An Expanded View from the Corner Office –
Further Discussions and Research on the Global Navigation of
International Corporate Communications

by

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1. Introduction

In 2006, one of the authors of this paper presented a paper entitled "A View beyond the Corner Office", where it was discussed that International Corporate Communications was not as easy as to pinpoint and label as it might seem. This paper looks to use the same skeleton as the previous discursive essay, but, with in-depth and concise further research on the subject, present new ideas and angles on a complex global issue. The authors have entered into open discussion and feedback loops with leading PR professionals across the globe, in order to present their discussion from as broad as possible a point of view.

The significance of international corporate communications[1] is growing rapidly, and the complexity associated with it is increasing almost exponentially. But systematic understanding of international corporate communications (ICC), even in the corner offices of the PR industry's top management, is not well developed.

There is no comprehensive interlinking of PR knowledge with relevant expertise derived from other disciplines. Anyone who wants to position specific content through specific institutions by means of specific people in specific media in a specific country has one overriding need: specificity and expertise on all those levels. Similarly, anyone who tries to do this on the internet cannot simply rely on English as the "lingua franca", but must likewise consider many communicative specifics of individual target countries - even if he or she perhaps ultimately decides on one "single" English-language version.

This essay will illustrate the status quo in this area through examples (see "The current state of research") and propose a heuristic analytical grid, along with its interdisciplinary application using the example of Media Relations. Finally, it will conclude with a few basic considerations about the future of cross-border corporate communications and a resolution of the scenarios depicted in the introduction.

2. The current state of research

The specialized literature about international corporate communications (ICC) dates back more than half a century. The Library of Congress registered the first edition of 'Who's Who' in public relations in 1959, and the first 'Handbook on International Public Relations' was published in 1967. But only in the last ten years has there been a small boom in scholarly research on this topic.

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'Internationale Unternehmenskommunikation im Globalizierungsprozess,' 'Public Relations ohne Grenzen,' and 'Lokal oder Global?' are just a few of the many monographs and essay collections that have been published on this topic in Germany (Andreas 2004; Huck 2006; Johanssen and Steger 2001; Achelis 1999). Two major collections by Hugh M. Culbertson and Ni Chen (1996) and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh and Dejan Verčič (2003) garnered the most international attention, as well as Donn Tillson and Emmanuel Alozie (2003).A series of titles with a regional focus, for example on Europe, also appeared (Sievert 1998 and updated 2006). 'Each country of Europe has developed a subtly different kind of media,' Cathie Burton and Alun Drake wrote (2004: 15) in a very practice-oriented manual. 'In fact, the idea of a "European media landscape" is in itself a misnomer: nothing much links the sensationalism of Albania to a British broadsheet or a long French analytical feature.' In PR theory, Betteke van Ruler and Dejan Verčič (2004) have shown in their collection how differently public relations as a science is practiced in different European countries, even while it holds the potential for a very rich, fruitful exchange.

Also in Asia, there are comparable approaches. An initial frame concept, which is of much significance outside of his part of the world, was already laid down by Krishnamurthy Sriramesh four years ago. His essay 'provides the conceptual framework consisting of three factors that public relations professionals and scholars can rely upon not only to understand the media environments but also for conducting, or studying, public relations practices in Asia and other regions' (Sriramesh 2003: 3). In the same chronological and content context, Ni Chen (2003) and Hyo-Sook Kim (2003) published notable case studies from China and Korea. This was followed one year later by Sriramesh's comprehensive anthology on this topic.

The international volumes in particular mostly contain a mixture comprising concrete country portraits and normative requirements. A truly fundamental systematic stab at the topic in alliance with internationalisation theories of other scientific disciplines is still outstanding. At least five authors, however, have achieved and provided preliminary work in their own countries that is definitely worthy of note:

- James E. Grunig (Grunig et al. 1995; Verčič, Grunig and Grunig 1996), in the further development of his excellence theory, defines specific variables as imperative prerequisites for successful international communication. Of greatest importance are the political-economic system, the culture, any language differences, the demographic development degree of a country, the degree of activism and the media system itself. These variables contribute to a vital extension of the excellence theory concerning global relations.
- Sandra Macleod (2005) emphasises that "international communications have seen their role expand" immensely since the turn of the millennium. She believes that CEOs and Top Managers need to bear international and cultural differences in mind more than ever

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before, and that it is the PR practitioner's job to have a "wider recognition" of cross-border PR activities.

- Juan-Carlos Molleda and Alexander Laskin (2005) suggest that "research in international public relations experienced a rise in the early nineties, especially in 1992." They suggest that this is intrinsically linked with the fall of the Soviet Union. It is highlighted that international collaboration between authors writing on the subject of global PR is seldom, and that the majority of researchers' attention is focussed on the United States and the United Kingdom as individual entities. Europe is considered unconquered territory for academic research of this nature.

- Simone Huck (2006) also marks the difference between international and national communication with concrete points. He names, as an example, the cultural variation and differences of the target countries. In order to solve this difficulty, she believes that an effective compromise has to be made, constituting local, country-specific PR and global PR that is organised in a cross-border manner.

- Toni Muzi Falconi (2006), who, in his posting on 'PR Conversations' discusses the comprising factors required to construct and implement a management dashboard tool to address issues on a national and global perspective, paying close attention to both differences and similarities within these areas. In his enlightenment of the concept behind his "global dashboard of local public relations infrastructure", the Italian PR expert discusses his initial ideas to conquer what he considers to be lacking on a global scale, namely "a well thought graphic synopsis, a typical managerial *dashboard* tool, constantly updated, which indicates to those of us who have responsibility to oversee, govern or manage stakeholder relationships in different areas of the world, a rationalized *map* of this global public relations infrastructure" (Falconi 2006).

What is common to all of these essays is that they primarily or even exclusively link to and develop the discourse within the field of PR. Whatever economics, law, cultural studies, political science, sociology, social psychology, linguistics and even communications theory beyond the range of PR have to say about the topic scarcely enters into the picture, if at all. The result is that terminological distinctions already in use in other fields for some time have been reinvented. More importantly, PR is robbed of the opportunity to ensure its ability to make relevant, high level connections in theory and practice within a relatively short time. Very few attempts have been made to tackle this difficult and quite specific topic area. Many approaches are simply initially superficial, and fail to address some more concrete aspects of PR functions within this context. As a nominative goal, Falconi seems to be a welcome exception. The authors believe the dashboard concept to be an ideal start and initial approach to the concept of addressing global PR, but wishes, in the course of this essay, to broaden the scope of the "dashboard", to incorporate the context of PR activities, as outlined in the automobile metaphor outlined in the introduction.

