



**PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND DOMESTIC OUTREACH IN FLANDERS:  
LESSONS FROM QUEBEC**

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## **1. Public Diplomacy of Federated Entities Introduced**

### **ACTORCRAFT & DOMESTIC OUTREACH**

Public diplomacy, defined in a narrow sense as diplomatic relationships with the non-official public abroad<sup>1</sup>, is not only a major concern at international, European and national government levels but became more relevant for federated entities (such as Regions, Länder(states)) as well. Partly due to the increasing globalisation, the ongoing impact of federalism, decentralisation and the expansion of international activity into spheres heretofore reserved for national units<sup>2</sup>, public diplomacy has been localized. Especially for federated entities public diplomacy remains the chief instrument of statecraft. It allows influencing and shaping the international agenda in ways that go beyond their (very) limited hard-power resources, their vulnerability and remoteness in political-economical terms<sup>3</sup>.

After all, comprehension and support of foreign and domestic civil societies are of vital importance for the foreign policy agenda of federated entities, its long-term goals and its perceptions abroad and at home. Public diplomacy is not a diplomatic digestive; it is a bitter need<sup>4</sup>. Neither is it a stand-alone phenomenon but an expression of broader changes in diplomacy, international relations and society. Concepts such as 'horizontal world'<sup>5</sup> or 'network society'<sup>6</sup> reflect the broader social evolutions that influence the theory and practice of public diplomacy of federated entities. Both refer to a 'meta-universe' of hybrid networks of ungraspable digital and human hyperlinks between institutions and individuals.

These tendencies stimulated the shift from a state-centred hierarchical or policy-driven model of foreign relations towards a network or more dialogue-centred relations-oriented model<sup>7</sup>, whereby foreign policy-making is taken as close as possible to the citizens. Such a dialogic communication<sup>8</sup> can be most effectively pursued and accomplished at the local level. Nowadays, public-diplomacy is pursued at multiple levels, with participation of federated entities being most effective in building mutual understanding and relationships

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<sup>1</sup> Melissen, 2005, p. XIX.

<sup>2</sup> Hocking, 1999; Hooghe & Marks, 2003; Kaiser, 2002; Michaud, 2002; Vengroff & Rich, 2006

<sup>3</sup> Batora, 2005, 2006, Mohamed, 2006

<sup>4</sup> Huijgh & Melissen, 23/04/2007; Huijgh & Melissen, 30/01/2007

<sup>5</sup> Friedman, 2005; Martin, 2006

<sup>6</sup> Castells, M., Hocking., 2005

<sup>7</sup> Fisher, 2006; Hocking, 2005; Riordan, 2005; Sending & Neumann, 2006; Wang, 2006

<sup>8</sup> Kent & Taylor, 2002

with citizens abroad and at home. The role of regions in international affairs is of vital importance and has been expanding.

This is clearly evidenced in the widening range of areas federated entities are pursuing; and, most notably their engagement in international trade. Federated entities have also asserted themselves on many social and political issues in the international arena by placing sometimes hotly debated foreign policy questions on their agenda<sup>9</sup> (for example Quebec's role in the international debate on cultural diversity). While doing so, some federated entities (such as Flanders and Québec) maintain a separate ministry of international relations and have representatives abroad.

Besides, public diplomacy of federated entities is not an exclusive realm managed by regional (or in the case of Canada provincial) representatives. The horizontal world in which public diplomacy of federated entities flourishes calls for a wider range of specialists, who can operate beyond the range of the old elites. Divergent non-governmental actors both at home and abroad (i.e. artists, civic activists, NGOs, journalists, enterprises, academics and religious groups) frame the public debate about foreign policy (see, also citizens diplomacy)<sup>10</sup>. Because of the credibility they enjoy among foreign and domestic publics, these non-state actors became prominent intermediates in public diplomacy.

Across this wide range of foreign policy-making circles the international dimension of public diplomacy of federated entities can count on most of the attention. The domestic dimension is however often neglected or underestimated, but yet crucial for a successful long-term relations-based public diplomacy. In the best circumstances, the domestic dimension of public diplomacy of federated entities is about 'pre-actively'<sup>11</sup> involving local civil society in foreign policy-making. This includes the engagement of diaspora populations that are changing fundamentally the raw material from which federated entities collective identities, ideas and interests are derived.

The bottom-up engagement of these divergent non-state actors at home is the precondition for an effective overseas public diplomacy strategy, identity building and communication with foreign publics<sup>12</sup>. The sense of local identity of citizens, and also how

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<sup>9</sup> Wang, 20006.

