



# **First Tests of the Dashboard in Europe**

**An Empirical Contribution to the Global Navigation  
of International Corporate Communications**

*by*

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## **1. Introduction**

Last year, the author of this paper presented his essay “From Back-Seat to Dashboard: The Global Navigation of International Corporate Communications” for the Annual Meeting of the Commission on Global PR Research (cf. Sievert 2009b).<sup>1</sup> That paper stated the significance of international corporate communications as growing rapidly, and the complexity associated with it is increasing almost exponentially. But it also showed that systematic understanding of international corporate communications (ICC), even in the corner offices of the PR industry's top management, is not well developed.

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

Last year's article illustrated the status quo in this area through examples and proposed a heuristic analytical grid, along with its interdisciplinary application using the example of Media Relations. It pointed out how important it is for a globally-engaged corporate communicator to be knowledgeable about the levels of target countries, target institutions, target contents and target actors (or why he or she should ensure that employees or service providers have the necessary knowledge). With the right information at hand, PR professionals are in a position to create a kind of ICC compass with regard to dichotomies in all four contexts presented. This compass consists of different axes featuring different key performance indicators for different perspectives on international PR.

During the last year, the author continued the development of that paper and presented it on different occasions. Today, it is possible to present the very first result on the application of the ICC compass, using the example of different European countries. The author will continue this this year, having planned the comparison of the US and Germany and its implication on the DaimlerChrysler merger and de-merger (cf. Sievert/Craig/Holman 2010) as the next step.

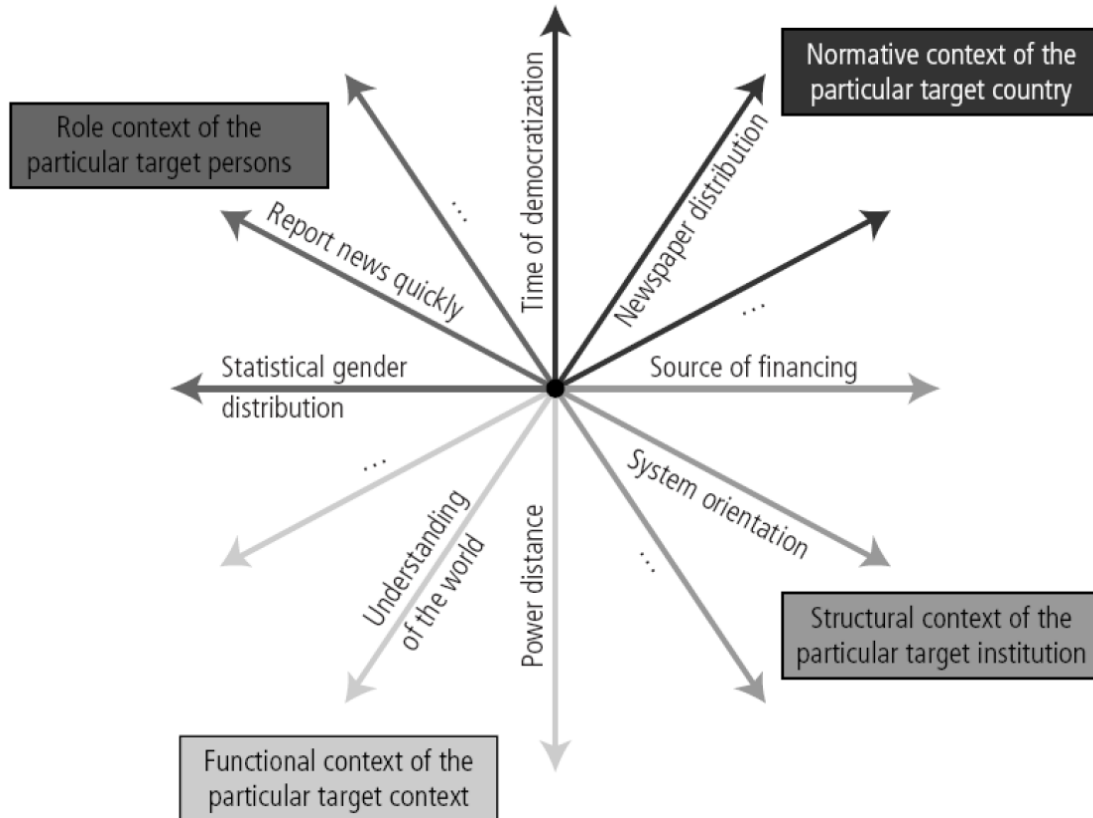
## **2. The functioning of the ICC compass**