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In particular, international comparative sub-disciplines within the fields mentioned above could contribute a great deal to an understanding of ICC, and the cross-border components of some of these fields have a large lead on PR research, as well as on all communications research, particularly in German-speaking countries (Rischke 2005).

On the other side of the coin, the economic sciences would currently profit greatly from a communications or concrete PR-scientific input. As such, standard works about international and transnational management, such as the otherwise superb volume from Christopher A. Bartlett and Sumantra Ghoshal (1995), formulate six challenges for global leadership, yet none of them are linked directly to the communications aspect.

The same applies when business management and economics literature takes on a continental perspective: Dutta et al (2006) understand the information society to be specifically technical in their excellent analysis, accompanied by much helpful data, as part of their edited volume "Information Society in an Enlarged Europe", yet barely touch the communicative aspects of society. Also, in Min Chen's (1997) extensive directory on "Asian Management Systems", the keyword "Communication" does not appear. A gratifying exception to this is formed by Linda Beamer and Iris Varner (2005).

3. Suggestion for a heuristic analytical grid

To analyze ICC, a heuristic working model that is as differentiated as possible is required. One starting point is Siegfried Weischenberg's description of the social system called 'journalism,' which, with a few modifications, can be applied to the social subsystem of 'corporate communications.'[2]

In his essay, Weischenberg, a Hamburg journalism expert, distinguishes among the normative, structural, functional and role contexts of journalism that refer to the systems, institutions, statements and actors associated with the media (Weischenberg 1992: 67-70). He compares these contexts to an onion in order to illustrate mutual interdependencies and influences. The normative context can be seen as the outermost frame (or the outermost "onion layer") of the journalism system. This layer is concerned with the norms that are generally recognised within a media system. These norms include the prevailing conditions and parameters of a society, historical and legal principles, influences of communications politics, but also professional standards and ethics. Within this normative context structure, there is the realisation and implementation of the structural context; economic, political, organisational and technological imperatives on the part of the media institutions. These contexts of journalism, outlined by Weischenberg, and closely cited by the authors can be seen as a developed ordination of the "six specific applications, whose

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variables greatly impact on an organization's public relations activities" discussed by Falconi (2006). They are listed as the legal system, the political system, the economic system, the activist system, the socio-cultural system and the media system. Falconi puts forward an argument for a dashboard that integrates and considers generic principles identified as a "platform of dialogue and communication with influential publics…based on a solid body of knowledge…[and] responsible communicative behaviours." He believes that with careful consideration and profile construction of various country-specific characteristics, it is well within the realms of possibility to create and "develop a technical, managerial and strategic role via a professional function which consciously plans, administers, implements and evaluates communication programs" on a global scale. These classifications can ultimately be organised under Weischenberg's "standard context", and the authors wish therefore to broaden this perspective.

Diagram 1: Heuristic grid for analysis of (international) corporate communications
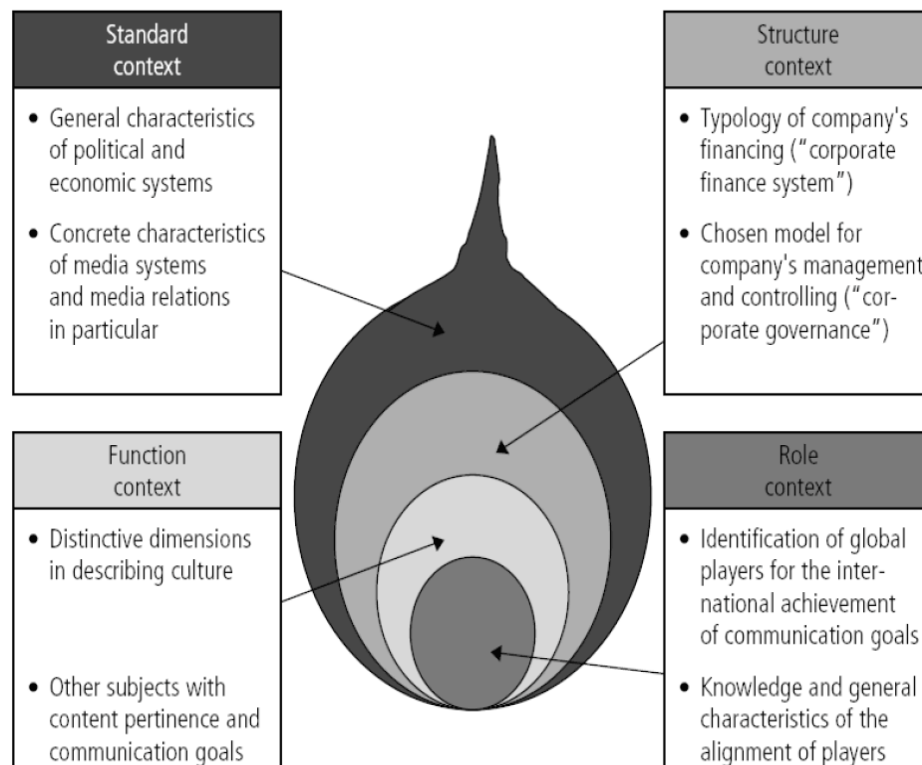
Source: Sievert 2007, following Weischenberg 1992

These four contexts are of immense importance when it comes to the navigation of Global PR activities. It is vital to consider them not just as individual entities, but more importantly as one

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larger organic body, which must be considered as one unit, within the context of public relations activities.

Then again, systems and institutions have effects and consequences on media systems, which Weischenberg assigns to the category of functional context. The nucleus of this category concerns questions about information sources and reference groups, about media coverage patterns and forms of presentation, about effects and retroaction. In short: about the way in which media concretely constitute reality. With all of these three contexts, the media actors are confronted and shaped, and these concepts are considered in the role context. These contexts have an effect on their subject-dependent, concrete occupational trade. As far as journalism is concerned, the demographic makeup and characteristics of these actors alongside their social, occupational and political attitudes is of great interest, as well as their training and life profiles.

