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# **Cultural Diplomacy in the Digital Age: How Social Media enhances Cultural Exchange between European Nations**

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## **Abstract**

This paper tests the potential of using social media for cultural diplomacy to engage with local audiences abroad. By adopting an institutional focus, it is researched how social media can help those who conduct cultural diplomacy, to achieve foreign cultural policy objectives. An in-depth comparative case study has been conducted, which examines how the Dutch, Danish, German and British governments practice cultural diplomacy in Italy and how they use social media to support their diplomatic efforts.

The case study is supported by a theoretical framework of two sections. First, cultural diplomacy is conceptualised by explaining how governments use the practice to interact with local audiences abroad. Second, by focusing on the characteristics of social media usage in Italy, it is discussed what potential social media has for the practice of cultural diplomacy.

This paper concludes that translating objectives for cultural diplomacy into social media content is challenging, especially when foreign cultural policy makers are far removed from those who create social media content. Even when government control on cultural diplomacy is tight, social media strategies need to be coordinated strictly in order for it to contribute to cultural diplomacy.

**Key words:** cultural diplomacy, social media, foreign cultural policy, Facebook, Twitter

## **Introduction**

Globalization has strongly influenced the exchange of cultural expression between states, as technological innovations allow creative professionals and policy makers to reach a global audience. Their expressions of national identity are becoming increasingly trans-national, which gives cultural diplomacy a growing resonance. More broadly, digitalization is changing diplomacy. Herein, a main topic of debate is social media. Social media gives a real time dimension to diplomacy and has redefined the diplomatic practice. This paper investigates whether social media is a tool that can help governments achieve their policies for cultural exchange. This paper adopts an institutional and contemporary focus. By focusing on with what objectives cultural diplomacy is conducted by European governments today, it is examined whether cultural diplomacy efforts exploit in the most effective way the opportunities of social media in order to engage with local audiences abroad.

This paper is shaped by the following research question “Can social media help those who conduct cultural diplomacy, achieve foreign cultural policy objectives, in an era characterized by increasing digital communication?” This question will be answered through a comparative case study with a narrow focus. The approaches of the implementation of foreign cultural policy in Italy of four European Union governments are examined, namely the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom (UK). This is followed by a discussion of the social media objectives which have been set by the bodies that represent these four governments in Italy. The content of social media posts, stemming from the channels of the representative bodies, is then analysed to examine its coherence with both social media and cultural diplomacy objectives of the governments.

The Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom were chosen based on their geographical proximity, the similarity of their cultural industries and the competitiveness of their soft power resources (Serventi, 2014). The governments of these country all have representative bodies that are located in Italy and practice cultural diplomacy. These include the Dutch, Danish and German Embassy, the Dutch and German General Consulate, as well as the German Goethe-Institut and the British Council.

## **Cultural Diplomacy and the Role of the Government**

For the purpose of this research, cultural diplomacy shall be defined as the exchange and promotion of cultural expressions between states, coordinated by the government and carried out in support of a state’s foreign policy goals. Cultural diplomacy is thus understood as a form of international cultural relations in which the government seeks involvement, because it treats cultural diplomacy as a form of public diplomacy that supports efforts in economic and political diplomacy.

Nation branding is probably one of the most prominent, shared objectives of cultural diplomacy. The practice is undertaken to differentiate one country from another and to shape a positive, but realistic image of a country in the minds of local audiences abroad. Nation branding is a sensitive topic however, and non-governmental agencies such as the British Council and the Goethe-Institut prefer to regard it as an activity of government alone (Costa 2015, Benians 2015). Identical to

the case of international cultural relations and cultural diplomacy, the perceived definition of the term nation branding depends on the government that is represented.

The extent to which a government exercises influence on cultural diplomacy has varying degrees and structures. This is key to understanding cultural diplomacy in the context of international cultural relations. According to J.M. Mitchell (1986) we may distinguish between three different models that governments have adopted for the conduct of cultural relations:

“Government control. The government, through a ministry or an official agency (...) exercises direct control. Examples are France, Italy, the United States, (...) smaller countries for which it would be uneconomic to practise any other system.

Non-governmental, autonomous agencies. The government provides money through a ministry, normally the foreign ministry, but delegates policy control and execution to an independent agency such as the British Council (...). The concept is familiar in Britain: it embodies ‘the arm’s length principle’ (...).

Mixed system. The government retains overall control but funds and contracts non-official agencies to operate independently within their competences. The Federal Republic of Germany is the prime example (...).”

The first model, “Government control”, characterises the conduct of cultural relations of the Netherlands and Denmark, both which are present in the case study below. For both countries, it is the most economic model as they are small in scale. The Dutch government for example, exercises direct control on cultural relations, and lists cultural diplomacy as one of its four international cultural policy objectives, defining it as “using art and culture to benefit foreign relations” (Government of the Netherlands 2015).