To analyze ICC, a heuristic working model for the social subsystem of ‘corporate communications<sup>2</sup> that is as differentiated as possible is required. The model proposed by the author is built on four contexts that are of immense importance when it comes to the navigation of Global PR activities.

The social subsystem of corporate communications can be represented by the layers of an onion, but also a kind of compass showing the different important dimensions (cf. diagram 1 on the next page). Economic and political systems and the respective media environments in which corporate communications occur form the normative context. The author of this paper appreciates that in no way, in the modern world, is PR simply media relations, but rather concerns many other fields of application. There is a certain narrowness to the perspective when these two terms are used synonymously. The understanding of media systems, however, continues to be vital for PR work, and therefore this definition seems to be wholly justified. In the structural con-

text, specific foreign target institutions, usually corporations, are scrutinized with regard to their financial and leadership structures.

Diagram 1: “ICC Compass” for planning and implementing ICC



Source: Sievert 2007

The functional context primarily involves cultural dimensions and conflicts that can (and should) influence the contents of international corporate communications to a great extent. Last but not least, the role context looks at international target actors against the backdrop of their different features, expertise, and attitudes.

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

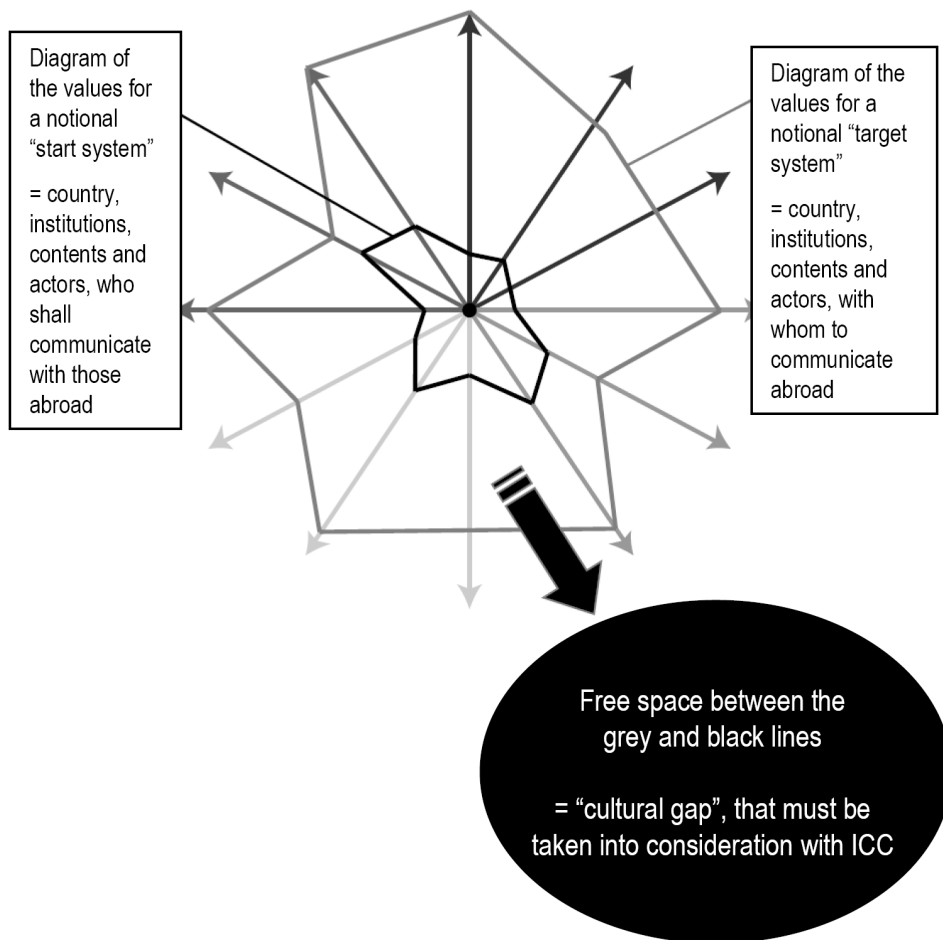
All this could be summarized in a kind of “compass” showing different intensities for different Key Performance Indicators on each level. And that again can be used for a gap analysis to show country parallels and differences (cf. diagram 2, again on the next page). It illustrates how important is it for a globally-engaged corporate communicator to be knowledgeable about the levels of target countries, target institutions, target contents and target actors (or why he or she

