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Public Diplomacy in Germany

By Claudia Auer and Alice Srugies

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CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy

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Abstract

Whereas public diplomacy has already been (widely) established in the U.S. as a field of practice and research, it is a rather new term and concept in Germany. Until now, only a few scholars have addressed public diplomacy in Germany and they have primarily focused on case studies. The first comprehensive, empirically grounded study on public diplomacy in Germany contributes to closing this research gap. The study looks at the understanding and practice of public diplomacy from three different perspectives: 1) it theoretically conceptualizes public diplomacy by applying approaches of communication science and sociology; 2) it depicts and discusses the historical development of public diplomacy in Germany; and 3) it empirically analyzes the practice of the most relevant German public diplomacy actors. On the basis of 32 expert interviews as well as a content analysis of the publicly available documents and online activities of the respective organizations, this research project explores the basic understanding of public diplomacy as well as the functions, aims, target groups, tools, and structures of PD used in Germany, while contextualizing the findings in an international comparison.

Introduction

When confronted with the concept of public diplomacy (PD) in this empirical study, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation distanced itself from the explicit use of the concept (IP 1: 70-73). The Friedrich Ebert Foundation as well as the German Development Service assert, too, that “we don’t work towards the concept” (IP 18: 54-55) or rather “don’t use this in our organization” (IP 16; IP 43) and Germany Trade and Invest admits to having “never heard the term before” (IP 19: 70).

However, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation fostered 2,000 scientific exchanges in 2011 and maintains an international alumni network of more than 25,000 researchers, 48 Nobel Prize laureates among them.¹ The Friedrich Ebert Foundation strengthens both the transatlantic dialogue and the international cooperation of trade unions,² whereas the German Development Service plays a decisive role in the promotion of democracy, peace and civil society in Africa, Asia and Latin America.³ Not least, Germany Trade and Invest’s mission is to “promote Germany as a location for industrial and technological investments.”⁴

At first glance, neither these organizations nor their actions have much in common. A closer look, though, reveals that the organizations’ strategies and activities explicitly or implicitly contribute to raising awareness of and increasing knowledge about Germany as well as shaping and maintaining a positive image of the country abroad by reducing stereotypes and prejudices, evoking understanding and sympathy for ideals, goals, and (political) programs, as well as establishing long-term partnerships. In short, elements of PD—the initially negated concept—run like a thread through the organizations’ external (communication) activities.

PD has only recently entered mainstream conversations of international relations. It is becoming more relevant in domestic and foreign policy⁵ as both national and international spheres⁶ are increasingly interconnected since universal issues such as climate

change demand a higher degree of transnational cooperation. These issues are not handled exclusively by governments, but involve a wide spectrum of actors ranging from non-governmental organizations to companies or individuals. The advancements in information and communication technologies make these different actors communicate faster and more transparently. PD serves as an important framework to meet these changing circumstances and new challenges in international relations.

Despite the growing acknowledgement of PD's relevance after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, profound empirical research on PD is still lacking, especially outside the U.S. So far, the empirical research has focused on the external perception of countries as well as case studies on single PD actors and events. This paper exceeds these previous research efforts and can be characterized as the first comprehensive, empirically grounded analysis of PD actors. Using the example of Germany, we provide new insights into the understanding as well as the practice of PD while discussing the goals, strategies, structures, and instruments of PD practitioners.

We will proceed in the following steps. First, we will briefly review the conceptual development of the concept against the background of real-world events and analyze the state of research on public diplomacy. Based on this we will then develop a concept of PD as communication activities drawing on theoretical considerations from sociology and communication science. This PD concept guides the empirical study and analysis of the results. We analyze German PD actors on a micro level (individual understanding of and contribution to PD), meso level (organizational understanding of PD, goals, strategies, structures, and methods of the single organizations), and macro level (social subsystems, organizational cooperation on the national and transnational level). Particular emphasis is given to the meso level, the organizations. The wide spectrum of actors operating in transnational relations is reflected by an examination of German governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as public and private actors from different areas. Finally, the report contextualizes the findings of the empirical study by presenting a

brief historical outlook while conducting an international comparison based upon the state of research in selected countries.

Conceptual Development: History Leaves Marks in Researchers' Definitions

Since Edmund Gullion coined the term public diplomacy in 1965, different developments in the international arena have altered the understanding of the concept over the course of time. The transnationalization of issues, the increasing participatory role of non-state actors and new information and communication technologies have redefined the procedures for conducting foreign policy and forced governments to acknowledge the multitude of voices in international relations. An analysis of definitions in the modern post-Gullion sense reveals that three distinct phases have framed the definitions and conceptualizations of PD. With only a few exceptions, the definitions follow the three historical breaks on an axis from persuasion to mutual understanding.

Figure 1: Definitions influenced by distinct global paradigms



Source: Illustration by the authors.

An example of a definition during the Cold War period, which focuses on persuasion, is Gullion's approach to defining PD as "the means by which governments, private groups and individuals influence the attitudes and opinions of other peoples and governments in such a way as to exercise influence on their foreign policy decisions."⁷⁷ By the end of the Cold War, PD was seen as a means of gaining *understanding* and empathy from a foreign public. For instance, in this period, Hans Tuch (1990) described PD as "a government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and

ideals, its institutions and cultures, as well as its national goals and current policies.”⁸ In the post-9/11 era definitions express a strong orientation towards mutual understanding, which is reflected in terms such as “engagement” or “relationship building.” An example is the description by Leonard et al. (2002): “In fact PD is about building relationships: understanding the needs of other countries, cultures and peoples; communicating our points of view; correcting misperceptions; looking for areas where we can find common cause.”⁹

These definitions simultaneously reflect the different roles that global citizenship is assigned in the evolution of the concept of PD. During the Cold War publics were seen as a target to be persuaded who would in turn persuade their own governments.¹⁰ At the end of the Cold War it was mainly a target group whose understanding was sought, and since 9/11 it has been an actor seeking mutual understanding. Although scholars today agree on the relational aspect of PD, a uniform, precise, and internationally agreed definition of PD is lacking. Based on considerations from sociology and communication science, this study suggests a theoretically grounded definition of PD.

