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German Foreign Cultural and Educational Policy as a Means of Soft Power[3]

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Abstract

The main focus of the following article is to highlight "foreign cultural and educational policy" as a very specific variant of educational transfer. Many countries have created specific ways and institutions to further their cultural and educational interests abroad by various cultural, educational and scientific institutes. This will be discussed by taking the example of some of the core institutions of the German Foreign Cultural and Educational Policy, namely the *Goethe-Institute, German Schools Abroad* and the *German Academic Exchange Service*, which have branches in a lot of countries around the world. These will be described and analyzed as instruments of foreign policy by applying the interpretative concept of 'soft power' (as propelled by Joseph Nye), also showing that their proclaimed reference to 'cooperation' may be considered as more or less rhetoric because it is likely to obfuscate the political self-interests behind it.

Keywords: Comparative Education, International Education, International Educational Transfer, Foreign Cultural Policy, Student Exchange, Cultural Institutes, Foreign Schools, Goethe Institute, German Schools Abroad, German Academic Exchange Service

3 This article is written in the memory of Wolfgang Mitter. It is based on an unpublished presentation of the author at the CESE (Comparative Education in Europe) conference in 2014 at Freiburg, Germany, where she last met and talked to him, who was, as had been the case often on conferences, accompanied by his wife. At this occasion, Wolfgang Mitter did not give the impression to decease not long after the CESE conference.

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I. Introduction

Educational transfer across national borders has since long been discussed in various social science disciplines including not least *Comparative Education*. There has been a recurrent debate in this sub-discipline if realms like international education or international educational policies and policy transfer across borders should be considered as legitimate concerns of Comparative Education as part of or besides its main focus on scientific comparisons. Wolfgang Mitter highlighted this issue in a very enlightening article (1996), in which he paradigmatically discussed these positions and relations between, as he illustratively named them: *'comparativists'* and *'internationalists'*. He expressed his conviction that, on the one hand, both are categorically different from each other, because comparativists aim at acquiring scientific knowledge about education worldwide, getting insights and explaining realities, whereby internationalists want to become practical by influencing educational practices and policies and change the world to the better. On the other hand, however, Mitter has suggested that both objectives should not lead to organizational ruptures and that in the academic reality both might even come together in one and the same person.

The scientific community proves that Mitter's reflections are still valid today, because they are fundamental for Comparative Education throughout. Most academic societies have adopted the practice of including both aspects, as can be seen in the example of the North American Comparative Education Society (CES), founded in 1956, which was renamed into Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) in the year 1969. In the days of international large scale assessments like PISA or TIMMS it has become obvious again that scientific research is entangled with educational policies. Furthermore, global challenges like climate change, international competition and increasing cross border migration also hint to the fact that Comparative Education cannot remain in an academic ivory tower, but instead has to reflect its societal relevance and enhance models and practices of intercultural or global education or education for sustainable development and others. This is why Mitter's deliberations on *comparativists* and *internationalists* have been chosen as one of the basics for the author's concept of Comparative Education (Adick 2008, 63ff.). The following analysis is placed into this perspective.

According to the debate mentioned above, educational transfer across borders, then, falls into the focus of *internationalists*, respectively into the *international* endeavors of the scientific community, if we may call them this. The international dimension belongs to Comparative Education since its beginnings, and was mostly discussed under the headings of *'borrowing & lending'* (cf. Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow, 2012). Research and discussions often referred to reform policies that travel around the world. In this respect, Phillips & Ochs (2003) developed an international policy cycle for the reconstruction of how a country adopts and adapts foreign influences. Alternatively the term *'international educational transfer'* has come into use as an umbrella term for reviewing all these 'practical' and 'political' border-crossing dimensions discussed in

Comparative Education (Beech, 2003). It will be used here to cover the broad range of activities across national borders in various governmental and nongovernmental institutions which are active around the world. These range from the *Associated Schools Project of UNESCO* to charity projects to further education in non-governmental organizations like *Save the Children*. It also includes variants of youth and students exchange programs like, for instance, between partner cities or in the well-known *ERASMUS program* for students in Europe and beyond. In addition, educational transfer also occurs between individuals and reform initiatives e.g. on international conferences. Commercial educational export prevalent in entrepreneurial branch campuses overseas or in the activities of e-learning in distance education enterprises abroad is also considered to be one variant of educational transfer (Adick 2014). It is posited in this article that *foreign cultural and educational policy* is another very typical version of educational transfer, which, however, is distinct from other variants like exchange or twin programs. Its specificity shall be demonstrated in the following analysis and interpretation.