<sup>10</sup> Batora, 2005; Brown, 2003; Cooper & Hocking, 2004; Henrickson, 2006; Langhorne, 2005; Riordan, 2005; Sharp, 2004; Pigman, 2005

<sup>11</sup> Pre-active here means addressing the conditions in which agendas are formed and relationships built; proactive is thinking ahead of the game in terms of forthcoming news agendas; and reactive is coping with breaking news.

<sup>12</sup> Evans, 1993; Batora, 2006; Kishan, 2004; Kunczik, 1997; Putnam, 1993; Page & Barabas, 2000; Rosenau, 1997; Sharp, 2004.

they feel about their region, should help to influence the non-official public abroad<sup>13</sup>. Civil society's involvement in public diplomacy of federated entities and thus the integration of a domestic dimension in the foreign policy machinery is an arduous task. It will not only increase existing interdepartmental tensions, it also puts to the test working attitudes and structural relationships between regional agents and policy-makers of international relations.

Federated entities are not yet used to functioning well in a horizontal space where effectiveness flourishes in inverse proportion to the degree of visible substate involvement. It remains a difficult task for ministries of foreign affairs not to reinforce their dominant role as communicators but to work horizontally, which means being able to work collaboratively across organizational borders where influence is derived from cooperation. Involving multiple actors in public diplomacy of federated entities, from a top-down approach, is one thing. Another - more arduous - thing is to guarantee that all the (in) direct forms of internal and external communication of the engaged actors at home and abroad are in one way or another on the same wavelength. This enables a positive relationship with the foreign public on which the success of public diplomacy depends.

Multi-actor public diplomacy and outreach of federated entities require strategic planning and horizontal management efforts. Notwithstanding its limitations, such a sophisticated and versatile approach of public diplomacy is increasingly moving at the forefront when confronted with the broadened actorcraft. Too many identities of the domestic actors engaged in public diplomacy of federated entities are causing confusion among targeted publics abroad. Therefore, the development and implementation of a strategic and horizontal-oriented plan has become inevitable. Without such a foundation the current efforts in this field will have little resonance, hamper efficiency and effectiveness and complicate the task of conveying consistent messages overseas and at home. These are just a few insights from Quebec's 40 years of experiences in public diplomacy and outreach.

## **QUEBEC'S ROLE MODEL**

Quebec is a world leader in the field of public diplomacy, and of particular relevance to Flanders. While most of the other regions or provinces in the world just recently picking up the idea of public diplomacy and outreach, Quebec's efforts to consult its civil society

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<sup>13</sup> Melissen, 2006; Kunzick 1997

and its interdepartmentally cooperation have been, during the past 40 years, at times innovative and trendsetting. Although Quebec exercises far less power than Flanders, it clearly is among the international leaders in this regard.

The Gérin-LaJoie doctrine<sup>14</sup> legitimised the international presence of Canadian provinces, and has, since its inception, been the fundamental basis upon which Quebec's external affairs have been conducted. Gérin-LaJoie's statement encapsulated the nature of Quebec's need for and justification of an identity-based diplomacy. The constitutional footing for the activities of Quebec's Ministry of International Relations is that Canada's constitution (see article 132 of the Statute of Westminster in 1931) does not explicitly confine foreign policy to the federal level<sup>15</sup>.

On the basis of this rather vague constitutional footing, Quebec's Ministry of International Relations is currently tasked with projecting the province's commercial, economic, political, social and cultural essence abroad. It accomplishes this through a variety of activities, including the ones related to public diplomacy and outreach. Thereby, the total budget invested in public diplomacy and outreach sometimes even surmounts that of the federal government (especially when taking into account the federal cuttings of 2006).

The latest report on Quebec's international policy 'Working in Concert' (2006) shows that interdepartmental cooperation and more structured ties with civil society are moving at the centre stage of its public diplomacy in order to strengthen its international influence and fields of action. It establishes, jointly with other departments, Quebec's position on international issues and ensures concerted efforts with the federal government to this effect. Thereby, it intends to work more closely with institutions and public agencies as well as with various organisations in civil society<sup>16</sup> whose international action help reinforce Quebec's presence and impact abroad<sup>17</sup>.

Such a participatory public diplomacy and outreach showed already fruitful. Driven by Quebec's preoccupation with its cultural distinctiveness, cooperation within and without Quebec's government resulted in the accord (signed in 2006) of the Federal Government

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<sup>14</sup> In 1965, Paul Gérin-LaJoie, at that time Vice-Président du Conseil et Ministre de l'Éducation de Québec, published what is now known as the Gérin-LaJoie doctrine. In this brief document, he declared that as part of the federal system, a province has the responsibility to concern itself with affairs that touch it directly, that Quebec is well within its constitutional rights to conduct affairs with other states, and that its unique aspects give it sufficient justification to do so.