Analogous to Weischenberg's model, the social subsystem of corporate communications can also be represented by the layers of an onion. Economic and political systems and the respective media environments in which corporate communications occur form the normative context. The authors of this paper appreciate that in no way, in the modern world, is PR simply media relations, but rather concerns many other fields of application. There is a certain narrowness to the perspective when these two terms are used synonymously. The understanding of media systems, however, continues to be vital for PR work, and therefore this definition seems to be wholly justified. In the structural context, specific foreign target institutions, usually corporations, are scrutinized with regard to their financial and leadership structures. The functional context primarily involves cultural dimensions and conflicts that can (and should) influence the contents of international corporate communications to a great extent. Last but not least, the role context looks at international target actors against the backdrop of their different features, expertise, and attitudes.

For each of these contexts within ICC, research can be carried out regarding the individual countries which are the targets of international communications. This research would look at the extent to which distinctions can be made between the contexts or the extent to which differences in other industries or corporate cultures flow from them. In this way, for each communication situation confronted in practice, a grid could be developed that would cover all target countries, institutions, media and actors. PR agencies could use the grid as they planned and evaluated efforts and strategies.

On a supranational level, that is PR activities that cross both political and cultural borders, it must be considered how best to tackle the problems that occur as activities spread on an international scale. The authors of this paper are of the opinion that there is constructive comment to be made concerning truly supranational PR structures, and that there is decreasing significance regarding the power of the nation state. As Peter Debreceny (2008) writes, when commenting on an earlier

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version of this paper written by one of the authors, "many corporations have become supranational and therefore the financial structures and cultural implications that they once had, which derived from the country in which they were founded may not be nearly as relevant." The authors of this paper toil somewhat when it comes to the concept of a truly supranational PR structure. The perception is that this is not necessarily the case, but instead that these structures are starkly culturally (at least continentally, potentially also nationally) shaped: A German firm conducts a different supranational communication in comparison with a French or American firm. There are clearly regional differences in PR structure to be seen within the nation state, but, however, as an example, regardless of the Anglo-Saxon axis, the UK and the east coast of the USA have important national differences. Therefore, knowledge about media contexts, where media relations is concerned, is not just art for art's sake, but, at least for media relations, is of fundamental importance: Only when one knows about the cultural differences amongst journalists and the job understandings, is one able to address the subject in a targeted and promising manner. Sievert (1998) underlines that there is a clear distinction to be made between "international and European synchronicity", describing them as "two different phenomena". This underlines the aforementioned concept that supranational PR and media relations activities differ from one supranational structure to another.
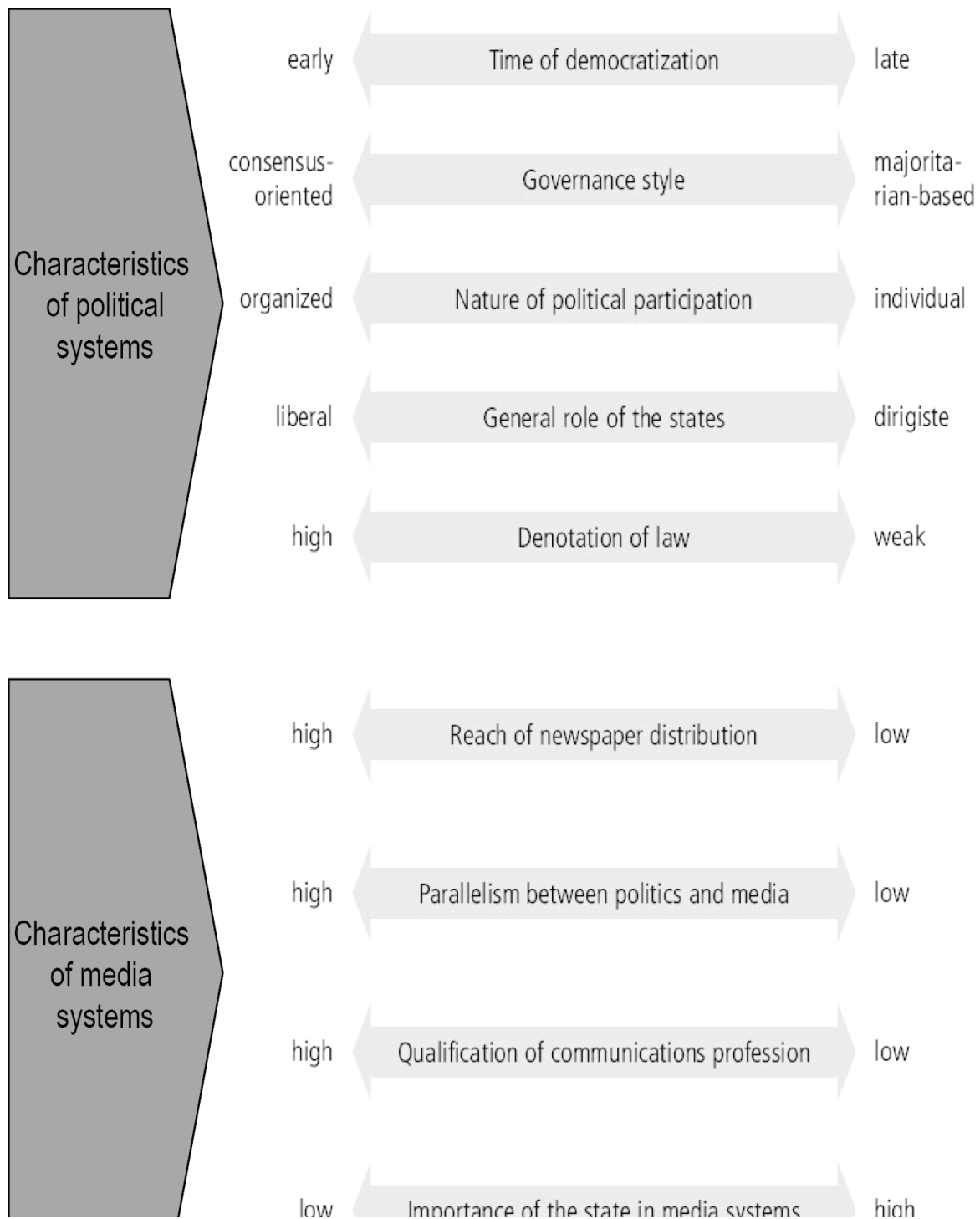
The examples in this essay are taken from media relations because universal examples were really not available. Once again, the authors wish to draw attention to the fact that there is no way watertight synonymy between media relations and public relations, but for the purposes of this analysis, they are used in this way. These examples are relevant because media relations still play a central, if no longer determinative, role in corporate communications. The additional emphasis on non-specific PR content serves to demonstrate the full potential of a more interdisciplinary approach. Individual models from other disciplines are randomly assigned to a context for the purpose of illustration. To the extent possible, individual aspects of the model are described as pairs of opposites in order to develop a kind of rough ICC compass for a specific ICC project at the end of this essay.