should ensure that employees or service providers have the necessary knowledge). With the right information at hand, PR professionals are in a position to create a kind of ICC compass with regard to dichotomies in all four contexts presented.

How many and which particular compass axes should be selected for an individual strategic communications goal depends upon the situation. In any case, however, by combining the points on the individual axes, a kind of rough map emerges. When the cultural expressions of the individual contexts for all axes are compared to the map, the biggest cultural differences between the systems in which a communications project originates and those of the target system become apparent. This background knowledge seems quite useful for professionals directing cross-national and cross-cultural corporate communications.

The above formed an introduction to the ICC compass. The following will now show a very first adaptation to some European countries.

*Diagram 2: "Cultural gap" within the "ICC Compass" framework*



Source: Sievert 2007

### 3. Results within the ICC compass for “typical” European countries

The following will present some very first results on the ICC compass for European countries. The selected European countries are Germany, the UK, France (selected due to being three of the largest countries within the European Union – coming from three different cultural backgrounds like Germanic, Anglo-Saxon and Roman), Poland (as the largest East-European EU member) and Denmark (as an example for Scandinavia). We will describe the results following the contexts, not the countries, in order to make direct comparison easier.

#### 3.1 Normative context

The first context which will be looked into for the five countries is the normative context. This context is concerned with the norms that are generally recognized within a media system (cf. Sievert 2009: 5). For this purpose, the model by Hallin and Mancini (2004) can be used to compare characteristics of the political and media systems in the chosen societies. The authors defined nine parameters, where the general political perspectives and the media system in concrete are analyzed. This comparison is focused on only five of these parameters. This focus seems reasonable, due to the fact that corporate communication is more directly influenced by these factors than by the others. The attributes are: ‘general role of the state’, ‘reach of newspaper distribution’, ‘parallelism between politics and media’, ‘qualification of the communication profession’, and ‘importance of the state in media systems’. The criterion ‘general role of the state’ is characterized by either a dirigiste attitude, which implies that the state is actively involved in market and the media, or a more liberal behavior, where the government tries to keep out of the above mentioned (cf. Hallin & Mancini 2004: 127). Next, the attribute ‘reach of newspaper distribution’ examines the newspaper circulation in the relevant countries, by analyzing the percentage of a population (>14 years) which reads a newspaper (cf. Hallin & Mancini 2004: 63). Then, the aspect ‘parallelism between politics and media’ investigates how strongly media organizations are tied to political organizations (cf. Hallin & Mancini 2004: 38). ‘The qualification of the communication profession’ displays how professionalized the communication business is (cf. Hallin & Mancini 2004: 289). Finally, the parameter ‘importance of the state in the media systems’ describes the extent to which the state can directly intervene in the media system in the country (cf. Hallin & Mancini 2004: 49).