Research on Public Diplomacy: Interdisciplinary and International Fragmentation

The research done in the field of PD can be described as interdisciplinary, international and multi-dimensional. While researchers have already related PD to propaganda, diplomacy, public relations and nation branding, the explanatory power of sociological approaches has been widely neglected so far. Furthermore, the body of literature mainly offers definitional, historical, institutional, and instrumental oriented research interests, whereas scant attention has been paid to the role of non-institutional actors such as citizens and citizen or people-to-people diplomacy.

The theoretical and empirical knowledge of public diplomacy is internationally desired, but disproportionally distributed

geographically. The majority of the institutions and authors dealing with PD are located in the U.S.¹¹ They dominate the PD research and use the U.S. as the main subject of analysis.¹² This leads to biased research: it interprets the field mainly through U.S. perspectives and undermines European, Asian, African, or Latin American interests. European researchers started engaging with PD only at the beginning of the 1990s.¹³ In recent years, scholars have drawn particular attention to PD conducted by Asian countries.¹⁴ In most nation states in Eastern Europe, and similarly in most African and South American countries, scholarship has been applied not at all or only very recently.¹⁵ Additionally, scholars have begun to turn their attention towards the PD of supranational organizations, like the European Union.¹⁶

In sum, the research on PD can be described as increasingly wide-ranging and thus intensely fragmented, with no agreement on the boundaries of PD as a field of research and many areas that remain unexplored. The state of research discloses the dominance of case studies focusing on single actors or countries, single events or campaigns, as well as selected PD instruments.¹⁷ This research project extends beyond the prevailing case study approach: instead of considering Germany as one case, it compares the approaches of 31 different actors whose communication efforts contribute to German PD.

Theoretical Approaches to PD as Communication Activities

In order to define public diplomacy more precisely, this paper approaches the question “What is PD?” through a deeper analysis of its constitutive elements: who (actor) communicates with what purposes (goals) to who (target groups) and how (instruments)? Currently neglected areas of research can prove fruitful when investigating these elements systematically. We will develop a concept of PD as communication activities drawing on theoretical considerations from sociology and communication science.

Public Diplomacy from A Social-Integrative Perspective: A Decentralized Actor Structure

The research on institutional aspects of PD has so far analyzed actors according to their social level (micro: individuals; meso: organizations), their organizational type (e.g. state actor, NGO, corporation) or their field of activity (political/military, economic, social/cultural). These findings, however, can be systematized and extended by applying concepts from actor-centered institutionalism and social-integrative theory.

Actor-centered institutionalism, developed by Renate Mayntz and Fritz W. Scharpf (2005), is “a tailor-made approach for research on the problem of governance and self-organization on the level of entire social fields.”¹⁸ It assumes that an analysis of structures without reference to actors is deficient—just as an analysis of an actor’s behavior without a reference to structures is incomplete. The approach provides precise definitions of central analytic categories such as “actor” and “institution.”

The term “actor” generally describes acting entities that consist of either an individual (individual actor) or a collective (complex actor).¹⁹ It is assumed that actors are able to make purposeful choices between alternative actions.²⁰ PD research often focuses on the interactions of complex actors, e.g. governments or non-governmental organizations. They are formed by a fusion of individual actors,²¹ but the constitutive factor of complex actors is their *collective* capacity to act: all individual acting is based on coordination in order to intentionally reach a *common* aim (organizational intent).²² External observers perceive the complex actors in relation to their communicative self-portrayal, their exterior appearance (design), and especially the actions of their organizational members.²³

The social-integrative approach by German sociologist Uwe Schimank elaborates more on the factors that influence the selection of courses of action. This approach assumes that individual action is guided by three social structures: (1) the subsystemic orientation

horizon (macro level), which is rooted in the social subsystem of an organization (e.g. politics, economy); (2) institutional structures (meso level), that provide a frame of reference for the individual through informal regulations (e.g. rites or ways of behaving) or formal rules of procedure that the organization has established (e.g. diplomatic protocols);²⁴ (3) constellations with other actors. It can be assumed that the strategies of different actors in the same social subsystem are interdependent.²⁵ As a result, some goals can only be reached in cooperation with others. Therefore, actors form constellations with each other. In those constellations, individuals observe, influence, and negotiate with each other. The constellation thus defines the actors' room to maneuver within it.²⁶ Although Schimank relates the constellations of actors only to individual actors, we can assume and empirically observe that organizations also unite with others to pursue their goals.

In addition, role theory²⁷ assumes that an individual is also guided by the role to which each social position or organizational function is attached: it is tied to expectations concerning the role behavior and role attributes (the appearance and "character").²⁸

These theoretical approaches offer a heuristic tool for the description of different types of actors (individual, complex) on all social levels (micro, meso, and macro) and the factors that guide them in their actions. As such, these approaches acknowledge the diversity of contributions made to PD by various actors. Applying these concepts to PD helps to identify who conducts PD on the respective social levels:

- *Micro level:* Actors can be individuals who communicate and act in an organizational role, e.g. as a scholar, politician, or creative artist, or in the role of a citizen of a country or a member of a transnational public sphere. In order to attain common goals, they form constellations. By doing so, actors mutually influence their actions: they observe and thus form conclusions on what they can expect from others, how they can be influenced and the effects their actions have on realizing their own goals. The

relevance of individual actors to PD is stressed by exchange programs and transnational cooperation of all kinds (e.g. Fulbright). In this context, citizens must not only be seen as recipients of PD efforts, but also as communicators that influence others. Individuals, as members of the global citizenship, also exert decisive power in the form of public opinion.²⁹

- *Meso level:* Organizations as complex actors also conduct public diplomacy. Leonard et al. (2002) group these actors into three dimensions³⁰—political/military, societal/cultural, and economic. Based on the social-integrative approach, these correspond to social subsystems. We must assume that the subsystem influences the organization, e.g. with regard to goals, target groups, or the selection of strategies.
- *Macro level:* Not least, the country itself is an actor of PD. This is evidenced by the expression “a German position” or “German public diplomacy.” It is important to keep in mind, though, that the assumption of German PD is simplified: the PD of a country is not carried out by a single actor from within the government, but refers to an aggregation of communication efforts of both state and non-state actors. These organizations operate in different social subsystems ranging from politics and military to education and research and may differ in their understanding of the PD concept as well as their pursuit of different PD strategies. This assumption is supported by the results of our empirical study (see below).

