Public Diplomacy and the “Self” in Regional Organization: A Network Approach to Identity Formation, Image Formation, and ASEAN Community Building

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Abstract
This paper examines the construction of the “Self” in regional community building—that is, the “actorness” of a regional entity in the international system. Specifically, I address the function of official public diplomacy in regional organization. I contend that formal public diplomacy is a crucial component to the internal identity formation and external image formation processes that constitute regional “community building,” leading to the “Self.” In explicating the development of a regional institution’s actorness, public diplomacy is conceptualized through constructivist networks. I posit that these network representations reflect the continuous nature of identity and image in community building. I have two purposes in this analysis: first, to advance network interpretations of identity formation and image formation, demonstrating the various functions of public diplomacy conceptualized in regional organization; and second, to apply them to the community building of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which explicates the envisaged function of public diplomacy in the “Roadmap” to integration, and in resolving the credibility disconnects of ASEAN’s present actorness.

Keywords
Public diplomacy, image, identity, regional community building, ASEAN.

Biography
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Introduction

In the contemporary postmodern period, regional organization has been revived as a global phenomenon. The present wave of post-Cold War regional integration has experienced variations in the self-definitions of multilateral groupings; institutions have embraced different logics and orders, from collective defense in the form of regime-based regionalization to a customs union assuming a structure of rules-based regionalism. The International Relations literature has thus focused on why regional organizations are created and what purposes they serve, but has not concentrated on how such arrangements are formed. How does a regional organization define itself, and how does that process unfold?

In this paper, I examine the construction of the “Self” in regional community building—that is, the “actorness” of a regional institution in the international system. The “Self,” which I refer to as “actorness,” is the product of identity and image; actorness, therefore, comprises both elements. Regional community building, which is the process of regional organization toward a conceived actorness, encompasses identity and image formation. Conceptualizing identity building as an internal phenomenon and image building as an external experience, projecting cohesion to the international community across both frontiers requires effective public diplomacy. Accordingly, I address the following:

I contend that formal public diplomacy is a crucial component to the internal identity formation and external image formation processes that constitute
regional “community building,” leading to the “Self” of a regional institution. In explicating the development of a regional community’s international actoriness, public diplomacy is conceptualized through constructivist networks. I have two purposes in this analysis: first, to advance network interpretations of identity formation and image formation, demonstrating the various functions of public diplomacy conceptualized in regional organization; and, second, to apply them to the community building of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which explicates the envisaged function of public diplomacy in the “Roadmap” to integration, and in resolving the credibility disconnects in ASEAN’s present actoriness.

This paper proceeds as follows. The next section explains the conceptual foundation of my analysis. The third and fourth parts expound network representations of identity and image formation, respectively. The fifth section outlines ASEAN’s blueprint according to the network identity process. The sixth part reviews ASEAN’s image-building problem through the network image process. The last section provides concluding remarks.

**Conceptual foundation**

In this analysis, I present network diagrams that depict the function of public diplomacy in the identity and image formation processes of a regional institution. I maintain that constructivist network interpretations embody the continuous nature of identity and image, and that public diplomacy plays a vital role in creating a collective regional identity. To elucidate my contention and the supporting diagrams, I expound on the following operational terms and premises: actorness,
identity, and image; community building; public diplomacy; constructivism; and, networks.

The actorness of a regional institution is the collective Self of the member states. As mentioned earlier, actorness is a function of both identity and image. The identity of a regional organization is composed of the collective history, tradition, heritage, culture, and socio-political values, inter alia, of member states. Image denotes a regional institution’s internally-conceived representation (self-representation) and its reflection back to the region as the external perception of the international community.

Community building refers to regional integration, oriented either to the structure of regionalization or regionalism. In addition, this term entails the processes of identity building and image building vis-à-vis actorness. Accordingly, community building is the reification of identity and image, as it involves the convergence of member states toward shared norms that have a constitutive effect on both elements.

