

Indeterminacy of Spatial Effects of Soft Power Architecture: Towards A Hypothesis of Untestability

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Abstract: This paper investigates the indeterminate spatial effects of soft power architecture, with a specific focus on spatial sequestration in embassy buildings and its implications for urban environments. Security-driven architectural interventions often disrupt urban morphology and neighborhood dynamics, presenting challenges in quantifying their qualitative impacts. Drawing upon urban studies and resilience theory, the study proposes an analytical framework to explore the inherent difficulty in measuring these effects, highlighting how urban and cultural contexts adapt to spatial barriers.

Furthermore, the paper examines implications for policy and design, advocating for approaches that balance security needs with urban livability goals. This interdisciplinary approach not only advances theoretical understanding but also offers practical recommendations for policymakers, urban planners, and architects. By optimizing the positive impacts of soft power architecture, such strategies aim to foster community resilience and enhance cultural exchange within urban settings, contributing to a more cohesive and sustainable urban environment.

Keywords: Soft power architecture, Spatial sequestration, Indeterminacy, Urban morphology, Cultural resilience

1 Introduction**1.1 Background and Context**

The idea of soft power is not new: as a concept, defined by Nye (2004), it delineates nations' ability to exert influence through attraction and influence rather than force or financial incentives. In the realms of architecture and urbanism, this concept manifests in tangible forms across physical landscapes, playing an integral role in cultural exchange and dissemination of officially sanctioned images and messages of national identity. Soft power architecture includes state-funded architectural initiatives, such as embassies, consulates, and cultural centers erected abroad, which contributes to strengthening bilateral ties, expressing national identity, and promoting cultural preservation (Filipović & Vasiljević Tomić, 2019). Nations utilize architecture's communicative power to share their identities globally: navigating its inherent fluid and complex nature requires a deep understanding and flexibility in both diplomatic and architectural practices.

By default, this type of architecture, rooted in diplomatic representation, utilizes the privileges granted by the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, namely the privilege of extraterritoriality. This particular aspect is viewed as a lynchpin of the concept of soft power architecture: in theory (and practice), extraterritoriality grants immunity from any type of design oversight and its implementation. As such, it can present a challenge when introduced into a foreign urban context that does not necessarily converge with the original design and/or ideological intention of the architect for the observed spatial manifestation. Moreover, due to their operational nature i.e. the practice of diplomacy and foreign representation in host countries, these spatial manifestations will exert influence on the surrounding urban matrices, especially in terms of security. Security concerns are crucial when discussing soft power architecture: although non-compatible with the latter's intentions of cooperation and cultural exchange, security issues are almost exclusively linked to this typology (embassy buildings and diplomatic-consular outposts).

Security concerns produce tangible spatial effects in the neighboring area that are observable and codifiable. Most noted effects of this type can be articulated as the loss of freedom in the surrounding public spaces, exemplified in the damage of established urban patterns, as well as disruption of activities of various actors and imposed discontinuity of the urban morphology. To illustrate, these effects are observable for the US embassies in various settings, such as Tokyo, Japan (Filipović & Vasiljević Tomić, 2021) or Belgrade, Serbia (Filipović, 2021). Examination of these examples shows spatial tendencies, rooted in security concerns, leading to spatial sequestration, which ultimately damages urban continuity and pattern. As a country, the US has been chosen to illustrate this point due to its well-articulated stance on design principles and the image to be projected by utilizing architecture for diplomatic purposes, exemplified in the Standard Embassy Design (SED). Spatial effects observed in these instances can be codified and examined qualitatively, but when attempting to arrange the obtained data quantitatively, the research landscape gains complexity.

The undertaking of quantifying spatial effects produced by soft power architecture, however complex, is a worthy endeavor. When presented with an objective set of quantified data, architects, urban planners, and policymakers alike can utilize this intel to both mitigate the unavoidable aspects of negative spatial effects produced by these typologies and develop novel methods of effective communication of values and cultural exchange, inherent in

the concept of soft power architecture. This paper addresses three pivotal questions: 1. Is it possible to measure the spatial effects of soft power architecture? If so, 2. Can we hypothesize reliable benchmarks for this measurement? Finally, 3. How can we ensure that any data collected is not misinterpreted, given the qualitative and often subjective nature of these effects? These questions are central to our exploration of whether the spatial effects of soft power architecture can be meaningfully quantified.