Consequently, the PD actor structure is complex (see Table 1): PD is an aggregation of performances by various individual and complex actors. These different actors follow—influenced by their respective social subsystem, institutional structures, and constellations with others—their specific constituting interests. Their contribution to PD is not always constitutive for their respective organization, but can be a side effect. Technisches Hilfswerk, for example, does not have a PD strategy, but contributes to German PD with its aid work.

Table 1: Actors of public diplomacy

Layer	Type	Manifestation	Influential structure
Micro	individual actor	role keeper (e.g. citizen, organizational role)	constellation of actor
Meso	complex actor	economic/political solidarity groups/organizations (e.g. political parties, associations)	institutional structures
		organizations oriented towards the common good (e.g. groups, society, clubs)	
		interest organizations (e.g. social and protest movements, NGOs)	
		public organizations (e.g. elected councils, public administration)	
		economic single organization/company	
Macro	social subsystem as actor (e.g. politics)		subsystemic orientation horizon
	<i>nation as actor</i>		

Source: Illustration by the authors.

In conclusion, from an institutional perspective, PD is characterized by a decentralized structure. This argues for the fact that PD is not a social subsystem on its own, but an output of various social subsystems that is generated by individual and complex actors. This understanding of PD differs from the characterization of public relations, which are generally defined as an independent organizational function serving a *single* actor and consciously conducted only by this single actor.

Public Relations' Contribution to Analyzing Goals and Target Groups

As indicated above, definitions of PD locate goals on a continuum from persuasion to mutual understanding. To these points, Signitzer (1993) allocates “two basic functions” of PD,³¹ political information and cultural communication. The respective strategy is chosen according to the situation, the actor, the program, and most notably the target group.

Signitzer and Coombs were among the first to point out the convergence of public relations and PD. For a systematic analysis of target groups, PD can draw on public relations research that has already created worthwhile means of identification and segmentation.³² Accordingly, target groups can be generally differentiated by their membership of an organization (internal/external dimension). Besides the specific differences between individuals or groups (e.g. gender, age, race), the study of global citizenship also has to consider and adapt to the contextual conditions in the target country. The infrastructure (e.g. political system, degree of activism), media system (e.g. diffusion of media, illiteracy)³³ and culture (e.g. negotiation style, language) of a target country influence an actor's PD strategy.

The Instrumental Aspects of PD

In order to reach their target audiences, PD actors not only have to select their strategy carefully, but also need to choose their instruments accordingly. A rather systematized list of PD instruments, however, is still lacking. This paper suggests a holistic PD instrument model based on the application of the public relations media model by Hallahan (2001). This model allocates instruments to five big groups: public media, controlled media, interactive media, events and group communication, and one-to-one communication.³⁴ This paper also suggests including non-state actors in this model that serve as intermediary organizations and play a vital role in implementing government programs and strategies. In many countries, they hold

more credibility than governmental actors.³⁵ Furthermore, the model integrates different existing approaches to systemizing PD strategies and instruments: these approaches include Leonard et al.'s (2002) model of the time frame of PD strategies, Cowan and Arsenault's (2008) "Three Layers of Public Diplomacy," which focus on the mode of communication, Cull's (2008) taxonomy of PD and Leonard et al.'s (2002) discussion of "actor-centered" instruments. The integrated PD instrument model is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Holistic model of public diplomacy instruments³⁶

	Public Media	Controlled Media	Interactive Media	Events/ Group Communication	One-to-One Communication	"Non-state Actors"
Main use in public diplomacy	information; mobilization; advertisement	information; advocacy; advertisement	exchange of information; establishing and cultivating contact; mutual understanding	exchange of information; establishing and cultivating contact; mutual understanding	exchange of information; establishing and cultivating contact; mutual understanding	individual achievements for PD; utilization of resources (e.g. human capital: personnel, expertise; immaterial capital: credibility, networks)
Main function	← political information		cultural communication →			
Orientation towards time frame	← news management		relationship management →			
Orientation towards relationship	← monologue		dialogue/cooperation →			
Examples	mass media, media cultural assets	government-run international broadcasting, actor websites, PR material	Internet; social media	exchange programs, cultural events, language courses	personal meetings, virtual communication	NGO diplomacy, diaspora diplomacy

Source: Illustration by the authors.

Interactive media outlets are said to be the main driving forces in the empowerment of non-governmental organizations and individuals in international relations, changing the structures and processes of traditional diplomacy.³⁷ According to Cull, "While the great powers continued (and continue) to broadcast their speeches, press releases and so forth into the ether and across the web, the audience was

no longer as likely to listen. Part of the change was rooted in the sheer number of voices suddenly speaking on-line and the range of choices available.”³⁸ Consequently, the Internet and social media are heralded for their potential to enhance dialogue and two-way symmetrical communication. Several reports recommend intensified use of the Internet to improve the success of PD,³⁹ and scholars have also discussed the possibilities of the Internet and social media as tools for PD.⁴⁰ Part of the study is therefore especially dedicated to the analysis of public diplomacy 2.0.

Working Definition of Public Diplomacy

Based on the application of theoretical approaches from other disciplines to PD, this paper concludes the theoretical discussion with the following working definition:

Public diplomacy is the aggregated direct or mass-mediated communication activities by various individual and complex actors to foreign or domestic individual (e.g. public, multipliers) or complex actors (e.g. government) to reach goals ranging from persuasion to mutual understanding. The actors' actions are influenced by their respective social subsystem, institutional structures, and constellations with other actors.

