



# Public diplomacy and nation branding in action: Swiss Embassy's participation in the Night of Museums Event in Warsaw

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## Abstract

The article explores the public diplomacy (PD) and nation branding (NB) implications of the Swiss Embassy in Warsaw opening its premises to visitors during the Night of Museum celebrations in 2021. The research aims to answer three research questions: what messages did the Swiss Embassy in Poland attempt to communicate to the public through its participation in the Night of Museums event; what was the motivation of the Embassy to engage in such action, and how the participation in the event related to the Swiss PD strategic goals. The study employs data collection through field visit and semi-structured interview. Obtained data was analyzed in connection to Swiss PD and NB strategies. The article argues that participation in the Night of Museums offers a convenient way of attracting and engaging the public of the host country. It may serve as a tool for communicating the main narratives included within states' PD and NB strategies. Thus, the Night of Museums can serve as a platform for PD and NB at a relatively low cost.

**Keywords** Public diplomacy · Nation branding · Switzerland · Embassy · Night of Museums

## Introduction

In 2021, the Embassy of Switzerland in Warsaw opened its premises to visitors as part of the Night of Museum celebrations. Its engagement in the event was part of the celebrations organized to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Switzerland's diplomatic presence in Poland (Embassy of Switzerland in Poland n.d.). On May 15, 2021, between 18:00 and 00:30, the Embassy was open to visitors, offering a tasting of Swiss chocolate, live grand piano music, and the opportunity to tour the historical interiors of the Embassy with its numerous pieces of art (Embassy of Switzerland in Poland 2021). During the opening hours, visitors could also meet Swiss diplomats, including the Ambassador Jürg Burri himself (Pik.warszawa.pl 2021). The event provided an opportunity not only to visit the Embassy and the Ambassador's residence but also to tour Wilhelm Rau's Palace, a historical building built in 1868 in which the Embassy and

the residence have been located since 1947.<sup>1</sup> Like other attractions made available to the public during the Night of Museums, the Swiss Embassy event attracted many visitors, with a long line of people waiting in front of the entrance. The most probable reason for the big interest in the event was the historical character of the building and the mesmerizing aura of the lifestyle of diplomats, which many people associate with the famous Ferrero Rocher commercial from the 1990s (Lequesne 2019; Gould-Davies 2013; Westmacott 2021).

The participation of the Swiss Embassy in Warsaw in the Night of Museums had clear public diplomacy (PD) and nation branding (NB) implications. Through this event, the general public, mostly Poles, engaged with the Embassy, which provided them with crucial information and messages about Switzerland and Polish–Swiss relations. At the same time, the event also bore some of the qualities typical for cultural diplomacy (CD) and museum diplomacy (MD). The aim of the research presented in the article was to study the event from the perspective of these concepts and regarding Swiss communication strategies. It was assumed that because of the character of the Swiss Embassy's participation in the Night of Museums, despite

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<sup>1</sup> Information derived from poster no. 2 on the fence of the Swiss Embassy in Warsaw during the field visit.



being a minor initiative, it had many features typical of PD and NB. Thus, it was analyzed in connection to the tools and objectives of both PD and NB, focusing on the messages that were communicated to visitors and the motivation for the Embassy's participation in the event.

The research attempted to answer three research questions. We sought to find out what messages the Swiss Embassy in Poland attempted to communicate to the public through its participation in the Night of Museums (RQ1); what was the motivation of the Swiss Embassy to engage in such an action (RQ2); and how the participation in the event related to the Swiss strategic goals of external communication (RQ3). Answering these questions required employing various data collection tools, including field visits and an interview. The data acquired in this way was analyzed in connection to Swiss PD and NB strategies, as well as general methods of external communication. The main argument presented in the article is that participation in the Night of Museums offers diplomatic missions a convenient way of attracting and engaging the public of the host country and communicating the main narratives of the sending country.

The article starts with a general description of the Night of Museums as a cultural event, followed by a brief review of the scientific literature that deals with this phenomenon. After that, an extensive theoretical framework introduces and discusses key concepts useful in the analysis of the participation of the Swiss Embassy in Warsaw in the Night of Museums, that is, PD (including new PD), NB, CD, MD, and soft power. Then, after a description of the methodology used in the research, the article moves to the results of the study, followed by a discussion of their implications and conclusions.

Analysis of the Swiss Embassy's participation in the Night of Museums in Warsaw contributes to PD scholarship in several ways. First, diplomatic missions very rarely make use of the popularity of the Night of Museums and partner with such events. Secondly, even though several diplomatic missions participated in this annual cultural event in more or less direct ways, the issue has not attracted the attention of PD scholars. As argued in the text, opening the doors of embassies to the general public might be a convenient way of reaching many people with content about the sending country. Thus, such events should be considered another element in states' external communication arsenal. The study of the event is therefore supposed to increase the understanding of the ways states can try to reach targeted audiences. Secondly, the article features a discussion of the interlink between PD, NB, CD and MD, demonstrating another level of the interlink between those concepts. The article should be of interest to PD, NB, and CD scholars, as well as foreign service officers and diplomats engaged in PD.

