PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AS A TOOL TO CHANGE THE IMAGE OF A COUNTRY IN CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore the means, the methods, and the techniques of public diplomacy that a country in crisis, such as Greece, should use. The paper addresses the very issues of whether a country in crisis can conduct public diplomacy and whether it should be recognized as a legitimate and powerful actor in the field. In a broader sense, it focuses on the processes that a country should follow and how a better understanding and framing of its situation, principles, and policy can be provided. A crucial factor for such countries is the choice of communication channels, which includes traditional tools like press releases, letters to editor, editorials, interviews, or more active tools like social media, events, campaigns, and networking. In this paper, three dimensions of public diplomacy are examined, and appropriate tools to be developed in the short, medium and long-term are proposed. The results of the study are based on case studies, methods, and tools employed by Greece during the last years that the country has faced a huge economic crisis. There is a short presentation on the methods that Greece tries to adopt in order to enhance its image worldwide.

Keywords: reactive public diplomacy, proactive public diplomacy, relationship building.

INTRODUCTION

The reputation of a country is comparable to the brand images of companies and products; it is essential to its progress and prosperity (Kimonye, 2014). The reputation can be based on public diplomacy (PD), which involves a multitude of actors and networks. It is a key mechanism through which nations, states, and international organizations foster mutual trust and productive relationships. PD for a country is very different from the same work done for an international organization. It is the totality of measures and means for a country to inform, communicate, and cooperate with a broad range of target audiences worldwide, with the aim of raising the level of awareness and understanding about its positions, policies, and activities to foster support and develop trust and confidence.

According to researchers, the debt crisis and mainly the “credibility deficit” of Greece have created the need to rethink the country's outdated PD. The emphasis on

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tourism, as well as on cultural and historical links, does not produce the desired results (Frangonikolopoulos, 2012). Issues like capital controls can affect directly tourism flow and the demand for Greek products. Consequently, PD should put a focus on understanding the causes of the crisis before aiming to create a positive reaction.

Greece should offer a more balanced interpretation of the crisis through the formulation and implementation of a PD strategy, which will be used as a foreign policy instrument in dealing with the complex and multifaceted issue of the debt crisis. Greece's PD, therefore, should aim at complementing its government to external and foreign relations with a strategy to facilitate communication and discussion processes between governments and foreign publics, encourage public debate and initiate international campaigns in order to communicate the country's standpoint and position to the rest of the world.

**Methodological Approach**

Leonard, Stead, and Smewing (2002) identify three dimensions of PD: reactive, proactive and relationship building. Time is the core element in this categorisation. These dimensions work jointly with three different types of activities that can be developed.

Reactive PD usually refers to a special event or important piece of news. Through my experience, I would like to emphasize that it is difficult to organize an event in order to respond to negative press coverage immediately. An event or a campaign can be used as tools of a medium-term proactive policy (see Table 1).

Leonard et al. (2002) describe this first dimension as “news management.” When faced with negative press coverage, a country should be ready to respond. In some cases, such a response presupposes an agreed planned course of action, taking the form of communication crisis response plans. This could be achieved through interventions in the media or even campaigns already designed to be implemented when particular issues emerge. Positive coverage is a first step which could definitely be taken further. Also, the frequency with which some news appears provides a good opportunity to promote the policy positions of a country to a foreign audience.

The second dimension, proactive public, can unfold in weeks or months. It takes PD a step further not only in terms of timeframe, but in terms of objectives and means. While reactive PD deals with news management, proactive PD deals with perception management. In other words, it is concerned with the image and perception of a country. Successful management of this perception is important if messages are to be communicated effectively. The image that foreign publics hold of a country can influence their reception.

Unlike the first dimension, where action is mostly driven by “news management,” proactive PD allows all spheres to be smoothly developed. At this stage, many partners from different fields, economic, tourism, or cultural, can contribute to effectively organize big events and international campaigns both in the public and private sector.

A successful event or campaign needs at least six months at the stage of preparation. This requires coordination and forward planning, because the planned activities usually fall under the mandate and responsibility of different institutions or public services. Therefore, cooperation between partners in the areas of culture, tourism and trade, for example, is the key factor at this stage, where PD has more lasting goals than in the first stage. While in the latter case the aim of PD is mostly to reverse any negative coverage caused by running events, in this case the aim is to
disseminate specific messages reflecting the perception a country wishes to promote for itself.

Leonard et al. (2002) put the third dimension of PD in the sphere of “strategic communication,” as relationship-building is the most lasting one. Relationship building develops over years and aims at building contacts and creating networks of communication among peers: media, non-governmental actors, academia, and so on. The purpose of relationship-building is to exchange ideas and experiences and ultimately develop a deep understanding of a country and its culture.