Mitchell mentions the UK as an example of his second model, “Non-governmental autonomous agencies”. The UK has delegated cultural policy control to the British Council. Interestingly, the British Council describes its own work as cultural relations, whereas the UK government has called it cultural diplomacy (Foreign & Commonwealth Office 2012). Recent developments have seen the British government aim for more influence on the British Council.

Germany is the fourth country of the comparative case study, and mentioned by Mitchell as an example of the “Mixed system”. The German government creates the necessary conditions for cultural and educational activities abroad, but requires intermediary organisations to implement them (Federal Foreign Office 2015).

In theory, a model that ensures tighter government control should better facilitate the contribution of social media to a state’s foreign cultural policy. This is because the arm’s length between cultural policy makers and the creators of social media content is shorter. As a result, the communication of cultural diplomacy efforts on social media channels is more likely to contribute to the overall foreign policy of a state. In contrast, independent cultural institutes may not be able to facilitate these spill-over effects. As they are further removed from government influence, their interest is not so much in supporting other forms of foreign policy objectives, and arguably has a stronger cultural focus instead.

## Potential of Social Media for Cultural Diplomacy

It has been recognised by many governments that social media is an ideal tool to address foreign policies (Grincheva 2013). Social media has the potential to reach wider and more diverse audiences, and establishes communication through a fast and easy mode (ibid). As cultural diplomacy is meant as a two-way communication flow, social media answers to the current needs of cultural diplomacy, as well as the demands of foreign publics (Kersaint 2014, 21). Through social media, local audiences can be approached as participants in interactive cultural dialogues.

*Cyber diplomat* and training director at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Stefano Baldi adds to this that using social media for cultural diplomacy has potential for other forms of diplomacy. Once audiences engage with a state’s culture, they are likely to interact with the organization on political and economic topics as well (Baldi 2015). He regards cultural diplomacy as the most pre-eminent type of diplomacy to introduce foreigners to a country.

The press officer of the British Embassy in Rome stresses that it is of great importance that social media is treated as part of a larger, digital communication strategy. He sees social media as one tool, used in a context of a wider effort in public diplomacy. The tool is used to understand what moves audiences, but also to push information out, make a vision clear and shared and interact with target audiences on these topics (Puglia 2015).

There is potential for embassies and cultural institutes, to reach and engage with audiences in Italy through social media. Compared to other Europeans, Italians spend the most time on social media, with an average of 2.2 hours a day (Kemp 2014). In 2014, 26 million Italians used social media, which is equal to 52% of the entire population (ibid).

Social media agency *We Are Social* reports that in 2014, the top three social media channels in Italy were Facebook, Google+ and Twitter. With 26 million users, Facebook attracts a 91% share of Italian internet users. Completely in contrast to worldwide trends, Google+ is the second largest social network in Italy, with 54% of Italian internet users owning a profile and 18% of them using the platform actively. This is similar to the amount of active Italian Twitter users, taking up 16% of internet users. However, when trying to reach Italians digitally, one will find that target audiences are scattered around several social media networks. It is important to pick your channel well, when targeting a specific age group or gender.

Italy is the EU Member State with the lowest amount of fixed broadband subscriptions. This suggests that social media should not replace traditional forms of cultural diplomacy, but rather complement it. According to the *2014 Digital Economy and Society Index*, only 51% of Italian households had broadband internet by 2014 (European Commission 2015). Social media managers should focus on communication through mobile devices, as over 70% of the Italian population has a mobile broadband description (ibid). This is slightly higher than the EU average. Governments should aim to integrate social media communication with more traditional forms of cultural diplomacy, such as live events. In addition, they should be

prepared for the mobile-first or mobile-only experience of its target audiences. Content may never be seen on a traditional desktop and should be both engaging and optimized for mobile devices.

## Methodology

The qualitative analysis of the case studies analyses the ways in which the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and the UK conduct cultural diplomacy in Italy. First, the foreign cultural policy of the national governments is explained and it is examined which bodies physically present in Italy, implement these policies in Italy. Data for this section has been gathered through official government documentation and by contacting national government departments.

Second, which social media objectives the representative bodies have set is examined and this is complemented by an explanation of who within the representative bodies is responsible for managing social media channels. Data for this section has been gathered through interviews with officials from the Danish and German and British Embassy in Italy, as well as the German Goethe-Institut and the British Council in Rome.

Third, social media posts are analysed to test whether their content coheres with the cultural diplomacy objectives of the respective governments, and the social media objectives of representative bodies. All social media expressions of the Dutch, Danish and German Embassy, as well as the Goethe-Institut and the British Council have been interpreted and assigned to the cultural diplomacy and/or social media objectives they adhere to. It is then examined to which extent social media content has contributed to foreign cultural policy objectives, by looking at which of the posts generate the highest level of engagement (in terms of number of likes, shares, retweets and comments). Specific attention was given to hashtags, names of famous artists, events and links to other web content, such as videos and articles. Posts that do not stem from a cultural department or do not report cultural content, have not been included in the research and are thus not represented in the total number of social media posts indicated in these tables.

