically exploited the Global South for resources. Which means that there is a pattern of systemic dependency..." **(1/ID85)**. While the survey data indicates a strong consensus that SASUF partnerships are established on foundations of trust and meaningful exchange, these interactions are more nuanced as illustrated in the qualitative interview data. Additionally, one cannot ignore the geographical differences let alone the implications of these differences such as the Global North being synonymous with economically developed and Global South being synonymous with developing among other terms (Odeh, 2010). This also speaks to Hernandez's (2021) example of systemic gaps causing imbalances in the interactions between two countries such as South Africa and Sweden.

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[3] (#/ID#) indicates an interview participant while (ID#) indicates a survey participant.

Additionally, these associations exist within and beyond SASUF, further informing a participant's positionality and therefore intentions of SASUF. In a similar vein, another interviewee shares how they believe "most people see [the relationship between South Africa and Sweden as a] parent and child type of thing. Sweden is the parent and South Africa is a child in relation to the money" **(4/ID68)**. Not only does this insight support Barasa, Jang and Zhan's (2023) point that the Global North has historically dominated the research ecosystem, referring to funding money in this case, it reinforces the call for a more equitable partnership in order to create positive change. Additionally, some research networks are highly dependent on external funding and the need for funding further feeds the narrative of knowledge diplomacy as soft power (Knight, 2022). This should be explored in a separate study as there appears to always be a need for funding in research endeavors.

Other participants' perception of intentions reveals the scale and spectrum of intentions. Ranging from the personal as one "can see that it's for the academic position, for [people] need to have a sort of collaboration, they need to publish papers, they need to get funding and such things" **(3/ID36)**, to the local and global in that "we should be working together to try and solve the global challenges. But also, the local ones, because that's why I'm saying we should partner with our neighbors as well, not just partners up North" **(5/ID50)**. This quote not only calls for the output of SASUF to reach a global level, but also supports The Global Goals (2023) emphasis for North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation. Regardless of intention, knowledge diplomacy calls for these differences to be respected and negotiated towards the common goal. Lastly, as one participant shared, "[our] assumptions of what a partnership or collaboration or foreign aid effort should lead to, and what the purpose should be, will shape and determine largely how it is implemented and practiced **(1/ID85)**. Overall, intentions as a form of input influence the processes at hand, directly shaping the output produced. These intentions are brought forth by actors and partners.

6.2   Actors and Partners

The diversification of actors in diplomacy and the role of non-state actors in IHERI encompass the major changes in modern diplomacy. Results of survey question 9, illustrated in Appendix D(C) indicated that 43% of respondents reported engaging with actors beyond their home

institutions represented in SASUF. These actors and partners include NGOs, startups, professional associations, government (local, regional and national), research funding bodies[4] such as the South Africa National Research Foundation (NRF) and the Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education (STINT), research centers, businesses, and healthcare bodies.

The subsequent survey question asked what value, if any, do these actors and partners bring to SASUF. The results were overwhelmingly positive, with many referring to actors and partners as a conduit to "real world experience and implementation" **(ID100)** as well as the means to "facilitate [the contextualization of] the research and enable greater implementation of changes" **(ID54)**. These quotes not only illustrate the changing global landscape of IHERI but further emphasize the inclusivity of non-traditional actors in diplomacy. Survey question 12 asked participants to what extent are SASUF partnerships built on trust and exchange. Respondents indicate a strong consensus (78%) that SASUF partnerships are established on foundations of trust and meaningful exchange. Building on these questions in the follow-up interviews, six of the seven respondents fall within the 43% of respondents engaging with actors beyond their home institutions. Additionally, a majority of them noted multiple benefits of including and partnering with diverse actors, supporting Hocking et al.'s (2012) point that today's global issues require a multi-actor approach. One of these participants explains how they believe

> "It is important for non-academic actors to participate in these research conferences, particularly NGOs in the field of development. Because that's what we've discovered through [their] own research project is that a lot of the NGOs that are in local development already collaborate with universities in order to get interns or staff to fill in the human resource gaps because [of] the lack of funding" **(1/ID85)**.

In addition to providing fresh perspective and different approaches to solving problems, partnerships may bring positive byproducts such as internship opportunities for students and emerging researchers and in return, organizations fill gaps in people power and resources as

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[4] NRF and STINT are two of the funding bodies of SASUF. Additional information on funders can be found at: https://www.sasuf.org/funding-opportunities.

mentioned above. In more general terms, diverse actors and partners "can only bring more to the table…It should be encouraged that we work with these other players because they have a lot to offer that as academics, we might not think of" **(5/ID50)**. While this participant does not negate Cauce, Flückiger and van der Zwaan's (2022) description of universities as a "fifth power", this quote speaks to the limits of perspective all actors and partners inevitably possess, including universities and academic institutions.

Two of the participants specifically mentioned the inclusion of Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs)[5] as actors and partners. One praised SASUF for insisting on "the collaboration with historically disadvantaged universities in South Africa, because [non-HDIs]...are resourced enough and connected enough to collaborate with international researchers **(5/ID50)**. Building on the perceived differences in resources, the other participant noted "the huge differences between the [HDIs] compared to the historically white institutions. I've worked with…the classic white elite universities. It works like a Western university. It's very structured and organized" **(4/ID68)**. Differences between and among South African and Swedish universities exist. Nevertheless, there is value in these differences as they further inform intentions, values and approaches.