1.2 Research Problem

Quantifying the qualitative impacts of soft power architecture is a challenging task: How can we quantify the extent of security-driven spatial interventions in public spaces? Should it be measured as a radius of influence in meters? Is it possible to subdivide this radius into rings of influence, with the impact decreasing as one moves away from its center, in which lies the spatial disruption culprit? What is the measuring unit for spatial disruptions, and how do we assess the width of each ring of influence? These are relevant questions for only one aspect of observed spatial disruptions, namely security concerns. Other issues of quantification will similarly occur: how do we measure the feeling of personal safety when in proximity to these typologies at a certain point in history, in relation to the then-current geopolitical landscape?

One may argue that quantification efforts have practical implications for urban planners and policymakers who must balance these challenges with the need for secure, functional urban spaces. However, it can also be argued that, even if quantified, the produced effects are unpredictable and volatile, so researchers and various practitioners may not benefit from the obtained data sets due to their changeable nature. Even if novel attempts at quantification succeed in establishing a framework, there remains a significant risk of misinterpretation. The qualitative nature of these effects, combined with the potential biases of those interpreting the data, could lead to misguided policies or ineffective design strategies. This raises a critical question: can we trust the data if we cannot reliably interpret its significance?

Conversely, even if novel attempts at quantification fall short or prove inadequate, they still offer significant value by fully encompassing the complexities of soft power architecture and its effects—an area previously underexplored in scholarly research. This can be attributed to the newness of the concept of soft power architecture, which has left many aspects under-researched. Prior studies have often focused on isolated aspects of the spatial effects produced by this typology without systematizing their overlapping consequences.

Nevertheless, providing secure, functional urban spaces remains a crucial goal, intertwined with the broader conceptual facets of soft power and soft power architecture. This paper will explore the necessity and alternatives for offering general guidelines when designing and interacting with spaces intended for these purposes.

1.3 Objectives and Hypothesis

This paper hypothesizes that the inherent untestability of spatial effects in soft power architecture challenges the necessity of quantification, raising critical questions about the effectiveness of traditional analytical methods. As we explore this hypothesis, we will also examine whether reliable benchmarks can be established or if the qualitative nature of these effects inherently limits their quantification.

In order to have a sufficiently developed framework to explore the untestability hypothesis of soft power architecture that is put forth as the main proposition of this manuscript, this paper will first discuss various identified theoretical aspects that will add to the overall attitudes presented in this research. The presented framework and findings have a clear purpose of discussing real-world implications for guiding design and policy decisions. It is argued that, with or without quantifiable data, discussion and better understanding of this novel subject matter will enhance its theoretical and practical approaches, further enhancing the goals of the examined typology, namely spatial communication of identities and intercultural exchange.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Soft Power Architecture and Spatial Sequestration

The concept of soft power architecture, particularly as it applies to embassy buildings, is a relatively novel area of study. Soft power, as articulated by Nye (2004), refers to the ability of a state to influence others through attraction rather than coercion. In the realm of architecture, this power is expressed through the physical and spatial design of diplomatic buildings, which act as symbols of national identity and instruments of cultural diplomacy. Despite the growing relevance of soft power in global politics, literature specifically addressing the architectural implications of soft power remains limited. Scholars have only recently begun to explore this interdisciplinary space, leaving significant room for further investigation.

Much of the current discourse on soft power architecture has been shaped by the author's research, which has started to establish a framework for understanding how buildings, particularly embassies, function as tools of

soft power. For example, Filipović (2023, 2021) and Filipović & Vasiljević Tomić (2021, 2019) have demonstrated how embassy buildings not only fulfill diplomatic roles but also convey cultural narratives that subtly shape perceptions of national identity. This dual function—as both diplomatic outposts and cultural symbols—underpins the ability of architecture to influence international relations without resorting to overt political pressure.

However, a significant gap remains in the literature regarding the spatial consequences of soft power architecture, particularly in relation to security-driven spatial sequestration. The focus of existing works is largely on the symbolic and diplomatic functions of architecture, often overlooking the physical isolation that embassy buildings experience due to heightened security requirements. This spatial sequestration refers to the physical detachment of embassy buildings from their urban surroundings, which results in a form of urban alienation. The tension between security needs and the goals of urban integration presents a critical challenge for architects and urban planners. While embassies are meant to be outward-facing structures that foster cultural exchange, security concerns often necessitate their withdrawal from the public sphere, limiting their potential for meaningful urban interaction.

This challenge is further compounded by the lack of established methodologies for measuring the spatial effects of soft power architecture. While some progress has been made in understanding the symbolic role of such buildings, there is still a need for more comprehensive frameworks that address both the symbolic and spatial impacts of diplomatic architecture on urban environments. The present study seeks to fill this gap by offering an analytical framework that explores how soft power architecture shapes not only perceptions of national identity but also the urban landscapes in which these buildings are situated.