II. Foreign Cultural and Educational Policy and the Concept of Soft Power

Many countries have formulated their specific *Foreign Cultural Policy*, also including institutionalized forms of educational transfer. Similar to the case of Germany – which is the topic of this article – the *French foreign policy* has installed the Instituts français, the *Centres Culturels Français* and the *Alliance Française* which incorporate their 'politique culturelle exterieure', and equally known around the world is the British Council and the 'cultural diplomacy' it claims for Great Britain. The British, German, and French ways have already been compared in a research especially devoted to their foreign cultural policies (Sattler 2007). In recent times Chinese Confucius Institutes have expanded in Europe, but also in other parts of the world. A detailed research on Africa revealed the strategies and outcomes of Chinese educational transfers, especially the expansion of Confucius Institutes, in various African countries (King 2013). Like Germany, many other countries operate their national schools in foreign countries (a short overview on Spain and Portugal, the Netherlands, the United States of America, and Great Britain in: Kohler-Fritsch 2014). For instance, the *French Agence de l'Enseignement Français à l'Etranger* coordinates nearly 500 French schools abroad and has been placed under the auspices of the French Foreign Office, the same like it is in Germany and possibly in many other countries (Horner 2014). Such schools mostly originated in order to furnish the children of their expatriates who live outside their home country with teaching and learning along the lines of their national education system. But in the course of time, these foreign schools abroad have often come to attract more pupils of the host country than expatriates and can thus be considered as important agents of educational transfer across borders.

The main mission of foreign cultural and educational policy is to the culture, education and science of a specific country across borders and around the world. This is done in

close and overt relation to the official Foreign Policy. Therefore, it is claimed here, that these organizations may be analyzed in the light of the concept of *'soft power'* as it has been propelled by Joseph S. Nye (esp. Nye 2004). Nye defines *soft power* in contrast to the well-known forms of *hard power*, namely military power and economic dominance. According to him, *soft power* means "getting others to want the outcomes you want" (Nye, 2004, p. 5). This can be achieved by applying various forms of attraction and moral persuasion, using reputation, co-optation, seduction, conviction, inducements, and other 'soft' means – all this in the name of influencing others towards one's owns interests, ideas and principles without exercising (overtly) coercive measures. The concept has been widely used in international relations studies, but also in political debates. Its strengths lie "in the fact that it allows theorists and practitioners to think about power in more complex and dynamic ways" (Commuri, 2012, p. 43). *Soft power* overlaps with the notion of 'nation branding' and the debates on public or cultural diplomacy which are set against or conceived of as supporting traditional 'secret diplomacy' practices behind closed doors. Even though there is the danger of *soft power* becoming a ‚catch-all'-concept, it is challenging to apply it to the topic of this article since *soft power* can also be exercised by non-state actors. This opens the way to interpret the border-crossing educational and scientific organisations such as the Goethe-Institute, DAAD, German Schools Abroad in the light of the *soft power* concept.

Used in social science research *soft power* is meant to be an analytical concept, and not a normative one. However, it can be mentioned that the concept has also attracted the interest of (practical) politics. For instance, meant to brief politicians, the scientific service of the German parliament prepared a dossier on *soft power*[5]. As an analytical concept it is directed in the following to analyse how foreign cultural and educational policies function, and how they appeal to the addressees, even though they are likely not to admit officially that they are 'applying soft power'. By the very nature of the 'soft' character of these power relations the 'real' aims behind the actions might be obfuscated or masqueraded. This is often done by claiming to practice various forms of *cooperation* or *collaboration* with national, European and local actors of the host countries in which they operate. Yet, there is no coherent concept of cooperation which might be traced back to a certain author (like *soft power* to Nye); instead, as a catch-all term, it is ubiquitously used in discussions about cross-border relations. For instance, the Federal German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development is responsible for 'development aid', which, however, is called *'cooperation'* in order to prevent the negative image of external aid coming from (powerful) donors and going to (dependent) recipients. Different sorts of cross-border educational relations; e.g. exchange of students, export of international campuses, education as part of development aid, school partnerships, educational enterprises venturing abroad, etc. all claim to practice 'cooperation' in one or the other way. But at a

[5] The dossier was prepared by Huberta v. Voss-Wittig from the scientific service (Wissenschafliche Dienste) of the German Parliament, and it is available online:
http://www.bundestag.de/blob/189706/8c40cb75069889f8829a5a0db838da1f/soft_power-data.pdf [accessed 16 Jan, 2016]

closer look, their objectives and practices are quite different so that a reference to *cooperation* might be purely rhetoric or ideological and thus does not appeal to be a valid analytical category as an alternative to *soft power*. Therefore it is concluded here, that *cooperation* or *collaboration* are equivalent to what is called co-optation in the concept of *soft power*.