The qualitative assessment covers a narrow time frame, 1 April to 30 May 2015. In these two months, numerous cultural events took place in Italy which had a global reach. These include the opening of the *EXPO Milano 2015*, the *Salone del Mobile 2015*, the *Salone del Libro Torino 2015* and the opening of the Venice Biennale 56<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition.

Social media benchmarking tool Quintly was used in order to effectively assess social media content, fan bases and engagement with audiences. It should be noted that not all social media and cultural diplomacy objectives could be analysed directly. The tables included below represent the most measurable and specific objectives identified in this case study. Furthermore, some organizations analysed in the case study use YouTube and Flickr to store videos and photos. As links to these accounts are regularly shared on Facebook and Twitter, they have not been included in the analysis.

## The Netherlands

The foreign cultural policy (ICB) of the Netherlands falls under the joint responsibility of the MFA and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken 2015). It is implemented by a special department of the MFA, the Unit International Cultural Policy (ICE). This department closely collaborates with civil servants from the Ministry of Education, other departments within the MFA, embassies, various art funds<sup>1</sup> and the cross-sector institution DutchCulture<sup>ii</sup>. The ICB of the Netherlands has the following objectives (Government of the Netherlands 2015):

- Helping leading Dutch institutions achieve international standards, by making considered choices within the basic cultural infrastructure
- Strengthening the international market position of Dutch artists and institutions
- Strengthening Dutch economic interests by emphasising cultural, trade and economic ties
- Cultural diplomacy: using art and culture to benefit foreign relations

Together with other EU Member States, Eastern Europe, South Africa, the Arab Region and the BRIC countries<sup>iii</sup>, Italy is a priority country for the Dutch ICB. As demonstrated in the “Government control” model proposed by Mitchell (1986), the ICB is implemented in Italy by two diplomatic missions, the Dutch Embassy in Rome, as well as the Consulate General in Milan. These missions share one cultural department.

On social media, the Dutch Embassy and Consulate General are represented by one Facebook, one Twitter, and an Instagram account that carry the name *Olandiamo*. The social media objectives of the missions are defined in an internal report as follows:

- Showing what we do and sharing information about the Netherlands
- Using international professionals from diverse sectors as opinion leaders. They are a news source on Twitter and may strengthen social media updates by retweeting on Twitter and by sharing on Facebook.

These objectives account for the two diplomatic missions as a whole. The missions target the following audiences:

- The Italian public
- Dutch people (residing in Italy or the Netherlands)
- International experts from diverse creative sectors

Cultural social media content is created and published by the intern of the cultural department and coordinated by the cultural attaché. The Dutch Embassy and Consulate General communicate in two languages on social media, Italian and English. The Dutch missions have set clear social media goals and the cultural department adheres well to the social media strategy. All cultural social media content of April and May 2015 had a direct link to Dutch culture or the projects of the cultural department. The missions targeted international professionals by tagging them in social media posts, hoping that they would share the respective post or tweet to their own profile. Almost half of the number of *Olandiamo* tweets included such a link. This gave international professional increased visibility and a feeling of recognition. However, just a small number were retweeted by them.



Figure 1. Olandiamo tagging Dutch Designers in a tweet

The Dutch missions successfully target their audiences. The ‘Facebook fans by country metric’ provided by social media benchmarking tool Quintly, shows that 65% of the 2918 *Olandiamo* followers are Italian and 26% Dutch.

	Italian	English	Dutch
Facebook posts total: 84	46 posts 55%	38 posts 46%	
Tweets total: 58	16 tweets 28%	41 tweets 71%	1 tweet 2%
Retweets total: 60	19 retweets 32%	34 retweets 57%	7 retweets 12%
Instagram posts total: 59	46 posts 22%	59 posts 78%	
Instagram reposts total: 7		7 reposts 100%	

Table 1. Languages used on Olandiamo social media accounts between 1 April and 30 May 2015

Furthermore, the missions successfully diversify between languages. Twitter is used as platform to target international professionals, which explains the large share of English tweets. As Italian Facebook posts generally perform better than content in English, the missions could opt for more Facebook content in Italian.