In terms of the challenges related to working amongst diverse actors and partners and scaling inclusion, one respondent believes that the biggest challenge continues to be

> "The issue of organizational focus and mandate. Every organization has their focus. They have their mandate. And they will try to enforce it, to achieve them. So, when they come into this kind of forum, mainly as actors and partners, everybody is coming to put their own agenda on the table" **(7/ID05)**.

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[5] In 2014, through the office of the minister of higher education and training, eight universities were identified as Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs) to address the injustices of the past and these included the University of the Western Cape, University of Fort Hare, University of Limpopo, University of Venda, Walter Sisulu University, University of Zululand, Mangosuthu University of Technology, and Sefako Makgatho Health Science University (UWC, 2023).

This participant speaks to the multiple inputs at play within the system. A SASUF participant not only has their own agenda, but so does the institution they are representing, the partners they are working alongside as well as the broader agenda of the country overall. It is important to note that actors may not be fully exposed to these broader agendas, nevertheless they still exist and impact the processes of knowledge diplomacy. Furthermore, as an open system,

> "SASUF networks and relations are built on top of the existing network of actors which [have] been established over many years. These actors are based in institutions and organizations that provide avenues to take our work forward. SASUF on its own is insufficient for us to achieve our goals in this regard" **(ID48)**.

The networks and relations within SASUF are constructed upon the foundation of an existing network of actors, developed over numerous years. These actors are situated within institutions and organizations, serving as conduits to propel IHERI and IR forward. Overall, it is emphasized that SASUF, in isolation, is potentially inadequate for achieving the actor's and partner's goals in this context and thus continuing to include diverse stakeholders may be the key to producing beneficial outputs.

6.3 Principles and Values

Principles and values are shaped by actors and partners, and reciprocally, actors and partners can be influenced by the principles and values inherent in the system and environment they operate within. Survey questions 13 and 14 asked participants to rank the following principles and values they believe SASUF upholds from most to least. The principles and values listed were taken directly from Table 1 column 3. While the data initially revealed partnership to be upheld the most, mutuality to be in the middle and multi-sector and transparency upheld the least, the data is potentially flawed as revealed by the follow-up interviews. The first follow-up interviewer recommended that I

> "Double check with all of the respondents who you choose to do deeper interviews with to see. Like if you have been given the option of just checking, do these apply? Yes or no? Would you have checked mutuality? Because I think mutuality might be a difficult

concept, so it could be that the other ones were simply easier to understand and thus indicate" **(1/ID85)**.

This quote not only provides a more appropriate alternative for this question, as the way it is written implies SASUF upholds all of the principles and values listed, which may not be true. Additionally, the latter half of the quote touches upon mutuality, one of the findings further discussed in the subsequent interviews. Mutuality among other principles and values is fundamental to knowledge diplomacy (Knight, 2022). Three participants shared similar views, claiming there is an overlap of mutuality and other principles and values listed:

> "The whole term mutuality, it seems a bit unnecessary, redundant, you know? I mean, because there's quite a bit of overlap in all these different principles and values" **(4/ID68)**.

> "If you look at cooperation, mutuality and partnership, they are almost in the same category" **(6/ID84)**.

> "Maybe [mutuality] is just a term that is not used often enough. As compared to the other terms, you know what I mean? So, it's term recognition" **(5/ID50)**.

As the interviewer, the principles and values were made explicit as the conceptual framework calls for it (Knight, 2022). Furthermore, definitions for each term were not provided as it is up to each person or group to determine whether these principles are upheld and if they are inherently good or bad. Although cooperation, mutuality and partnership center on working together towards a common goal, they all differ as well. One potential reason for this is that the meaning of these principles and values is dependent on the environment in which they exist as well as how people in this environment interpret them. If principles and values function as inputs, they will constantly inform the processes of knowledge diplomacy. Mutuality, as a principle, serves as an input to a system by fostering collaborative relationships, promoting reciprocal interactions and processes, and contributing to shared resources and knowledge. These inputs are crucial for creating a dynamic and interconnected system that can adapt and thrive in complex

environments. Pivoting towards the discussion on mutuality, many respondents echo the sentiment of this one participant who shared how they believe

> "Mutuality in terms of SASUF is very central just in terms of having a fair and balanced collaboration. It's very much like a common effort right, from all. The results will be better if we actually achieve a kind of mutuality in what we put in" **(2/ID04)**.

This quote speaks to the potential outputs and outcomes of processes such as SASUF being informed by the principle of mutuality. The dependency of the outcomes on the inputs also speaks to the intentions of actors and partners involved. In other words, outcomes will differ depending on whether or not mutuality is an input. Furthermore, a mutual input should lead to a mutual output. In this sense, the first three elements of knowledge diplomacy can function as inputs within knowledge diplomacy. Additionally, all three can be influenced by the larger environment, constantly informing and being informed. Building on this, a respondent shared that

> "In order for there to be a truly mutually beneficial partnership or interaction, I do 100% agree that there needs to be a strong sense of treating each other and viewing each other as equals….because otherwise I might not see how I could learn something from you because I don't view you as an equal with the capability of teaching me things" **(1/ID85)**.