## Diplomatic institutions and the Night of Museums

The Night of Museums is an annual event during which cultural institutions, particularly museums, open their doors to visitors in the evening and at night, often offering additional extraordinary attractions. It is held every year in European cities under the auspices of UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and the International Council of Museums with the aim of highlighting the richness of European heritage. The first such event was held in Berlin in 1997 under the name Long Night of Museums (*Lange Nacht der Museen*) (Evans 2012; *Lange Nacht der Museen* n.d.). It quickly spread to other countries, although in different places its particular name differed; for example, *The Spring of Museums* (*Le Printemps des Musées*) was organized in France or the *White Night* (*Nuit Blanche*) in Paris. Since 2005, the event has been promoted as the *European Night of Museums* (Dumbraveanu et al. 2014). Since then, the event usually referred to as the *Night of Museums* has been spreading around Europe (Gordin and Dedova 2016). In Poland the *Night of Museums* was first organized in Poznań in 2003, but soon other cities followed, and nowadays it is held in all major Polish cities (*Noc Muzeów* n.d.). The *Night of Museums* is distinct from regular days at cultural institutions, not only in terms of opening times and free or reduced admission, but also in the special activities organized by participating institutions. For example, interactive sessions may be arranged (Dedova 2013), and some museums may open additional exhibitions that are normally closed. Additionally, cities may open special public transport routes to facilitate movement from one museum to another during the event (Urząd Miasta Łodzi 2022). Furthermore, the *Night of Museums* often involves partnerships with other institutions, including those not typically accessible to visitors. One such case is the focus of this article.

While the vast majority of institutions participating in the *Night of Museums* are cultural ones, the event has also attracted diplomatic missions that use it as part of their cultural or PD undertakings. Sometimes, their engagement is connected to the general promotion of culture. For instance, in 2015, the Czech Centre Rotterdam was one of the partners of the Rotterdam Museum Night, and the Czech music band *The Tchendos* performed during one of the exhibitions (*The Embassy of the Czech Republic in The Hague* 2015). In turn, in 2017, the U.S. Embassy Warsaw's American Center organized an event called *American Night at the House of Meetings with History* (*Dom Spotkań z Historią*) in Warsaw, featuring film screenings, workshops, lectures, and discussions focused on various U.S. icons, with the United States in



the 1950s and 1960s as the central theme (U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Poland 2017). On other occasions, diplomats serving abroad have become directly involved. If we consider Poland, in 2018, the Embassy of Italy residing in the historical Szlenkierów Palace opened its doors to visitors as part of the Night of Museums celebrations (Istituto Italiano di Cultura Varsavia 2018). This research focuses on another such occurrence—the participation of the Embassy of Switzerland in Poland in the 2021 Night of Museums.

## Literature review

The Night of Museums has attracted attention from scholars representing various disciplines, who have studied it from different perspectives. Particular attention has been dedicated to the event from the perspective of its contribution to the development of the recognition of museums and the creation of new museum audiences and visitation (Mavrin and Glavas 2014; Komarac et al. 2019; Śliwa n.d.; Gordin and Dedova 2016; Dedova 2013). Several studies have focused on the event's influence on the tourist industry. For example, Dumbraveanu et al. (2014) used the case of the Night of Museums to investigate the event's influence on tourism in Bucharest, while in another study, they examined the geopolitical dimension of cultural events in Romania, including the European Night of Museums, taking into consideration the implications of the country's communist past on such events (Dumbraveanu et al. 2017). Other examples of research have focused on the link between the Night of Museums and tourism and include studies by Herman et al. (2023) or Kočevar and Škrtić (2012). Scholars representing different disciplines have also considered the Night of Museums. For example, Schaller et al. (2012) studied how people searched for information about the 2011 event in the framework of computer science, while Juanals and Minel (2017) used the case of the 2016 European Night of Museums to study engagement and interactions on Twitter.

Though not dedicated directly to the Night of Museums, a growing scholarly is dedicated to MD. Studies on MD fall into the broader area of CD research and to a large extent focus on the engagement of museums and other cultural institutions in international relations and diplomacy. For example Sylvester studied art institutions, museums and galleries as institutional locations of international relations (Sylvester 2015, p. 3), Grincheva in numerous studies considered the contemporary transformation of the museums and their engagement in CD (Grincheva 2013, 2019, 2020a, b, c, 2022). Nisbett analysed the museum's engagement in diplomacy from the perspective of the goal of their own development (Nisbett 2013). There were also studies dedicated to activities within MD, such as international museum

exhibitions which are considered one of the main dimensions of MD (Davidson and Perez-Castellanos 2019), and attempts to assess the effectiveness of MD in cross-cultural museum exchanges in fostering international understanding (Cai 2013). These and other studies only indirectly correspond with the research subject. Still, their argument about the usability of cultural institutions such as museums in international relations provides one of the theoretical foundations for this research. Apart from that, studies on MD provide analytical conceptions useful in the research that shall be discussed in the “Theoretical framework” section.

The Night of Museums attracts a lot of attention among visitors, and an increasing number of cultural institutions have been partnering with the event. Still, scientific publications dedicated to the event remain rare in general terms. This gap is even more striking when it comes to the interconnection between the Night of Museums and PD. Even though the event in theory offers a great opportunity for PD, CD, or NB, and some states have even engaged in using this opportunity to promote their countries among foreign publics, the issue has not attracted the attention of PD and NB scholars. If the available literature is considered, the authors found no evidence for such studies, although it should also be underlined that occurrences, when diplomatic missions engage in the Night of Museums, remain rare. The aim of this study is to fill this gap. With the use of the case of the Swiss Embassy in Warsaw participating in the Night of Museums in 2021, the authors seek to study the event from the perspective of its usefulness in pursuing PD and NB.