4. Interdisciplinary application of the heuristic analytical grid

4.1 Normative context in political science and general communications theory

In considering the normative context of ICC, helpful stimuli can be found in the fields of political science and general communications theory (Hepp, Krotz and Winter 2005). In recent years, two models have been developed in these disciplines that integrate a political and economic perspective in relation to a description of various types of media systems. Their authors are Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, as well as Roger Blum.

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Diagram 2: Standard context – Characteristics of political and media systems

	early	Time of democratization	late
	consensus-oriented	Governance style	majoritarian-based
Characteristics of political systems	organized	Nature of political participation	individual
	liberal	General role of the states	dirigiste
	high	Denotation of law	weak

	high	Reach of newspaper distribution	low
	high	Parallelism between politics and media	low
Characteristics of media systems	high	Qualification of communications profession	low
	low	Importance of the state in media systems	high

Source: Sievert 2007, following Hallin and Mancini 2004

Hallin and Mancini (2004) developed a total of three media and political models that rest principally on nine indicators. These aspects, labeled 'characteristics' by the authors, can be

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illustrated in somewhat abbreviated form as pairs of opposites, whereby, for this purpose, general political perspectives and concrete media perspectives are divided. This form of comparison should also be chosen for the analysis of the other contexts, so that the possibility ultimately presents itself to develop a diagram or a compass for a concrete project concerning international communication.

Diagram 3: Standard context – Country classification in three models of media systems (according to Hallin and Mancini)

	Mediterranean or polarized-pluralist model	Northern European or democratic-corporatist model	North Atlantic or liberal model
Countries concerned (examples)	France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain	Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland	Britain, United States, Canada, Ireland
Newspaper industry	Low newspaper circulation	High newspaper circulation	Average newspaper circulation
Political parallelism	High political parallelism; commentary-oriented journalism	External pluralism, especially in national press; shift toward neutral commercial press	Neutral, commercial press; information-oriented journalism; internal pluralism (in the U.K. more external)
Profession-alization	Weaker	Strong	Strong
Role of the state in the media system	Strong state intervention (including press subsidies)	Strong state intervention, but with protection for press freedom	Market-dominated (except strong public broadcasting in U.K.

Source: Hallin and Mancini; revised by Sievert 2007

Building on these nine distinctions, the authors assigned 18 Western countries to one of three models. For countries like France, Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal, they established a polarized pluralistic model. In these more directorial political structures, newspaper print runs are low and the media are closely aligned with highly polarized politics. Journalism is marked by opinion,

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barely professionalized, and easily instrumentalized. The state intervenes significantly in the media and subsidizes the press.

Great Britain, Ireland, Canada and the United States are assigned to the liberal model. The market plays a big role, print runs are medium-high, and there has long been a commercial, relatively neutral mass press. Journalism is highly professionalized, self-regulation is institutionalized (while also weak at times), and the media distance themselves from politics and play an active investigative role.

The researchers classify the media systems in Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Austria and Switzerland as democratic and corporatist. Newspapers have high print runs, the mass press developed early on, and the party-affiliated press has been significant historically, although more recently it has been overshadowed by a neutral commercial press.

A second approach by Roger Blum (2005), a Swiss researcher, can be described only briefly here. Blum distinguishes among six models, three of which roughly correspond to Hallin and Mancini's distinctions. Particularly noteworthy are the East European shock model, classified by Hallin and Mancini, especially the "East- European shock-model", alongside two truly international models. Prinzing comments on Blum's work, with particular focus on the three new models:

"In the East-European shock-model (Russia, Turkey Iran), the state is strong and consistently intervenes in media freedom; an action that occasionally amounts to a censorship. Journalist's reports and writings are biased and written with a narrative style and they act – a few courageous colleagues aside – quite devotedly towards the political elite; professionalism is weak. In the Arab-Asian patriotic model (Egypt, Yemen), the government system is authoritarian and the political culture wholly concordant. […] In the Asian-Caribbean commando-model (China, Vietnam, Burma, Zimbabwe, Cuba), journalists function within totalitarian systems. Basically, their fundamental task is to spread the ruling ideology, and everything else falls under censorship. Mostly, the media belong to the state, or function among the services of societal organisations – even in China, where they are partly financed through the market." (Prinzing 2006: 11).

Taken together, both approaches offer an outstanding opportunity for communications professionals to adjust at a system-wide level to the target country of their communications and thus prepare three subsequent analytical steps. The systems of journalism and their political backgrounds are similar in the countries the researchers assigned to a single model of media system, so the way in which media relations can (and must) operate as a part of corporate communications can be assumed. Analogously, journalism and PR in these countries differ substantially from journalism and PR in countries assigned to a different model of media systems. And this applies, although some of these countries have been aware of the political context of the

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European Union for the longest possible time: The communications cultures typical to a particular country remain apparent and a PR specialist must take these phenomena into account.

4.2 The structural context using the example of law and finances

Moving on from the general normative context of target countries, this subchapter will focus on the concrete structural context of the target institutions. When the issue is better communicative understanding of a specific foreign corporation, economics and business administration in particular are interdisciplinary sources of insight. An understanding of the legal system can contribute interesting perspectives as well, particularly where it goes beyond generalities about legal standards in the target country and looks into their implementation in corporate reality.

If the goal is to understand a specific corporation and its communicative behaviour, that will not be possible without at least basic knowledge of financial structures and the cultural implications associated with them. Within corporate finance, Erik Berglöf (1997) has developed an interesting approach that describes models of venture capital finance. In contrast to classical financial literature, he distinguishes not only between equity and debt capital and direct and indirect financing, but also between arm's-length finance and control-oriented finance.