In an article on public and cultural diplomacy, it has been remarked that the organisations operating in this field may be considered as long-term soft-power instruments of external networking. Their special value for the foreign policy of a country lies in the fact that they are meant to attract future top executives from around the world and to strengthen the position of a country as an important global player in education, science and research (cf. Schwan, 2012, p. 221ff.). This leads to the question: who are the addressees of *soft power* in the 'receiving' countries? If soft power is understood as *relational power* it is not a one-way road; instead, the receptive state and society and their reactions must be taken into consideration. For instance, it makes a difference if the culture of a given country is attractive to the elites or to the masses in another country, and if the relations of the two countries bear historical legacies like between former colonial powers and their ex-colonies (Commuri, 2012, p. 51, p. 55).

It should be added that soft power has in the meantime been operationalised in the construction of an international ranking scale by explicitly paying tribute to Nye's concept (McClory 2010). In this endeavour under the auspices of *The Institute for Government* (a British charity organisation, i.e. a NGO) and the *Monocle* (a monthly periodical) the soft power of countries is assessed on the basis of the five categories: Business/Innovation, Culture, Government, Diplomacy, and Education. Among others the index is made up of variables which are directly connected with the topic of this article, such as the global distribution of the language of a country, its attraction of foreign students, and the number of its cultural institutes abroad. In the first ranking (year 2010), the first five places (from N=26 countries) went to France, UK, USA, Germany, and Switzerland.[6]

Following these general remarks on the concept of soft power as an interpretative frame, German Foreign Cultural and Educational Policy will be considered namely the *Goethe-Institut, German Schools Abroad* and the *German Academic Exchange Service*, which have branches in a lot of countries around the world. It will be analyzed how they function and how they use factors like attraction, persuasion or co-optation in their operations.

III. German Foreign Cultural and Educational Policy: an overview

German Foreign Cultural and Educational Policy (*Deutsche Auswärtige Kultur- und Bildungspolitik*) falls into the domain of the Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt; AA) and is

[6] The rankings under the title "Monocle Soft Power Survey" have since been repeated in successive intervals and included a larger number of countries. Over the years the placement of the first five or ten countries has fluctuated to a certain degree, but it would lead too far to go into more details in this article. Readers are directed to check information in the internet.

part of the official German Foreign Policy, which follows three main objectives: (1) *political relations* – via embassies and official treaties, (2) *economic relations* – via chambers of commerce, (3) *cultural relations* – via education and scientific exchange.

The self-description on the English-language website of the German Foreign Office can be taken as an illustration of what *soft power* means [www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Aussenpolitik/KulturDialog.html; 10 May, 2014]:

"Along with political and economic relations, cultural relations – including education – is one of the three cornerstones of German foreign policy and has, moreover, a demonstrably long-term impact. Cultural and educational programmes tailored to the needs and interests of people in our partner countries not only create a broad basis for stable international relations but also build trust in our country around the world. As a result of such programmes, our civil society, business and political actors readily find a host of important and reliable partners to work with. Our cultural relations and education policy objectives are:

- to present Germany as a country with a lively, multifaceted and internationally renowned cultural scene,
- to strengthen Germany as an education, science and research location by awarding scholarships, for example, to students and outstanding young researchers from all parts of the world,
- to promote interest in the German language in Europe and also internationally,
- to contribute to international crisis and conflict prevention efforts by helping, for example, to rebuild schools and universities in Afghanistan,
- to promote European integration by introducing EU-wide education and training parameters, for example,
- to preserve cultural diversity around the world by supporting, for example, projects to restore endangered cultural sites in developing countries,
- to create a stable foundation for international relations by fostering dialogue and encounter.

Seen in the light of the *soft power* concept, the proclamation refers to "long-term impact" (an indication of power relations) by addressing "partners" overseas (a sign of co-optation). Cultural relations want to build "trust in our country" (using persuasion, conviction), and to appeal to Germany's "lively, multifaceted and internationally renowned cultural scene" (in search of reputation), etc.