## Theoretical framework

Together with the development of many new forms of more direct involvement and participation of people in politics, PD emerged as a significant element of foreign policies. PD is focused on government-to-people (G2P) or people-to-people (P2P) communication (Huijgh 2016). It generally refers to diplomatic conduct targeted at foreign audiences (Pamment 2013; Huijgh 2019). Such communication is aimed at influencing foreign governments by reaching their citizens (Gilboa 2008) through engaging foreign audiences to support this government's foreign policy objectives and political interests (Snow 2020). Various scholars understand the essence of this influence differently. For Manheim (1990), the influence on foreign politics is central. He describes the process of PD as actions taken by the government of one nation aimed at influencing either the public in general or elites' opinions in a second nation, with the aim of changing the foreign policy of the target nation in favor of the first one. Melissen (2013), when explaining PD, described it as a tool used to “understand cultures, attitudes, and behaviors, to build and manage relationships, and to influence thoughts



and to mobilize actions to advance their interests and values” (p. 436). Similarly, Tuch (1990) emphasizes the meaning of PD as fostering understanding for a nation’s ideals, ideas, culture, institutions, and goals of current policies. One of the aims of effective PD is promoting the image and shaping the reputation. Wang (2006) even argued that managing the reputation of a nation is of key significance within PD. Finally, PD is about developing long-lasting relationships with the recipients that are perceived as potentially key partners (Nye 2019). Generally, we can distinguish several perspectives regarding understanding PD: state-centric perspectives which restrict PD to state agencies; neo-statist perspectives that reserve the term for state only while offering alternative terms for non-state actors; nontraditional perspectives that accept nonstate actor activities as PD; society-centric perspectives which are similar to nontraditional but perceive public as people in the global public sphere, and accommodative perspectives which accommodate nonstate actor activities only if they meet certain criteria (Ayhan 2019).

With the advent of the information age, a new category of PD has emerged, known as the new PD, indicating a significant shift in scope and motivation. It has become clear that the development of many new tools and channels for communication has redefined PD, expanding the range of actors and channels involved. This development challenges the “traditional foreign ministry gatekeeper structures” and the perception that Foreign Ministries are the only actors engaged in the process of conducting foreign policies (Pamment 2012). Non-state actors have become more influential in setting agendas, shaping policies and implementing them on a domestic and international level (Cull 2009; Bjola et al. 2019) and even shaping their own PD policies (Melissen 2005; Gilboa 2008). Another feature of the new PD is the recognition of the complexity of external communication. In the information age of the post 9/11 world, scholars focused on how the new PD should be practiced in this complex environment. The democratization of communication patterns and processes opened new windows for a wider debate, voicing opinions and acquiring information. New international media outlets have gained more significance, and the new PD focused on communication with the use of new media channels and tools (Pamment 2013). Another significant difference between traditional PD and the new PD is the communication direction. While during the Cold War, PD was frequently referred to as a one-way information flow, sometimes even equated to propaganda (Mor 2006; Hocking 2005), the new PD is more about engaging in dialogue (Melissen 2005), is relational in its character and strives for relation-building with various stakeholders (Manor 2019). It is also multidimensional, multidirectional, and aimed at an active and directly participating audience (Huijgh 2016). In this sense, non-state actors or even individual citizens can participate in the process of shaping the new PD and

its content, among others, through social media (Ingenhoff et al. 2021). An example of the new PD in action is the Swiss Embassy's participation in a cultural event called The Night of Museums. This event demonstrates the multi-actor and multidimensional character of the new PD, where some initiatives are not necessarily inspired or managed by higher-level administrations but shaped by visitors and communicated through social media channels.

The second key concept is NB which was introduced by Simon Anholt in 1996 and has gone a long way ever since. Anholt noticed that in a globalized and interconnected world, states, just like commercial brands, have to compete with each other in attracting tourists, talents, and investments (Anholt 2007). NB is a useful tool for making this competition more effective. Generally speaking, it is based on the process of “designing, planning, and communicating the name and identity to build or manage the reputation” (p. 4). This process can have various dimensions, from minor initiatives focused on the visual aspects of creating a nation brand (logos and slogans) to comprehensive and long-term strategies of image creation (Kaneva 2011). Later on, Anholt moved to the competitive identity terminology, but NB, or country branding, are well accepted.

As a concept, NB managed to attract the interest of scholars from many disciplines, from management to political science, communication and even cultural studies, who noticed the positive influence of branding on their fields of research (Dinnie 2016). There is a plethora of different definitions of NB, depending on the perspective and scientific specialization (Szondi 2010; Hao et al. 2019). In general terms, NB is about increasing trade, investments, tourism, and about attracting talents (Dinnie and Sevin 2020). Following the conceptualization of brands proposed by Hankinson (2004), they can be perceived as communicators, perceptual entities, value enhancers and relationships. On the basis of such understanding of a brand, Ying Fan defined NB as the process of promotion of a nation’s image through marketing and branding techniques (Hankinson 2004). Similarly, Gudjonson (2005) defined NB as a process of shaping image of a nation as well as changing behaviours and attitudes toward a nation so it would become more appealing. Anholt (2007) equaled the reputation of a country to brand image and concluded that they are equally significant. Having a good reputation contributes to more effective competition on global markets where states try to attract the attention of international media, foreign publics, and foreign governments. Thus, in terms of the purposefulness of NB, two different aspects are frequently highlighted. The first one refers to creating a more effective environment for a nation’s brand to compete with others. However, it can also be used for political and diplomatic purposes, and sometimes those two aspects mix with each other (Gudjonsson 2005). Reaching those varied goals is possible owing to the adoption of



different tools in the process of development and implementation of branding strategies. They can be based on marketing communication tools, engagement of the citizens, or engagement through new media channels like social media, where the content is created by the users themselves (Dinnie and Sevin 2020).