He describes the three-dimensional matrix fields emerging from between these axes in detail so as to be able, in the ultimate absence of sufficient distinctions, to declare the differentiation he initially suggested decisive. Namely, that there is a marked contrast between those companies which tend to be managed "at arm's length" by their portfolio-orientated owners and whose ownership structures are more diverse, and those companies in which the majority of these invest and which are very important in day-to-day business. Using the examples of the United States and Japan, he also indicates clearly that, while all forms occur in most countries, there are nonetheless traditional financial systems and associated corporate forms typical of each country.
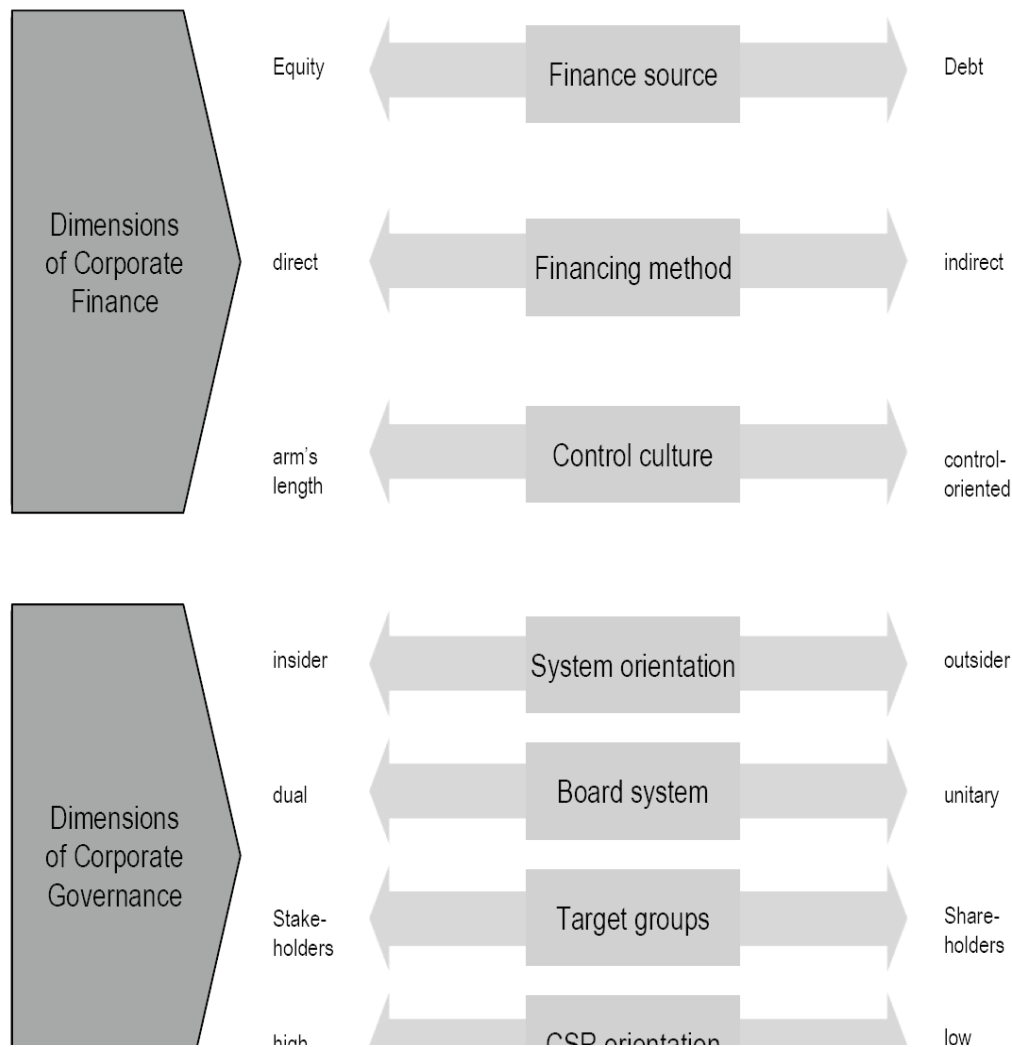
Comparative corporate governance research within the study of law makes similar country-specific distinctions. Cynthia A. Williams and John M. Conley (2005: 494, with additional references there) begin their analysis with the classic distinction between the Anglo-American outsider and the Continental European insider systems. Williams and Conley cite the different ways in which they go about achieving the corporate goal as the main difference between the two: whereas the former model focuses on the "Shareholder Value", the latter also includes many other "Stakeholders".

Alongside these two types, in her almost encyclopaedic work on Corporate Governance in 13 important economic centres, Christine A. Mallin (2006) distinguishes two other groups: a Central

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and East European one marked by the privatization of the 1990s, and a much less uniform Southeast Asian system marked by a great deal of state influence. Despite this variety, however, there are nonetheless 'certain core features which emerge, such as the importance of transparency, disclosure, accountability of directors and protection of minority shareholders' rights.' (Mallin 2006: xiv). This development is also seen by Istemi Demirag (2005), who, however, states Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a further global trend, and has therefore compiled a set of numerous rather atypical country examples from various corners of the globe. Williams and Conley in no way refer to an "emerging third way" when they write:

"The United States, despite some small changes at the legal margins, continues to adhere to a legal regime focused almost entirely on short-term shareholder wealth maximization. Until very recently the UK has followed a similar path […]. Recently, however, a distinctly British approach has emerged […]. The UK's goal appears to be to maintain its corporations' financial accountability to a constituency of dispersed, independent shareholders while simultaneously using market forces to push companies in the direction of greater social responsibility, and a longer-term evaluation of corporate value. Perhaps the major question […] is whether the United States will follow Britain's lead. […] Only time will tell" (Williams and Conley 2005: 550).

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Diagram 4: Structure concept – Variables of corporate finance and corporate governance

Dimensions of Corporate Finance		
Equity	Finance source	Debt
direct	Financing method	indirect
arm's length	Control culture	control-oriented

Dimensions of Corporate Governance		
insider	System orientation	outsider
dual	Board system	unitary
Stake-holders	Target groups	Share-holders
high	CSR orientation	low

Source: Sievert 2007a, closely following Berglöf, as well as following Williams and Conley 2005; more distantly Mallin 2006

In the case of the structural context, both of these systems offer corporate communications the possibility of preparing PR activities in an international context for a specific target institution. The existence of country-specific dominant types facilitates this work, although it is not a substitute for considering the individual corporation and its classification.

Moreover, this section has not considered the relationship of communication and leadership in corporate governance (Sievert and Westermann 2005), although there is little internationally comparative material on this issue (an initial approach is made by Sievert, Westermann and Houben 2007).

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4.3 The functional context using the example of cultural and management studies

The target country in general and the target institution in a more narrow sense are not the only factors in the design and implementation of international corporate communications, however. Target content has to be carefully considered as well— whether it can be directly conveyed in a certain cultural context or whether perhaps it needs to be transmitted through several interim steps. This factor plays a particular role in larger, consolidated corporations in which the corporate culture is not necessarily the same throughout affiliated national companies because they are influenced by national cultures in each case.