This participant places additional emphasis on the idea of mutuality as a key principle for knowledge diplomacy. They go on to define equality in their eyes, which transcends simply viewing some as equal but also as someone who has some knowledge to exchange. This holds true for the countless interactions I have had in SASUF. The concept of mutuality holds little value if it is not complemented by tangible actions and behaviors such as active inclusivity and networking, joint publications with equitable representation, data creation and exchange, and shared resources and infrastructure (i.e., funding, specialized equipment). Overall, knowledge diplomacy as a two-way process is heavily influenced by the inputs of all stakeholders involved. The inputs of intentions, actors and principles directly impact the outputs and help determine the outputs and more importantly, how everyone benefits from said outputs.

6.4   Modes and Approaches

Systems theory offers a method for analyzing how complex systems, like SASUF, operate. Survey question 15 asked participants to describe relations between South Africa and Sweden through SASUF. 20% of participants describe the relations as "good". While this appears very low in contrast to other positive answers, this may be due to the method of analysis. NVivo identified this word as the most frequently used, which does not imply that 80% of participants describe relations in a different manner, but used other descriptive words that were mentioned less frequently. Looking at the data for this question reveals many used synonyms for good, such as beneficial, excellent and constructive. When conducting analysis on this element, I equated SASUF as a mode of knowledge diplomacy, operating within a dynamic, larger environment. Now, this environment hosts other open systems operating at different levels. On this reflection of interaction on multiple levels, one participant shared that "The relations are generally good at a political level but in practice, I think there are still imbalances between the South African and Swedish partners" **(ID99)**. The statement suggests that, on a political level, the relations between South Africa and Sweden are generally positive or favorable. However, when it comes to implementation (on another level), there are perceived imbalances or unevenness between the South African and Swedish partners. This could indicate disparities in the actual mode or approach within the partnership, despite the positive political discourse. This also echoes Hernandez's (2021) systemic imbalances that exist despite balances in other spheres.

As another participant shared, the imbalances may pertain to the "enormous diversity issues in both countries, such as the welfare structures and the professional habitus and roles" **(ID42)**. This quote not only points out some of the potential reasons for these imbalances but further elaborates on the differing environments between Sweden and South Africa in the areas of welfare and professional backgrounds. Furthermore, "habitus", which according to Oxford Reference (2024) refers to "a set of norms and expectations unconsciously acquired by individuals through experience and socialization as embodied dispositions" describes an agent or partner on a personal level constantly interacting with their environment, which in turn informs how one acts and operates within the system.

Expanding on the focus of an actor or partner operating on an individual level, one participant believes "The umbrella initiative [of SASUF] can work and is a good starting platform. But for long-term collaborations, personal contacts and a good working environment is needed" **(ID66)**. The statement suggests that while the overarching initiative or framework of SASUF provides a functional and beneficial starting point for collaborations, sustaining long-term partnerships requires the establishment of personal contacts and a positive working environment. In essence, the mode of operation of SASUF can be enhanced and extended over time through the cultivation of interpersonal relationships and the creation of a conducive and supportive working atmosphere as "different is not wrong, it's just an entry point for new knowledge" **(6/ID84)**. This underscores the importance of both formal structures and informal, personal connections in fostering knowledge diplomacy. Overall, modes and approaches inform and are informed by the other elements of knowledge diplomacy, adding further dimensionality to international interactions taking place on multiple levels.

6.5 Activities and Instruments

Activities and instruments serve as tangible and observable elements within knowledge diplomacy, and the increasing examples of such activities exemplify the evolving landscape of IHERI and diplomacy. These concrete initiatives and tools demonstrate the dynamic nature of collaboration, knowledge exchange, and diplomatic engagement in the realm of higher education, research, and innovation. Survey questions 16 and 17 asked participants to check which SASUF activities they participate in and to write-in any activities that were not already listed. Participants reported participating only in the network itself as well as engaging in joint projects, SASUF Goes Digital, SASUF Research and Innovation Week, student/scholar/staff exchanges (both in-person and virtually), funding opportunities, and the SASUF Student Network[6]. All of these examples illustrate the changing landscape of IHERI and the growing number of activities associated (Cooper, Heine and Thakur, 2013). Additional activities requested by the respondents include PhD focused support and activities, specifically in the form

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[6] Visit: https://www.sasuf.org/past-activities to view past activities of SASUF. Visit: https://www.sasuf.org/sasuf-research-and-innovation-week-2024-1 to view information on the upcoming SASUF Research and Innovation Week taking place in Skåne, Sweden in May 2024.

of funding and exchange, different levels of seed grants for travel and research costs, as well as funding specifically earmarked for short-term scientific visits. Many participants in the follow-up interviews shared their personal experiences of participating in SASUF activities as well as the activities as an output of SASUF:

> "I am doing a couple of projects now with [a university in South Africa] for example, where we've created a bilateral agreement for exchange of teachers and you know students and so forth. So, it's grown so much more." **(4/ID68)**.