One of the main differences between the new PD and NB concerns their principle goals. While PD is traditionally perceived as a tool supporting political interests, mostly focused on contributing to foreign policy, NB is rather perceived as a marketing tool strengthening the competitiveness of a state. However, some of the definitions of NB also highlight aspects related to the political dimension, such as reshaping national identity, enhancing image and reputation, and promoting political interests (Fan 2010). Taking into consideration different motivations behind NB and its potentially diverse goals, it can be perceived as both a marketing and a political tool. In this sense, it can intertwine with the new PD focused more on reaching political goals. Another significant difference between the new PD and NB was reflected by the character of its communication and implementation. While the new PD is mostly shaped based on identity and is focused on relation building, NB was traditionally perceived as image-driven, focusing more on one-way communication through marketing (Szondi 2008). Such a perspective has also been undergoing significant changes in recent years, revealing further similarities between PD and NB. This process can be observed in the changing character of both phenomena from top-down towards more relational and participatory models. Thus, new PD and NB focus more and more on new media and how they encourage users to create certain content and exchange information (Dinnie and Sevin 2020). What is more, further similarities and interconnections between new PD and NB can be identified. According to Kaefer, nation (country) branding and PD both require “close collaboration with foreign representations and cultural institutes, often sharing infrastructure,” both rely on a foundation of listening (both domestically to engage the stakeholders and abroad to reach target audiences), and both seek to establish favorable reputation (Kaefer et al. 2020, pp. 130–131). According to Cull, new PD has also changed its terminology and explicitly uses concepts derived from marketing such as NB (Cull 2009). Still, despite multiple similarities and links, in this study (new) PD and NB are considered separate concepts, although largely interrelated and to some extent complementary.

The use of the museum event as the opportunity for pursuing PD and NB connects the opening of the Swiss Embassy in Warsaw for the general public also with the concept of CD and the associated concept of MD. CD is defined as “cross cultural exchanges of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding” (Cumings 2003, p. 1;

quoted in Grincheva 2020c). These definitions reveal a close connection between CD and PD, a view widely accepted, with some authors claiming CD is a constituent part of PD (Harker 2020), although there are also views that CD actually preceded PD since it occupied an important place in states’ activity already in mid-nineteenth century (Ociepka 2013). It is not our goal to engage in the debates regarding the scope and interconnection between CD and PD, but they both surely share the objective of fostering state’s foreign policy goals. Also, both terms are related to the concept of soft power. According to Nye, the founder of the concept, a state may sometimes fulfill its objectives without resorting to coercion or payment because other states could aim to follow in its path by admiring the values it represents, emulating its example, or aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness (Nye 2004). In regard to the relationship between soft power and PD, Nye claimed the latter is an instrument that governments use to mobilize soft power resources “to communicate with and attract the publics of other countries” (Nye 2008). Although not as directly, NB is also considered to be related to soft power as it can contribute to strengthening it, especially when it is used strategically to spread a positive image (Lee 2023). Similarly, CD is about using the products of a country’s cultural life in the service of foreign policy goals and, as a concept, has been receiving growing attention as a potential means of maximizing states’ soft power (Clarke 2016). Soft power thus constitutes another part of the theoretical framework of this research.

Traditionally, CD has been employed by states seeking to achieve foreign policy objectives, both in reference to political and economic goals (Grincheva 2020a). However, in the twenty first century, the term expanded its meaning to embrace actions also beyond the control or involvement of governments (Grincheva 2020c). In the scientific literature, there are even references to new CD that concern the new ways of communicating and connecting between cultures resulting from technological advancements (Davidson and Perez-Castellanos 2019). Thus, recent and contemporary developments in CD and the emergence of the new CD corresponds with the emergence of the new PD, both reflecting recent evolution of international relations and diplomacy.

MD has been considered in connection with international activities of museums and with CD. Though CD diplomacy is a wider term and embraces a number of activities not connected to museums, such as architecture, reading rooms, books translations, publications, libraries, exchange of scholars and students (Harker 2020), museums have been a traditional key actor in CD (Grincheva 2022). For example, governments have been supporting international missions of museums through funding the export of their collections (Grincheva 2020a). Museums have often used this as a means of increasing their growth, with the diplomatic gains as a byproduct (Nisbett 2013), particularly since museums



have become more independent when it comes to international activity (Grincheva 2019).

International activity of museums with some diplomatic context is most commonly considered in reference to interstate artifact exchange, such as the successful engagement of the British Museum with China and Iran, leading to the exhibitions of Chinese and Iranian art in 2007 and 2009, which are believed to have opened a path for dialogue at the time of political estrangements (Cai 2013). Foreign tours of museum collections are aimed at boosting political and economic relations (Wang 2018), although they are also to serve institutional and commercial objectives (Davidson and Perez-Castellanos 2019), important from the perspective of museums. Other activities of museums that bear a connection with diplomacy include museum franchising like in the cases of Guggenheim Bilbao, the Hermitage Amsterdam or the Louvre Abu Dhabi (Grincheva 2020b) which receive high-level foreign guests in the museums (Wang 2018), or multiple digital and online activities (Grincheva 2020c).

All the discussed forms of external communication, aimed at strengthening soft power, shaping the image of a state, or establishing positive relationships with other nations developed a number of tools that may overlap and be assigned to more than just one category. For example, PD tools include using sport as a platform for diplomatic conduct, engaging celebrities, and using health-related aspects to shape perceptions, just to name a few (see Constantinou et al. 2016). Major events can be perceived as one such tool that contributes to image creation and shaping favorable perceptions of states or cities (Richards and Wilson 2004). Simultaneously they are also often used for promoting tourism (Rivera et al. 2008), with the aim of increasing the number of foreign visitors to a country, thus corresponding with NB (Dinnie 2016). Accordingly, some tools can be assigned to both PD and NB. This strongly refers to a wide range of events, which can contribute to image creation, attract tourists, and at the same time, provide space for relationship building. In this sense, organizing events falls under the umbrella of both PD and NB (see Kobierecki 2023) and contributes to increasing soft power (Kramareva and Grix 2021). Such a view is shared by Dubinsky, who claimed in reference to sports events that 'athletic field has always been a stage for NB and PD battlefield through participation and performance' (Dubinsky 2022, p. 7).