	Facebook posts total: 84	Tweets total: 58	Retweets total: 60	Instagram posts total: 59	Instagram reposts total: 7
1. Strengthening the international market positions of Dutch artists and institutions	73 posts 87%	46 tweets 79%	35 retweets 58%	49 posts 83%	4 reposts 57%
2. Strengthening Dutch economic interest by emphasizing cultural, trade and economic ties	11 posts 13%	20 tweets 34%	20 retweets 33%	13 posts 22%	3 reposts 43%

Table 2. Policies addressed on Olandiamo social media channels between 1 April and 30 May 2015

Concerning Dutch foreign cultural policy objectives, the *Olandiamo* accounts successfully addressed the first policy objective (shown in table 2 above) and were partly successful in addressing the second. The first objective (table 2) was evident mainly in tweets, Facebook and Instagram posts that shine the spotlight on Dutch artists and institutions. The second objective (table 2) could have been addressed more, by providing a broader context on cultural collaborations, projects and their relevance to relations between Italy and the Netherlands.



Figure 2. Shining the spotlight on a Dutch institution on Facebook

In order to answer whether social media aids the cultural department of the Dutch Embassy and General Consulate in achieving foreign cultural policy objectives, the popularity of social media expression in May and April 2015 should be examined more closely. Looking at the number of likes, comments, shares, retweets and level of engagement, it may be concluded that the Dutch social media accounts have contributed to the objective of “strengthening the international market positions of Dutch artists and institutions”. A lot of interaction with target audiences has been generated through posts and tweets that shine the spotlight on iconic Dutch artists, landmarks and institutions. These hot topics include the Rijksmuseum, the Rotterdam Markthal designed by MVRDV, Daan Roosegaarde, the Dutch Pavilion at the Venice Biennale and Dutch artist Marlene Dumas.

Furthermore, the Dutch missions have shared meaningful and strong visual content in the social media campaigns set up for the *Salone del Mobile* and the Venice Biennale, which also contributed to “strengthening the international market positions of Dutch artists and institutions”. The success of the *Olandiamo* content can be explained by the fact that it is produced by the cultural department itself. The cultural attaché and his intern build bridges between the needs of target audiences and the foreign cultural objectives of the Dutch government.

## Denmark

The Danish government does not speak of a foreign cultural policy as such but instead has a common strategic action plan for cultural exchange, which is set by the International Culture Panel<sup>iv</sup>. This panel is a cross-ministerial collaboration between the Danish MFA, Ministry of Business and Growth and the Ministry of Culture and brings together a range of prominent cultural institutions that strengthen cultural exchange and give it a shared focus (Kulturministeriet 2013). The strategic action plan has the following purposes (ibid):

- Development and renewal of Danish arts and culture
- Promotion of Denmark as a country
- Furthering of cultural export
- Furthering of intercultural dialogue

For the strategic action plan 2014-2016, the Culture Panel has agreed upon a set of five shared principles for Cultural Exchange:

- The implementation of initiatives and projects must be based on the high cultural or artistic quality
- Cultural exchange projects should be embraced by the audiences in the recipient countries, through securing outside interest, reciprocity and local anchorage
- Cultural exchange initiatives should include a measure of longevity

- Projects should be based on strengthening cooperation between involved stakeholders, through the promotion a bottom-up approach and the facilitation of agent-to-agent cooperation within projects.
- High visibility and impact should be ensured for any cultural exchange project. This is achieved by focussing on target groups and visibility in the communication of projects.

Denmark’s cultural exchange is represented by four types of entities. Namely the Danish Cultural Institute, The Danish Centre for Culture and Development (CKU), the 105 Danish diplomatic missions and a number of local networks abroad (Tandgaard Derno 2014). As the principles for cultural exchange have a geographical focus on the BRIC countries, South Africa and the Middle East, there is no Danish Cultural Institute or CKU in Italy (Kulturministeriet 2013). In Italy, the principles for cultural exchange are implemented by the Danish Embassy in Rome. This is done by policy officers and diplomats who work on several policy areas simultaneously, including economics, politics and culture (Neivelt 2015).

The social media objective of the Danish Embassy is to get more online attention without paying for it. This objective is not specific enough to measure its effectiveness. Through its Facebook page *Ambasciata di Danimarca in Italia*, the Embassy aims to target younger Italians aged 20-35. The Danish Embassy targets this audience because it feels it is better acquainted with social media and more interested in Northern Europe due to its living conditions (Neivelt 2015). The language in which the Danish Embassy communicates on Facebook is Italian. The 31 Facebook posts published in April and May 2015 were all written in Italian. Quintly confirms that the Embassy is targeting its audience well, 70.5% of the 1204 Facebook fans of the Danish Embassy are Italian.

At the Danish Embassy, social media content is created by a policy officer and an intern, who are specialised in several policy areas. Some social media content is produced centrally. The Embassy receives a Denmark Digest newsletter from its MFA, which includes links to mainly English articles with positive news about Denmark and its culture (Neivelt 2015). Table 3 indicates that this newsletter might be a direct result of the fact that a majority of Facebook posts published in April and May 2015, contribute to the “promotion of Denmark as a country”.