2.2 Urban Morphology and Resilience Theory

To bridge the existing gap in the literature on soft power architecture, it is essential to incorporate insights from related fields such as urban morphology and resilience theory. Urban morphology, which examines the form and structure of urban spaces, provides a valuable lens through which to understand how buildings interact with their surrounding environments. Scholars like Conzen (1960) and Whitehand (1992) have extensively explored how urban form evolves over time, shaped by socio-economic, cultural, and political factors. In the context of embassy buildings, these morphological shifts are often driven by security concerns, leading to spatial configurations that prioritize protection over public accessibility.

Embassies, as part of the broader urban fabric, undergo significant morphological transformations in response to both global security dynamics and local urban planning policies. These transformations often result in embassies being situated in highly secured zones, distanced from the public realm, which contradicts the ideal of soft power architecture as an open and welcoming interface between nations. By understanding these morphological changes, urban planners and architects can better assess how diplomatic architecture fits into the larger urban framework and what spatial compromises might be required to balance security with urban engagement.

Resilience theory, as applied to urban planning, offers another crucial perspective for addressing the tensions inherent in soft power architecture. Ahern (2011) defines resilience in urban systems as the ability to absorb and recover from shocks while maintaining essential functions. For embassy buildings, resilience theory can be used to conceptualize strategies that reconcile the often-conflicting demands of security and urban integration. Rather than viewing embassy buildings as isolated entities subject to strict spatial sequestration, resilience theory suggests that they should be considered as integral parts of the urban ecosystem. This approach promotes the design of flexible and adaptive urban spaces that can withstand security threats while still facilitating public interaction.

Incorporating resilience theory into the design and planning of embassy buildings could provide a pathway toward more balanced outcomes. It suggests that embassies can be designed to accommodate necessary security measures while still maintaining a level of openness that contributes to the vitality of urban life. For example, the U.S. Embassy in London's integration narrative into the Battersea development could potentially serve as a case study for how soft power architecture can presumably balance security concerns with urban livability, providing a model for future embassy designs that seek to harmonize these competing priorities.

By drawing on both urban morphology and resilience theory, this paper builds a more comprehensive understanding of how embassy buildings can function within their urban environments. The convergence of these fields offers architects and urban planners' tools for designing diplomatic architecture that is not only secure but also responsive to the needs of urban integration, thereby enhancing the role of embassies as cultural and political connectors in global cities. Future research will benefit from further interdisciplinary collaboration, combining insights from architecture, urban planning, international relations, and security studies to refine and test the framework presented in this paper.

2.3 Measuring Qualitative Impacts in Urban Planning

One of the key challenges in studying soft power architecture is the difficulty in measuring its qualitative impacts. Traditional urban planning metrics, which often focus on quantifiable aspects such as density or land use, fall short when it comes to assessing the subtle, indeterminate effects of architectural design on cultural perceptions and urban experience. This limitation has been noted in the broader literature on urban planning, where scholars have called for more nuanced approaches to understanding the qualitative dimensions of urban spaces (Talen, 2005; Gehl, 2010).

Recent advances in qualitative research methods, such as ethnographic studies and participatory design processes, offer potential avenues for capturing the intangible effects of architecture. For example, the work of Dovey (2010) on place-making emphasizes the importance of understanding the lived experience of urban spaces, highlighting how architecture can shape social interactions and cultural narratives. Applying such methods to the study of soft power architecture could provide a richer understanding of how embassy buildings influence their urban contexts, not just through their physical presence but also through their symbolic and cultural resonance.

2.4 Gaps in the Literature and the Need for a New Framework

The literature reviewed thus far highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the challenge at hand. While there is a growing body of work on urban morphology, resilience theory, and qualitative impacts in urban planning, these areas have not been sufficiently integrated into a cohesive framework for analyzing the spatial effects of soft power architecture. The gap is particularly evident in the lack of empirical studies that address how these buildings function within the broader urban fabric, balancing security with openness, and influence with integration.

Given the novelty of the concept, it is not surprising that there is a dearth of comprehensive studies directly addressing the spatial indeterminacy of soft power architecture. This gap underscores the need for a new analytical framework that can accommodate the untestability hypothesis—a framework that does not seek to quantify the unquantifiable but rather to provide tools for understanding and managing the complex, often unpredictable interactions between architecture and urban environments.

3 Discussion

This section engages with the theoretical and practical concerns of the analytical framework, focusing on the pivotal questions that underpin this paper: (1) Is it possible to measure the spatial effects of soft power architecture? (2) Can we hypothesize reliable benchmarks for this measurement? (3) How can we ensure that any data collected is not misinterpreted, given the qualitative and often subjective nature of these effects?

