
Guest editorial: Promoting citizenship through international public engagement. Research perspectives on public, organisational and civil society diplomacy

Guest editorial

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In the midst of the COP 16 climate summit in Cancun, Mexico in late 2010 the British analyst and policy adviser Simon Anholt made a startling remark. His words did not relate to the climate crisis but rather to geopolitics. ‘There is only one superpower on the planet’ he began. As the Americans in the audience nodded with a pride born of two decades of unipolarity, he continued with a dousing of cold water: ‘The name of that superpower is public opinion’ (Cull, 2019, p. 18). His point was that publics – empowered by new technologies – were necessarily the essential ingredient of any collective response to any of the looming and transnational issues of our age, including not only climate but also extremism, mass migration, economic inequality and so forth. The subsequent decade underlined his point. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic was an object lesson in the need for collective action and the challenge of public confusion. The disruption of public opinion through propaganda and disinformation, which is so characteristic of our age, is in itself an indication of the public’s power. It is precisely because public opinion is so powerful that so much energy is expended keeping it divided. The key force pitted against the impulse to division is the subject of this special issue – citizenship – that sense of the collective good that permits the subordination of the priorities of the individual in favour of the well-being of the many. This collection considers new research into the mechanisms by which publics are being rallied to action in a world in dire need of help. All articles gathered here address aspects of the great issues of our age and all deal with the drawing together of publics into the kind of collective units that can be partners in shared global solutions. Many draw on a set of research papers presented at the MARPE Diplo conference: Fostering European Citizenship through Public, Organisational and Civic Diplomacy, hosted by the Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas (ISCSP), University of Lisbon, which took place online on 31st May and 1st June 2021. That conference focused particularly on the European context. This collection further develops the scope of the original event and includes examples from further afield including China, South America and West Africa.

This issue uses a number of core terms to explore its subject. All are varieties of diplomacy, meaning that they are mechanisms deployed by international actors to manage a transnational environment. Public diplomacy is the process by which an international actor, most often a nation state, advances its foreign policy by engaging with a foreign public. Its strategies include listening, advocating, working through culture or exchange or through the sponsorship on media. A second core approach in this collection is that of organisational diplomacy. Organisational diplomacy looks more closely at one specific type of actor in global engagement: the NGO (non-governmental organisation) or commercial corporation. The third approach highlighted here is civil society diplomacy. Focussing on non-state diplomatic actors (such as individuals, civil society organisations, networks and movements), civil society diplomacy can be seen as a counterweight to public diplomacy, one in which the diplomatic agendas and



processes are public-led, not state-led. The practice is unlike that of citizen diplomacy, a subset of public diplomacy, where citizens are encouraged by a nation state to act as unofficial ambassadors. During the Cold War centrally created citizen groups were an important part of the psychological struggle. Both Moscow and Washington understood the value of citizen's speaking on behalf of their country. Yet civil society diplomacy points to the value of further democratisation of diplomacy, where non-state actors, irrespective of their nature, can act in a diplomatic setting towards policy and governance goals even against a nation state, holding it to account or pulling it into line.

The first article by Bruno Asdourian of the University of Fribourg opens the perspectives on civil society diplomacy by considering the ways in which civil society actors responded to the COVID-19 crisis by coming together in hackathons. The author uses a sample of Swiss tweets sent between March and June 2020 to analyse the networks and attitudes before, during and after the collective action and finds a clear case of civil actors combining in what he refers to as civil tech diplomacy in transnational space. Evidence of effectiveness includes a marked increase in positive emotions revealed by the content of the tweets.

In the second article Juliana Santos of the Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas, Universidade de Lisboa, analyses the ways in which the civil society actors within Brazil have recently worked together to defend human rights with the legislative branch of government. Insights include how advocacy on human rights issues is developed to defend causes with the legislative branch. Santos identifies their contributions and shows that advocacy, as a public relations activity, increases civil society participation in political decisions.

Article three by Raluca Moise of the London College of Communication considers how the Romanian Diaspora in Britain has organised to collectively engage its host society and operates as an international actor in its own right. Moise sets out the challenge of Romanians being singled out for implicit criticism – as in 2019 when a supermarket in the West Midlands displayed anti-shoplifting posters in the Romanian language – and the response. She presents three cases of organisation and engagement and proposes a wider model for studying the diaspora as a diplomatic actor.

In the fourth article Anca Anton of the University of Bucharest examines one of the most noticeable features of civil society diplomacy in recent years: the emergence of what she terms the 'unattached diplomats.' These are citizens of the world who operate without specific reference to a state agenda by advocating around a particular issue, but who nonetheless are much heard on the global stage. Cases considered are those of Malala Yousufzai, Greta Thunberg and Bill Gates. The author draws particular attention to the freedom to speak available to the unattached diplomats which is beyond the reach of state-based voices.

Article five by Sonia Pedro Sebastião of the Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas, Universidade de Lisboa, maintains the theme of significant individuals by recounting the career of the British television naturalist David Attenborough as an environmental diplomat. The study focuses on the years 2018–2020 when Attenborough spoke out repeatedly against the destruction of biodiversity by human beings. Sebastião compares Attenborough's interventions to those of the UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change revealing the greater freedom of action available to an individual. Beyond this the article argues that Attenborough is a good case of state public diplomacy being conducted by a proxy, arguing that Attenborough's voice was deployed as an extension of that of the British government.

With article six the emphasis of the collection remains with the climate crisis but shifts to the use of organisational diplomacy by the corporate actor the Secil Group working in the cement industry. The piece by Andréia Soares (Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas, Universidade de Lisboa) analyses the Secil Group's communication of its corporate social responsibility (CSR) and its contribution to this process of environment, social and governance (ESG) as a new market metric. The method of studying the frames used by Secil allows insight into the companies attempts to be both profitable and ethical/responsive to the

needs of the environment. Profits remain the lead logic even if there is a demonstrable attempt to reconcile this with ethical practices in ESG.