Organizing events is a significant element of both image creation and relationship building. The term "event tourism" has attracted a lot of interest among scholars who perceive events as elements of an integrated approach to development and marketing and a tool for image creation (Getz 2008). Much of the existing research concerning the impact and significance of events focuses on major events and their economic impact (Getz 1991; Foley 1991; Crompton and McKay 1994; Rivera et al. 2008; Bracalente

et al. 2011), such as increases in tourism, expenditures made by visitors (Bracalente et al. 2011), new infrastructure investments, and contribution to the place's landmarks (Richards and Wilson 2004). However, smaller events can also have more or less tangible impact.

Events are interrelated with PD and NB, but at the same time, they are often linked to CD and MD. For example, the features of CD can be traced when discussing the organization of mega-events. For instance, sports mega-events such as the Olympic Games normally implement multiple references to culture, particularly during the opening ceremony. Lee argued using the examples of winter Olympic Games in Sochi, PyeongChang and Beijing that the event involved the implementation of CD (Lee 2021). This is even more evident in regard to directly cultural events, which according to Ociepka (2019) are an element of CD and a basic tool of soft power. There is a number of types of events used as part of CD. They include performing arts events, seminars and conferences around cultural themes (Isar 2017), art exhibitions, years of culture organized in another country (Ociepka and Arendarska 2021), etc. It is similar when it comes to MD, which at its core is about organizing events.

The Night of Museums as an event does not directly bear many qualities of PD, NB, CD, or MD. It focuses primarily on the domestic audience and aims to promote the culture and traditions of the state that organizes the event ('Noc Muzeów' n.d.). Still, the participation of an Embassy in the event directly creates a link between all these concepts. One of the main functions of any Embassy is to promote friendly relations with the receiving state (Berridge 2022). This refers primarily to the relations with governments but also covers relations with the receiving society which, in turn, are pursued most directly through PD. However, contemporary embassies also seek to promote tourism, trade, or investments, aspects connected with NB. Similarly, the Night of Museums is considered an emerging tool for tourism promotion (Dumbraveanu et al. 2014). What is more, the Night of Museums being a cultural event connects the initiative with CD and MD. For example, in regard to communication with the outside world, CD has been the tool based on human-to-human contact, even though contemporary processes amplified by the COVID-19 lockdowns also introduced digital innovations to CD and MD (Grincheva 2022). PD and NB are certainly not about avoiding P2P contact. In fact, many typical PD tools such as international exchanges build on creating P2P bonds, but attracting people to visit a venue is more typical for CD and MD. Either way, the interlink between PD, NB, and CD/MD together with their shared link with soft power constitute the theoretical framework for the research.



## Methodology

The present article reports on a case study that focuses on the engagement of a diplomatic mission in the Night of Museums celebrations, using the case of the Swiss Embassy in Warsaw participating in the event in May 2021. The data collection for this study comprised two main parts. The first and main part of the study was carried out through direct observation. During a field visit, the authors visited the Embassy as part of the general public during the Museum Night in Warsaw on May 15, 2021. The observations were documented through note-taking and supplemented by photographic documentation. The aim of this part of the study was to answer the research question about the messages to be communicated to the public through participation in the event (RQ1). Despite the exceptional character of the event (diplomatic missions rarely participate in the Night of Museums) and no prior studies to refer to, the observation was structured and focused on searching for evidence of PD and NB according to the theoretical understanding of these terms. The authors looked for references to Switzerland and Polish–Swiss relations, covering both the interior of the building (the rooms available to the visitors) and the surrounding area of the Embassy, including the posters on the fence.

The second part of the research focused on the motivation of the Swiss Embassy to participate in the Night of Museums event and how it related to Swiss PD goals, which corresponded with the second (RQ2) and the third (RG3) research questions. Roughly one month after the event, on 10 June 2021, the authors conducted a semi-structured interview with H.E. Jürg Burri,<sup>2</sup> at the time the Ambassador of Switzerland in Poland, accompanied by his assistant responsible for organizing the event. Besides the interview with the Ambassador, this part of the research also concerned analysis of Swiss strategic aims regarding its external image.

The aim of this study was to analyze the participation of the Swiss Embassy in Poland in the 2021 Night of Museums from the perspective of the realization of Swiss PD and NB among the Polish public. The goal was to determine if this occurrence can be considered a PD event and to contextualize it among typical PD and NB tools. To achieve this goal,

the data collected during the study was analyzed in terms of the general goals of PD and NB discussed in the theoretical section and in regard to Swiss strategies in these respects.

## Results

### Messages presented to the visitors

Prior to gaining entry into the Swiss Embassy, visitors were required to queue for a period of time, with waiting times estimated at approximately 30 min during the time of our field visit. The queue ran along the perimeter fence of the Embassy building, which was adorned with several informative posters. The topics of these posters were diverse, including (1) the centennial anniversary of the Swiss Embassy in Poland, (2) the history of the Embassy building, (3) the current Swiss residence, (4) the Swiss Embassy in Poland (detailing its mission, the Ambassador, and its organizational structure), (5) intriguing facts about Switzerland, and (6) the Swiss–Polish bilateral relations. All of the information provided on the posters was presented in Polish; however, the posters also featured QR codes that could be scanned to access the English versions of the information.