3.1 Theoretical Insights: Indeterminacy, Untestability, and Feedback Mechanisms

The concept of untestability is particularly relevant in the context of soft power architecture, as the spatial effects of such buildings are often intangible and subjective, making them difficult to measure through conventional empirical methods. Soft power, by its nature, operates through influence rather than force, and its manifestations in architectural form—such as embassy buildings—rely heavily on symbolism, cultural perception, and subtle shifts in international relations. As a result, the impact of these structures on local urban environments and their ability to project national identity is often difficult to isolate or quantify.

This introduces a degree of untestability, where traditional metrics of evaluation may not apply. In this research, untestability emerges when attempting to assess how embassy buildings shape public perception or foster cultural exchange—both of which are deeply rooted in subjective human experiences. Despite this, acknowledging untestability does not render these effects irrelevant; rather, it challenges researchers and architects to devise alternative methods of evaluation, such as narrative analysis, interviews, or speculative design scenarios, which can provide insight into the less tangible, yet significant, consequences of soft power architecture.

Addressing the first question (Is it possible to measure the spatial effects of soft power architecture?), the spatial effects of soft power architecture—such as the influence of embassy buildings on their surrounding environments—are inherently difficult to quantify due to their indeterminate and often untestable nature. These effects are shaped by a myriad of factors, including cultural perceptions, geopolitical contexts, and the dynamic interactions between the built environment and its users.

However, it is possible to measure these effects indirectly through qualitative assessments, user feedback, and observational studies. For instance, public surveys and interviews with local communities can provide insights into how an embassy is perceived and its impact on cultural exchange and urban livability. Moreover, the

framework can incorporate spatial analysis tools, such as GIS mapping and urban morphology studies, to visualize and assess the spatial impact of these buildings over time.

To answer the second question (Can we hypothesize reliable benchmarks for this measurement?), hypothesizing reliable benchmarks for measuring these effects requires a nuanced approach that considers both qualitative and quantitative indicators. These benchmarks could include factors like the level of public accessibility, the degree of cultural engagement facilitated by the building, and the extent to which the embassy integrates with the surrounding urban fabric. While these benchmarks may not provide a definitive measurement, they offer a structured way to assess the potential impact of soft power architecture.

To ensure that data collected is not misinterpreted – a response to the third question (How can we ensure that any data collected is not misinterpreted, given the qualitative and often subjective nature of these effects?) – it is essential to employ a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative data with qualitative insights. For example, a high level of public accessibility may be quantified through the number of visitors to an embassy's public spaces, but the qualitative impact of these spaces on cultural exchange must be evaluated through interviews and narrative accounts. This approach mitigates the risk of oversimplifying complex phenomena and ensures that the subjective nature of soft power architecture is appropriately captured in the analysis.

3.2 Balancing Security and Urban Livability: Practical Examples and Case Studies

The challenge of balancing security with urban livability directly ties into the three pivotal questions by providing real-world contexts where the theoretical framework can be applied and tested. The spatial effects of embassy buildings often manifest in how these structures influence the urban environment, either positively through cultural engagement or negatively through spatial isolation.

For example, the U.S. Embassy in London attempts to integrate security with urban engagement through its design, but the resulting spatial effects are mixed. While the building includes public spaces intended to foster cultural exchange, the extensive security measures have led to a degree of spatial sequestration that some critics argue diminishes its contribution to urban livability (Loeffler, 2010). Measuring these spatial effects can involve both quantitative data, such as foot traffic in surrounding areas, and qualitative data, like public perception surveys.

On the other hand, the Brazilian Embassy in Tokyo, Japan, serves as a case study where a more successful balance has been achieved. Here, the embassy's transparent design and accessible public spaces have fostered both security and urban integration, providing a benchmark for similar projects. By comparing these examples, the framework can hypothesize benchmarks such as the visibility of public spaces or the level of public interaction as indicators of successful soft power architecture.

However, the qualitative nature of these effects means that care must be taken in interpreting the data. For instance, while public accessibility can be a positive indicator, it must be contextualized within the broader urban and cultural landscape. This underscores the importance of using a mixed-methods approach, where quantitative data is always interpreted in light of qualitative insights to avoid misinterpretation.

3.3 Broader Implications: Partnerships and Real-World Testing

The broader implications of this research extend to practical applications in urban planning, diplomacy, and architectural practice. To address the three pivotal questions, partnerships with urban planning agencies and governmental bodies are essential for applying and refining the framework in live environments.

Pilot projects and/or explorative case studies could be initiated in collaboration with these bodies, where the framework's benchmarks and measurement strategies are tested in the design of new embassy buildings or urban redevelopment projects. These projects would provide critical data on the spatial effects of soft power architecture, allowing for continuous refinement of the framework based on real-world outcomes.