Soft power is not exerted directly by the Foreign Office but through *intermediary organisations* of a special kind. Citing again from the self-description of the Foreign Office addressed to the international public: "These are non-governmental organizations which operate under strategic guidelines laid down by the German Government and with a German Government mandate. In their programme and project work they enjoy a very large measure of independence. In the interest of consistency, the various activities

undertaken by these organizations abroad on behalf of the German Government are coordinated locally by the relevant German embassy and consulate-general. Given the increasing number and diversity of the organizations involved, the coordinating role of our missions abroad is becoming increasingly important."[7]

The role of these organisations seems to match the classical situation of what in social psychology is known as a 'double-bind' relationship, since on the one hand, they are said to "enjoy a very large measure of independence", while on the other hand, they are stated to work under "strategic guidelines" and a "mandate" of the German Government, reasons for which they are and have to be "coordinated" (re: controlled) by the German embassies. Regarding the literature on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or non-profit organisations (NPOs), it is difficult to place them correctly.[8] They are NGOs – yes, but they are only formally independent, since they operate under governmental custody. They are NPOs – yes, but they depend on public money to a large extent and not on 'private' money (donations, private investments) as other NPOs. According to Anheier (2005, 48) all these organisations can be called *'quasi-NGOs'*. Even though they are organised under private law, they are no genuine NPOs, since they have national members (Frantz & Martens, 2006, 43). According to Fowler (1997, p. 32) they are a „Para-state body set up by government as an NGO, often to enable better conditions of service or create political distance". In the case of foreign cultural and educational policy the motif 'to create political distance' applies, since the foreign country may not interfere into the host country, but an *'intermediary organisations'* formally organized as NGO / NPO may do so according to the laws of the host country. In this regard, the creation of a special type of *intermediary organization* may itself be identified as one mechanism of exerting *soft power*.

IV. DAAD, Goethe-Institut and German Schools Abroad: an illustrative analysis

The main intermediary organisations of the AA are the Goethe-Institut (GI), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH), the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa), the Central Agency for Schools Abroad (ZfA), the Educational Exchange Service (PAD), the German Commission for UNESCO (DUK), the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB), the Max Weber Stiftung – Foundation for German Humanities Institutes Abroad (MWS), the Federal Cultural Foundation (KSB), and the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (House of World Cultures, HKW) [www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Aussenpolitik/KulturDialog.html; 10 May, 2014]. In the following, three of

7 www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Aussenpolitik/KulturDialog.html; 10 May, 2014

8 For a more extended discussion of the classification of these organisations in the literature on NGOs, NPOs and the Third Sector see Adick/Hahm/Weiler (2014).

them: DAAD, Goethe-Institut and German Schools Abroad (see table 1), will be considered because they are very important agencies for educational transfer.

Table 1: Actors of German Cultural and Educational Policy (2014)

	Locations	Finances	Main activities
DAAD	HQ in Bonn, office in Berlin, 15 regional branch offices, 54 information centres worldwide	AA (ca. € 170 Mio.) plus BMBF (ca. € 92 Mio.) and BMZ (ca. € 35 Mio.); i.e. 77 % state financed	Academic exchange, cross-border mobility, scholarships and collaboration in Higher Education, internationalisation of German Universities
Goethe-Institut	HQ in Munich, office in Berlin, 159 institutions incl. 12 liaison offices in 94 countries	AA (ca. € 224 Mio); i.e. 63% state financed, private financing via inscriptions and fees	German language courses & exams, cultural projects, e.g. films and arts; libraries
German Schools Abroad	ZfA in Bonn under the auspices of the AA, part of Bundesver-waltungsamt, 141 German schools in 72 countries	AA (ca. € 152 Mio); i.e. 30% state financed; mainly private financing of each school	Assistance in dispatching teachers from Germany; controlling the quality of the schools and certificates, further education of the teachers

Sources: own elaboration according to if possible the English-language website of each organisation: www.daad.de/en; www.goethe.de/ins/enindex; www.bva.bund.de/DE/Organisation/Abteilungen/Abteilung_ZfA/ (no English website available), accessed in May 2014. The data on Finances for around the year 2011 are taken from Hahm & Weiler, 2014, p. 184

From the financing schemes it can be concluded that the main public financier in all three cases is the Foreign Office (AA) which proves they are part of the official German Foreign Policy. The DAAD also receives money from other federal ministries; but this is also public money. The Goethe Institutes also live on fees, private money which the participants pay. Contrary to what one might think, the German schools abroad are mainly financed by their own individual school budgets. But their most important public financier is also the Foreign Office. Applying the interpretative view of the *soft power* concept, one might say, that even though all these organisations are not completely remunerated by the German public purse for their 'image campaigns' for Germany, and the German schools even less than the other two organisations, they obviously accept their role of mediating German culture to the outside world.

The headquarters of these organisations are located in Germany, but all of them have offices and are well-known around the world. If one considers the number of offices outside Germany, one can say that in about half of the countries assembled in the United Nations (N= 193) there are Goethe-Institutes (N= 94 countries) to be found, and in about every third there will be a German school (N= 72 countries) and/or a representation of the German Academic Exchange Service DAAD (N= 69 countries).