The posters exhibited clear implications for PD and NB. They were displayed on a daily basis on the fence of the Embassy, a common practice among diplomatic missions. However, according to Ambassador Burri, they were specifically printed for the celebrations of the centennial anniversary of Switzerland's presence in Poland and were part of the same campaign as the Embassy's participation in the Night of Museum event. The posters were noticeable to the Embassy's visitors waiting in the queue (refer to Fig. 1), enabling them to learn about the history of Polish–Swiss relations and Switzerland in general even before entering the Embassy. Both of these topics can be viewed from the perspective of PD and NB. The poster on bilateral relations showcased that they were strong, with numerous Poles migrating to Switzerland, and an increase in trade, cultural and sports exchanges. Additionally, it highlighted Switzerland's assistance in providing refuge to Poles during the nineteenth century and World War II, and its present-day development aid to Poland. On the other hand, the poster on Switzerland showcased key events in its history, official languages, multilateralism (with reference to Swiss neutrality, the tradition of humanitarian aid, and numerous multilateral cooperation centres situated in Geneva), its political system, innovation, education, cooperation with the United Nations, and commitment to sustainable development. Thus, the posters conveyed typical PD and NB messages, emphasizing the close ties between Switzerland and Poland and showcasing Switzerland in a positive way as an excellent place to reside, visit, or study. Although such rhetoric is not uncommon,

<sup>2</sup> Jürg Burri served as an Ambassador of Switzerland in Poland with residence in Warsaw between 2018 and 2022. Previously, he worked as the Director General of the Consular Directorate of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in Berne, while at the time of writing (February 2023) he served as the Ambassador of Switzerland to the People's Republic of China, Mongolia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, with residence in Beijing. Embassy of Switzerland in China, Curriculum Vitae of Ambassador Jürg Burri, [https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/countries/countries-content/china/en/CV-Ambassador-Juerg-Burri\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/countries/countries-content/china/en/CV-Ambassador-Juerg-Burri_EN.pdf), accessed 27.02.2023.



**Fig. 1** Line leading to the entrance of the Swiss Embassy in Warsaw, 15 May 2021



the Night of Museums event enabled reaching wider audience and contribute to shaping the perception of Switzerland among the Poles, spreading knowledge about this country and as a consequence contributing to Swiss soft power.

The messages concerning Switzerland and Polish–Swiss relations displayed on the fence were further promoted within the premises of the Embassy and the Ambassador's residence. Upon entering, visitors were greeted by a short film showcasing the beautiful landscapes of Switzerland, aimed at encouraging tourism, thus manifesting elements of typical NB. Additionally, in the entrance hall, a large-format picture of Matterhorn Peak illuminated with the colors of the Polish flag was presented. This referred to the event organized by the Zermatt municipality as a symbol of international solidarity during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was explained on a special plate placed in front of the picture. This element of the exhibition was supposed to showcase close bonds, positive cooperation and mutual support of the two countries—both elements of NB in the sense of shaping positive perceptions and PD through highlighting close relations between Swiss and Poles.

Most of the exhibition showcased elegant interiors, with a pianist performing classical music in one of the rooms, featuring pieces by the Polish composer Fryderyk Chopin, and a table set for a formal dinner in another. This approach is reasonable since it was the historical character of the building and the mesmerizing aura of the diplomats' lifestyle that seemed to attract visitors. The exhibition was accompanied by not particularly ostentatious references to Switzerland and its relations with Poland. A large poster with artwork

depicting two bound faces, one with the Swiss flag and the other with the Polish flag, clearly symbolized Polish–Swiss closeness. Visitors could also see a plush Saint Bernard dog wearing a scarf with Switzerland's promotional logo and a roll-up promoting tourism in Switzerland. At the exit, visitors could receive small free gifts, such as a piece of Swiss chocolate or a folder promoting tourism in Switzerland. Those tools presented another feature of NB through tourism promotion.

Based on simple field observation of the elements exhibited in the Embassy during the Night of Museums, mostly features of NB and PD could have been observed. There were references to the mutual history and bonds between Switzerland and Poland, as well as to strengthening the feeling of closeness between the two nations and to positive relationship. That was reached not only through presenting some historical aspects but also more contemporary symbols of friendship such as the support provided during the coronavirus pandemic.

### **Motivation for participating in the Night of Museums**

The event, being part of the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Swiss Embassy in Poland, was organized by a special working team. Before the preparations started, the team identified innovation and sustainability as the main areas to be communicated. These issues strongly corresponded with the core issues of general PD and NB. According to the Ambassador, participation in the Night





of Museums provided a good opportunity for promoting and communicating traditional areas of Swiss PD and NB. Another significant goal was to engage with the Polish public and showcase the close relations between the two nations. The celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Swiss Embassy in Poland pertained not only to diplomatic relations but also to P2P relations. One of the symbols representing strong Swiss–Polish bonds, according to the Ambassador, was suggested by the picture that presented the Polish flag projected onto the Swiss mountain Matterhorn in April 2020, embodying solidarity and hope. It referred to Poland and Switzerland's joint efforts to overcome the COVID-19 crisis (Embassy of Switzerland in Poland 2020).

The P2P dimension of the event is loosely linked to how such contacts are considered within the PD framework. Ayhan and Jang defined P2P diplomacy, which they considered a supplementary aspect of state-centric PD, as “intentional, political and transboundary communication-based interactions between groups of people for public rather than private interests that contribute to peaceful management of relations” (Ayhan and Jang 2022, p. 100). The P2P component of PD is thus centered around government-initiated exchanges or programs initiated by non-state actors that feature contacts between people (Ayhan 2020). None of these was present during the Night of Museums in the Swiss Embassy in Poland, although it definitely featured contacts between the Embassy staff and the public. However, it needs to be underlined that the P2P contacts were not supposed to be the PD tool within the initiative. Rather, it was the Polish–Swiss P2P bonds to be promoted during the event.