Tracing the Roots of German Public Diplomacy: A Historical Overview

When we reflect on the ancient Olympic Games, which had a political and a cultural dimension that extended well beyond the sporting competition, or the Ancient Régime, it becomes apparent that PD did not start with the birth of the term in 1965.⁴¹ Tracing back the roots of PD by analyzing a country's history serves as a powerful tool for understanding Germany's contemporary PD practices. PD in Germany draws on its own tradition, which has evolved relatively independently from the PD practice of the U.S. This section provides a brief overview of the historical development of the concept of PD in Germany from the foundation of the German Empire in 1871 until today. It depicts the key historical events, goals, and strategies

of important PD actors as well as the international environment in which these actors operated. It is important to keep in mind that the term PD itself was not used in most of the historical periods analyzed and is still hardly used by German practitioners. Consequently, this historical review focuses on single components of PD including the country's external representation, foreign cultural and educational policy, development cooperation initiatives, as well as foreign trade in the context of general foreign political guidelines.

Foreign Cultural Policy as Expansionist Policy: From the Foundation of The German Empire To The First World War

Whereas foreign cultural policy activities had been predominantly financed by private actors until the 1870s, foreign cultural policy constituted an important, steadily growing share of the government's budget of the young German Empire just one decade later. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Federal Foreign Office (founded in 1871) coordinated nearly all foreign cultural political activities.⁴² Private organizations, however, did not disappear, but remained important in supporting these foreign cultural political activities abroad.⁴³ Moreover, the exchange of professors and the establishment of German schools abroad as well as Archaeological Institutes in Rome and Athens serve as early examples of scientific and educational relations.⁴⁴

The German understanding of foreign cultural policy prior to the First World War differs fundamentally from its understanding today: the German Empire competed for the establishment of its own national culture on an international level.⁴⁵ Cultural expansion was considered a preliminary stage of political and even territorial expansion. In fact, culture was degraded to a mere instrument for reaching political aims.⁴⁶ The so-called "Auslandsdeutschtum," describing communication activities targeted at German emigrants who had not fully integrated themselves into their new homes, gained relevance in the nineteenth century. Also referred to as "Volkstumspolitik," it not only contributed to maintaining and strengthening relations with German emigrants, but also served

as a pretext to interfere with the cultural political affairs of other countries.⁴⁷

Laying the Foundation for a Pluralistic Public Diplomacy Network: The Weimar Republic

The expansionist politics that had defined the German Empire under the leadership of Wilhelm II at the beginning of the twentieth century came to an abrupt end after Germany's defeat in the First World War. Germany lost one-seventh of its territory and one-tenth of its population and found itself an isolated state. The "Auslandsdeutschum" became an even stronger focus of the German Government after the First World War.⁴⁸ Propaganda was subject to critical analysis⁴⁹ and replaced with a more subtle, more open approach to foreign policy under Chancellor and Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann. Stresemann succeeded in reintegrating Germany into the international community, which became particularly visible with Germany's admittance to the League of Nations in 1926.

Germany maintained international relations with the U.S., the U.K. and the Commonwealth States, Japan, and South America, but also Western and Southeastern European states, Scandinavia, and the Baltic States. Cooperation with these countries was not only based on the efforts of the Federal Foreign Office: intermediary organizations such as the German Academic Exchange Service (founded in 1925) played an important role in fostering educational exchanges, as their engagement in public diplomacy proved to be more successful than initiatives solely run by the government. As Busch-Janser and Florian (2007: 226) state: "The more apparent and the closer links to the government are to a PD initiative, the more distrust assails it."⁵⁰ This organizing principle still applies today (see the findings of the empirical study).

The death of Gustav Stresemann in 1929 brought about a decrease in the interest in foreign cultural policy as well as substantial budget cuts.⁵¹ From 1929 to 1932, revisionist politics as well as a focus on exports dominated the international strategy of the

Weimar Republic.⁵² The mass media were nationalized and restricted to being an instrument of propaganda and election campaigning in 1932—an important precursor to the policy of enforced conformity (“Gleichschaltungspolitik”) in the Third Reich.⁵³

Propaganda and Enforced Conformity: The Third Reich

At no other time in history has communication targeted at audiences abroad been so closely associated with the threat of violence or the actual exercise of violence.⁵⁴ The cultural foreign political activities in the Third Reich were reduced to assisting the realization of expansionist goals abroad.⁵⁵ The communication directed towards foreign audiences was aggressive propaganda that focused on the superiority of the German culture and language as well as the superiority of the “Arian race.” Communication activities were no longer coordinated by the Federal Foreign Office, but by different national socialist organizations. Intermediary organizations still existed, but could no longer carry out their work autonomously, and were degraded to the operative hand of the Nazi regime.⁵⁶ The pluralistic structure of the Weimar Republic had given way to a centralized, uniform approach to foreign cultural policy that was granted a comparably high budget.

A Nation Divided: The Cold War

The end of the Second World War left Germany isolated and under the control of the occupying powers of the U.S., Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union (S.U.); all cultural diplomatic relations came to an abrupt end. Germany was no longer a central European power, but a weakened state divided by two opposing superpowers: the U.S. and the S.U. The very recent national socialist past weighed as a heavy moral burden on Germany.⁵⁷ The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) pursued fundamentally different strategies to regain national sovereignty and reintegrate themselves into the international community. The following section compares the PD approaches of the two “Germanies” in the Cold War period.