The wide international distribution of these organisations can be taken as an indicator for their visibility as representations of German language, culture, education and science. But

contrary to the rhetoric of cooperation or exchange suggesting equal partners there is no reciprocity that would lie in the fact that these many host countries would have equivalents of their cultural organisations in Germany. In a research project on German-Mexican relations in profit compared to non-profit organisations (Adick/Gandlgruber/Maltezky/Pries 2014) it was envisaged to compare counterparts, but in the area of *foreign cultural and educational policy* no single Mexican cultural or educational organisation could be identified in Germany that would match the DAAD, Goethe-Institut or German Schools which are all having offices in Mexico. Considering staff mobility between Mexico and Germany and vice versa (which was the main object of the research), we found out that German branch offices overseas are headed by a German Representative, who is paid and dispatched by and who is – next to his/her headquarters – responsible to German governmental institutions. Furthermore, it may be highlighted that these expatriates have to sign a contract whereby s/he has to respect German interests and image abroad. In addition, it was stressed that the organisations are closely knitted among them and around the German Embassy. All these features are strong indications on how *soft power* works alongside official diplomacy.

Considering the actual activities of the DAAD, Goethe-Institut and the German Schools Abroad in the case of Mexico and including what expert interview partners of these organisations have responded, the following main features may be summarized (for more details and references cf. Hahm & Weiler, 2014). These organisations propagate German language and culture. The five German schools are private schools under Mexican law, but they are nevertheless controlled in peculiar ways by the German government. In 2014, Germany issued a special law (*Auslandsschulgesetz*) for these schools; among others they have to send regular reports and student registers to the German government agency which sends out German civil service teachers on a rotational basis. These German expatriate teachers work alongside other (less well paid) categories of teachers including locals and are mostly forming a (privileged) minority (about only one fifth; year 2012) within the overall staff at the German foreign schools. The schools are attracting a lot of Mexican students who, because of the school fees, mostly stem from well-to-do families. The Goethe Institut recorded nearly 4,000 inscriptions (2011-12) in Mexico; it also employs local staff alongside (numerically much fewer) expatriates with long-term assignments from Germany. Schools and Goethe-Institut are rewarding such certificates and language diplomas that are recognised in Germany – which is not least meant to attract Mexican scholars to Germany. Germany is not so attractive as the neighbouring USA or the historically and culturally close European country Spain, but it nevertheless ranks among the most popular destinations of Mexican students abroad, which might be the reason for having installed a DAAD office in Mexico that (possibly) already resulted in a factual increase of German-Mexican collaborations in higher education. Some common features arise: Teachers, lecturers and top personnel are dispatched from Germany on the basis of rotation after some years. The reason behind is that they are not meant to take roots in the host country, but, instead, stay in close contact with their home country Germany, for which they have to fulfil the roles of cultural representatives abroad. All

three organisations have to report back and are linked to German governmental institutions by law, special agreements, budgets, evaluation schemes and others. All these features can be interpreted as mechanisms aimed to further the international reputation of Germany by ‚soft', i.e. non-coercive means.

V. Concluding Remarks

The article commenced by recalling Wolfgang Mitter who has suggested that international educational transfer should be considered as a legitimate part of Comparative Education. Most of the scientific community including the author of this article have practiced this option in their research and teaching. In this view three important actors of the Foreign German Cultural and Educational Policy have been sketched out and interpreted through the lens of the *soft power* concept. This was done with the objective to direct the attention of researchers in Comparative Education to the broad scope of international educational transfers with their very different variants. It was posited that the type called '*foreign cultural and educational policy*' has very specific traits which sets it apart from other forms of international educational transfer. The logic it follows has been subsumed here under the heading of *soft power*, which is quite different from e.g. education aid (humanitarian impetus) or from education export (commercial interests). Systematic comparisons of various types, let alone a typology of all the different variants of *international educational transfer* are still lacking, as far as the author knows. The article can be seen as in incentive to start on more discussions and to draft typologies of this varied field.

VI. Acronyms

BMBF (Bundesministerium fur Bildung und Forschung). The Federal Ministry of Education and Research

BMZ (Bundesministerium fur wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung). The Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development

ZfA: Zentralstelle fur das deutsche Auslandsschulwesen: Central Agency for the German Schools Abroad

DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst). German Academic Exchange Service; Motto: Change by Exchange (Wandel durch Austausch)

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German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD, Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst). www.daad.de/en;

German Foreign Office (AA, Auswärtiges Amt), concerning its foreign cultural and educational policy: www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Aussenpolitik/KulturDialog.html www.auswaertiges-amt.de/

Goethe Institut: www.goethe.de/ins/enindex