> "We've been coming together and we've…formed a consortium and we've applied for seed funding. SASUF has made it possible for me to work in the two fields that I have my feet in" **(5/ID50)**.

> "One of our joint projects has now escalated and it's bigger and we are now kind of pushing the new generation to apply for the same grant" **(6/ID84)**.

All three quotes illustrate the many possible outputs of SASUF and how these outputs can be mutually beneficial for all involved. Whether it is a new bilateral agreement stemming from the original SASUF network, a consortium emerging from multidisciplinary work or a joint project transcending generations, the outputs of SASUF create micro-systems within the larger system. Another example of a micro-system within SASUF is the Student Network mentioned in section 1.2. One respondent shares how this micro-system benefits from the main system in that

> "if we want to create workshops or webinars…it's very useful to have the platform, being able to have it on the website, use their social media, use the newsletter. [SASUF is] a unique platform to be able to email all of these universities at the same time" **(2/ID04)**.

All of these activities, including the Student Network, provide examples of both generic and IHERI specific activities and yet I would argue that specifying them into a category is pointless as they become specified depending on the system and context in which they are

occurring. Overall, similar to the other four elements, they are informed by the environment and in return influence the environment further illustrating how IHERI influences IR and how IR influences IHERI.

7   Discussion of Findings

The culmination of the qualitative data from both the survey and follow-up interviews undergoing grounded theory analysis led to the creation of three key categories, discussed below in relation to the two research questions. This section is intended to build upon the analysis of findings and illustrate the outcomes of the iterative process of a grounded theory approach in addition to positioning the findings in terms of existing research, theoretical assumptions, policy analyses, and on-going debates within the field of international relations and international development.

7.1   The Influence of Actors and Partners in the Global System

While reviewing the findings categorized under actors and partners, two noteworthy discoveries emerged, indicating a need for an additional in-depth discussion. Firstly, all of the respondents in both the survey and follow-up interviews focused on discussing South Africa and Sweden relations and networking in an international context as this is one of the key elements of this study. However, I found it interesting that some respondents highlighted how this international platform reinforced their individual relationships with actors and partners from their respective countries. As a Swedish researcher, one respondent shared that collaborating with their own

> "Swedish side was interesting because obviously we gravitated to and have a lot of contact with [another Swedish university] because it is geographically close, I know them…But then, because it's based on the subjects, we ended up collaborating with [another Swedish university] and it was a mix, so it actually broadened collaboration even at home, which we probably never would have collaborated [in the first place] without SASUF" **(4/ID68)**.

Not only does this confirm the rise of research networks locally, regionally, and internationally as discussed by Adams (2012) and Vogel et al. (2019), it answers the call for SDG 17. In trying to identify this phenomenon of regional collaboration being reinforced by international collaboration, Fitzgerald, Ojanperä and O'Clery (2021) provides a way to quantify dynamics of international versus regional collaboration diversity. Additionally, the words "cluster" and "interregional" are used in various studies to describe regional collaboration alongside international collaboration in different contexts (Fitzgerald, Ojanperä and O'Clery 2021; Adams et al., 2013). While looking through literature on southern African-Nordic research partnerships, I came across the concept of *netweaving*. According to Halvorsen et al. (2017, p. 167), the concept is "an alternative to networking [and] proposes to create a stronger and sustainable social fabric for effective relationships". In other words, netweaving aims to extend and reinforce existing networks. While this finding proves fruitful for discussion, this so-called example of netweaving can also have negative consequences despite trying to avoid the creation of new boundaries (Halvorsen et al., 2017). As a respondent shared, only working with people from your country

> "creates this Eurocentric bubble within Swedish researchers. And then in the end, you've started networking here [in your respective country or institution], so you'll stay there. And I mean it just leads to the classes that they teach, use of western academics and their journals. You're not exposed to other things. It's a domino effect" **(2/ID04)**.

Similar to the few studies touching upon the negative consequences of knowledge diplomacy, there does not appear to be a lot of literature on netweaving and how the strengthening of existing networks can have negative effects. This may be due to the term being used most frequently in the business sphere as evidenced by a quick google search of its applicability. The second noteworthy discovery revolves around SASUF being perceived as an open system and how international relations beyond the bilateral relationship discussed in this study may influence future IHERI relations between South Africa and Sweden. Although the study primarily centers on South Africa-Sweden relations through a case study of SASUF, it is essential to acknowledge and recognize the influence and dynamics of other interconnected systems and relationships at play in the broader global context.