The FRG regained its independence in a comparably short amount of time: after the occupying powers had granted the FRG to set up consular posts abroad in 1949, they ended the occupation of West Germany in 1951. The PD of the FRG was coined by a “culture of reticence,”⁵⁸ which followed the conscious delimitation from the aggressive expansionist foreign policy at the beginning of the twentieth century and in the Third Reich. PD was geared towards the interests and requests of the target audiences and was only active in countries that showed an interest in the FRG.⁵⁹ It was predominantly financed by Federal Ministries such as the re-established Federal Foreign Office, but was carried out by intermediary organizations like the Goethe Institute or the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations, again to avoid the impression of state-led activities.⁶⁰

The FRG had focused on communication efforts towards other European countries and NATO member states in the first decades of its existence, but it placed more emphasis on developing countries in the early 1980s. The *détente* in the 1970s and 1980s was accompanied by growing relevance of foreign cultural policy and a growing emphasis on exchange.⁶¹ The Kohl Era, on the contrary, was dominated by power politics and economic interests and focused the country’s PD initiatives on Central and Eastern European countries as well as the Commonwealth of Independent States.⁶² The PD of the FRG adapted to a transforming international environment and shifting foreign political priorities, but can also be characterized by persistent, long-term-oriented projects like the Franco-German cooperation.⁶³

In contrast to its cautious communication approach towards other countries, the FRG pursued a strategy of aggressive confrontation towards the GDR that reached its peak in 1955 with the Hallstein Doctrine. The Hallstein Doctrine was the FRG’s attempt claim to the sole legitimate representation of Germany and stated that the FRG would only establish and maintain diplomatic relations with countries that did not recognize the GDR as a sovereign state. However, with the growing relevance of development cooperation, the Hallstein Doctrine was no longer sustainable. The Basic Treaty signed in 1973

sealed the mutual recognition of the two German states⁶⁴ and went along with the rapprochement of the FRG to the S.U. and Eastern European states under the Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt.

The GDR, on the other side, could neither fall back on its own history nor act independently when establishing its image abroad.⁶⁵ During half of its existence, the GDR was denied its national sovereignty by many states outside the Eastern Bloc. Thus, being acknowledged as a sovereign state and being integrated into the international community was the primary PD objective of the GDR until the early 1970s.⁶⁶ By the first half of the 1970s, the GDR was recognized as a sovereign state by most countries. The GDR's PD strategy in the following years was defined by close cooperation with the S.U. and former Eastern Bloc states on the one hand and delimitation to the Western states on the other hand, which was referred to as a "peaceful coexistence."⁶⁷ Despite its newly gained independence, the GDR could not dissociate itself from the foreign political position of the S.U. until the 1980s. The GDR failed to adapt its PD strategy to the fundamental political changes in the S.U. led by Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s.

The PD-related activities of the GDR and the messages it sought to convey were controlled by the Socialist Unity Party for the entire period of its existence. This centralization left little room for pluralistic ideas: the GDR placed great emphasis on a positive image abroad that did not allow for critical self-reflection.⁶⁸ Even though the GDR participated in exchange programs, it concentrated its exchange relationships on countries with a similar political alignment.

A New Role and New Responsibility: German Public Diplomacy up to Present-day

The reunification of the two German states in 1990 strengthened Germany's position in the world and coincided with a greater responsibility within the international community and particularly in Europe. At the same time, it presented Germany with the challenge

of integrating the PD approaches of the FRG and the GDR, which was met with strategic and structural continuity of the PD by the FRG: cultural institutes of the GDR were closed, and diplomats and lecturers were not transferred.⁶⁹ Therefore, Germany wasted the potential of regional experts who held important knowledge on the former Eastern Bloc states.⁷⁰

Based on the “Konzeption 2000,”⁷¹ the German foreign cultural and educational political efforts were now focused on four core areas: 1) fostering German foreign cultural and educational political interests abroad; 2) establishing and maintaining a positive, modern image of Germany abroad; 3) furthering the European integration; 4) preventing conflicts by setting up a dialogue on values.⁷² These strategic foci still pave the way for German PD today. For example German public diplomacy practitioners, in response to the 9/11 terror attacks, strengthened the already-established dialogue with the Islamic world. In 2011, the German government reinforced these four objectives, but accentuated the particular relevance of education and research as important PD dimensions.⁷³ Moreover, since the enlargement of the European Union in 2004, European integration has occupied an increasingly important place on the agenda of both German and European PD practitioners. The concept of “Auswärtige Kultur- und Bildungspolitik in Zeiten der Globalisierung” (foreign cultural and educational policy in the age of globalization) stresses the need to adapt the structures and tools of foreign cultural and educational policy to the changes in the international environment.⁷⁴ It particularly emphasizes private–public partnerships as well as a dialogue-based approach to communication that is also accompanied by a heightened focus on social media activities.⁷⁵

More recently, the FIFA World Cup, which was held in Germany in 2006, marked an important step towards a more self-confident external representation of the country. The World Cup was accompanied by “Germany—Land of Ideas,” a joint campaign by the German Government and industry that sought to modernize the image of Germany abroad and break down the existing stereotypes.⁷⁶

Historical Experiences as Building Blocks for the Future

This brief historical review has brought forward a number of important insights that help us to understand the PD practice in Germany today. The aggressive approaches to foreign policy prior to and during the First and Second World Wars— after which Germany found itself in isolation—demonstrate that messages and cultures must not be imposed on anyone, but can only be communicated to foreign audiences that show an interest in them. The development of the GDR has underlined that PD has to be based on honesty and critical self-reflection. This critical self-reflection also includes reprocessing Germany's past as a precondition for its external representation. Communicating contradictory messages to different target audiences as well as veiling facts can lead to irreparable damage to a country's image and a loss of trust. Against the backdrop of a growing interconnection of the national and international spheres, this strategy also must apply to domestic audiences. Not least, the heavy moral burden of the Third Reich framed the structure of Germany's PD: today's actors are eager to avoid any impression of a centralized approach. Therefore, several federal ministries finance and coordinate the PD efforts; intermediary organizations, however, carry out the bulk of PD activities and operate largely autonomously.

Public Diplomacy in Practice: Findings of the Empirical Study

The theoretical treatise leads to seven research questions guiding the empirical analysis of how public diplomacy is understood and conducted in Germany.

RQ1: How is PD defined in Germany?

RQ2: What PD strategy do organizations pursue with regard to their goals, methods and instruments, target groups and the image of Germany abroad?

RQ 3: How is PD structured within the organizations?

RQ 4: How do organizations cooperate with each other and does a German and respectively an international PD network exist?

RQ5: How much does the German understanding and way of conducting PD differ from the PD understanding and practice of other countries?