Official (or formal) public diplomacy, as defined by Sharp, is “the process by which direct relations are pursued with a country’s people to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented.” In sum, official public diplomacy is an instrument employed, to varying extents, for policy. As Cull maintains, sound public diplomacy is connected to policy; in this linkage, the former functions to facilitate the goals of the latter. Nye explicates this relationship further, averring that the strategic value of public diplomacy is its capacity to achieve “milieu goals,” which are objectives that produce an operating environment more conducive to “high” policy and “high” policy ends. Public diplomacy can assume various forms. As Cull describes, formal public diplomacy is comprised of
five functions: listening; advocacy; cultural diplomacy; exchange diplomacy; and, international broadcasting. I add to this the function of networking. Constructs is the ideological basis of this community building framework because it encapsulates the continuous creation of both identity and image. Akin to Anderson’s conception of “nationalism,” regional community building is an “exercise in learning, adaptation, and collective self-imagination.” Therefore, in contrast to Realism and Liberalism, constructivism neither takes identity as a given nor proposes it as exogenous to actorness. Instead, constructivism explains the endogeneity of identity in the development of the “Self” through constant interaction and socialization. This paradigm emphasizes identity as an ongoing reinterpretation of “essentialist” (i.e., fixed) and non-essentialist attributes. Accordingly, constructivism establishes the evolving nature of actorness, which is the product of the continuous identity and image formation processes.

A network approach is utilized because it depicts the decentralized, multidirectional nature of identity building and image building dynamics. Integrating these premises together, I contend that constructivist networks are instructive representations that reflect the continuous systemic construction of identity and image in community building. In these networks, public diplomacy is cardinal to the processes of identity and image formation, and thus, the creation of a regional institution’s actorness.

Identity formation

Regional community building, and thereby construction of actorness, begins with the internal dimension of identity formation. How does public diplomacy fit in the
identity building process? Concisely, the purpose of public diplomacy is to achieve milieu goals that engender the realization of the regional identity. I explain, through a linear representation, the general public diplomacy-policy linkage that characterizes the soft power instrument’s strategic value. I then diagrammatically elaborate on this linkage through a “nodal point” network interpretation of identity building.xvi

Cull underlines that effective public diplomacy is connected to policy.xvii As Nye explains, the function of public diplomacy in this connection is to secure “milieu goals,” thus creating an operating environment more conducive for achieving “higher” policy goals. This linear relationship is depicted in Figure 1.

In extending this public diplomacy-policy linkage to community building, the role of public diplomacy does not change in the institution’s process of identity formation. However, Rasmussen maintains that public diplomacy’s connection to policy goals is more intricate than the simplistic linear representation in Figure 1.xviii Referring to Figure 2, he contends that public diplomacy operates in a network of interests, which he terms “nodal points.”xix This representation is an adaptation that fuses Rasmussen’s network analysis and Nye’s goal differentiation (possession versus milieu) in the context of regional organization.xx

Figure 1: Public Diplomacy-Policy linear linkage.

Source: Author.
As depicted in the network diagram, public diplomacy is indirectly associated with the ultimate goal of regional identity. Between public diplomacy and the high policy goal of regional identity are intervening variables—the milieu goals and possession goals. Public diplomacy operates by engendering the milieu goals that allow for the higher policy interests to be secured. Following the constructivist paradigm, these milieu goals of public diplomacy are realized as a consequence of a recurring intra-regional socialization phenomenon. Indeed, through its diffusion of norms among member states, public diplomacy instrumentalizes the socialization process that constitutes regional identity building.

Referring to Figure 2, public diplomacy creates favorable routes to regional identity through various, overlapping links and by realizing shorter-term goals. Consistent with the objectives of public diplomacy, Figure 2 conveys, for instance, the compound impact that the milieu goals of mutual understanding and intercultural competence (between member states) can have on higher policy possession goals.\textsuperscript{xxi}

Without public diplomacy, normative convergence among member states (resulting from socialization) would be unlikely, rendering regional identity elusive. This nodal point network representation illustrates the potentially diffuse impact of public diplomacy in the community building process of identity formation. But identity is only one part of a regional institution’s actorness.
To develop a comprehensive actorness, identity must be complemented by an image. *How does public diplomacy fit in the image building process?* Succinctly, public diplomacy serves to project a regional identity to the international community by communicating policies and images. I explicate the role of public...
diplomacy in reifying the internally-derived identity and image through two network interpretations, which convey the relationship of public diplomacy with the elements of policy, image, and identity.