Figure 3. Promoting Denmark as a country

Especially the fourth objective as listed in table 3 “projects should be based on strengthening cooperation between involved stakeholders”, should have been addressed to a greater extent. In April 2015, the Danish Embassy collaborated with other Scandinavian Embassies in Italy to organize the Nordic Film Fest. Although much content was geared towards this topic, collaborations were not explained and no shared social media strategy between the Embassies was discovered on the Facebook page.

	Facebook posts total: 31 posts
1. Promotion of Denmark as a country	20 posts 65%
2. Implementation of initiatives and projects must be based on the high cultural or artistic quality	12 posts 39%
3. Cultural exchange should include a measure of longevity	8 posts 26%
4. Projects should be based on strengthening cooperation between involved stakeholders through the promotion of bottom-up approach and the facilitation of agent-to-agent cooperation within projects	4 posts 13%

Table 3. Policies addressed on the Facebook page of the Danish Embassy between 1 April and 30 May 2015

Looking at which Facebook posts have led to the greatest amount of engagement with the target audience, we may conclude that the embassy's Facebook page successfully contributes to the "promotion of Denmark as a country". Typical nation-branding content such as the birthday of the Danish Queen, the celebration of 70 years of Freedom in Denmark, Danish government giving money to Nepal to recover from an earthquake by far generates the highest number of shares, likes and comments.

As the policy officer and intern who manage the Facebook page work on several policy areas simultaneously, they could exploit their social media channel to provide more context around cultural content, explain collaborations, highlight relations between Denmark and Italy, and build bridges between cultural, economic and political diplomacy.

## Germany

The German government has combined foreign cultural policy with education policy. According to the German MFA, cultural relations and education policy are the most sustainable and visible instruments of German foreign policy (Federal Foreign Office 2015). This combined policy pursues the following objectives (ibid):

- Creating stable foundations for international relations with the synergy of knowledge and culture and the dialogue between people
- Promoting the German language in Europe and around the world
- Contributing to worldwide crisis and conflict prevention
- Promoting European integration
- Preserving cultural diversity in the world
- Presenting Germany as a modern and attractive location for education, science, research and professional development
- Showcasing Germany as a country with a world-renowned, creative and diverse cultural scene
- Communicating a realistic and vibrant image of Germany

As illustrated by Mitchell (1986), the German government has adopted a "Mixed system" for the conduct of cultural relations. The government thus retains overall control, but requires intermediary organisations to implement its cultural relations policy (ibid; Federal Foreign Office 2015). In Italy, there are over sixty German research and cultural institutions (see figure 4), which enjoy a large degree of independence (German Diplomat 2015, Costa 2015). In order to coordinate these institutes, the cultural department of the German Embassy in Rome and Consulate General in Milan maintain direct contact and meet with representatives several times a year (ibid).

This case study focuses on the German Embassy in Rome and the Goethe-Institut in Rome. This is because the German government defines the Goethe-Institut as one of three mediators of German cultural relations policy, together with the Institute for Foreign Relations, as well as the German Publishers and Booksellers Association (Federal Foreign Office, 2013). Out of these three mediators, only the Goethe-Institut is represented in Italy. The Goethe-Institut has a particular relationship with the German government, which is described in the *Basic Agreement* that defines three contractual duties (Goethe-Institut, 2005):

1. Furthering the knowledge of the German language
2. Fostering international cultural cooperation
3. Conveying a comprehensive picture of Germany by providing information on cultural, social and political life

Another reason for focusing on the embassy and the Goethe-Institut in Rome in this case study, is that the cultural department of the German Consulate General in Milan, which coordinates the Goethe-Institutes in Northern Italy, does not use social media. The German embassy pursues the following social media objectives:

- Providing a home for the group of people who are interested in Germany
- Making people happy, giving a feeling that they are supported by the Embassy
- Distributing information stemming from cultural institutions
- Using social media for news analysis



Figure 4. German cultural and research institutes in Italy.  
Source: *Deutsche Vertretungen in Italien*, 2015

Through its Twitter and Facebook account *Germania in Italia*, the German Embassy targets Italians with a certain interest in Germany, who understand German or have stayed in Germany for a while. Social media content is created by the press office of the embassy, which is supported by one intern. The German Embassy has only been partially successful in reaching its social media objectives. The main reasons for this is that there is little coordination in communication between the German diplomatic missions and cultural institutions (German Diplomat 2015). This hinders the embassy to fulfil its coordination role and reach the objective of “distributing information stemming from cultural institutions” (table 4).

	Facebook total: 25 posts	Tweets total: 67	Retweets total: 21 retweets
1. Making people happy, giving a feeling that they are supported by the Embassy	8 posts 33%	5 tweets 7%	2 retweets 10%
2. Distributing information stemming from cultural institutions	11 posts 46%	7 tweets 10%	6 retweets 29%

Table 4. Social media objectives addressed on the social media channels of the German Embassy between 1 April and 30 May 2015

The embassy successfully targets Italians. Nearly all social media content is Italian and Quintly indicates that out of the Facebook pages analysed in this case study, the German Embassy has the highest share of Italian Facebook fans at 80.5%.