Table 1 Dimensions of Public Diplomacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Type of management</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Methods/Tools</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reactive</td>
<td>Immediately</td>
<td>News Management</td>
<td>Respond to negative press coverage Direct intervention</td>
<td>Press Releases News Stories Editorials/ Letter to Editor Contact with journalists Social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive</td>
<td>Short &amp; medium - term</td>
<td>Perception Management</td>
<td>Coordination and planning of activities between partners</td>
<td>Big events Campaigns Social Media</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship Building</td>
<td>Long-term</td>
<td>Strategic Management</td>
<td>Exchange ideas Develop a deep understanding of a country</td>
<td>Building contacts Creation of networking</td>
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How to Rebuild the Country's Brand Image

In order to rebuild the country's brand image, it is important to focus on the communication strategy by following a combination of reactive, proactive, and relationship building PD on three major fronts: the organization of big events and campaigns, the relationships with major communication players and the creation of networks, and the active presentation in social media.

Put Major Events on the Agenda

Mega tourist and music events, business forums, and cultural exhibitions offer classic platforms from which to engage the world. An excellent example of big events aimed at forming a better image for the country was the decision of the Greek Ministry of Culture, triggered by the initiative of UNESCO, to name 2013 as Cavafy Year in order to mark the 150th anniversary of his birth. It was a project conceptualized centrally at a national level but executed at an international level in a large number of countries through the Press Offices of Greek Embassies and Consulates.

The General Directorate of Modern Culture, the Department for the Protection and Development of Greek Letters, and the National Book Centre were responsible for the main schedule of the action project, which had access to the full archive of Cavafy. In
addition, foreign embassies in Greece, the seats of Modern Greek and Culture of universities abroad where Cavafy's work is being taught to students, the Library of Alexandria, the European Culture Center of Delphi, literature organizations, and other associations were additional bodies that provided added value to this national strategy.

Following the decision of the Ministry of Culture, a Scientific Organizing Committee was established, which addressed an open invitation to cultural institutions, university departments, and artists from Greece and abroad, in order to apply for events in the framework of the Cavafy year. Having completed its work and evaluated the proposals, the Commission approved and financed 45 events, which took place in Greece, Alexandria, Paris, Italy, England, and the Netherlands to list a few countries.

In previous celebrations for Cavafy, the result was mainly literary. New publications, revelations of his life, and new analyses of his poems were recommended. In 2013, none of these took place. Nobody learned anything new about Cavafy as a writer, his work, or the era in which he lived.

The celebration of 2013 showed that “Cavafy” of the 21st century has become more a “field” of events and less a movement for the writer. The exciting fact is that during the last years, Cavafy has ceased being an author and became an entire “field.” The major change, which was made clear in the celebration of 2013, is that "Cavafy" is now called a “cultural field,” covering different areas from theatre to painting, from dance to school, and from concert to journalism. Cavafy is not just someone we seek to analyze, it is “something” we want to use.

In 2013, it became clear that there is no Cavafy as a writer any more but a global and ever-expanding “Cavafy field.” Cavafy has become a diva, stock, capital, product, brand, and copyright. The "Cavafy" is not sold, but it sells. It is produced, consumed, done, and accomplished. We downloaded him from the podium and we created an available field around him for appropriation, deconstruction, and assembly. According to the C.P. Cavafy Chair of the University of Michigan, "Cavafy" is used mainly as a museum, Internet, and music field (Lambropoulos, 2014).

The same did not happen in 2012, when UNESCO commemorated the 50th anniversary of the death of George N. Papanikolaou, one of the greatest medical scientists of the 20th century. Although Papanikolaou invented the famous "pap-test," a test which detects uterine cancer in its early stages and which has saved the lives of millions of women worldwide, his commemoration did not reach the general public because the events were limited to the medical field and addressed to specific audiences.

The conclusion of these two examples is that the success of major events requires the creation of a central committee composed by a central government body, such as a ministry, the synergy of many partners, and funds for organizing events around the world.

Nevertheless, during an economic crisis, a major cultural event is not sufficient to enhance the image of a country. It needs a major event facing the problem directly. A major event with well-known speakers (like eminent journalists and academics), organized in collaboration with a big institution, (like an EU body or a think tank), directly addressing target audiences (with an agenda focusing on arguments and facts) to promote the first positive results of the economic policy. Such an event was a lecture organized in March 2014 in The Hague by the Press Office of the Greek Embassy in the Netherlands. The lecture, entitled “The other face of the Euro crisis,” was organized in the framework of the Hellenic Presidency of the European Union.
Council in the first half of 2014 in collaboration with the Representation of the European Commission and the European Parliament Information Office in the Netherlands (Europees Parlement, 2014). This was an excellent partner for collaboration based in the heart of The Hague, with key-note speakers, such as a well-known Dutch reporter and columnist and a professor of Maastricht University. The lecture was promoted on social media with messages sent via Twitter to governmental bodies.