Explaining the formation of a polity’s “international role,” which corresponds to my conception of “actorness,” Luciarelli describes the interaction of three fundamental variables: political identity, foreign policy, and external image. Luciarelli’s process begins with a polity’s internally-constructed political identity. This identity is conveyed through foreign policy. The reaction of the international community to the polity’s conduct of international relations then creates a feedback effect that transmits an external image to the polity. In sum, the development of an “international role” depends on a polity’s political identity (the internally conceived role) corresponding to the international community’s image of the polity (the external perception of the polity’s role). Although Luciarelli includes the important feedback process via the external image, she excludes the effect of public diplomacy.

Divergently, I develop on Cross’ conceptualization, which accounts for public diplomacy in the interaction of the variables of identity, policies, and image. Through Figure 3a, I posit a network of relationships between these elements that conveys, in one dimension, the process of image building. (These variables are capitalized—e.g., “Image”—to indicate nodes of the network.) Referring to the external perception of the international community, Image is a function of proactive Public Diplomacy that concretizes Identity; and this exercise of Public Diplomacy occurs through a range of linkages.

The representation in Figure 3a underscores the multidirectional relationships of the four variables and their continuous processes, the centrality of
Identity, and the dimensions of state-driven and civilian-led public diplomacy (i.e., official public diplomacy vs. New public diplomacy). As conveyed in the diagram, Image, Policies, and Public Diplomacy are functions of Identity, the component that is fundamental to all processes. Accordingly, Identity is positioned as the central node of the network. The relationships within the top and left inner triangles, as well as those along the outer edges of the network, constitute official public diplomacy. By contrast, the right inner triangle is the realm of the New public diplomacy. However, civilian-led public diplomacy is outside the scope of this analysis. I, therefore, translate this macro overview of Figure 3a into a micro representation in Figure 3b to isolate the realm of official public diplomacy, which is the focus of my analysis.
Figure 3a: Network dimensions of image building – Macro overview.

Source: Author.
In the process of developing actorness, the image building process operates from the identity building process. Figure 3b, a micro overview of the image formation network, illustrates the various sequences through which public diplomacy can be conducted to impact the external image. Particularly, public diplomacy proactively projects a regional identity in two ways—by directly promoting images or accompanying policies.

In both scenarios, Identity is the basis of any formal public diplomacy strategy. I explicate, first, public diplomacy’s direct promotion of an internally-contrived image. This forms an Identity-Image-Public Diplomacy-Image-Identity system of relationships. Referring to Figure 3b, the sequence of influences in this
path unfolds as follows: Identity shapes the formation of a self-conceived Image; this internal Image is promulgated through Public Diplomacy, which initiates a feedback process; the product is an improved external Image that reinforces Identity.

In a second linkage, public diplomacy accompanies policies to engender an external image from the international community that corresponds to the self-conceived image. This forms an Identity-Policies-Public Diplomacy-Image-Identity system of relationships. Tracing this in Figure 3b, the sequence is as follows: Identity shapes Policies, which are enhanced by Public Diplomacy; this triggers a feedback process that improves the external Image and strengthens the Identity.

Figures 3a and 3b demonstrate the range of multivariate relationships of Public Diplomacy with Image, Identity, and Policy in the network image formation process. Nonetheless, proactive public diplomacy, which effectively reifies identity and enhances the external image, solely operates through two linkages. Hitherto, I have expounded the theoretical function of public diplomacy in identity and image formation processes utilizing constructivist network interpretations. In a substantive application, I employ these community building networks to explain the nature of public diplomacy in ASEAN regionalism.

**ASEAN community building**

The identity and image formation processes of regional community building that I have articulated can be applied to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its construction of its actorness. Utilizing the earlier representations of network identity formation—based on nodal points—I illustrate the institution’s “Roadmap” to the collective identity of an “ASEAN Community” through one of
the blueprint’s three pillars: the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC). xxv

Subsequently, I integrate the network approach of image formation to explicate the credibility disconnects of ASEAN’s actorness.