The inter-social dimension of Polish–Swiss relations received special attention during the event. Polish citizens generally hold positive perceptions of Switzerland, according to surveys conducted by the Embassy. Through participation in the Night of Museums, such perceptions were supposed to be sustained. The main values attributed to the Swiss by the Polish are friendliness, helpfulness, and a willingness to interact. Therefore, participating in the Night of Museums and opening the Embassy building to visitors held a special meaning for the Ambassador, as it directly referenced these perceptions. The Ambassador's main idea was not to hire hostesses but to engage actual people who work in the Embassy. The assumption was that visitors would not only come to see the residence but would also have the opportunity to meet diplomats and other members of staff. The narrative behind this was to portray Switzerland as an open country with an accessible administration and citizens who are willing to interact. Although it was not a direct reference to P2P exchanges typical for PD, some form of contact was therefore featured in the event.

The Night of Museums, as described by Ambassador Burri, provides an excellent platform for achieving the various goals of Swiss PD and NB. Being an established

event, it offers a means of promoting and attracting visitors, including social media channels. As the Swiss Embassy was new to social media platforms, participating in the Night of Museums provided an opportunity to utilize its communication and promotion channels to attract more visitors than the Embassy could have achieved alone. Engaging visitors more directly was to be critical to achieving the objectives of PD, which aims to facilitate communication, deeper engagement, and relationship building. Visitors to the Embassy were thus encouraged to take pictures and share them on their social media channels, further increasing the reach of the event. According to the Ambassador, the event was planned as a social media event from the beginning. To deepen visitor engagement, a Saint Bernard dog was placed in the corridor alongside a painting symbolizing Swiss–Polish relations and friendship. This served as a “selfie spot” for visitors, enhancing the interactive aspect of the event. This dimension of the event clearly corresponds with the modern trend in PD, NB, CD, and MD. Growing attention is recently dedicated to digital reality. Consequently, PD and NB increasingly employ digital tools to increase their reach and allow more individuals to engage in the process of multidimensional communication. Though in principle based on attracting people to participate in stationary events, CD and MD have also engaged in digital activities to increase their audience. The participation of the Swiss Embassy in Warsaw in the Museum Nights event was also part of these trends.

One of the main conclusions drawn from the interview is that the Swiss Embassy enjoys a significant degree of freedom in initiating its own projects, such as its participation in the Night of Museums, which was suggested by the Ambassador himself. The Ambassador estimates that around 80% of the Embassy's initiatives are self-initiated, while 20% are suggested or imposed by higher-level authorities, with approximately 2–3 projects where the Embassy follows the lead of headquarters. These initiatives are carried out on multiple diverse levels and platforms, with the Embassy collaborating with Polish authorities, Swiss companies operating in Poland, Swiss government agencies, and NGOs. The Embassy's budget is also diversified, with some funds provided by the government for PD and NB initiatives, for which the Embassy must apply, while other funding is obtained from collaborating partners.

### **Embassy's participation in the Night of Museums versus Swiss strategic communication goals**

Switzerland is considered to be one of the strongest nation brands in the world, according to the 2021 edition of the Nation Brand Index, in which it ranked 7th globally (IPSOS 2021). Furthermore, the Future Brand Country Brand Index 2020 revealed that Switzerland achieved a higher ranking, placing 2nd, compared to the previous



year's edition, where it was ranked 3rd (Future Brand n.d.). External communication plays a crucial role in Swiss Foreign Policy. The Swiss Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–2023 outlines that Swiss strategic communication aims to promote ‘awareness and understanding of Switzerland's positions, interests, and values abroad’. Communication conducted by Switzerland abroad is intended to shape how the country is perceived, to explain Swiss positions, strengths, and domestic and foreign actions. All of this is intended to improve the ‘diplomatic room for maneuver, attractiveness of Switzerland as a business location, economic and scientific hub, and tourism.’ The strategy also indicates that Switzerland aspires to be recognized as an attractive location with a high quality of life, and an innovative and competitive country (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Swiss Confederation 2020). All this can be perceived as focused on strengthening Swiss soft power and potential to softly influence other actors on the international level.

Many of these messages were integrated into the Swiss Embassy's participation in the Night of Museum in Warsaw. The Swiss Ambassador identified innovation as the central theme and sustainability as a complementary topic for Swiss PD and NB. Other supplementary topics included direct democracy, historical remembrance, equality in law, and scenic landscapes. At the international level, Switzerland's focus remains on the banking system and its positive approach to the European Union, showcasing Switzerland as a dependable partner and an active participant in negotiations, despite not being a member of the EU. Other general strategies include promoting tourism and providing a platform for peaceful negotiations, serving as an international hub for peace conferences. For instance, the Ambassador referred to the meeting between Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin held in Geneva in 2021 as an example. As the Ambassador stated, ‘If there is any international issue, bring it to Geneva. This is the clear message of the government. We are here to solve problems.’

Swiss PD and NB have overarching strategic goals, which are tailored to local requirements and perceptions of local communities. Regarding Switzerland's specific relationship with Poland, regular surveys on Polish perceptions are conducted, and its NB for Poland is reviewed approximately every 2 years. The main positive perceptions in Poland relate to mountains, cheese, chocolate, and watches. However, a mixed approach to the Swiss banking and financial system is one of the main issues when considering Polish perceptions. Therefore, Swiss branding emphasizes that its banking system has undergone significant reforms in the past two decades and now meets European standards. Regarding sustainability and innovation promotion in Poland, a major conference was organized in 2021 on the use of statistics to provide more sustainable development. Some bilateral initiatives were

also undertaken with the Polish authorities, including a debate on sustainability in 2021.