RQ 6: To what extent do German PD organizations use social media tools to reach their target groups?

RQ 7: To what extent do German PD organizations engage in a dialogue with their target groups through social media tools?

The empirical analysis is based on guided expert interviews with 31 German PD actors. The sample comprises complex actors, state and non-state, public and private, from different social subsystems. Additionally, the research team carried out a content analysis of the publicly available documents of these organizations as well as their websites, related web presences, blogs and social media profiles. The appendix of this publication contains a detailed description of the research design and the sampling procedure.

Public Diplomacy—What it Means to German Practitioners

PD as a term and concept is rather unknown among German actors, as the analysis of the interviews shows. Aside from the German Federal Foreign Office, only a few organizations are familiar with the term. In particular, problems arose when interviewees were asked to give a translation and definition of the term and concept (RQ 1). One interview partner traced these difficulties back to the fact that the German academic research on the term and concept is lagging behind the state of research in other countries, such as the U.S. (IP 2). The interviewees' definition of PD is shaped by the social subsystem to which their organization belongs: organizations from the field of education and research translate PD as scientific diplomacy, whereas cultural actors emphasize cultural foreign policy and cultural diplomacy.

However, common ground for a definition can be found. Organizations agree on the fact that PD consists of communication activities to shape the image of a country (IP 11; IP 23; IP 25), to influence (IP 2; IP 11; IP 18), to build relationships (IP 1; IP 24) and to raise understanding (IP 14; IP 20). Furthermore, consensus is found in terms of the most important principles guiding PD practice: honesty, credibility (IP 2; IP 12; IP 15; IP 24) and mutuality (IP 6; IP 14; IP 24).

A Public Diplomacy Network in Germany and Beyond

German PD actors can be clearly allocated to the three social subsystems differentiated by Leonard et al. (2002):⁷⁷ political/military, societal/cultural and economic. The analysis even disclosed the need to include a fourth subsystem: education and research. All four subsystems comprise governmental and private as well as non-governmental organizations. The analysis shows that an overall German network of PD actors does not exist; in fact, three rather close networks can be identified that occur within single social subsystems, but do not span across them (RQ 4). These findings confirm the assumptions of the social integrative approach by Schimank.

The Association of International Cooperation is an umbrella organization that aims to foster and strengthen the cooperation in the areas of development cooperation and foreign cultural and educational policy. The actor constellation is composed of organizations like the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the Goethe Institute or the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations. The second close network covers the subsystem of education and research. In this field, the German Academic Exchange Service and the German Rector's Conference established the consortium GATE Germany, which works towards the internationalization of German universities. The German Development Service, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit and Inwent have closely collaborated in the field of development cooperation and finally merged into the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit. In

addition to these close networks, loose networks are established on a project basis.

The interviewees state that a general German PD network would not work (IP 11): organizations form constellations with other networks to reach specific goals that other constellations might not want to pursue. A common strategy for all German PD actors is not welcomed either (IP 11). There are two reasons why: first, the non-governmental organizations want to preserve their independence and do not want to be perceived as an instrument of the government in great part due to historical reasons; and second, the organizations would prefer to present a pluralistic image of Germany (cf. IP 2; IP 12). In effect, PD in Germany comprises partial and even contradictory strategies in order to depict Germany as a diverse, multifaceted state. Even though an overall German PD strategy cannot be detected, many organizations place the Federal Foreign Office at the center of a loose German network (IP 1; IP 13; IP 15; IP 24). Its task of managing the foreign relations of Germany in a central manner is set up by the common rules of procedure of the German Government and the law of the Foreign Service.⁷⁸ Its leading role is rooted in its function as a coordinator of campaigns and financial provider for organizations like the Goethe Institute or Deutsche Welle (IP 14: 3.2; IP 24: 3.2).

Apart from these PD networks within Germany, nearly all the organizations engage with foreign PD actors as well as international and supranational organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations. Supranational organizations take the role of a financial provider (IP 14; IP 21) or a long-term cooperation partner (IP 14; IP 31), or they cooperate with organizations on a case-by-case basis (IP 4).

Public Diplomacy within Organizations

As a rather young concept in Germany, PD is not (yet) institutionalized in an organizational capacity. Instead, different departments within an organization are in charge of PD (IP 11;

IP 15) (RQ 3). The analysis of organizational charts discloses that departments below the executive level that already manage communication activities take the responsibility in most cases. Only within a few organizations is PD a part of the management level.⁷⁹ Thus, PD activities are not yet an explicit part of the organizational strategies, but can often be regarded as a by-product of the initial organizational actions.

The education and professional background of PD practitioners within organizations are heterogeneous: civil servants and graduates from the humanities as well as employees specializing in development cooperation, regional experts (IP 2; IP 15; IP 18; IP 22; IP 28) and engineers (IP 6; IP 17; IP 21; IP 28) are among the PD practitioners. Staff members with a communication background, however, remain an exception (IP 14; IP 22; IP 25; IP 30). The majority of the organizations call for a higher PD budget to increase the organizations' capacity to act. Moreover, the interviewees criticize the allocation of resources on an annual basis: "[W]e work on an annual budget basis. So, we may think about the future in the long run, but we can [only, the authors] act on an annual basis" (IP 24: 227-229).

What German Public Diplomacy Wants and Who it Wants to Reach

The goals of German PD actors are closely associated with their organizational intent and the subsystem in which they operate (RQ 2). However, the interviewees agree on two overarching goals: shaping the image of Germany, and relationship management (IP 1; IP 11; IP 24; IP 32: 81ff). Some interviewees target their PD efforts at publics "abroad" (IP 2; IP 11), whereas others explicitly name domestic target groups. The foreign target groups can be classified into three groups: (1) states and organizations (complex actors), (2) multipliers and (3) citizens (individual actors).