A means of regional security and development in Southeast Asia since 1967, ASEAN has recently reinvigorated its spirit of integration. xxvi The origin of the institution is in the Cold War security cooperation between five nations—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. xxvii Following 1984, ASEAN has expanded to 10 nations, with the inclusion of Brunei Darussalam, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Although the institution has continued its security dimension despite the end of the Cold War, its economic cooperation has become the priority.

In the 21st century, the institution seeks to adapt itself; it has the objective of creating a comprehensive “ASEAN Community” by 2015. xxviii Borrowing from the postmodern integration exemplar of the European Union, ASEAN has developed its own blueprint for community building, referred to as the “Roadmap,” that is comprised of three pillars: the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC); the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC); and, the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC). xxix Applying the constructivist network interpretations to the institution’s community building, I focus on the role of public diplomacy in the third dimension—the ASEAN Political-Security Community. I first describe the function of public diplomacy in ASEAN’s identity building process as envisaged in the institution’s Roadmap. I then discuss the credibility challenge public diplomacy must resolve in the image building process to establish the institution’s conceived actorness.
The ASEAN Community identity

One pillar of the collective ASEAN identity, which I refer to as “the ASEAN Community,” is the Political-Security dimension, or APSC. *How does public diplomacy fit in ASEAN’s formation of its identity?* The institution’s Roadmap outlines the identity building agenda. Utilizing the linear and nodal point representations, I map the envisioned impact of public diplomacy in this process.

According to the Roadmap, ASEAN public diplomacy assumes several forms. Through these modes, public diplomacy achieves milieu goals that support the high policy possession goal—the collective “ASEAN Community” identity. The functions of public diplomacy prevalent in the strategy toward the regional identity are *advocacy, broadcasting, exchange diplomacy, and networking.*

Applying the conception of the public diplomacy-policy linkage established earlier, Figure 4 depicts the basic linear relationship of ASEAN public diplomacy to the established ASEAN Community identity. However, the public diplomacy-policy connection envisioned in the Roadmap fabricates an elaborate system of interests.

**Figure 4: Public Diplomacy-Policy linear linkage of ASEAN.**

![Diagram](image)

*Source: Author.*
Adapting the earlier representation of network nodal points, Figure 5 demonstrates the envisaged milieu goals of public diplomacy and their linkage to the realization of the ASEAN regional identity. As the diagram illustrates, the high policy objective of “ASEAN Community” identity is facilitated by two sets of secondary possession goals: on one level, the confluence of all three pillars; and, on a second level, the sub-pillar objectives. These high possession goals are supported by the range of milieu goals, which themselves are achieved by public diplomacy. In the following, I systematically discuss ASEAN’s envisaged role of public diplomacy in this network interpretation by approaching the four APSC secondary possession goals and their supporting milieu goals, which are conveyed in Figure 5.

Referring to this diagram of the network identity formation process, a first sub-possession objective is political development. In pursuit of this, public diplomacy is oriented to attain the milieu goals of the promotion of democratic principles, protection of human rights, peace and stability, appreciation of national diversity (in political systems, culture, and history), good governance, and mutual understanding and assistance among member states. Public diplomacy is conducted primarily through advocacy, broadcasting, exchange diplomacy, and networking.
ASEAN’s efforts, for instance, consist of seminars and workshops for experience-sharing on pluralism and tolerance, as well as media exchange programs. Furthermore, the public diplomacy strategy involves facilitating dialogue between public and private sectors, promoting public awareness, and cross-national education connections and curriculum development.

A second sub-possession goal is conflict resolution. To engender this high objective, the milieu goals of public diplomacy are the pacific settlement of disputes and peace and stability. Incorporating the functions of advocacy and networking.
public diplomacy, for example, aims to establish regular multi-stakeholder workshops on “peace, conflict management and conflict resolution,” and to link ASEAN peace centers to enable “experience-sharing.”