The Goethe-Institut in Rome targets Italians interested in the German language, society and culture through its Facebook page and Twitter account. Quintly indicates that, compared to the other representative bodies included in this case study, the Goethe-Institut Rome has a relatively low number of Italian Facebook fans at 68.1%. In Rome, social media content is created by two press officers. Table 5 indicates that the Goethe-Institut could do more on social media to fulfil its duties with the German government. Especially “furthering the knowledge of the German language” could be more directly addressed on Facebook and Twitter. The British council for example, shares language exercises and information on language courses, whereas the Goethe-Institute indirectly promotes the German language by sharing information on German films and music.

	Facebook posts total: 95	Tweets total: 271	Retweets Total: 197
1. Furthering the knowledge of the German language	10 posts 11%	8 tweets 3%	
2. Fostering international cultural cooperation	20 posts 21%	19 tweets 7%	66 retweets 34%
3. Conveying a comprehensive picture of Germany by providing information on cultural, social and political life	18 posts 19%		5 retweets 3%

Table 5. Contractual duties addressed on Facebook page Goethe Rome and Twitter account GoetheItalia between 1 April and 30 May 2015

Tables 6 and 7 show the depths to which the social media channels of the German Embassy and the Goethe-Institut Rome have addressed the foreign cultural policy objectives of the German government. The tables indicate a few similarities. Both organizations have been very successful in showcasing the diversity of the German cultural scene on social media. In addition, both struggle to communicate a realistic and vibrant image of Germany. This might be explained by a cautious approach towards nation branding in Germany (German Diplomat 2015).

	Facebook posts total: 25 posts	Tweets total: 67	Retweets total: 21 retweets
1. Promoting the German language in Europe and around the world	2 posts 8%	6 tweets 9%	1 retweet 5%
2. Presenting Germany as a modern and attractive location for education, science, research and professional development	2 posts 8%	7 tweets 10%	3 retweets 14%
3. Showcasing Germany as a country with a world-renowned, creative and diverse cultural scene	13 posts 52%	28 tweets 42%	14 retweets 67%
4. Communicating a realistic and vibrant image of Germany	8 posts 32%	20 tweets 30%	3 retweets 14%

Table 6. Policy objectives addressed on the social media channels of the German Embassy between 1 April and 30 May 2015

The most engaging content published by the press office of the German Embassy in April and May 2015 concerned iconic German traditions, positive news about the German language and posts about iconic Germans such as Gunter Grass and former pope Ratzinger. These topics are not very contemporary, which explains why social media posts did not portray a vibrant image of Germany, nor promote Germany as a modern and attractive location.

**Ambasciata di Germania Roma**  
16 April · 🌐

Alles Gute zum Geburtstag, #BenediktXVII!  
Il 265° papa della Chiesa cattolica compie 88 anni e il 19 aprile festeggia i dieci anni dall'elezione al soglio di Pietro.



Foto: Colourbox.com

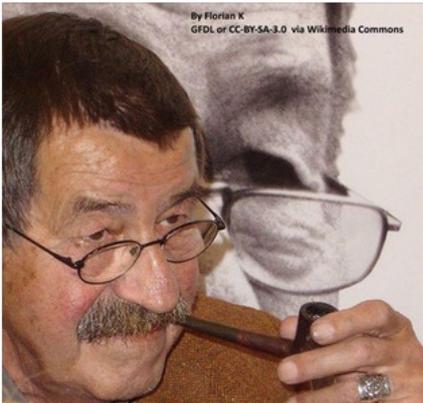
Like Comment Share

67 people like this. Top Comments ·

11 shares

**Goethe-Institut Rom**  
13 April · 🌐

Non lo nego: sono ricoverato in un manicomio; il mio infermiere mi osserva di continuo, quasi non mi toglie gli occhi di dosso; mi scruta anche attraverso lo spioncino della porta, ma il suo sguardo non può penetrarmi poiché egli ha gli occhi bruni, mentre i miei sono celesti. (Il tamburo di latta)  
GÜNTER GRASS (Città Libera di Danzica 1927 – Lubecca, 2015)



By Florian K  
GFDL or CC-BY-SA-3.0 via Wikimedia Commons

Like Comment Share

21 people like this. Top Comments ·

15 shares

Figure 5 and 6. Showcasing Germany as a country with a world-renowned and diverse cultural scene.

The Goethe-Institut has been very successful in creating popular and engaging content, which was integrated with a live cultural event. In 2015, Germany was host country of the *Salone del Libro* in Turin, which presented great opportunities for social media. The success of this campaign might be explained by the fact that Goethe accounts are managed by communication professionals.