Moreover, the broader application of the framework could involve developing policy recommendations that ensure the qualitative nature of these spatial effects is respected in urban planning guidelines. For instance, urban planners could be encouraged to incorporate qualitative assessments, such as community feedback, into their evaluation processes for diplomatic architecture, ensuring that the subjective and intangible aspects of soft power architecture are not overlooked.

4 Conclusion

The conclusion emphasizes the paper's key findings, focusing on the practical implications of the analytical framework and how it addresses the three fundamental questions related to the measurement, benchmarking, and interpretation of the spatial effects of soft power architecture. The framework's potential to guide future design and policy decisions around diplomatic architecture is particularly noteworthy.

4.1 Summary of Key Findings

This paper has introduced an analytical framework aimed at overcoming the challenges associated with measuring the spatial effects of soft power architecture. By hypothesizing reliable benchmarks and mitigating the potential for misinterpretation of qualitative data, the framework seeks to provide a systematic approach to evaluating how architectural structures, specifically embassy buildings, impact urban environments and the broader objectives of cultural diplomacy. The discussion surrounding concepts like indeterminacy and untestability has been key to expanding our understanding of the often-intangible influence of soft power architecture.

Through real-world case studies, including the U.S. Embassy in London and the Brazilian Embassy in Tokyo, Japan, the framework illustrates how spatial effects can be assessed using mixed-methods approaches. These examples demonstrate the framework's utility in quantifying the role of embassy architecture as a tool for both geopolitical representation and urban engagement. The research ultimately underscores the potential for architecture not only to serve functional diplomatic purposes but also to integrate seamlessly into the urban matrix, enhancing security while fostering cultural exchange and urban livability.

4.2 Implications for Policy and Practice

The implications of this research for both architectural practice and urban policy are significant: The proposed analytical framework provides a structured method for addressing the complex interplay of quantitative and qualitative factors, offering a new avenue for urban planners, architects, and policymakers to evaluate soft power architecture. By discussing specific benchmarks, it aims to ensure that the spatial impact of embassy buildings aligns with broader urban goals, addressing both security concerns and the potential for community engagement. Policy implications extend to the incorporation of mixed-methods assessments in urban design guidelines, urging policymakers to consider not only security protocols but also the diplomatic and cultural functions of such spaces. Integrating public engagement into the design and evaluation process is another vital recommendation. By including the opinions of local communities, embassy buildings can better contribute to the urban fabric, reinforcing their role as open, accessible spaces that facilitate cultural diplomacy rather than merely closed-off symbols of state power.

To enhance urban livability, policymakers might also adopt frameworks that assess the long-term impact of embassy buildings on the surrounding public spaces, ensuring that these structures contribute positively to the social and cultural life of their host cities. By considering embassies as key nodes in a city's diplomatic and cultural landscape, the framework can provide guidelines that promote sustainable, culturally enriching urban environments.

4.3 Future Directions

While this research offers a foundational framework for understanding the spatial effects of soft power architecture, further empirical validation is necessary. Future research should focus on applying the framework to additional case studies, preferably through partnerships with urban planning agencies and governmental institutions. This would enable researchers to test the proposed benchmarks in live projects, offering opportunities to gather real-world data and refine the framework iteratively. Such collaborations could provide insights into how the framework functions across diverse geopolitical contexts and urban environments, leading to more accurate predictions of how embassy architecture shapes urban life.

Moreover, interdisciplinary collaboration is essential for addressing the multifaceted nature of soft power architecture. While this paper focuses on the intersection of architecture and cultural diplomacy, bringing in perspectives from fields like international relations, cultural studies, and urban economics could broaden the framework's applicability. For example, scholars in international relations could help explore how shifts in geopolitical strategies might influence embassy design, while urban economists could offer insights into the long-term financial and developmental impact of such buildings on host cities.

Another potential avenue for future research lies in the speculative analysis of how embassy architecture might evolve in response to geopolitical changes, such as the rise of new global powers or shifting diplomatic alliances. Exploring scenarios in which embassy buildings play a more pronounced role in fostering international collaboration could expand the discourse on how architectural spaces facilitate not only representation but active diplomacy.

Ultimately, by continuing to refine the framework and expanding its interdisciplinary scope, future research could significantly influence both policy and practice. As embassies increasingly function as symbols of national identity and tools of soft power, understanding their spatial impact is crucial. The analytical framework introduced in this paper has the potential to restructure how we conceive of diplomatic architecture, ensuring that future embassy buildings are designed with both security and cultural engagement in mind.

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