This is particularly evident in geo-politics as countries, governments and bodies choose to align themselves according to their intentions, actors, principles, modes of operation, and activities inside and outside of the realm of IHERI. More than one respondent brought up the current events including but not limited to the ongoing war in Ukraine and the growing power and influence of China and how the decisions made by Sweden and South Africa at a country level may weaken the exchange and collaboration of IHERI activities within SASUF. Additionally. one respondent elaborated on the potential consequences of relations made at one level influencing relations at another by saying "...in the future, if SASUF is used as a platform for [either] government to kind of, you know, legitimize their politics and stuff. Then we have a problem" **(2/ID04)**. Once again, we have an example of knowledge diplomacy potentially being used as soft power or masking hard power as defined by Nye (2004 cited in Knight, 2022 p. 3). In the same vein, the same participant shared how they "attended the leadership summit in my role as a student representative and the theme was academic freedom and you can see academic freedom is declining in both of our countries and it's a trend worldwide" **(2/ID04)**. With Cauce, Flückiger and van der Zwaan's (2022) universities as a fifth power in mind, the influence of IHERI on international relations cannot be underestimated and perhaps even more importantly, the influence of international relations on IHERI cannot be ignored.

7.2   Obstacles and Solutions to Knowledge Exchange and Dissemination

Applying systems theory to SASUF facilitated a more profound comprehension of the internal components of the system and initiated the delineation of the broader environment within which SASUF functions. Moreover, the generation of knowledge and information as an outcome exemplifies a beneficial result of SASUF. Nevertheless, upon closer examination, the findings unveil challenges in the exchange and dissemination of knowledge within SASUF and extend to environments beyond SASUF. Some of these problems have been outright stated and encompass both individual and institutional level responsibilities. There is the unfortunate reality of gatekeepers as described by one participant,

> "...my experience with Sweden specifically, their researchers are more than willing to
> share their knowledge. It's sad to say, but I've worked with colleagues who wouldn't

share with me. So, I was fortunate to get this group of people that I could link up with to help me get more knowledge" **(6/ID84)**.

As illustrated by this quote, actors who gatekeep can limit the input from others and in turn influence the knowledge outputs or the lack thereof. On an institutional level, another participant shared a similar sentiment in that "departments and faculties are working in silos. Institutions with governments, all the stakeholders, they are all working in silos. How can the research result get to the people if it does not inform the policies made?" **(7/ID05)**. This respondent identifies more components of the system, including institutions, governments, stakeholders, people, and policy. In other words, imagine inputs from various stakeholders informing the processes; however, all of these inputs have never been informed by others and or acted upon by the larger environment. How would this influence the processes taking place and what type of outputs would be produced? Would these outputs produce feedback encouraging collaboration? Furthermore, while this study solely focuses on the processes of knowledge diplomacy, exploring how outputs inform policy and in turn how policy influences the system would be time worthy. Remaining on the institutional level, one respondent put it plainly in that "I feel like universities in general…have such a medieval way of communicating. As in they're not good at communicating at all and they don't prioritize it" **(2/ID04)**.

While universities are centers for knowledge creation, dissemination, and learning, the administrative and communication processes do not always reflect the same agility or efficiency seen in other sectors. This could potentially be explained by academic institutions not fully understanding their role in the changing landscape of diplomacy and IR, but could also be due to these actors having varying resources and time. Recognizing this, participants were very forthcoming with a plethora of potential solutions to address these obstacles. These include prioritizing bottom-up research **(3/ID36)**, disseminating results and information via mobile learning and mobility (**4/ID68; 6/ID84**), creating a summary report of project results and or best practices that would be dispersed both physically and digitally[7] **(5/ID50; 4/ID68; 2/ID04)**, and

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[7] One of the participants mentioned an open source platform called The Conversation and I thought it was pretty cool. It is an independent source of news and views from the academic and research community, delivered directly to the public. Visit: https://theconversation.com/africa.

using social media **(4/ID68; 2/ID04)**. Whether or not these proposed solutions will work and will be adopted by actors such as universities, only time will tell. Additionally, it will be interesting to observe the rapid technological changes in the form of social media and communication further expanding the reach and accessibility of actors and partners (Knight, 2022) in real time. Overall, systems theory helped facilitate the tracing of knowledge as an input and output, which revealed ongoing challenges of knowledge exchange and dissemination.

7.3   Cultural Exchange is Central to IHERI and Knowledge Diplomacy

Cultural exchange plays a pivotal role in knowledge diplomacy and is further emphasized above, in the analysis of findings. It serves as a fundamental mechanism for fostering mutual understanding, bridging cultural gaps, and building relationships between individuals and institutions involved in the exchange of knowledge. Furthermore, this interpersonal and cross-cultural interaction contributes to the development of a shared global perspective, promoting collaboration and cooperation in the international arena and should therefore not be seen as a byproduct but rather a critical facilitator of knowledge diplomacy as a two-way process. Multiple respondents believe cultural exchange is important within this forum, sharing:

> "I think that cultural exchange is possibly the most important aspect of [collaborations]. By having cultural exchange aspects, that's how you really get to understand that 'oh you're not worse than me, you're just different'. And that's fine and I can learn from you. You can learn from me and then we can just accept that we are different and some things we will agree on, some things we won't. And we can learn in the in between" **(1/ID85)**.

This statement advocates for the transformative power of cultural exchange in collaborations, emphasizing understanding, mutual learning, acceptance of diversity, and the ability to navigate differences constructively. It reflects an inclusive and open-minded approach to collaborative endeavors. Furthermore, this quote supports the claim of Lin and Ju Chan (2023) in that cultural exchange can be a core interest within knowledge diplomacy. Additional respondents share this idea of cultural exchange as a foundation for knowledge diplomacy, conveying:

"I think cultural exchange should be the first point of strength…cultural exchange is very important if collaboration and partnership will go well" **(7/ID05)**.

