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**Deliberative Diplomacy:
Performing Democracy Beyond Borders**

**An Analysis of the American Embassy's
Going Green Project**

By

Svea Burmester



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*To all the wonderful people
engaging in deliberation
and helping others to do so.*

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“[T]he framework of our Constitution can [...] organize the way by which we argue about our future. All of its elaborate machinery – its separation of powers and checks and balances and federalist principles and Bill of Rights – are designed to force us into a conversation, a *deliberative* democracy”

– Barack Obama in *The Audacity of Hope*¹

A. Deliberative Diplomacy – Ambitious and Precious

Most Germans, even before the era of “Trump” would have perceived the idea of green and democratic education for German students initiated by the Embassy of the United States of America in Berlin as an oxymoron. On an academic level, almost the same holds true for the occurrence of ‘democracy beyond borders’, which may strike some as a utopian theory, or at the most, might be associated with complex international institutions where national governments negotiate on behalf of their citizens. Yet, in the case of this work, the hypothesis states that it is the citizens themselves who perform democracy beyond borders in accordance with the Habermasian standards of deliberation and in this specific case, they are encouraged to do so by a project of the Embassy of the United States of America in Berlin. While this research project is based on theories of International Relations (IR) and democratic theory alike, the focus of this book is of empirical nature, seeking to verify its hypothesis of *deliberative diplomacy* by means of a comprehensive set of data collected as part of a case study designed to evaluate the educational *Going Green* project of the American Embassy in Berlin.

In other words, this book will analyze a specific initiative of American public diplomacy in Germany, which is entitled *Going Green* and designed for high schools to address environmentalism. With this program, the hypothesis contends, the Embassy carries out a new phenomenon of public diplomacy that encourages transatlantic civil society² to perform democratic

¹ Cited from *Cavalier* (2011b: 266), emphasis added.

² Even though the investigated schools are public schools, the discourse that the *Going Green* project encourages among students is perceived as civilian because the student body represents society as private citizens, in accordance with the Habermasian understanding of the democratic periphery (1992: 361 ff.).

deliberation. This novel means of foreign policy can therefore be described as *deliberative diplomacy*.

The idea of deliberation and its criteria are based on the Habermasian definition of deliberation. While his concept of deliberative democracy has been applied most frequently to the nation-state level, the research project at hand derives from the field of IR. By integrating the two fields of democratic and IR theory, this case study shows that deliberation can play a major role in cross-border democratic forums.

Following Steiner, “in a nutshell”, the idea of deliberation suggests that: all participants can freely express their view, that arguments are well justified, which can also be done with well-chosen personal stories or humor, that the meaning of the common good is debated, that arguments of others are respected, and that the force of the better argument prevails; deliberation, however, does not necessarily have to lead to consensus. (2018: 1)

In order to prove the book’s hypothesis of *deliberative diplomacy*, an empirical approach has been chosen that will assess the deliberative quality of the *Going Green* project and thereby verify the theoretically derived idea of *deliberative diplomacy*.

The scientific means of case studies has a long tradition within the field of deliberative democracy. For example, Goodin finds that, however ambitious, valuable and “assiduous” scholars of deliberative democracy engage with reality, their possibilities remain limited mainly to “small-scale face-to-face interactions” that can only contribute to the understanding of large-scale societies to some extent (2008: 3). With this in mind, when drafting the new concept of deliberative diplomacy, it has to be taken into account that Habermas locates deliberation at the legislative level or at the pre-stage of the opinion-forming process within the public sphere. Diplomacy, however, is the “function of a government” (Rugh 2014: 3) and thus part of the executive. For this research project, the concept of deliberation is thus shifted from a macro-level of legislature to a micro-level of executive action, demonstrating how civic deliberation and opinion-forming can and should accompany the political process as a whole. This conforms with Goodin’s outlook on deliberation, who finds:

[d]istributing deliberative virtues across different stages of a deliberative process might be ‘good enough’, if not perhaps ideal, from a deliberative point of view. It is, in any case, probably the most to which we can realistically aspire. (2008: 203)

Goodin furthermore maintains that the public sphere is not formally organized, but rather chaotic and unruly, which leads him to conclude that generalizations are hardly possible, leaving scholars the only option of giving examples, thus advocating for the scientific means of case studies (ib., 260 f.). While most scholars who follow this view conduct experiments in

order to gain empirical insights, this research project has access to authentic data of the participants of the *Going Green* project.

Going Green is a teaching unit designed by and in cooperation with the U.S. Embassy in Berlin. The teaching material and instructions are provided through an online platform that allows teachers from all over Germany to participate in this project. It is designed to meet the curriculum criteria of English classes of the German *Oberstufe* (senior level) of the German high school, but can be adjusted to fit the needs of lower grades as well. It is a project of blended learning that teaches the English language in an applied way through project work focused on the challenge of environmental sustainability. While many resources provided within this teaching unit address and challenge the American status quo of environmentalism, no further emphasis on the United States is made, but the students are encouraged to look at their own, individual environments in order to foster a more sustainable lifestyle.

In order to test the deliberative quality of the project and verify its focus on the common good – i.e. prioritizing it over single, national interests – two participating classes consented to serve as research subjects. These two classes, therefore, constitute the case study of this book. Among the participating students, a variety of data has been collected in order to test the hypothesis from different angles: Besides an analysis of the teaching material provided through the *Going Green* website, which allows for an evaluation of the deliberative quality of the input, the students agreed to have their discussions recorded in class and also participated in a survey that explored their attitudes over the course of the project. Furthermore, the teachers in charge and two representatives of the U.S. Embassy were interviewed about the teaching unit. Accordingly, a comprehensive set of data has been collected and analyzed by applying a mix of qualitative-interpretative methods.

Amid the empirical focus of this book, one major emphasis is on Jürg Steiner's methods, the Discourse Quality Index (DQI) and the concept of the Deliberative Transformative Moments (DTM), that enable scholars to test the deliberative quality of a discussion. While there is a rich experience with the DQI and the DTM and albeit these instructive methodological tools are not bound to the nation-state, up until now there has been very little research exploring the deliberative potential transnationally (see Steiner 2012: 23 ff.). Besides the research team of Steiner et al. who focus on divided societies, scholars of deliberation have rarely explored how to successfully integrate ordinary citizens into bilateral or international deliberative exchange – neither in theory, nor in practice (see Price 2011: 224 f., Frisch 2007).