Most German PD actors operate worldwide, although a general orientation along the recommendations of the Federal Foreign Office

exists (IP 6; IP 18). Since 9/11, Muslim countries have become a major focus of German PD (IP 2). European countries as well as the U.S. still remain a major focus of the organizations, and Asian countries are increasingly considered major target publics.⁸⁰

Public Diplomacy Instruments

Public diplomacy organizations select the instruments they use according to their target groups and goals (RQ 2). Following the holistic model developed by the authors (see above), the analysis shows that the instruments are used to serve both main functions of PD: political information and cultural communication. Regarding political information, the organizations mainly use public media, communicating in a “one-to-many” mode, and controlled media, such as advertisements, websites or printed material (IP 1; IP 16; IP 19). Accordingly, goals like news management, information and persuasion, as well as image shaping, can be achieved. The public media serves as an instrument and as a target group at the same time. The press is mainly addressed by press conferences and off-the-record-conversations (IP 2; IP 9; IP 10). Although Deutsche Welle is a non-state actor, it is funded by the Federal Foreign Office to send out political communications to target audiences (IP 2; IP 25). It can thus be considered an “actor-centered” instrument.

In order to create and deepen dialogue, build relationships, and shape a positive image (IP 2), the organizations use interactive media, events, group communication such as round tables, language courses or exhibitions, and academic and artistic exchanges “with a view toward transmitting messages about lifestyles, political and economic systems, and artistic achievements.”⁸¹ Organizations from the societal/cultural and the education/research subsystem especially esteem the value of exchange programs, even if they are aware of having a minor degree of control over them. For a deeper analysis of the use of social media, see below.

Evaluation constitutes a marginal share of an already small PD budget. These financial restrictions often do not allow for a detailed

analysis of the success and the impact of public diplomacy. Thus, the interviewees call for institutionalization and professionalization of PD evaluation (IP 7; IP 11). Moreover, this analysis reveals methodological weaknesses in the evaluation of projects and initiatives (IP 4). PD scholars and practitioners need to develop valid evaluation tools in order to prevent PD from being “condemned to play a secondary role within states foreign policy systems.”⁸²

Public Diplomacy 2.0? Yes and No!

The Internet and social media are heralded for their potential to enhance dialogue and two-way symmetrical communication. However, only a few empirical studies have been conducted to investigate the relation between the potential and the actual reality.⁸³ Contrasted with the democratic hopes connected with PD 2.0, the results of this study show that the interactive modes of social media are rarely used by PD actors in Germany⁸⁴.

Almost half of the organizations analyzed maintain a Twitter account (n=13), a Facebook profile (n=14) and/or a YouTube channel (n=17). Few organizations have established their own video channels or engaged in networks such as the photo community Flickr. German PD actors appear reluctant to integrate blogs into their communication strategies: up to now, only five organizations have maintained weblogs.

With regard to *YouTube*, the number of videos placed online and the attention they receive varies to a great extent. Whereas 23,654 users subscribe to the YouTube channel of the German Armed Forces, the YouTube channel of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit has only 4 subscriptions. However, a great number of views and subscriptions do not automatically equal a dialog with the target audiences. Out of 17 organizations maintaining a YouTube channel, 8 actors did not receive any comments at all; the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology even deactivated the option to comment on its videos. If videos do receive comments it happens mostly sporadic, and almost all the organizations answer within a few

days. These findings indicate that the technological pre-conditions for initiating a dialogue do not guarantee that a dialogue is really evolving and kept up.

The number of fans on *Facebook* ranges from 33,954 fans (Goethe Institute) to 434 fans (German Research Foundation). The degree of activity also varies to a great extent. Only the Robert Bosch Foundation and the Goethe Institute actively stimulate dialogue, for instance by asking followers about their favorite books during the German book fair.

The analysis of the *Twitter* accounts suggests that there are two groups of organizations: the first, small group concentrates on informing target audiences without following the information of other actors; the second, larger group also follows individuals and organizations that reach beyond its own network and shows greater interest in the activities of other actors.

German PD actors emphasize dialogue and network building as crucial goals of their work. This quest for dialogue is also reflected in the fundamental conceptions of German foreign cultural and educational politics.⁸⁵ Many interviewees recognize the value of Web 2.0 applications for establishing dialogues and follow-up contact (IP 2; IP 4; IP 14; IP 20; IP 19; IP 25; IP 28), but only a very few organizations engage in a social media dialogue with foreign audiences.

Resources play a decisive role in organizations' hesitant use of online information, identity and relationship management (IP 1; IP 4; IP 5; IP 18; IP 28). However, budget restrictions do not remain the only reason for the perceived reluctance concerning social media: the study discloses a lack of social media competence as well. The interviews reveal that a number of organizations do not know what the term Web 2.0 stands for (IP 7; IP 11; IP 17; IP 21; IP 23). Additionally, some organizations (e.g. Federal Foreign Office, German embassies) express concern about the loss of control over the content that is posted online and might be distributed by third

parties in a different context (IP 1).⁸⁶ Moreover, some actors indicate bureaucratic obstacles and the fact that organizational change does not occur overnight.

In sum, most German public diplomacy organizations hardly use social media in order to establish and maintain relationships or networks. This might be traced back to the fact that some respondents prefer slower forms of engagement, such as exchange programs or exhibitions, to establish a dialogue: “[...] [W]e can communicate, we can exchange ideas, [...] we can prepare meetings, everything. But [...] nothing in the world replaces [...] the meeting of people and dialog between them” (IP 24, 367-373). On the contrary, the results suggest that those organizations that generally focus on exchanges and relationship management in their work—especially the German Academic Exchange Service and the Goethe Institute—are also more active in establishing and keeping up relationships and networks online. Up to now, PD 2.0 has been more fiction than reality and has been used more for marketing purposes than relationship building. Nevertheless, the majority of German PD actors plan to develop their digital PD tools further in the future, although they understand social media as just one instrument of a varied PD toolbox (IP 1; IP 4; IP 5; IP 11; IP 12; IP 13; IP 18; IP 19; IP 20; IP 22; IP 30).