"I think these cultural differences are very important because you can see how you react or act in different ways and you learn from that" **(6/ID84)**.

The first quote speaks to the idea that cultural exchange comes before collaboration and partnership. If we apply systems theory, cultural exchange can be viewed as an input to the collaboration and partnership processes taking place. In this sense, cultural exchange is also an input to knowledge diplomacy and not just a byproduct (Lin and Ju Chan, 2023). As an input, it has the potential to enhance mutual understanding and build trust and relationships, further setting up knowledge diplomacy as a two-way process for success. Furthermore, the second quote conveys that changes occur in the form of learning from cultural differences. In the same vein, another participant shared:

"I think [cultural exchange] plays a big part, but it's also something that's more commonly put in the informal lane, like something that we don't prioritize during our work time. It should be done in the spare time, which can be a mistake. I think especially in this context where our cultures can be very different and just concepts of time and how to meet and how to interact with each other and the level of formality and whatever. And I think a lot of things can be gained through the personal kind of relationships that are built when we showcase or share our cultures" **(2/ID04)**.

In summary, the speaker recognizes the significance of cultural exchange, challenges the perception of it as solely 'informal', and suggests that prioritizing it within work time is essential, particularly in a context characterized by diverse cultural norms and practices. The emphasis on personal relationships and sharing cultures underscores the potential benefits of integrating cultural exchange into professional settings. Cultural exchange steers knowledge diplomacy in the direction of mutuality versus soft power as learning about one another's similarities and differences facilitates a greater understanding of each actor's positionality and how that in turn informs their intentions and principles. Overall, while it can be used as a means

to an end, it can be operationalized as a process within knowledge diplomacy as well as a process in and of itself that interacts with knowledge diplomacy.

7.4   Reflections Following Data Analysis and Discussion

Following the completion of the data analysis and discussion it was brought to my attention by a fellow peer the contrast between the survey results and the follow-up interviews and it encouraged me to further reflect upon my research methods and design and how this may have influenced the results and findings discussed above. Overall, I would say that the survey results were overwhelmingly positive in terms of people's experiences, relations and perceptions of SASUF as well as IHERI relations between South Africa and Sweden. This contrasts the more critical feedback received in the follow-up interviews where respondents had more space and time to reflect on the questions posed and interact with me as the interviewer for any clarification and questioning of terms and concepts. As evidenced by the organization of the analysis and discussion, survey results served more as a 'pulse check' overall while the follow-up interviews provided more nuanced findings. Additionally, as stated above, the mixed methods approach further aided in data triangulation. Upon further reflection, if I could make changes to the research design and methods, I would keep the mixed methods approach but would either add or change the majority of survey questions to be open ended as this would provide more qualitative data for coding as well as a more neutral environment for discussion.

8   Conclusion

8.1   Purpose and Research Questions Revisited

This study set out to increase understanding of the role knowledge diplomacy can play in an ever-changing and complex global landscape by examining IHERI relations between South Africa and Sweden. In answering the first question, we find the following. Firstly, IHERI facilitates the exchange of knowledge, expertise, and innovative ideas between and among South African and Swedish actors and partners. This exchange contributes to the mutual development of academic and research capacities in both countries, which can facilitate joint strategies in addressing ongoing development challenges such as the SDGs. Secondly, IHERI can contribute to shaping policies that support international development cooperation. Lastly, IHERI provides a

platform in which non-traditional actors of diplomacy, such as universities, can network with existing actors in the diplomacy space.

In answering the second question, the application of systems theory reveals knowledge diplomacy as a two-way process is exercised through the five elements interacting within the system as well as the global system. These five elements are influenced by one another as well as by the environment they exist in. These contextual details further determine the positioning of intentions, actors, principles, modes of operation, and activities as inputs, outputs and feedback. Which in turn directly influences the processes taking place. While cultural exchange can function as both an input and output, findings reveal that cultural exchange plays a critical role in knowledge diplomacy as a two-way process, facilitating the contribution IHERI can make to strengthening IR and the role of IR in enhancing IHERI.

Furthermore, the analysis and discussion reveal the importance in distinguishing the role of IHERI in a knowledge diplomacy approach from the role of IHERI in a soft power approach. This can be done by examining the five elements of knowledge diplomacy and assessing whether they prioritize mutuality. Secondly, international collaboration may reinforce regional and intra-country collaboration. Thirdly, it is essential to acknowledge and recognize the influence and dynamics of other systems at play in the global context and how this may impact IHERI. Overall, while this study draws multiple conclusions, it also identified areas that warrant further exploration relevant to the role IHERI in IR and in particular the conceptualization and practice of knowledge diplomacy.