*Table 1: Results normative context*

<b>Country / Attribute</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>Poland</b>	<b>Denmark</b>
General Role of the State	Dirigiste	Dirigiste (mixed)	Liberal	Liberal	Dirigiste
Reach of Newspaper Distribution	High	Low	Medium	Low	High
Parallelism between Politics and Media	Medium (neutral)	High	Medium (neutral)	High	Medium (neutral)
Qualification of Communication Profession	High	Low	High	Low	High
Importance of the State in Media Systems	High	High	Low	High	High

The government in Germany and Denmark is more actively involved (cf. Hassel 2006: 315) (cf. Schild & Uterwedde 2006: 167), while the United Kingdom and Poland have a more constricted state (cf. Dolgowska & Hishow 2006: 1). France represents a special case here, as it transformed from a dirigiste to a more liberal state (cf. Hallin & Manchini 2004: 127). With regards to the newspaper circulation in the examined countries, Denmark is leading with a newspaper reach of almost 80 percent, followed by Germany with 76 percent, followed by United Kingdom with 48 percent and France with 45 percent (cf. Wruck 2006: 2). Poland, with a newspaper reach of 23 percent, has the lowest newspaper circulation in this comparison (cf. Wyka 2008: 60). In reference to the aspect of 'parallelism', Germany, the United Kingdom and Denmark have a medium degree of parallelism between politics and media, where the political influence is mainly imbedded in a neutral commercial press (cf. Hallin & Manchini 2004: 67). On the contrary, France and Poland are signalized by a high degree of political parallelism, where the government model of broadcast governance is dominant (cf. Hallin & Manchini 2004: 67) (cf. Wyka 2008: 57). Concerning the 'qualification of the communication profession', the media systems in Denmark, Germany and United Kingdom are self-regulated and show a high professionalization (cf. Hallin & Manchini 2004: 67), whereas France and Poland have a less professionalized system (cf. Hallin & Manchini 2004: 67) (cf. Wyka 2008: 60). Finally, the importance of the state in the media is relatively high in Germany, France, Poland and Denmark, where the state can actively intervene in the media system (cf. Hallin & Manchini 2004: 67). An exception is the United Kingdom, where the state plays only a minor role in the media system (cf. Hallin & Manchini 2004: 67). Table 1 shows a summary of the results.

## 4.2 Structural context

After analyzing the general normative context of the target countries, the structural context will focus on the target institutions, thereby focusing on the financial structures and the cultural implications associated with them (cf. Sievert 2009: 10f). Based on the work of Berglöf (1997), Williams and Conley (2005) and Mallin (2006), the target countries will be analyzed with the help of five variables, which cover the dimensions of corporate finance and corporate governance. The five dimensions, which the countries will be compared to, are: 'finance source', 'control culture', 'board system', 'target group', and 'CSR orientation'. The attribute 'finance source' is measured by the percentage of the equity ratio in the different countries. A higher equity ratio indicates a higher level of autonomy, enabling the company to decide how to communicate without necessarily requiring to take other stakeholders into account. 'Control culture' indicates if a more control-oriented or an arm's length oriented control culture prevails. In an arm's length control culture, investors do not intervene in the company, as long as payment obligations are met. In a control oriented control culture, investors' intervention is typically based on a control block of equity or a position as exclusive or dominant creditors (cf. Buckley 2004: 44). The factor 'board system' analyzes what kind of board system is predominant in the countries. It is divided between unitary and dual board systems. In a dual system, two control instances are responsible for the company, to ensure a balance of power within the company (cf. Thompson 2001: 81). Then, the 'target group' criterion explores if the country corporations are focused on their shareholders or if they also take other stakeholders into account (cf. Skrzipek 2005: 9ff). Finally, the 'CSR orientation' is another benchmark in this comparison. In this, the emphasis the enterprises in the investigated countries put on corporate social responsibility is reviewed.

Table 2: Results structural context

Country / Attribute	Germany	France	United Kingdom	Poland	Denmark
Finance Source	19,6% (Equity ratio)	21,5% (Equity ratio)	38,5% (Equity ratio)	40% (Equity ratio)	35,8% (Equity ratio)
Control Culture	Control oriented	Control oriented	Arm's length oriented	Control oriented	Arm's length oriented
Board System	Dual	Unitary	Unitary	Dual	Dual
Target Group	Stakeholder oriented	Stakeholder oriented (Mixed)	Shareholder oriented	Shareholder oriented (Mixed)	Stakeholder oriented
CSR Orientation	High	Medium	High	Medium	High