Conflict prevention is a third secondary possession objective. To facilitate this outcome, public diplomacy must attain the milieu goals of confidence-building measures, as well as transparency and understanding of defense policies and security perceptions. The public diplomacy strategy integrates exchange diplomacy and broadcasting functions. ASEAN initiatives include bilateral exchanges between military institutions at all levels (e.g., military academies and colleges) and “voluntary briefings on political and security developments in the [Southeast Asian] region.”

The last sub-possession goal is peacebuilding. In this pursuit, the milieu objectives of public diplomacy are humanitarian assistance, capacity building in post-conflict areas, and cooperation in reconciliation. Advocacy, exchange diplomacy, and networking are the main forms of public diplomacy. Campaigns, for instance, are centered on promoting cooperation for the resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as “civil-military dialogue and coordination.” Concurrently, other initiatives include inter-communal exchange activities and public participation—of academia, media, and non-governmental organizations, inter alia—in reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts.

The ASEAN Roadmap outlines the envisaged function of public diplomacy in the institution’s APSC pillar and longer-term formation of the collective ASEAN Community identity. As the network representation of the Roadmap depicts in Figure 5, public diplomacy develops the foundation for the regional identity. Public diplomacy’s normative diffusion engenders region-wide convergence, which
achieves milieu goals and establishes positive conditions for the high policy objectives. However, the collective identity must be concretized in the image building process to complete the construction of ASEAN actorness. Public diplomacy has a critical role in this phase as well.

The ASEAN Community image

ASEAN’s actorness is based not only on its internally-contrived identity, but also on its externally-derived image (i.e., the perception of the international community). How does public diplomacy fit in ASEAN’s projection of its conceived image? Unfortunately, the international community’s perception of ASEAN does not relate closely to the regional institution’s own conception of itself in the world system. Therefore, the priority for public diplomacy in ASEAN image building ought to be the “credibility” issue.

The development of ASEAN’s actorness is undermined, paradoxically, by the “ASEAN way” culture embedded in the institution’s evolving Community identity. The culture of the “ASEAN way” has produced credibility disconnects in two related areas, which are depicted in Figure 6: first, between the ASEAN Community identity and its external image (the external image perceived by the international community); and second, between the ASEAN Community identity and the implementation of policies concerning the APSC.
The “ASEAN way” is the approach to relations among member states. The culture’s informal, non-institutional, ad-hoc nature of governance is problematic. A corollary of this method is that the “ASEAN way” places primacy on process rather than results, which has impacted the projection of a cohesive regional institution.

The ASEAN Community identity involves a conflict between the “ASEAN way” and the institution’s liberal values. Consequently, this friction in the collective identity has generated a lack of credibility on two frontiers. First, there is a disconnect between the ASEAN Community identity and the external image held by the international community. Following from its identity, predominantly composed of liberal values, ASEAN conceives of itself as a “democratic, tolerant,
participatory, and transparent Community,” which is concurrently “cohesive, peaceful, [and] stable.” Nonetheless, the international community does not maintain this precise image of ASEAN. This discrepancy, between the external image of the international community and the internal image conceived by ASEAN itself, is a product of intra-regional politics in the APSC sphere.

The credibility gap between identity and image is, in part, a consequence of the second disconnect between the ASEAN Community identity and the implementation of policies concerning APSC issues. Despite the embrace of “unity in diversity,” variation in national socio-political structures is a source of this disconnect. There is no region-wide consistency on national political organization, which renders tenuous the image of community convergence on the aspects of democracy, tolerance, and participation. Furthermore, disputes between member states and intrastate conflict undermine the intended impressions of peacefulness and stability; APSC issues that continue to pose challenges to internationally-perceived regional solidarity include Burma’s political situation and the border dilemma between Cambodia and Thailand. Collectively, this evidence underlines the absence of ASEAN cohesion, and thus the discrepancy in the institution’s external image and identity.