Geert Hofstede, a Dutch communications expert, was the first to show this empirically. Between 1967 and 1978, the culture scientist evaluated almost 120,000 questionnaires, which had been completed in 50 different countries by employees occupying all manner of positions in a major American corporation. His aim was to find a language in which it would be possible to analyse culture scientifically, free from misunderstandings. He identified four different dimensions to describe cultures (Hofstede 1980), to which he later added a fifth (Hofstede 2001). "The four-dimensional model of national culture differences certainly does not represent the ultimate truth about the subject", wrote Hofstede et al. (1990: 228).

Despite some shortcomings, his findings provide helpful cultural insight and awareness, which can be taken into account when producing PR content (the data pertaining to individual countries can be found at www.geert-hofstede.com/geert_hofstede_resources.shtml).

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Diagram 5: Function context – Dimensions in describing culture

Source: Sievert 2007, following Hofstede 1980 and 2001, as well as Hampden-Turner and Tompenaars 2000

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Diagram 6: Country classification in the seven Hofstede models of cultural systems

Name	Power distance	Avoidance of insecurity	Individualism vs. collectivity	Masculinity vs. femininity	Countries
Developed Latin countries	high	high	high	intermediate	Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, France, Spain
Less-developed Latin countries	high	high	low	intermediate	Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, Venezuela
Developed Asian countries	intermediate	high	intermediate	high	Japan
Less-developed Asian countries	high	low	low	intermediate	Hong Kong, India, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand
Middle East	high	high	low	intermediate	Greece, Iran, Turkey
Germanic	low	high	low	intermediate	Austria, Germany, Israel, Italy, South Africa, Switzerland
Anglo-Saxon	low	low to intermediate	high	high	Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, New Zealand, USA
Nordic	low	low to intermediate	intermediate	low	Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden

Source: Hofstede 1980, following Henry 2001, revised by Sievert 2007

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Within classical management studies, Charles Hampden-Turner (Cambridge) and Fons Trompenaars (Amsterdam) have established an alternative distinction centered around six basic conflicts with regard to communicative target contents in management. This approach is noteworthy in that in addition to pointing out the conflicts, it provides possible solutions based on case studies. Hence the introduction to their book reads:

"This book describes our conventional order of things, and then compares this with unconventional reversals of that order, used by some (not all) foreign cultures. In doing this we discover what we see so clearly, some foreigners miss. What they see so clearly, most of us miss. The ideal we seek […] is to perceive and think in both directions. This is another of ageing that we must learn to think in circles, or cybernetically" (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 2000: 3).

Approaches based on conflict analysis are often found in the most recent application-orientated management literature (a typical example being Herbes 2006). Leaving such approaches aside, the differences in content presented in this essay should hopefully enable many a future cross-border information campaign to be devised in a much more sophisticated manner. This also applies to types of representation and characteristics patterns of specific PR activities not discussed in further detail here to the relationship between news and reputation (Meijer and Kleinnijenhuis 2006), and to inputs from the field of linguistics (Vollstedt 2002), which all also fall into this context.

4.4 Role context using the example of human resources science and journalism research

Last but not least, the role context of the actors involved and especially their target actors must be considered. Since comparative international data on communications specialists is not available (for studies of individual countries, see Bentele, Großkurth and Seidenglanz 2005 and the essay by Sievert, Thomann and Westermann in the same anthology, as well as van Ruler 2000), the discussion must be limited to PR professionals working in Germany. However, comparative data from journalism research is good, so this professional group will be the subject of cross-border comparison, with the focus on media relations as previously mentioned. This should not, however, belie the differences in task profile and qualification of the two groups (Hoffjann 2001, Rinck 2001; as well as Sievert 2007a).

There are already two summaries concerning communications actors in Germany (Sievert and Thomann 2005 and Lüdeke and Sievert 2006), so only the most important findings will be mentioned here. In a comprehensive personnel study of 255 PR professionals conducted in the summer of 2004 (Langen and Sievert 2006 on methodology and other results), close to a quarter

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of the respondents said they were responsible for worldwide communications at their corporations. When these global communicators in Germany are analyzed, the statistical average is a 50-year old man with a liberal arts and social sciences education who works in a telecommunications or chemicals industry.
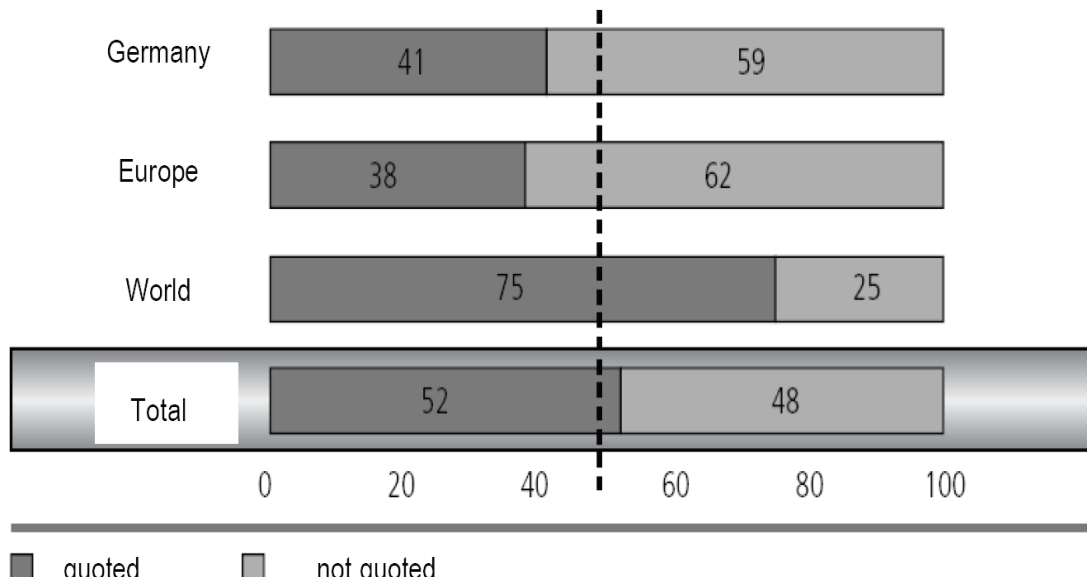
Diagram 7: Those asked according to regional jurisdiction and age groups
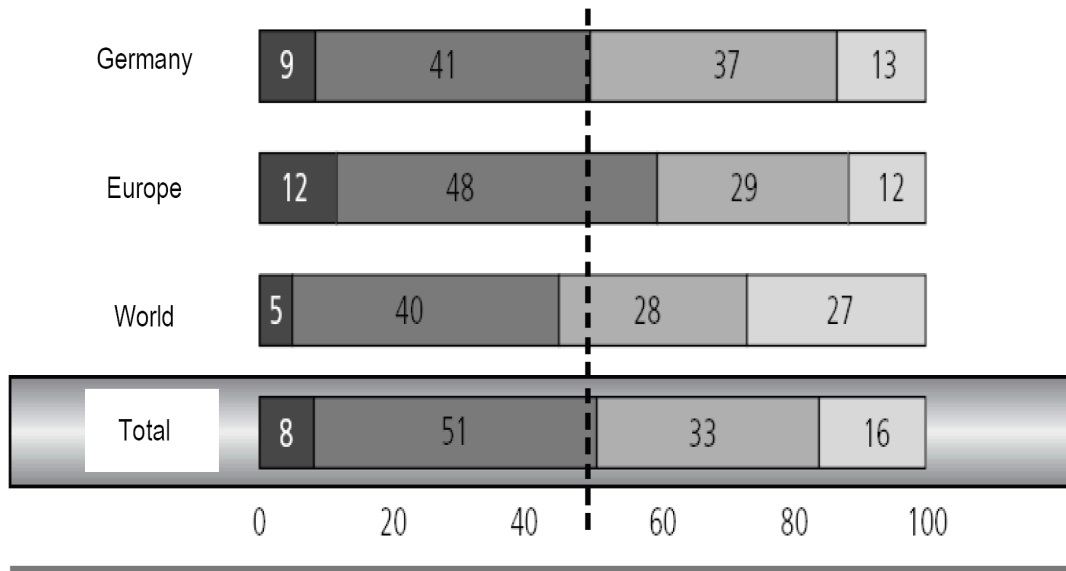
All data in percent of respondents (with rounding differences)
Source: ¡communicate!-survey 2004/05