Within the 'financial source', Germany and France have the lowest equity ratio in this comparison, with 19.6 percent for Germany and 21.5 percent for France on average. Denmark and United Kingdom are in the middle with 35.8 percent and 38.5 percent (cf. Initiative Neue Soziale Marktwirtschaft 1999). Poland has the highest equity ratio on average with 40 percent (cf. Bass 2007). In regards to the 'control culture', German, French and Polish firm rely on a control oriented control culture (cf. Karmann 2000: 26, Buckley 2004: 45 and Liebermann et al. 1999: 92), while English and Danish firms are more arm's length controlled (cf. Buckley 2004: 45 and IMF 2006: 119). Concerning the 'board system', German, Polish and Danish firms are normally guided by a dual board (cf. Du Plessis et al. 2007:169 and Mallin 2006: 104). In comparison, the majority of French and English companies have a unitary board system (cf. Mallin 2007: 172, Thompson 2001: 83). For the attribute 'target group' it has to be stated that a general trend towards a more stakeholder-oriented management can be recognized (cf. Carroll & Buchholtz 2008: 57). Nonetheless, in a direct comparison some countries are less stakeholder-oriented than others and are seen as shareholder-oriented. Germany, France and Denmark can clearly be perceived as stakeholder-oriented countries (cf. Cooper 2004: 18, Zu 2008: 89 and Rose & Mejer 2003: 335), while Poland and the United Kingdom are more shareholder-oriented country (cf. Chen 2004: 51, Bluhm 2007: 83). For the last criterion, which is closely connected with the previous attribute (cf. Crane et al. 2008: 180), it can be seen that all the examined countries put emphasis on 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR). Nonetheless, in this comparison, Germany, the United Kingdom and Denmark show a higher priority for CSR than France and Poland (cf. Schrott 2007: 87, Den Hond et al. 2007: 206, Perrini et al. 2006: 43, Hiltz 2008: 60 and Habisch 2007: 497). The complete research for the structural context is subsumed in Table 2.

### 3.3 Functional context

In this part of the paper, the differences in regards to the functional context are compared. Here, the functional context describes the target content, whether it can be directly conveyed in a certain cultural context or whether it needs to be transmitted through several interim steps (cf. Sievert 2009: 13). To analyze the cultural context of the selected countries, the work of Geert Hofstede (2001) serves as an excellent starting point. In his work, he discovered four cultural dimensions (later a fifth one), which differ within countries. The five dimensions are: 'power distance', 'uncertainty avoidance', 'individualism vs. collectivism', 'masculinity vs. femininity', and since 2001 'long-term vs. short-term orientation'. Power distance describes how different countries handle inequality in society. With the uncertainty avoidance factor, Hofstede analyzed the differences how societies cope with the uncertainty of the future. Individualism vs. collectivism

reflects on the relationship between the individual and the collectivity that prevails in a given society. The masculinity vs. femininity factor investigates how societies cope differently with the duality of the different sexes. Finally, the long-term vs. short-term orientation dimension discovers the different attitudes in societies towards the length of future planning (cf. Hofstede 2001: 87ff). While the first four dimensions are covered by the research of Hofstede and are presented under [www.geert-hofstede.com/geert\\_hofstede\\_resources.shtml](http://www.geert-hofstede.com/geert_hofstede_resources.shtml), the last dimension is not available for all the investigated countries by Hofstede, due to the fact that the dimension 'long-term vs. short term orientation' was introduced after the original study (cf. Hopper et al. 2007: 98). Therefore, to ensure a consistent and reliable comparison, the current saving ratio of the different countries is used to investigate the long- or short-term orientation of the societies.