8.2   Considerations for Future Studies

The study recognizes the need for additional exploration into knowledge diplomacy and identifies several crucial issues that warrant further in-depth analysis. These include the assessment of knowledge diplomacy in relation to science diplomacy; the exploration of cultural exchange as not only a principle or value of knowledge diplomacy, but as a process; national policies to support knowledge diplomacy as this study focused on the processes; knowledge diplomacy and the knowledge-power nexus; the role of funding in knowledge diplomacy; knowledge diplomacy in a knowledge economy; and the influence of geopolitics on knowledge

diplomacy. Overall, a one-size-fits-all approach to the global challenges we face does not exist, however, knowledge diplomacy emerges as a potential catalyst for adapting people and strategies to the ever-changing systems we inhabit.

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10 Appendices

10.1 Appendix A: Online Survey

Final Thesis Survey - SASUF
The survey will take approximately 5 - 10 minutes to complete and your participation and thoughtfulness is greatly appreciated.

The answers in this survey will only be used for research purposes in completion of a thesis for a MSc. degree at Lund University. All information collected is treated confidentially and securely stored, in compliance with GDPR requirements. By beginning the survey, you are consenting to participating in this survey and have the right to stop at any time.

DEMOGRAPHICS
1. How do you identify?
- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary
- Transgender
- Prefer not to say
- Other

2. How old are you?
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

3. I represent:
- A South African university or another South African organization
- A Swedish university or another Swedish organization

4. I participate in the South Africa Sweden University Forum (SASUF) as:
- A bachelors student
- A masters student
- An emerging researcher (up to 10 years after completion of PhD or without PhD; current PhD student)
- A mid-career/senior researcher (more than 10 years after completion of PhD) A representative of project or university administration
  A representative of an embassy (either South Africa or Sweden)
  A staff member of an international office
- Associated Partner
- Other

INTENTIONS, PURPOSES, RATIONALES
5. What does SASUF mean to you?

6. What motivated you to participate in SASUF? If your main motivation is not listed, please elaborate in OTHER.
- Funding opportunities
  A joint commencement to addressing/responding to global challenges
- International collaboration
- To build/strengthen relations between and among South Africa and Sweden through international higher education, research and innovation
- Other

7. To what extent do you think SASUF builds/strengthens relations between and among South Africa and Sweden through international higher education, research and innovation? (1 – Very Little Extent; 2 – Little Extent; 3 – Neutral; 4 – Large Extent; 5 – Very Large Extent)

8. To what extent do you think SASUF helps address global challenges (i.e., SDGs)? (1 – Very Little Extent; 2 – Little Extent; 3 – Neutral; 4 – Large Extent; 5 – Very Large Extent)

ACTORS, PARTNERS
9. While universities are key actors in SASUF, there is a broad range of other state and non-state international higher education and research and innovation actors involved, (i.e., national, regional or international centers of excellence, research institutions, foundations, think tanks, professional associations, NGOs, etc.). Have you OR are you currently working alongside any such actor(s)?

- YES or NO

10. If you answered YES in question 9, what type of actor(s)?

11. What value do these actor(s) bring to SASUF? Leave blank if you answered NO in question 9.

12. To what extent do you think SASUF partnerships are built on trust and exchange? (1 – Very Little Extent; 2 – Little Extent; 3 – Neutral; 4 – Large Extent; 5 – Very Large Extent)

PRINCIPLES, VALUES
13. Please rank the following principles and values you believe SASUF upholds from most to least:
- Interdisciplinary
- Common ground
- Cooperation
- Partnership
- Reciprocity
- Transparency
- Multi-sector
- Common good
- Mutuality

14. Based on your rankings in question 13, please elaborate on your highest ranking AND lowest ranking.

MODES, APPROACHES
15. How would you best describe the relations between South Africa and Sweden through this forum?

ACTIVITIES, INSTRUMENTS
16. What SASUF activities have you participated in OR are currently participating in? * Please click all that apply.
- Only in the network itself
  Joint projects (i.e., research)
  SASUF Goes Digital
  Attending SASUF Sustainability Forum and/or SASUF Week Student/scholar/staff exchanges (both in-person or virtually) Funding opportunities (i.e., NRF seed fund grants, STINT, etc.) SASUF Student Network
- Student Essay Contest on South Africa - Sweden Relations
- Other

17. What SASUF activities from the list above (if any) contribute most to strengthening relations between and among South Africa and Sweden? Additionally, if there are activities that do not exist but you think would contribute to strengthening relations, please list below.

18. I am willing to discuss my responses in more detail and would like to participate in a short virtual follow up interview. Please provide EMAIL, if YES.

Please type your (YES or NO) response below. If YES, please provide the best email to reach you.

10.2 Appendix B: Follow-up Interview Guide

Information
You have indicated interest in participating in a follow up interview on the Final Thesis Survey - SASUF form. As a participant, you will be asked a series of questions pertaining to the researcher's thesis topic on knowledge diplomacy and South Africa Sweden relations. It is important to note that your participation is voluntary and that you have the right to withdraw your participation at any time. Below you will find the questions that will be asked during the interview.

Consent
Verbal consent will be obtained at the start of the interview. Please note that you have the right to independently decide whether, for how long and under what circumstances to participate. You can terminate participation at any time and without any consequence.