A third section on the research perspective on promoting citizenship – via “public diplomacy”. The section begins with an analysis of the use of strategic narratives by the European Union by Juan-Luis Manfredi Sánchez of Georgetown University and Nicholas Ross Smith of the University of Canterbury. The article recounts six significant crises of recent years: the Eurozone crisis (2008), the Ukrainian crisis (2014), the migrant crisis (2015), Britain’s Brexit referendum (2016), the new transatlantic relationship (2017) and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020). In case after case the authors show a notable shortfall in the EU’s narrative response and stress the scale of the challenge faced by the Union’s communicators. They end with an appeal for better European story-telling by the government and cultural sectors to dramatise the promise of the European Union.

Maintaining a focus on Europe, in the eighth article Anne-Marie Cotton (Artevelde University of Applied Sciences and team leader for the MARPE project) and Hélène Boulanger (Université de Lorraine) examine the European External Action Service (EEAS)’s use of Twitter. Their piece applies the methodological framework created by MARPE Diplo and tracks treatment of key public diplomacy approaches in a series of Tweets created by the EEAS. The results show an increased use of the platform and an overall growth in attention to public diplomacy approaches, suggesting that the EEAS is coming of age as a public diplomacy actor and emphasising the importance of an off-centred approach in the analysis of the practices of public diplomacy.

The final pieces in the collection consider specific country cases. In the ninth article of this collection Gabriela Seccardini and Lucile Desmoulin (Université Gustave Eiffel) consider the presence of dark/war tourism in the branding and image management of Croatia’s Dalmatian Riviera. The piece reveals a disjunction between the preferred national image of the Riviera and the alternative depiction emerging from internet discussion of the aftermath of the Civil War. The authors argue that international Instagram influencers as well as local photographers, artists and amateur historians promote many shades of darkness in their depiction of tourism and travel in the region. The dark-inflected Instagram posts present new narratives about the past and its memorialisation, far from the silence and denial promoted by the Croatian government’s official social media.

The 10th piece by Cynthia Schneider (Georgetown University and a former US ambassador) considers work to build both peace and citizenship in the West African country of Mali through the use of cultural and public diplomacy. The article shows how cultural events organised internally and by external agencies have worked well to defuse internal tensions and attract positive attention to the country. While culture is an unusual focus for the study of issues of citizenship in public diplomacy, the Mali cases presented suggest that the approach deserves broader attention.

The 11th and final article in the collection considers recent developments within China’s public diplomacy, focussing on the country’s messaging during the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak. Zhao Alexandre Huang (Université Paris Nanterre) and Rui Wang (Communication University of China) focus on the *intermestic* nature of Beijing’s approach, using international messages for domestic purposes and vice versa. The analysis of tweets by officials and journalists reveals shifting concerns within the government as the pandemic took hold. The chapter shows that the lose mixing of NGO and government communication which prompted the coining of the term *intermestic* as applied to public diplomacy is in contrast to the rigid, top-down strategy applied by the Chinese government, and implicitly calls into question some of the assumptions about public diplomacy being directed in the first instance at global publics.

Taken as a whole this collection bears out Anholt’s observation of the centrality of public opinion to international affairs. It shows the range of practices deployed around to goal of

citizenship and the range of scholarly approaches that can draw out nuance from this still-under studied element of statecraft. A number of papers show the need to continually push against the standard limits of the field, to show how approaches play out in places that have not been well studied before or to consider new kinds of actors from the super-state-level EEAS to the ad hoc grass roots groups found in the Romanian diaspora in Britain or human rights activists in Brazil. New platforms emerge and with them come new emphasis. The relevance of the domestic theatre in public diplomacy is plainly growing. A number of writers here reference Cull's statement in 2010 that 'public diplomacy is not a performance for domestic consumption.' This statement was intended not as a rule but a recommendation. It was made with an eye to the many ways in which a desire to shape domestic public opinion had inspired a range of public diplomacy gambits in the first decade of the new century from the Beijing Olympics to the priorities of US embassy press relations in the era of George W. Bush. In the contemporary US State Department, the advocacy element of public diplomacy now rests in an integrated bureau of global public affairs made by a merger of the domestically facing bureau of public affairs (PA) staff and the internationally facing bureau of International Information Programs (IIP). This new arrangement is further evidence that the future will see less distinction between international and domestic media spheres. The injunction that 'public diplomacy is not a domestic performance' should stand not to say that public diplomacy should not have a domestic dimension but rather that the domestic should not be pursued at the expense of the quality and integrity of the core mission to engage foreign publics.

It is striking that there are few examples in this collection of what American baseball terms a 'home run'. The victories here are gradual and nuanced. They emerge from evidence of learning, re-positioning and growing confidence with the tools of global communication in a digital age. This is not a weakness. Experience suggests that public diplomacy gains made slowly are longer lasting and less likely to spark the diplomacy equivalent of what the commercial sector terms 'buyer's remorse.' What we do see is a widening toolbox for practitioners seeking to engage publics in the great issues of our era and a developing field of scholarship to analyse and, one hopes, advance the process. These articles illuminate the challenge we face and help to show a way ahead.

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Reference

Cull, N.J. (2019), *Public Diplomacy: Foundations for Global Engagement in the Digital Age*, Polity, Cambridge.

Further reading

Sebastião, S.P. and Spínola, S.de.C. (Eds) (2022), in *Diplomacy, Organisations and Citizens: A European Communication Perspective*, Springer, Cham, Switzerland.