*Table 3: Results functional context*

<b>Country / Attribute</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>Poland</b>	<b>Denmark</b>
Power Distance Index	31	62	31	51	13
Uncertainty Avoidance Index	61	81	31	74	19
Individualism vs. Collectivism	64	66	85	56	69
Masculinity vs. Femininity	62	39	62	60	10
Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation	11%	13%	1%	4%	-3%

The first dimension of Hofstede, the power distance, shows that France is leading on an index of 100 with 61 and can be seen as the country where the distribution of power is most unequal, followed by Poland with 51, Germany and United Kingdom with 31 each and Denmark with the lowest value of 13 (cf. Hofstede 2009). In regards to the individualism vs. collectivism dimension, Germany, France and Denmark are close together within a 65-70 range. The United Kingdom has the highest emphasis on individualism with 85, while Poland is last with 56 (cf. Hofstede 2009). Germany, the United Kingdom and Poland, with 60-62 value masculinity attributes, score higher than France with 39 and especially Denmark with 10, where "feminine" values seem to be valued more highly (cf. Hofstede 2009). In terms of uncertainty avoidance, France with 81 and Poland with 74 show the highest willingness to avoid uncertainty. Germany follows with 61. United Kingdom and Denmark, with 31 and 19, tend to be more tolerant towards uncertainty and risks (cf. Hofstede 2009). Finally, within the last dimension, it must be anticipated that overall European and Anglo-American countries traditionally have a short-term orientation in a global comparison (cf. Lussier 2009: 392). Nonetheless, in this differentiation, France and Germany with a saving ratio of over 10 percent show a slightly stronger long-term orientation (cf. Finanz.Geld Finanznachrichten 2008), while Denmark, with -3 percent, has a clearer orientation towards short term planning (cf Statista 2006). The United Kingdom with 1 percent and Poland with 4 percent are arranged in the middle (cf. Kollewe 2008, Statista1 2006). Table 3 summarizes these findings.



### 3.4 Role context

Finally, in the role context, the target actors in the chosen countries must be revised. Due to the fact that communication actors work in manifold disciplines and professions the last part is primarily focused on journalism, where a cross-border comparison is applicable (cf. Sievert 2009: 15). At this, David H. Weaver book 'the global journalist' (1998), where he analyzed 21 countries in regards to their journalistic proficiency and formulated various features and attributes, which can be fulfilled to a higher or lesser extent, can serve as a basis of this comparison. Combined with some general characteristics the role context is analyzed by means of five attributes: 'statistical sex ratio', 'academic degree', and 'degree in journalism', which cover general journalistic characteristics, and the aspects: 'provide analysis', and 'be a watchdog of the government', which describe the attitudes to the occupational role as a journalist. The first characteristic describes the distribution between the sexes within the journalistic profession in the investigated countries. Then, the overall academic degree and the percentage of journalistic degrees in particular are compared. After that, the professional attribute 'provide analysis' is concerned with how important it is for journalists to provide analysis and interpretation of complex problems (cf. Weaver 2007: 139) and the criterion 'be a watchdog of the government' examines the extent to which the journalists identify themselves as a 'fourth estate' notion, covering ideas of the press as representative of the public, critic of government and advocate of policies (cf. McQuail 2005: 284).

*Table 4: Results role context*

Country / Attribute	Germany	France	United Kingdom	Poland	Denmark
Statistical Sex Ratio	Medium (37,2% female)	Medium (39% female)	Low-Medium (30% female)	High (50% female)	High (45% female)
Academic Degree	High (60%)	High (69%)	Medium (49%)	Medium (45%)	High (60%)
Degree in Journalism	Low (13%)	—	Low (4%)	Low (11%)	—
Provide Analysis	High (74%)	Medium (40%)	High (83%)	High (78%)	High (79%)
Be a watchdog of the government	Low – Medium (33%)	Medium (40%)	Medium (56%)	Medium (56%)	Medium (43%)