It is underscored that the event was retweeted by Prime Minister Rutte. Additionally, the main points of the event were uploaded in the intranet system of Dutch Ministries. The main result of the lecture was the creation of two documentaries by the Dutch public broadcasting channels VPRO and HUMAN, which are producing a successful investigative journalist documentary series called “Argos TV.” The documentaries were being broadcast on the television channel “Nederland 2,” placing the issue of the Greek economic crisis in a new context: the role of the statements made by European officials of the decision making delay producing a negative image of Greece. For this ambitious project, the reporters interviewed prominent and leading opinion makers throughout Europe and the US. Interviews took place with Jean-Claude Juncker, Jean-Claude Trichet, and journalists from The Financial Times and Der Spiegel.

The main achievement of the lecture was to increase interest at the governmental level (decision makers) and media level (opinion leaders). The crucial element for the success of the lecture was the presentation of new arguments based on data, facts, and statistics that were differentiated and seen from a different point of view, making people rethink the question of crisis. Moreover, during the lecture, it was stressed that the negative publicity of the country created a lose-lose situation for both countries, Greece and the Netherlands, given that the Netherlands faced a decline in its exports to Greece and Greece had a decline in tourism flow from the Netherlands (Secretary General of Information, 2014).

**Relationships with Media Players and Creation of Networks**

The first challenge that communication officers face is the multiplicity of players and communication channels that can be used during a crisis situation. These can involve international, national, regional, or local players. They can be officials or volunteers, traditional communication channels or social media.

A key ingredient for a country to obtain publicity by any medium is to be accessible, flexible, and accommodating. The ability to reach the media when it is necessary requires establishing the representatives of a country and especially the press offices as a reliable and valuable media resource.

The following steps can help a press office to establish and maintain positive working relations with journalists:

a. Build rapport and help reporters do their job: The press office should take advantage of opportunities to nurture a positive relationship with the media, sending periodically new information or items of interest to remind them the positions of the country on a special issue. One of the best ways to establish productive relations is to help reporters accomplish their own objectives by providing them with information and other sources, respecting deadlines and responding questions on time.
b. Stay in regular touch: The press office can express its compliments to the media when they do an accurate, thorough story or positive editorial about a priority issue of the country. If a reporters use positively quotations on an issue, the press office should send a note of appreciation for their job. Likewise, if stories contain inaccurate or misleading information, the press office should contact the reporter to point this out in a polite, objective manner and offer to provide specific information that will help prevent similar "misunderstandings" in future coverage.

c. Be one step before news stories: The press office should develop key message points, delivering consistent messages about the importance of certain issues. The press offices might update these messages regularly to remain relevant to emerging news stories. News stories should be drafted by press offices, consisting of the basic axis for any future printed news story of media.

d. Be an expert source for reporters (become indispensable): When reporters recognize the press office as a valuable source for stories and commentary, they become used to paying attention to its suggestions and views. One way for a press office to become indispensable is to work as an expert or as a knowledgeable resource with access to a range of experts on key issues. The best way is to provide statistics that cannot be accessed by any other source of information. Another way is to keep on hand a list of informed speakers and commonly requested facts that can be provided quickly (Bloomberg, 2007).

e. Offer other contacts: A press office could demonstrate its value as a media resource by recommending other reliable contacts which will enhance credibility, reinforce messages, and complement missions and objectives.

The second important step of obtaining good relationships with media players and think tanks is networking. Working through networks has become essential for achieving specific communication goals. Developing, nurturing, and mobilizing networks has become another task for governments and governmental agencies such as press offices. Network-building seeks to form an intellectual consensus behind ideas and positions and facilitate dynamic platforms for international exchange, ideas, dissemination, and political reflection.

A network can serve as a platform for research and ideas and for promoting expert ideas and political analysis on the key economic, social, and political issues and challenges. It can disseminate excellent research and relevant knowledge to a wider public audience through interactive policy networks, including interdisciplinary and scholarly collaboration. It can also engage and inform the public debate about the future of European politics in relation to the positions of a country.

In addition, it can engage in external collaboration with partners including higher education institutions, the private sector, think tanks, charities, community organisations, and trade unions.

Finally, it can deliver an innovative events programme combining seminars with large-scale public conferences designed to influence and contribute to key public debates.