<sup>15</sup> Levine, 2006

<sup>16</sup> Quebec's towns, cities and regions, universities and research centres, business community, artist and creators, ...

<sup>17</sup> Balthazar, 1993, 1999; Bernier, 1996; Gouvernement du Québec, Ministère de relations internationales, 2006, 04/2005, 10/2005, 11/2005; Nosall, 1997; Vengroff & Rich, 2006; [www.mri.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.mri.gouv.qc.ca)

of Canada with the Government of Quebec relative to UNESCO participation<sup>18</sup>. It gives the ability for a representative of the Quebec government to accomplish the all-important task "faire valoir la voix du Québec" at all work groups, meetings and conferences of Unesco. In Jean Charest, premier of Quebec, words: "*For the Quebecois, this agreement on the promotion of cultural diversity is the most beautiful victory in the history of Quebec's diplomacy*"<sup>19</sup>. Undoubtedly, cultural capital is at the core of Quebec's public diplomacy and outreach: 20% of the overall budget of the Ministry of International Relations is invested in the involvement of local cultural organisations.

Quebec is not alone or even at the cutting edge in terms of developing a public diplomacy and outreach of federated entities. Following the adoption of a new federal constitution by the Belgian parliament on 14 July 1993, Belgium allowed its communities and regions to sign treaties and other agreements with sovereign states and to have an international role that sometimes equals (and even surpasses) that of the Belgian federal state<sup>20</sup>. This is especially the case when taking into consideration that one of the major forces behind public diplomacy, cultural activities and educational exchanges falls exclusively within the competence of the communities.

The Flemish Department of Foreign Affairs did develop several public diplomacy initiatives (such as the new corporate logo (see cover page), the English newspaper 'Flanders today' for foreigners in Belgium, the forthcoming website Flanders.be etc.). Nevertheless, these current initiatives are for the most part downsized to one-way communication instruments in order to enhance the image-building abroad. Quebec's best practices however show that public diplomacy is a genuine two-way street. Dialogue must in all instances prevail on the one-way communication toolkit, whereby technologies must be used effectively without letting go of the individual<sup>21</sup>.

In this age of information overload (the so-called paradox of plenty), and given due attention to financial limitations; themes, targeted publics, instruments and actors or stakeholders of public diplomacy of federated entities must from the beginning be carefully selected. More than communication and symbols, behaviour (emotional intelligence) is the most influencing part of public diplomacy, and close cooperation of foreign affairs with human resources is of vital importance when trying to win the hearts and minds of overseas and domestic publics.

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<sup>18</sup> In essence, this accord provides a permanent representative of Quebec to be present at the Parliament Delegation of Canada at Unesco Paris; the representation of the Quebecois government, according to its wishes, to be present at all Canadian delegation work group meetings and inferences of Unesco.

<sup>19</sup> Levine, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Crikemans, 2006; Paquin, 2003

<sup>21</sup> Huijgh & Melissen, 23/04/2007

Successful public diplomacy of federated entities is grounded in the involvement of non-governmental actors, especially those at home, and sufficient budgetary elbowroom and cooperation with the department of domestic affairs and finances are necessary.

Above all, the rule of thumb here is that effectiveness flourishes in inverse proportion to the degree of visible state interference. Public diplomacy of federated entities is not just an additional task or spin-off of everyday practice of the regional representatives; it requires a change of attitude and skills. As an investment for the future, long-term perspectives and sustainable support at the highest levels are needed. This is just a handful of the lessons that Flanders can learn from Quebec's past and recent successes and failures if it wishes to outgrow its embryonic stage.

## 2. **Main research question and principal objectives**

Starting from the aforementioned contextualisation, the main research question of the proposed study can be described as follows:

In order to pursue a participatory and pre-active public diplomacy and outreach, what can the Flemish government learn from the experiences of Quebec?

The principal purpose of this proposed study is to examine ways in which a foresighted public diplomacy and outreach of the Flemish Department of Foreign Affairs can adapt best practices from Quebec's Ministry of International Relations.

This central purpose falls apart in the subsequent research objectives:

- To lay down theoretical criteria and elaborate a conceptual design of public diplomacy and outreach of federated entities in order to delineate and assess activities in this field
- Starting from the results of the theoretical benchmarking, to map empirically (characteristics, impact etc.) public diplomacy and outreach initiatives of the Ministry of International relations of Quebec and to situate these on a broader programme-mix continuum.
- To evaluate the empirical results of Québec's public diplomacy and outreach with respect to their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
- To interpret the public diplomacy and outreach activities of the Flemish Department of Foreign Affairs, situated on the programme-mix continuum
- To formulate customized public diplomacy and outreach recommendations for the Flemish Department of Foreign Affairs

### **3. Methodological Design**

To fulfil these objectives and to provide an answer to the research question, the study requires the following theoretical, empirical and policy-oriented research phases:

#### **3.1. THEORETICAL PHASE: BENCHMARKING**

A first research phase consists of benchmarking. The sensitising research concepts (public diplomacy and outreach of federated entities) will be made operational, whereby indicators will be developed. This preliminary investigation is essential with regard to the following phases. It makes the empirical mapping and the formulation of coherent and goal-oriented policy recommendations possible.