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Diagram 8: Share of quoted firms according to internationality

	quoted	not quoted
Germany	41	59
Europe	38	62
World	75	25
Total	52	48

◼ quoted   ◻ not quoted

All data in percent of respondents
Source: ¡communicate!-survey 2004/05

But at the level of actors, who is the media relations counterpart to this average global PR professional? Until a few years ago, the state of research on international comparative journalism polls was even sparser (Weischenberg and Sievert 1998). "The Global Journalist", a pioneering collection of essays by David H. Weaver (1998a) summarized studies from 21 countries and thus made possible a comparative consideration of journalism features and attitudes formulated according to dichotomies.

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Diagram 9: "Typical" communication for Germany, Europe and the World

Germany	Europe	Worldwide
Young men under 40	Middle-aged men between 30 and 50	Older men over 40
Employed at listed companies or agencies with up to 200 employees	Employed at non-listed service providers (often agencies)	Employed at listed large-scale enterprises (mostly industrial concerns)
Humanities/arts graduate	Often humanities/arts graduates, but also economists or those who have completed a traineeship	Often humanities/arts graduates, but also career changers who previously worked in journalism
Would like to study Marketing or Concept Training if given the chance of further education	Would like to study Controlling, Management or Texts if given the chance of further education	Would like to study Business Studies and Controlling if given the chance of further education

Source: ¡communicate!-survey 2004/05

In the present case and building on Weaver's work, one can investigate the extent to which features and characteristics of individual target actors in ICC are typical for certain target countries. Among other findings, the results regarding journalists' understanding of their role are particularly interesting. Although more up-to-date findings are now available for some of the countries, the fundamental findings are still valid. 'Summarising the results, Weaver writes:

"The findings […] suggest that the typical journalist is still primarily a young college-educated man who studied something other than journalism in college and who came from the established and dominant cultural groups in his country. In some countries, such as Finland and New Zealand, women are almost as well represented as men in journalism […]. The single professional role that most journalists agree on is the importance of getting information to the public quickly […]. Beyond these roles, there is much disagreement over how important it is to provide entertainment, to report accurately and objectively, to provide analysis of complex issues and problems, and to be a watchdog of government" (Weaver 1998b: 478f.).
The great differences in understanding of the role of journalists underscores the importance of intercultural expertise gained through interdisciplinary studies in public relations. The wrong tone in a press release or, even worse, a thoughtless remark that would be completely harmless in Germany but that is insulting to a 'foreign' journalist can endanger an entire communications process.

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Diagram 10: Role context – Features and attitudes of journalists as a target group of media relations

Source: Own representation, closely following Weaver 1998

Diagram 11: Role context – Country allocation concerning the features and attitudes and journalists

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All data in percent of respondents
Source: Weaver 1998, reworking Sievert 2007a, arrows show extreme vales in respective column

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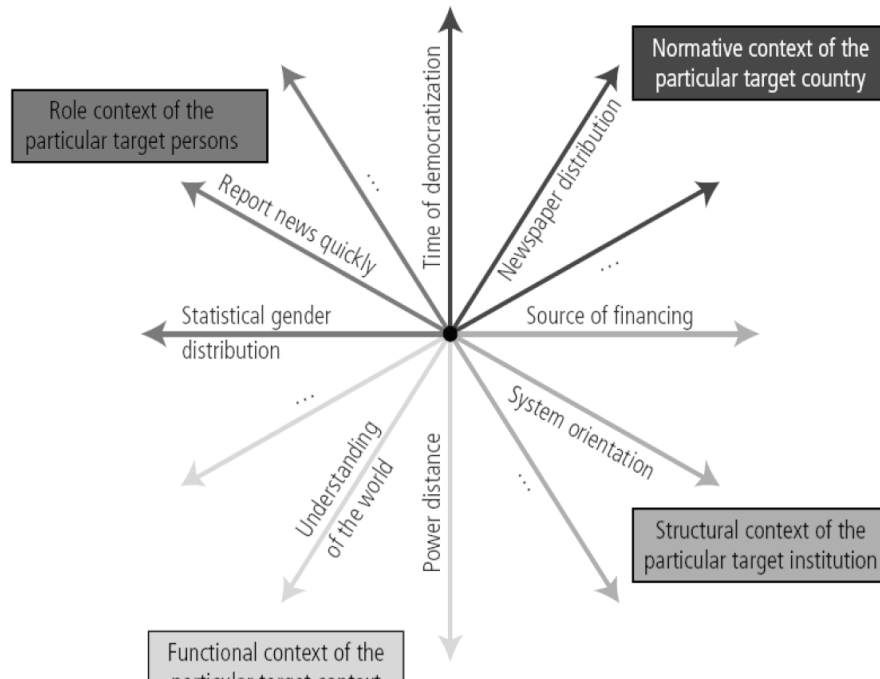Dr. Holger Sievert and Stefan Porter
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5. Summary and perspective

The discussion above illuminates the complexity of the context within which international corporate communications occur. It illustrates how important is it for a globally-engaged corporate communicator to be knowledgeable about the levels of target countries, target institutions, target contents and target actors (or why he or she should ensure that employees or service providers have the necessary knowledge). With the right information at hand, PR professionals are in a position to create a kind of ICC compass with regard to dichotomies in all four contexts presented.