Contextualization of the Findings⁸⁷

The empirical analysis shows that there is no common understanding of public diplomacy among German practitioners. This empirical finding discloses parallels with the U.S. PD debate. In contrast, China and the U.K. have reached a uniform understanding: China describes PD with the more common term propaganda (*xuan chuan*), which has positive connotations in China,⁸⁸ and both the U.K. and Norway agree on a uniform definition of PD.⁸⁹ Some countries put particular emphasis on single PD dimensions: Swedish and Danish PD actors focus on the economic dimension of PD. Their understanding and practice of PD is strongly influenced by the concept of nation branding.⁹⁰

Great Britain's efforts to achieve a uniform definition of PD might be traced back to the institutionalized network structure of PD in this country. British PD is coined by a strong emphasis on developing a coherent, consistent strategy that reaches beyond the individual goals of single PD actors and builds on a close network of PD actors. The PD of the Northern European countries also concentrates on the development of a consistent, overarching PD strategy, which is limited to a few core areas and core values. Through "Brand Sweden," Sweden tries to communicate the image of a progressive nation based on four key values: innovative, open, authentic, and caring.⁹¹ Norway, on the contrary, concentrates on communicating itself as having a "peaceful nature."⁹² Despite Germany's emphasis on a decentralized, pluralistic PD structure, a number of interviewees highlight the benefits of closer collaboration between the organizations. The Northern European countries serve as examples: Norway and Sweden concentrate their development cooperation efforts in the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation⁹³ and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency⁹⁴ which foster "prosperity, good government and security"⁹⁵ in poor countries.⁹⁶ In the United States, the Under Secretary for PD and Public Affairs is the central, responsible actor for state PD. It stresses the importance of aligning PD goals, programs, resources, and structures with U.S. foreign policy objectives.⁹⁷ Like Germany, the U.S. pursues a broad range of PD goals. Yet, Snow points out that the PD of the U.S. is rather "crisis-driven and self-preservation oriented."⁹⁸ With regard to Australia, Byrne (2009) criticizes the PD efforts as "fragmented, ad hoc and disconnected from Australia's strategic foreign policy interests." Byrne identifies many individual PD messages and activities that only receive little coordination by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.⁹⁹ This call for a more strategic approach to PD refers not only to nation states, but also to supranational organizations like the European Union.¹⁰⁰

It becomes evident that bigger countries, such as the United States and Germany, can concentrate on many more target countries than, for instance, Norway, which is trying to distinguish itself from other countries as a mediator and promoter of peace¹⁰¹ and

thus concentrating its PD efforts on countries such as Sri Lanka or Colombia.¹⁰² Whereas only some German PD actors mention domestic target groups as part of their target group portfolio, China defines both domestic target groups and emigrants as valuable target groups.¹⁰³ In contrast, the U.S., the U.K. and Norway do not define their citizens as a target group of PD activities.¹⁰⁴ However, as globalization and migration are still growing phenomena, it seems reasonable to integrate people living in one's own country into the target group portfolio.

German PD practitioners apply Web 2.0 only hesitantly. In contrast, almost every U.S. PD actor is familiar with Web 2.0 applications as PD tools. Frequent social media use—ranging from online language courses¹⁰⁵ to setting up virtual embassies in *Second Life*¹⁰⁶—is a vital part of Chinese, British, Finnish, Swedish and even Maldivian PD strategies.

Conclusion

This study aimed at describing German PD from a theoretical, a historical, an empirical as well as an internationally comparative perspective. On the basis of 32 expert interviews as well as a content analysis of the publicly available documents and online activities of the respective organizations, this study has shown that international research is far ahead of the practice of most organizations in Germany. Accordingly, German PD research appears to be still in its infancy when compared with that of the U.S. The term PD is rarely used to describe organizational strategies and activities and has not yet been embedded as an organizational function. In fact, many actors are still rather unconscious about their role in shaping and maintaining a positive image of Germany abroad, raising awareness and understanding or building relationships. To date, PD often remains a side effect or by-product of organizational actions that are aimed at the attainment of different objectives. Because of this, a large part of the concept's potential remains unused. German PD actors operate in four social subsystems (political/military, societal/cultural, economic, education/research) that have major impacts on

their definition of the concept and the goals they connect to PD. As one of the larger countries commanding a comparably large amount of resources, Germany can pursue several objectives at the same time and apply a broad, diversified PD approach, whereas small and medium-sized states, such as Norway, need to focus on a few subject areas.¹⁰⁷ This diversification is also visible in the structure of PD in Germany. Even though the Federal Foreign Office takes on a central role as coordinator and financial provider, there is neither an overall German PD strategy nor a general PD network. This institutional perspective on PD demonstrates that the concept needs to be analyzed against the background of determining national factors such as a country's historical and cultural characteristics or—in the case of Germany—its subdivision into federal states. There is no internationally agreed definition of PD target groups yet. Whilst the U.S., the U.K. and Norway do not consider their own citizens as target groups, China puts particular emphasis on domestic target groups and emigrants.¹⁰⁸ Germany strikes a balance between the two views and concentrates on foreign governments and organizations, multipliers as well as citizens, but acknowledges the importance of domestic target groups as well. Even if dialogue is regarded as a central basis for reaching target groups, German PD actors use the Web 2.0's potential for interaction only hesitantly. Scholars critically remark that, despite its strategic focus on dialogue, German PD is still far from practicing symmetric communication.¹⁰⁹

Future public diplomacy research must turn its attention much more towards empirical studies that not only analyze single actors or events, but also scrutinize on a large scale how PD is understood and practiced in different countries. Such comparative analyses will enable scholars to develop empirically grounded theories of PD, detect patterns of PD practice and fathom the influence of contextual factors on the understanding as well as the practice of the concept and permit practitioners to learn from the PD practice of others.¹¹⁰ The study at hand provides important theoretical and empirical starting points for these future research endeavors.

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Claudia Auer obtained a bachelor degree in International Journalism at the University of Applied Sciences Bremen and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia, and a master degree in media and communication research at the Ilmenau University of Technology.

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She has obtained a master degree in media and communication science (focus on strategic communication) at the Ilmenau University of Technology in Germany in 2010. Moreover, she has acquired a bachelor degree in communication science (with a particular focus

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