Public diplomacy is often used reactively by governments characterized as inexperienced in the soft power realm. While damage control is a task for the soft power instrument, the function of public diplomacy in ASEAN image building must be proactive. Accordingly, in changing the external image of ASEAN, the institution’s public diplomacy in the APSC sphere should reify the internally-conceived image. (Variables that are capitalized—e.g., “Image”—indicate nodes of the network.) Mapping this in Figure 6, the sequence would begin with Identity,
which is the basis for an internally-constructed Image; this Image is projected through Public Diplomacy, which feeds back an improved external Image that correlates more closely with the Identity (Identity-Image-Public Diplomacy-Image-Identity connection). Concurrently, ASEAN public diplomacy in APSC issues must be bounded to APSC policies. Tracing this in Figure 6, the sequence would flow as follows: Identity instructs Policies, the implementation of which is accompanied by Public Diplomacy; this Public Diplomacy then results in an external Image that is more closely related to Identity (Identity-Policies-Public Diplomacy-Image-Identity linkage).

As the network representation in Figure 6 depicts, identity building is inherently connected to image building. Public diplomacy’s function is to ensure consistency across both processes. This analysis of ASEAN has expounded the credibility disconnects that result when public diplomacy is not wielded properly. Instead, public diplomacy must be utilized proactively to reify the ASEAN Community identity and shape the external image. Indeed, both the network identity and image formation processes illustrate the significant functions of public diplomacy in constructing ASEAN’s actorness in the international system.

**Conclusion**

This paper has demonstrated the function of public diplomacy, theoretically and substantively, in regional community building and the construction of actorness. I have advanced network interpretations of identity and image formation to explain public diplomacy’s constructivist role. I contend that official public diplomacy is cardinal to the regional community building processes of internal identity formation and external image formation, which have the constitutive effect of producing an
evolving conception of actorness—that is, the “Self” in the international system. In an application of this constructivist network approach to ASEAN community building, I have mapped the milieu goals linking public diplomacy to the higher policy objectives of the Political-Security pillar (APSC), ultimately leading to the ASEAN Community identity. Concurrently, I present the credibility disconnects that public diplomacy must correct to project ASEAN’s internally-conceived image.

In addition to this insight, my analysis has implications for other conceptual issues. This examination prompts discussion on the idea of “actorness”; the relationship between the variables of Policy, Image, and Identity; the impact of informal public diplomacy (i.e., New public diplomacy) on regional community building; and, the explanatory utility of constructivism to explain regional organization. These dimensions provide avenues for future research. Nevertheless, the constructivist network interpretations advanced in this paper demonstrate the function of public diplomacy in the complex processes of regional community building and, ultimately, the formation of the “Self.”
“Institution” refers to both informal (forums) and formal (organizations) structures.


Networking is a mode I include in the New public diplomacy, as the traditional functions of exchange diplomacy and advocacy do not entirely encompass the objective of networking. This conception is based on Leonard’s review of UK public diplomacy, as well as Hocking and Melissen’s discussion of the “New public diplomacy”. See B. Hocking, Rethinking the ‘New’ Public Diplomacy, in J. Melissen (Ed.), The New Public Diplomacy (pp. 28-43) (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Melissen, Introduction to The New Public Diplomacy, J. Melissen (Ed.) (pp. 106-23) (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

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Demossier, The political structuring of cultural identities in Europe; Kockel, Heritage Versus Tradition: Cultural Resources for a New Europe?


Rasmussen (2010) utilizes a “nodal point” analysis of public diplomacy as it relates to discourse; I adapt this to explain public diplomacy as it relates to policy.


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American Propaganda and Public diplomacy, 1945-1989 (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008a). The milieu goals in Figure 2 are only examples of typical public diplomacy objectives.


Cross, seminar, 1 February 2011.

My contention is based on the following: while Identity influences Image, Policies, and PD, these variables do not necessarily shape Identity. The logic is that negative Images, Policies, and Public Diplomacy can cause the formation and implementation of those processes to be reformed, but Identity may not be affected at all.

ASEAN’s blueprint for community building is commonly referred to as “the Roadmap”; therefore, blueprint and roadmap are synonymous here.


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Paper for Presentation at the UACES Annual/ Research Conference, September 1-3, University of Edinburgh.