	Facebook total: 95	Tweets total: 271	Retweets total: 197
1. Promoting the German language in Europe and around the world	8 posts 8%	1 tweet 0,3%	
2. Presenting Germany as a modern and attractive location for education, science, research and professional development	15 posts 16%	26 tweets 10%	1 retweet 0,5%
3. Showcasing Germany as a country with a world-renowned, creative and diverse cultural scene	36 posts 38%	217 tweets 80%	110 retweets 56%
4. Communicating a realistic and vibrant image of Germany	1 post 1%		

Table 7. Policy objectives addressed on Facebook page Goethe Rome and Twitter account GoetheItalia, between 1 April and 30 May 2015

It may be concluded that the social media channels of both the German Embassy and Goethe-Institut have the potential to contribute to foreign cultural policy objectives of their government to a greater extent. However, the German social media channels lack what the Danish Embassy is very successful in: creating engaging nation branding content. Like in the case of Denmark, it might help when such content gets produced centrally. Furthermore, as little communication synergy exists between the Embassy and its cultural institutions, the press officers of both the Goethe-Institut and the German Embassy are not yet exploiting their social media channels as effectively as possible. Either the press office or the cultural department of the Embassy should therefore consider to assume a more coordinative role.

## United Kingdom

The national cultural policy of the UK is set by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (Department for Culture Media & Sport; Department for Education 2015, Puglia 2015, Benians 2015). The UK government does not speak of a foreign cultural policy as such. It views cultural relations as a subset of wider public diplomacy activity, having a value in contributing to the broader effort of winning influence for the UK (Baker 2015).

The Department for Cultural Media & Sport specifically states that the British government has outsourced the promotion of British culture abroad to the British Council (Department for Culture Media & Sport 2015). This means that the UK government provides money, but has delegated policy control and execution to the British Council (Mitchell 1986). Strictly speaking, the British Council does therefore not conduct cultural diplomacy.

The British Council has been included in this case study as the UK government is increasingly shortening the metaphorical arm between itself and the British Council, which means that the UK model is leaning towards a “Mixed system”. In its most recent Triennial Review of the British Council, the UK government has expressed its desires to exercise greater oversight of the British Council (Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014, pp. 2-5). Moreover, the government feels that a transfer of some duties from the British Council to the UK Department for Trade and Investment might be appropriate (ibid).

The corporate purpose of the British Council, as stated in the corporate plan 2015-2017 is as follows (British Council 2015):

- Developing a wider knowledge of the UK and the English language
- Improving cultural and educational understanding, relationships and co-operation between the UK and countries around the world
- Changing lives around the world through access to UK education, skills, qualifications, culture and society
- Attracting people who matter to our future to engage with the UK’s vibrant cultural and arts scene, education opportunities and diverse, modern, open society.

The British Council delivers programmes and services in the English language, arts, education and in society. It aims for the following sector outcomes:

- English: More widespread and better quality teaching, learning and assessment of English worldwide.
- Education and society: enhanced UK leadership of and shared learning from international education. Societies whose young people, citizens and institutions contribute to a more inclusive, open and prosperous world.
- Arts: New ways of connecting with and understanding each other through the arts, to develop stronger creative sectors around the world that are better connected with the UK. (website + corporate plan)

In Italy, the British Council is represented by three seats. This case study focuses on the British Council in Rome, as in contrast to those in Milan and Naples, this office covers cultural projects all around Italy. The social media objectives of the British Council in Rome are:

- Audiences must be reached digitally. This is less costly and less labour intensive
- Creating meaningful content around the arts

The second objective of “creating meaningful content around the arts” was specific enough to measure and it was found that this objective has not been addressed on Twitter, but that is has been met in 17.4% of Facebook posts published in April and May 2015. Through its Facebook and Twitter account, the Council aims to target:

- Italians under 35 years of age
- Italian adults looking for English language courses
- Italians parents looking for English language courses for their children

At the British Council in Rome, social media content is curated by the Director of Programs, with the support of the communications manager. In terms of language, it’s observed that the British Council has often not addressed its Italian audiences in Italian (see table 8). With regards to Facebook, this is because English content concerns language exercises or fun-facts about the English language. Many retweets are English as they stem from British stakeholders. The British Council could consider creating more Facebook posts in Italian, as this generate a much higher level of engagement.

	English	Italian
Facebook posts total: 23 posts	19 posts 83%	3 posts 13%
Tweets total: 133	67 tweets 50%	66 tweets 50%
Retweets: total: 113	45 retweets 40%	68 retweets 60%

Table 8. Languages used on Facebook British Council Rome and Twitter British Council Italia between 1 April and 30 May 2015

Quintly indicates that 78.6%, of the British Council Rome Facebook fans come from Italy, which is a good result compared to the other organizations that have been analysed. It may be concluded that the British Council has mainly addressed “Italians under 35 years of age” through social media content about FameLab, an event aimed at finding new faces of science organized by the British Council in the UK EXPO Pavilion in May 2015. Although this content generated a high level of engagement, other content, mainly on Twitter, included a considerable amount of information on high culture, written in difficult English.