To realize this, the study will draw up a status quo of the existing academic and policy literature on public diplomacy and outreach of federated entities on the basis of data collection at inter-university libraries, research and policy documentation centres. From the hypothesis that divergent scientific disciplines complement their weaknesses and strengths, it will be an eclectic literature study. The proposed study will not only include studies from political sciences (international relations and diplomatic studies) but it will broaden its insights with research in other scientific areas (communication sciences).

Policy documents will be included in the literature study. Theory and practice are interdependently related to one another and have to be studied as such. To give an overall picture of public diplomacy and outreach of federated entities, it is of vital importance to underwrite tendencies in both fields. Practical insights will certainly refine the theoretical results.

This in-depth scientific and policy literature study on public diplomacy of federated entities will be assessed through the social scientific methodology of making abstract and complex concepts and their interrelationships operational. It provides a methodological framework that makes further empirical research possible. This methodology allows creating a conceptual design. The conceptual design outlines a classification and a mapping of the core characteristics, categories and measures of public diplomacy and outreach of federated entities.

### **3.2. EMPIRICAL PHASE: CASE STUDY AND MAPPING**

The second research phase focuses on a case study approach. On the basis of the benchmarked criteria in the theoretical phase, the public diplomacy and outreach activities of Quebec will be investigated.

The study will identify and create a stock-list (a programme-mix continuum) of the undertaken communication initiatives, especially those activities related to the non-official public both abroad and at home, those in order to involve non-governmental actors and those that manage the former (such as strategic planning and horizontal management). In doing so, the scope (that is, the total number or targeted public), the functioning (tools, period, budget and processes) and other intrinsic properties (including bottleneck analysis) of such activities are at the core of the mapping.

To realise the mapping, secondary and primary sources on the research object will be gathered on the spot. The fact that the researcher is temporary living in Canada (from 2007-2010) and thus familiar with and close to the place of investigation, can be considered as an advantage. To collect the secondary data, desk research at libraries of universities, research centres and government institutions in Québec City, Montréal and Ottawa and Internet consultation are needed. This research phase focuses on primary information on public diplomacy and outreach in Quebec, obtained by qualitative in-depth interviews of experts and government representatives.

### **3.3. POLICY-ORIENTED PHASE: SWOT-ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The results of the aforementioned research phases are the starting-point of a three-stage policy-oriented research phase.

Firstly, the empirical results on Quebec's public diplomacy and outreach will undergo a SWOT-analysis. The stock-listed initiatives will be analysed with respect to their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Secondly, it is essential in order to formulate policy recommendations to have a clear understanding of the public diplomacy activity of the Flemish Department of Foreign Affairs. The proposed study will identify the undertaken initiatives, situate these on the programme-mix continuum, and it will take into consideration the future plans with

respect to this subject. By preference this stage will be realised in close cooperation with the Department.

Finally, the descriptive stages will culminate in a prescriptive stage, whereby public diplomacy recommendations for the Flemish government and the Flemish Department of Foreign Affairs will be formulated. They are especially related to non-governmental actors' involvement, featuring domestic outreach.

Bearing in mind that understanding public diplomacy of federated entities is much easier than putting it into practice, and that effective use is contingent upon situational contexts and the vicissitudes of attraction and repulsion, recommendations will be tailor-made to the needs and actual limitations of a long-term and sustainable public diplomacy and outreach in Flanders

### **3.4. OUTPUT PHASE: REPORTAGE**

The results will be evaluated in:

- A brief research report (including policy recommendations) (in English) accompanied by a summary (in Dutch)
- In cooperation with the Flemish Department of Foreign Affairs an expert meeting could be organised to present the report (in Dutch)
- A Clingendael Diplomacy paper (in English)
- An article in a daily newspaper in Flanders (in Dutch) and in Quebec (in French)
- An article in the newsletter of 'Vlamingen in de wereld' or/and 'Flanders today'
- Conference papers (presented in The Hague, November 2007) and preferably also at the ISA Conference in San Francisco (March 2008), the ICA Conference in Montreal (May 2008) and the International Conference of the International Council for Canadian Studies in Ottawa (May 2008) (at own expenses)

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