Confidentiality
All information on identifiable individuals is to be noted, stored and reported in such a way as to render individuals unidentifiable to outsiders. As with the survey you participated in prior to this follow up interview, everything is anonymous unless outright stated by the participant.

Follow up interviews will be conducted on a digital platform (i.e., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc.) depending on the participants technological access and needs. Interviews will be recorded, if participant consent is provided, using the Voice Memos application on the researcher's laptop, which is a password protected device.

Data, both the survey and follow up interviews, will be stored until the end of the thesis submission and defense (August 2023) and will be destroyed after 2 years.

Use
Information on individuals, gathered for research purposes, will not be used or lent for commercial purposes or other non-research aims. The information gathered during these follow up interviews will solely be used for research purposes and will inform the researcher's master's thesis, which is compulsory for degree completion at Lund University.

Interview Questions*

Knowledge diplomacy is "the process of building and strengthening relations between and among countries through international higher education, research and innovation" (Knight, 2021).

Part I

A key characteristic of knowledge diplomacy is mutuality. According to the survey results, specifically question 13, mutuality ranks 5 out of the 9 principles/values listed. Why do you think this is?

In your opinion, what role does cultural exchange play in research collaborations and knowledge diplomacy? How does it contribute to mutual understanding if any?

Please describe your experience networking within SASUF, both within and across South Africa and Sweden.

What have you observed during these interactions?

Part II

What challenges or barriers do researchers and institutions face when engaging in international research collaborations?

While SASUF is meant to be a mutual exchange, do you believe dependencies exist between South Africa and Sweden and/or within South Africa and Sweden?

While SASUF is an entity in itself, there is a broad range of other state and non-state international higher education and research and innovation actors involved, (i.e., national, regional or international centers of excellence, research institutions, foundations, think tanks, professional associations, NGOs, etc.).

While the survey asked about the value they bring, I am curious about your thoughts on some of the challenges they may bring (i.e. increasing environmental complexity and turbulence, different motivations)

Part III

How can individuals and institutions effectively communicate and disseminate the findings and knowledge generated through international collaborations to wider audiences (i.e., local communities, government, NGOs, etc.)?

Looking ahead, what do you envision as the future of research collaborations, such as SASUF, and their role in promoting knowledge diplomacy on a global scale (beyond South Africa and Sweden)?

What steps can be taken to enhance the sustainability and long-term impact of research collaborations in promoting knowledge diplomacy?

Any further comments or questions?

*I may use some answers from the survey to guide interview questions.

Thank you for reviewing this document and I look forward to speaking with you shortly. Should you have any questions or points of clarification, do not hesitate to reach out at ca2508ho-s@student.lu.se.

10.3   Appendix C: List of Follow-up Respondents

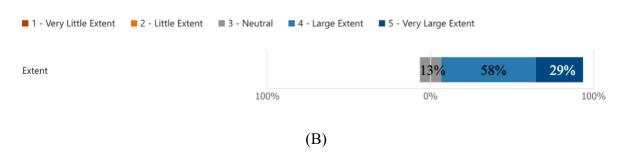| Participant Interview # (Survey ID)	Country	Participant Type
1 (ID85)	Sweden	A bachelor's student
2 (ID04)	Sweden	A master's student
3 (ID36)	Sweden	A mid-career/senior researcher (more than 10 years after completion of PhD)
4 (ID68)	Sweden	An emerging researcher (up to 10 years after completion of PhD or without PhD; current PhD student)
5 (ID50)	South Africa	An emerging researcher (up to 10 years after completion of PhD or without PhD; current PhD student)
6 (ID84)	South Africa	An emerging researcher (up to 10 years after completion of PhD or without PhD; current PhD student)
7 (ID05)	South Africa	An emerging researcher (up to 10 years after completion of PhD or without PhD; current PhD student)

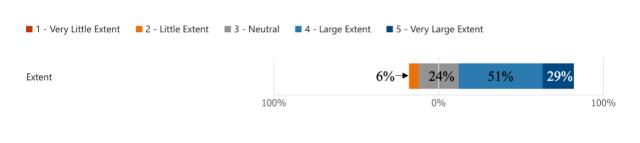## 10.4 Appendix D: Survey Results from Questions 7(A), 8(B) and 9(C)

(A)

7. To what extent do you think SASUF builds/strengthens relations between and among South Africa and Sweden through international higher education, research and innovation?

More Details

■ 1 - Very Little Extent   ■ 2 - Little Extent   ■ 3 - Neutral   ■ 4 - Large Extent   ■ 5 - Very Large Extent

Extent

13%   58%   29%

(B)

8. To what extent do you think SASUF helps address global challenges (i.e. SDGs)?

More Details

■ 1 - Very Little Extent   ■ 2 - Little Extent   ■ 3 - Neutral   ■ 4 - Large Extent   ■ 5 - Very Large Extent

Extent

6%→   24%   51%   29%

(C)

9. While universities are key actors in SASUF, there is a broad range of other state and non-state international higher education and research and innovation actors involved, (i.e. national, regional or international centers of excellence, research institutions, foundations, think tanks, professional associations, NGOs, etc.). Have you OR are you currently working alongside any such actor(s)?

More Details

● Yes   43
● No   57