Table 9 shows that a considerable amount of social media content was dedicated to informing the other two target audiences (table 9) about available language courses.

	Facebook posts total: 23	Tweets total: 133	Retweets total: 113
1. Italian adults looking for English language courses	20 posts 87%	7 tweets 5%	14 retweets 12%
2. Italian parents looking for English language courses for their children	2 posts 9%	3 tweets 2%	1 retweet 1%

Table 9. Social media obj. addressed on Facebook British Council Rome and Twitter British Council Italia btw. 1 April and 30 May 2015



Figure 7 and 8. Attracting people who matter to our future and targeting parents looking for English language courses for their children

	Facebook posts total: 23	Tweets total: 133	Retweets total: 113
1. Developing a wider knowledge of the UK and the English language	16 posts 70%	7 tweets 5%	15 retweets 13%
2. Attracting people who matter to our future to engage with the UK’s vibrant cultural and arts scene, education opportunities and diverse, modern, open society.	2 posts 9%	123 tweets 92%	95 retweets 84%

Table 10. Policy obj. addressed on Facebook British Council Rome and Twitter British Council Italia between 1 April and 30 May 2015

Looking at to what extent the British Council has addressed its own policy objective (table 10), it can be concluded that the social media channels of the British Council have mainly shown the diversity of the UK cultural and arts scene. Furthermore, the channels have addressed the objective of “developing a wider knowledge of the English language” (table 9 and 10). Very little content was found about the UK and its education opportunities, diverse, modern and open society.

The most engaging Facebook posts of the British Council concerned languages exercises and information on language courses. On Twitter, only British Council tweets about FameLab led to a considerable level of engagement. The British Council has thus successfully integrated its social media with a live event, similar to the Goethe-Institut. However, in order for the British Council to contribute to foreign policy objectives of its government, it should arguably aim to better inform its audiences on the UK as a county and society.

## Conclusion

The case study has indicated very interesting similarities and contrasts between the social media content of the Dutch diplomatic missions, the Danish Embassy, the German Embassy, the Goethe-Institut Rome and the British Council Rome. These can be summarized in a few points:

- Content on a country’s iconic artists or other personalities, institutions, artistic masterpieces and traditions scores well on social media. Social media is therefore the place to shine the spotlight on ‘cultural flagships’.
- The exploitation of social media networks to strengthen cultural and economic ties, by emphasizing with which cultural diplomacy stakeholders the organizations in question collaborate, has not been completely successful. Seeing that success in this area can be easily achieved, it is recommend that more attention is given to this.
- The German representations as well as the British Council struggle to promote their country on social media. Nation branding content is either almost non-existent or focuses on themes that are not contemporary enough.

To conclude, the analysis has demonstrated that the model of “Government control” and “Mixed system” for the conduct of cultural relations, create the right environment for social media to contribute to cultural diplomacy. It has become apparent that policy officers of the Dutch and Danish embassies, who share cultural expressions on social media channels, are able to create the most interactive and engaging social media content for Italian audiences, especially with regards to nation branding. Only in the case of the Netherlands however, have social media posts led to meaningful content that reflects foreign policy objectives.

In theory, the “Mixed system” possesses great potential for social media to contribute to cultural diplomacy. In the case of Germany, German cultural expression can be showcased through the social media channels of the German embassy as well as strong cultural institutes, such as the Goethe-Institut. Hereby, wide and diverse local audiences can be reached. In practice however, there is a lack of synergy in communication between the German Embassy in Rome and its cultural institutes. This may be explained by the great level of independence that the German cultural institutes have acquired.

In the case of the UK, where the government has outsourced cultural diplomacy to an autonomous agency, contributing to a state’s overall foreign policy becomes very difficult. Those who create social media content within the British Council, are far removed from those who set diplomacy objectives for UK ministries.

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<sup>i</sup> These art funds include the Dutch Performing Arts Fund, Creative Industries Fund, Mondriaan Fund, Netherlands Film Fund, Dutch Foundation for Literature, The Cultural Participation Fund, Het Nieuwe Instituut and Eye Film Institute Netherlands (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2015)

<sup>ii</sup> DutchCulture is the Centre for International Cooperation. It is an advisory body that works with and for the cultural sector, governments and the diplomatic network in the Netherlands and abroad (DutchCulture, 2015)

<sup>iii</sup> The BRIC countries include Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa

<sup>iv</sup> The members of the International Culture Panel are The Danish Arts Foundation, The Danish Cultural Institute, Danish Architecture Centre, Danish Design Centre, Danish Film Institute, Centre for Culture and Development, Danish Agency for Culture, the Danish MFA, Ministry of Business and Growth and the Ministry of Culture

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