The exhibitions available to visitors at the Swiss Embassy in Warsaw and the residence of the Swiss Ambassador during the Night of Museums to some extent align with the goals of Swiss PD and NB. The main area identified pertains to promoting incoming tourism, with films showcasing beautiful Swiss landscapes and other promotional materials such as leaflets and posters. References to the high quality of life and innovations were prominently displayed in posters hanging on the Embassy building fence. Although the exhibits largely referred to Swiss–Polish friendship, which does not directly correspond with the aforementioned strategy, the fundamental purpose of diplomatic missions, besides representing their nation, is to build positive relations with the host country. Therefore, participation in the Night of Museums was a convenient way to reach a wider public with such rhetoric. Many elements included in the Night of Museums event made reference to the positive Swiss–Polish relations. In this sense, participation in the Night of Museums event aligns with the main general goals of Swiss PD and NB, which aim to shape international perceptions of Switzerland abroad and increase awareness of Swiss positions. Highlighting close relations between Switzerland and Poland and explaining the Swiss position in Europe were some of the elements identified directly or indirectly in the exhibition prepared for the Night of Museums.

## Discussion and conclusions

The current Swiss Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–2023 aims to promote “awareness and understanding of Switzerland's positions, interests, and values abroad,” by shaping international perceptions and presenting its strengths, foreign actions, and general positions. Participation in the Night of Museums was planned as an element of the 100th anniversary of the Swiss diplomatic presence in Poland and aligns with the Swiss foreign policy strategy in terms of PD and NB efforts. The event allowed the Swiss Embassy to reach a wider audience with its communication.

The primary objectives of the Swiss Embassy's engagement during the Night of Museums event were related to typical NB and PD goals. Both direct observation within the field study and the interview with the Ambassador revealed that the Swiss Embassy focused on promoting tourism and some significant cultural assets and values constituting Swiss identity, as well as showcasing the strong bonds and positive relations between Switzerland and Poland. On the occasion of the Night of Museums, a special exhibition was prepared and displayed outside the Embassy on its fence, presenting the history of the Embassy and Switzerland's relations with Poland and



Europe. The exhibition outside the building featured information about Switzerland's position in Europe and its full engagement in cooperation with the European Union, despite not being a member state. This aligns with the strategy of presenting Switzerland's position and actions on the international level. While materials referring to tourism in Switzerland and its culture were also present, they were only available inside the Embassy. The interiors available to visitors primarily focused on the historical site and the elegance associated with diplomats in popular perception. As mentioned above, several additional exhibitions focused on friendly Polish–Swiss relations. Such narratives were identifiable in some of the communications, referring, among other things, to the close cooperation and solidarity with Poland during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other elements of the exhibition referred to Swiss symbols and the promotion of tourism in Switzerland. Such communications are typical in the case of PD, showcasing close and friendly relations, while also corresponding with typical NB efforts that focus on shaping positive images of a nation based on stereotypes or symbols, such as chocolate or the Saint Bernard dog.

Another significant aspect of the Swiss Embassy's participation in the Night of Museums event focused on engaging people. According to Ambassador Burri, the Night of Museums provided a great platform for organizing an event that would reach a wider audience, owing to the promotion channels provided by the event itself. This aspect is closely related to the concepts of CD and MD. Admittedly the messages communicated with the use of the event were not particularly linked to promoting culture, nor Embassy can be considered a museum, but besides that, there were several easily observable links. The Embassy used the opportunity provided by a clearly cultural event that features museums not only in its name. These days there are many institutions from beyond culture that participate in the Night of Museums, but the core is composed of museums. The Swiss Embassy in Warsaw used the fact that it is located in a historical building and, in a way, for one night turned into a museum. Additionally, the event demonstrated characteristics of digital diplomacy, as it had a typical social media character, with visitors being encouraged to post pictures from their visit on their social media platforms, thus creating specific content and directly participating in the process of PD communication. The Embassy prepared a special “selfie spot” with the aforementioned Saint Bernard dog for this purpose. The use of digital tools and personal engagement of the visitors further multiplied the number of recipients who could become acquainted with the exhibition's communications. Thus, the Night of Museums provided a solid ground for communicating the main areas of Swiss NB, PD, and contributing to relationship building between the Swiss and Polish nations.

One of the observations made through the analysis is that in the case of Switzerland, there is significant freedom in planning PD and NB efforts. Based on the case of the Night of Museums, which was initiated by the Swiss Ambassador to Poland, it can be said that many projects and endeavors undertaken with the aim of promoting Switzerland and shaping its perceptions have a grassroots character and are not imposed by higher-level administrations. Thus, Swiss PD and NB have a multi-actor and multi-level character, with various actors, such as NGOs, governmental agencies, host country governmental agencies, and private companies, engaging in cooperation. It leads to the conclusion that even though the event was organized by an Embassy which clearly is a state actor, the event itself revealed qualities of both traditional and new PD and CD.

The analysis of the Swiss Embassy's participation in the 2021 Night of Museums celebrations in Warsaw provides an interesting case study on how diplomatic missions can make use of their sophisticated premises and the general aura of the lives of diplomats to attract a wider public in the receiving country. Such opportunities enable diplomatic missions to reach a broader audience with their PD and NB communications at a relatively low expense. In this sense, participating in such events may allow embassies to promote their countries in a novel but at the same time potentially efficient way, strengthen the closeness between the sending and receiving countries in a manner typical for PD, and promote the brand of the sending country and in the end, strengthen its own soft power. All this happens in the circumstances of a typically cultural and not necessarily diplomatic circumstance of the Night of Museums.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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