How many and which particular compass axes should be selected for an individual strategic communications goal depends upon the situation. In any case, however, by combining the points on the individual axes, a kind of rough map emerges. When the cultural expressions of the individual contexts for all axes are compared to the map, the biggest cultural differences between the systems in which a communications project originates and those of the target system become apparent. This background knowledge seems quite useful for professionals directing cross-national and cross-cultural corporate communications. Seen in this light, this essay can also be understood as what Günter Benteles calls "a contribution to an as yet underdeveloped subdiscipline of public relations research: international comparative studies in public relations or communication management" (Bentele 2004: 492).
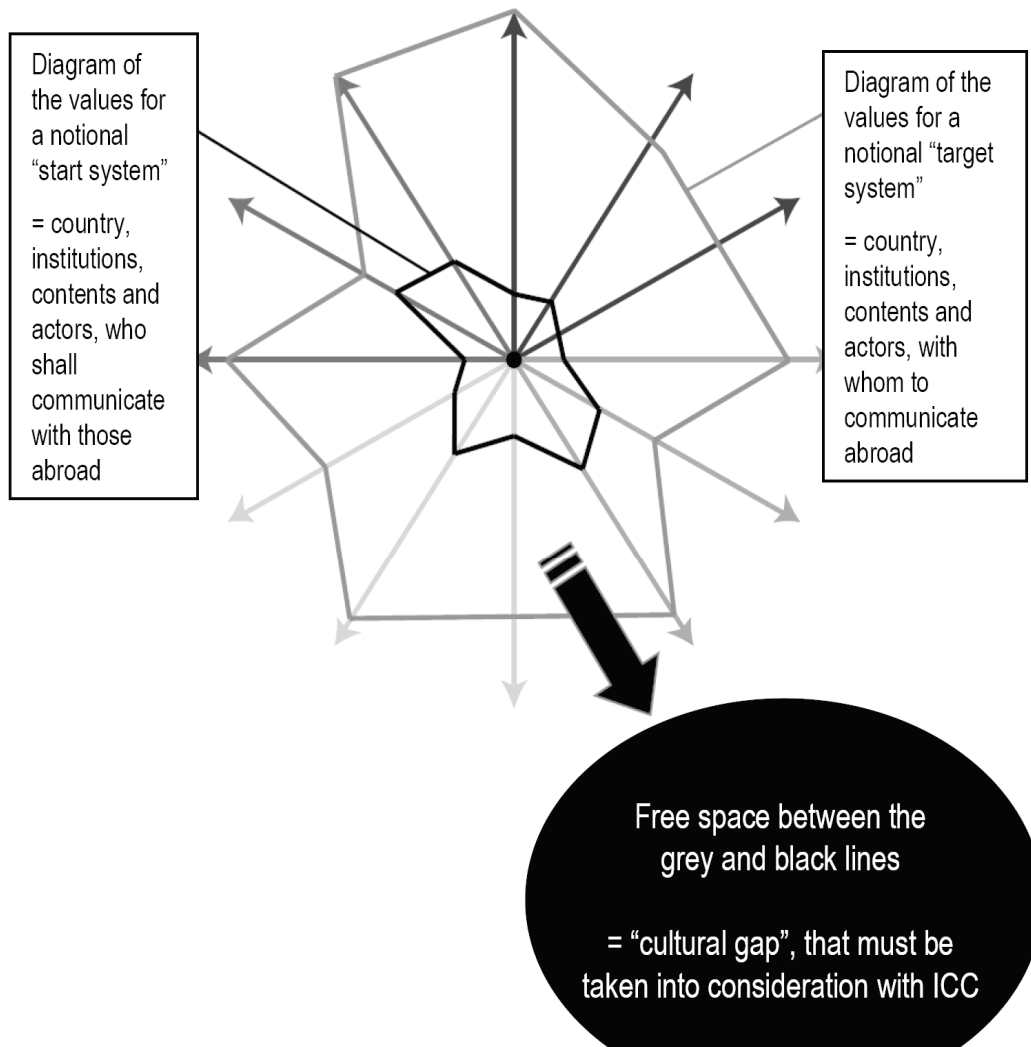
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Diagram 12: "ICC Compass" for planning and implementing ICC

Source: Own representation, 2007

This essay intends to make evident the potential usefulness of interdisciplinary approaches in international comparative PR research—without forgetting the core expertise, which for reasons of space could only be mentioned in passing here. It goes without saying that this core expertise needs to be part of PR education (cf. Sievert 2005; Sievert and Lüdeke 2005).

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Diagram 13: "Cultural gap" within the "ICC Compass" framework

Diagram of the values for a notional "start system"

= country, institutions, contents and actors, who shall communicate with those abroad

Diagram of the values for a notional "target system"

= country, institutions, contents and actors, with whom to communicate abroad

Free space between the grey and black lines

= "cultural gap", that must be taken into consideration with ICC

Source: Own representation

Perhaps the most important conclusion to draw from these various analyses, thoughts and discussions is the context in which PR activities must be placed. International Corporate Communications must be carefully planned and considered with the utmost attention given to cultural details, as well as the classic tools of PR. The wheel need not be reinvented, but its path must be laid in advance of its journey.

End notes:

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1 The terms corporate communications (CC) and public relations (PR) are used synonymously here. The distinctions between them suggested by some authors do not seem to serve a purpose in this context. When public relations refer to the narrower field of media relations, the latter term is used explicitly.

2 In this essay, the authors chose a working model that, in the final analysis, starts from system-theoretical concepts from the German-speaking world (cf. instructively Sievert 1999). Corporate communications is understood here to refer to a territorially differentiated subsystem of the economic system. The present essay does not provide the necessary space or the appropriate context to discuss related questions. An essay on that issue is in the planning stages.

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