The press offices of Greek embassies work toward this direction, developing close contacts with editors, reporters, and opinion leaders of institutions and think tanks. There is an evaluation system every month on their activities and initiatives, separated by different contact categories such as those with local media, foreign and Greek correspondents, reporters of Greek origin, Greek diaspora, think tanks, decision
makers, opinion leaders, academic staff, professors of modern or ancient Greek culture, and other institutions.

Additionally, press offices draft an annual report to present the most important results and the best practices that they have applied. In these reports there is a profound and sound analysis of the published articles and pieces of foreign mass media with direct references to Greece. Furthermore, the contribution of press offices as a source of information, is made by interviews, press releases, articles, letters to editors, and interventions in public discussions.

**Social Media and Digital Platform Strategy**

Social media facilitate governments and representatives of countries like the press offices of embassies to share and shape opinions. When a crisis occurs, social media provide the opportunity to react in real time, correcting any reported mistruths and managing bad images. In 2013, OECD published a report which highlights the changing landscape of risk and crisis communications. In particular, it points out how social media can serve as a beneficial tool but also create challenges for crisis managers (OECD, 2013).

In parallel, citizens have an equally important role to play, as they can become the most powerful ambassadors of a nation. Thanks to digital media, citizens can participate in the building and rebuilding of a country's brand. During a crisis, they should lend support to government's efforts and spread positive messages through communication platforms of government bodies in the interior of a country and of embassies abroad for an international public.

Another important player in a crisis situation is the decision maker or the opinion leader, who can originate from the international community. The challenge is for a country to decide how to deal best with the broad range of players and channels which could potentially be part of its crisis communication strategies. At this point it is crucial for a country to decide whether organizational and national culture is potentially served better by a multichannel approach based on a centralised or decentralized option.

The best practice of a centralized strategy concerning Greece, is the site http://www.gr2014.eu/el which was used as a strategic tool during the Hellenic Presidency of the European Union Council from January 1st to June 30th 2014. It was used as a source of information for EU and non-EU citizens, governments, embassies, journalists, and correspondents. It was a central tool and information source for Twitter accounts and other social media, and websites of Greek embassies in the EU and other countries worldwide.

One month before the official launch of the Greek Presidency, the Secretariat General of Information and Communication asked the press offices of Greek embassies to create accounts in social media: Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Pinterest, and Youtube and to manage them on behalf of the embassies on a daily basis. Until that period, the presence of press offices in social media was limited and depended on the personality and special interests of its personnel.

The centralized option is crucial during a crisis, because the number of messages exchanged through social media can be so high that it becomes impossible to have a clear picture of what is happening, as bloggers or Facebook users can also publish
false information. It is vital to use the embassies official social media, providing accurate information which should be prepared by a central communication body.

In the case of Greece, it is obvious that it is appropriate to follow the centralized option with a specialized communication group which will serve as the central point of guidelines and sources of information about the kind and frequency of information provided through the mass media. The same message, which has a common goal, must be transmitted by the mass media of all embassies at the same time in order to be effective and efficient. Different kinds of messages, transmitted at any time without any central coordination, cannot have any consistent impact. It is also crucial to have a guideline and a comprehensive strategy for crisis management, giving precise rules and recommendations on how to engage with social media.

Conclusions
PD is a central and vital tool that can be used in order to overcome the negative brand of a country, especially in periods of economic crisis. Greece should offer a more balanced interpretation of the crisis through the formulation and implementation of a PD strategy. Planning a crisis communication strategy is critical, as crises cannot always be predicted. An integrated communication strategy should contain the three dimensions of PD, utilizing the effectiveness of all tools, traditional and digital, from short to long periods of time.

Developing a robust crisis management procedure provides a country, both before and during a crisis, with the ability to deal with an emergency and build long-term relationships and networks.

Combining reactive and proactive relationship strategies is the best solution to managing a country's brand under crisis. This strategy must focus on a country’s goals, actions, and understanding of PD to better frame a country’s situation, principles, and policy.

In order to rebuild the country's brand image, it is important to focus on a communication strategy following a combination of reactive, proactive, and relationship building PD on three major fronts: the organization of big events and campaigns, the relationships with major communication players and the creation of networks, and the active presentation in social media. The press offices of Greek embassies are the governmental bodies that can apply PD worldwide, especially in a crisis situation.

Successful crisis communication depends largely on developing a planned, integrated process and a sustained communication approach. It needs a centralized planning by a crisis communication team which must be in place and available at any time. It requires a list of people in charge with timetables and the distribution of tasks and responsibilities. The more prepared a country is, the easier it is to execute the strategy worldwide through the press offices when the need arises.
REFERENCES