Poland and Denmark have the highest percentage of women in journalism. Poland has a ratio of 50 percent (cf. Anonymous 2005) while Denmark has a ratio of 45 percent (cf. Absalonsen 2006). France with 39 percent (cf. Creedon & Cramer 2007: 165) and Germany with 37.2 percent (cf. Köstler 2008: 8) show a medium percentage. The United Kingdom is the bottom of this attribute: 'only' 30 percent of the English journalists are female (cf. Creedon & Cramer 2007: 165). In regards to the 'academic degree' of the journalists, France with 69 percent and Denmark and Germany with 60 percent each have the highest parameter value (cf. Sievert 2008: 21, Schorr et al. 2003: 21 and Huck 2004: 89). The United Kingdom and Poland indicate, with 49 percent and 45 percent respectively, a lower percentage (cf. Anonymous 2005 and Sievert 2008: 21). When it comes to a particular degree in journalism, a by far smaller percentage can be recognized for the chosen countries. 13 percent of German journalists possess a journalistic degree compared to 11 percent of Polish journalists and just 4 percent of British journalists (cf. Wahl Jorgensen & Hanitzsch 2009: 43, Anonymous 2005 and Weaver 1998).

Denmark and France have to be excluded from this attribute, due to the fact that these countries do not provide sufficient information about the percentage of journalists with a journalistic degree. After analyzing the general characteristics, attitudes towards journalism are examined. The United Kingdom's journalists value the attribute 'provide analysis' the most with 83 percent, followed by Denmark with 79 percent, Poland with 78 percent and Germany with 74 percent (cf. Hovden et al. 2009: 161, Sievert 1998:???, and Weaver 1998). French journalists show a medium degree with 40 percent (cf. Sievert 1998, p.???). Relating to the last reviewed item, 'be a watchdog of the government'; the United Kingdom and Poland show with 56 percent the same percentage (cf. Weaver 1998 and Sievert 1998). 43 percent of the Danish journalists and 40 percent of the French journalists perceive this element as important (cf. Hovden et al. 2009: 161 and Sievert 1998). German correspondents 'only' value this remark with 33 percent (cf. Weaver 1998). A summary of the results can be found in Table 4.

#### **4. Summary and perspective**

Putting all these results together, we can draw a kind of new "map of Europe": a map of International Corporate Communication (cf. Diagram 3)

The main similarities we can see here are concerning the role context. Journalists throughout the surveyed countries considered themselves to some degree to be "watchdogs of government"; they thus generally ascribe moderate importance to investigative journalism. Analysis, in turn, is considered a very important part of the journalistic activity; and the profession as a whole is generally professionalized, in view of the relatively high importance ascribed to higher education training, if not specifically in the area of journalism itself. Similarities between the countries are therefore evident primarily within the "role context" – indicating that journalistic self-perception shows relatively little variation from country to country. However, also the normative context is characterized by a relatively high degree of conformity between most of the countries surveyed on the level of state influence, as seen in contrast with a distinctively "Anglo-Saxon" media landscape in Britain.

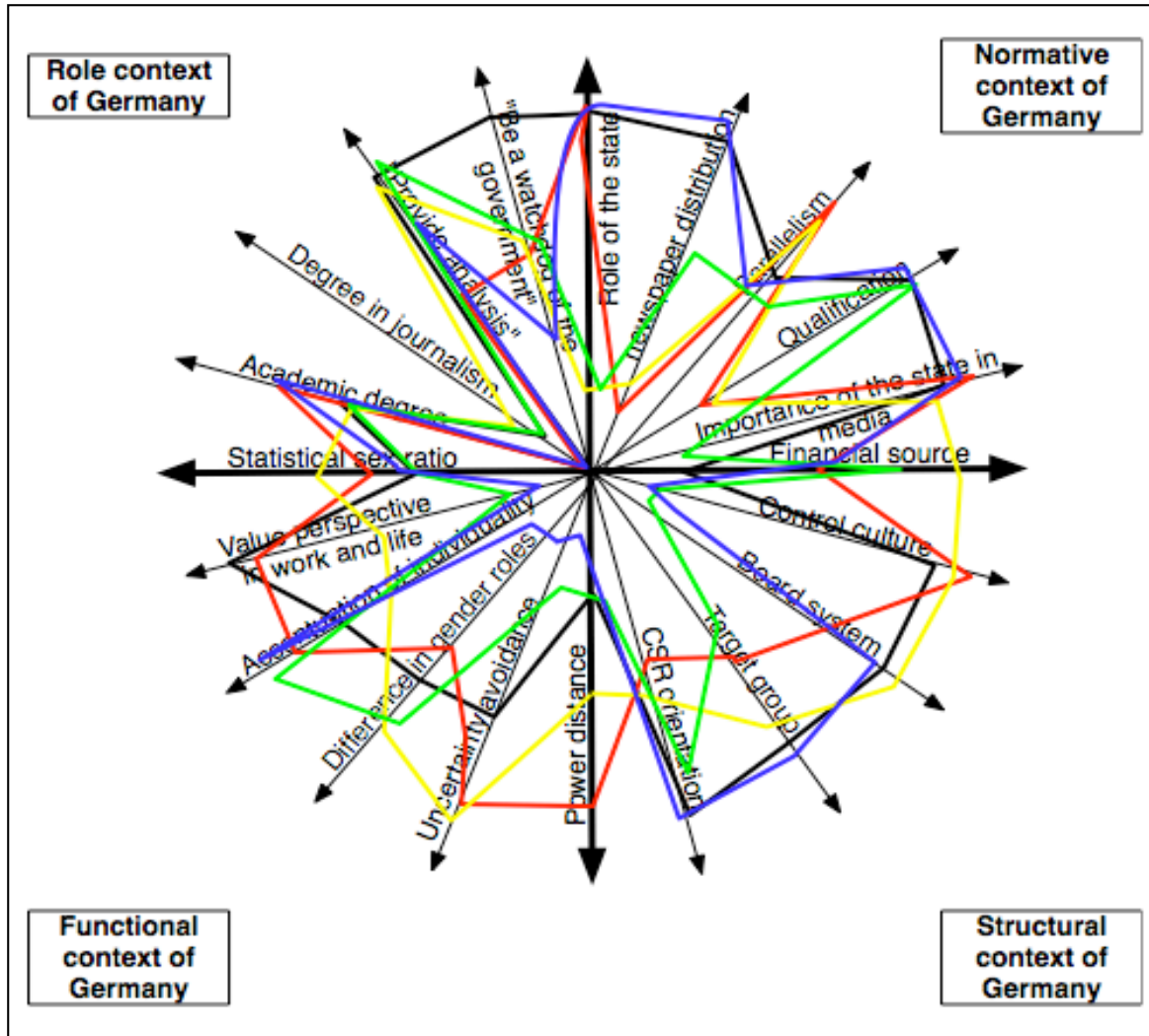
The main differences are respective results for "power distance" that show considerable variation. Whilst Denmark evidences a very equal wealth distribution, the highest scoring country, France, displays a very uneven society. - Large differences can be observed within the structural context, largely on account of the fundamental economic differences between "dirigiste" and "liberal" economic models. France, Germany, and Denmark show a "dirigiste" relationship between the state and the media, which is in turn reflected in the state's considerable importance in media operations. A notable exception to this rule is Poland, characterized as it is by a "liberal" state but showing significant state influence in the media.

In general terms, therefore, the major differences occur in the regions of functional and structural context, allowing us to conclude that cooperate structures and attitudes will be rife with stumbling blocks for international corporate communication due to the cultural gap which arises between source and target countries.

To conclude we can note that the differences, or "cultural gaps" between the selected countries here are significantly more prominent than the similarities, and that there is therefore no real potential for seeing and describing a homogenized model for "European" journalism. Consequently we must acknowledge that the need for such compasses is great, and that awareness of intercultural structures and attitudes as analyzed here is vital in the preparation of any international communication, as the country from which the information comes will invariably possess

different values to that into which the information is to be sent. Using the ICC compass, we can provide PR professionals with an adaptable tool to recognize and prepare for the potential problems which arise from intercultural communication, even within Europe.

Diagram 3: Result overview for selected countries within the ICC compass



Germany
  France
  Poland
  UK
  Denmark

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## 6. Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, it is not available on the Institute's website (only in its preliminary version awarded with the IPR Bledcom Special Price 2009 at [www.instituteforpr.org/about/global\\_commission/icpublications](http://www.instituteforpr.org/about/global_commission/icpublications)), but at the Social Sciences Research Network (SSRN) at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1371507>.

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