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The Bled Manifesto on Public Relations

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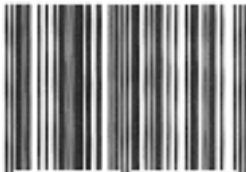
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Preface

Public relations practice in Europe has existed for more than a century. Bentele and Szyska (1995) refer to Krups as the first company with a department dedicated to press relations, set up in 1870. L'Etang (1999) places the beginning of public relations in England in the 1920s. Lagerwey (1997) shows that the first public relations departments in the Netherlands also emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century. Moreover, the Dutch claim to have the oldest professional association in the world, established in 1946 (Denig, 2000). European professionals and scientists have been meeting through the IPRA network for decades. Since 1976 they have also been connected through the European Confederation of Public Relations (CERP). Despite its long history, little is known about public relations in Europe. All over Europe, American textbooks are used to study both the concept and practice of public relations. Such books place the development of public relations in the United States, and few devote any space to aspects of public relations in other countries. Moreover, the authors of an article on European public relations practice in *International Public Relations* (Hazleton & Kruckeberg, 1996), a leading book in this field, were not even Europeans or foreigners who have lived in Europe for a longer period.

It is obvious that the teaching of public relations in European countries is largely US-centered (see Verčič, 2000). We, however, believe that this does not apply for practice of and research on the phenomenon. Most academics on public relations believe that public relations is a cultural construct. Although it is impossible to see Europe as one cultural and political system, it can clearly be differentiated from USA. What we need to understand is what is common with and what is different from USA.

Some textbooks state that after World War II modern public relations came over to Europe, together with the Marshall aid. We, and many public relations experts in Europe, believe, however, that the Anglo-American ideas are being mixed with the already existing concepts of public relations, although never referred to as "public relations" and never studied as such. In 1998, we started the debate to answer the question whether public relations is just an Anglo-American concept or whether there is (also) a European authenticity of public relations. The Delphi study on Public Relations, in which participants from 25 countries participated, is the basis for this document (see for a full presentation of the results Van Ruler et al, 2000). We, however, will also use other, more informal, sources to typify European public relations and raise some questions about it. We will discuss five topics, raised by the participants of the Delphi study and discussed in the three rounds of this study.

Method

For the purposes of our study we adopted the Delphi research method (e.g. Helmer, 1966; Brody & Stone, 1989). This method was developed by employees of the Rand Corporation for assessing future, complex or ambiguous subjects. It is based on iterative and anonymous group interviews. The group of respondents is to be composed of experts who are capable of clarifying complex issues descriptively and/or normatively. The premise of this method is that iterative measurements will either cause the range of answers to converge on the midrange of the distribution or will show a clear and reasoned dichotomy. The total group response will move to "true" answers after two to five rounds (Emmons & Kaplan, 1971). The essence of the method is the use of participants' answers in the following rounds. However, this is also its weakness, due to vague concepts and halo effects. The heuristics of the method are nevertheless very interesting. This is because every statement counts equally; furthermore facts, views and opinions can be clustered before being subjected to in-depth questioning in the following rounds.

The quality of the respondents is, of course, critical to the quality of the results. The EBOK project team designed three selection criteria:

1. As many European countries as possible should be involved.
2. The respondents should be qualified to discuss the topic under investigation (either by reputation within the European network of the Association and/or by reputation from publications).
3. Each country should be represented by an academic and a practitioner.

The work of selecting participants started with longtime members of the Association. Although they are primarily academics, some are professional public relations researchers or practitioners, involved in public relations training and/or research. If more than one candidate was available from a given country, the candidate that fitted our criteria best was consulted on his or her availability. By these means an initial network of 22 potential respondents was identified, one from each of the countries involved. This group was labeled "national coordinators". The majority of these individuals were academics involved in higher education, who were teaching courses that they themselves identified as public relations. They were asked to help us locate their counterparts in countries that were still not represented in the sample. They were also asked to nominate a compatriot who was a prominent practitioner; this individual would then serve as a second respondent from that country. Unfortunately, this approach was not very successful. A national coordinator only represented most countries. Finally, 37 participants from 25 countries were involved in the project (see Appendix).

Questionnaires were distributed and collected electronically (by e-mail). The first round of the EBOK Delphi study was conducted between January and July 1999. The first

questionnaire was an open and rather informal one. The aim was to collect as much data, and as many issues and opinions, as possible. These would then be used as input for the following rounds. As a result of the responses received from the first wave, the project team also decided to collect specific information from each country in separate "country cards". Data collection was concluded by March 2000, after three rounds.

The method by which the participants were selected made it impossible to obtain a full and representative picture of practice and research in Europe, covering people's views and the state of the art. This study should, therefore, be seen purely as explorative research. We take the view, however, that the picture obtained from the participants to this project represents a fascinating starting point for further research.

1. The naming of the field in European countries

The first question we want to raise is the naming of the field. The commonly used names for this field in the participating countries to the Delphi study differ, not only between countries, but also between practice and science.

Figure 1. Commonly used names of the field in practice and in science in European countries

Practice	Science
Public relations 11 x	Public relations 3x
Communication 5 x	Communication 8 x
Information 1 x	Information 0 x
Several names 6 x	Several names 2 x
Others, none mentioned	Others: mediation/promotion/corporate communication

When only one name is common, this one seems to be public relations in the practical field and communication in the scientific field. It became obvious that public relations is not a very widely used name for the field in Europe, not in practice but especially not in science. In many countries it is even not possible to talk about public relations, when speaking in their own languages (especially the northern and the north western and central European countries). Moreover, it became obvious that the term public relations (if ever used) is more and more being replaced by terms like communication management or corporate communication or integrated communication. The comments of the Delphi participants showed that these, however, are not commonly felt as good terms either. Some dislike the term communication management or integrated communication, because of the orientation to managerial work or to the demands of the organization. The differences are probably to some extent caused by differences in connotations of the concept of communication, but they are also caused by differences in the concept of public relations.

Names for "public relations" in Germanic and Slavonic languages mean "relations with the public" where "the public" itself denotes a bit different phenomenon than it is gene-

rally assumed to mean in the public relations discipline in English. Here we take the German term for "public relations" as an example, but similar explanations apply to other Germanic and Slavonic languages (and thus covering the whole Northern, Central and Eastern Europe) - with the exception of Slovenian language.[i] The German term for "public relations" is "Öffentlichkeitsarbeit", which literally means "public work" and is explained as "working in public, with the public and for the public." (Nessmann, 2000). This denomination contradicts the mainstream (U.S.) understanding of public relations as management of relationships between an organization and its publics.[ii] Yet, it also needs to be recognized that at least one British author defined public relations as "relations with the public" (Jeffkins, 1977:3) and that Olasky (1987) proposed an alternative approach to the history of public relations as being differentiated from "private relations" (and thus giving us also an alternative current meaning of public relations as something different from just "relations with publics").

Ever since these Germanic and Slavonic translations of the term public relations had been introduced to these languages it was obvious to the native speakers of those languages that their terms mean something different than the original (U.S. English) term, as Nessmann (2000) argues. One consequence of this terminological discrimination is a parallel use of the original term in English and its translation in all Germanic and Slavonic languages. But as we have learned through the so called "Country Cards" (written by the national coordinators regarding the status quo of public relations in their countries) there was a strong reaction in many countries against the use of the American expression which together with a recognition of the inadequateness of its translation caused several European public relations associations to rename themselves in their languages into some kind of "communication" associations (although they still define themselves as public relations associations in English). This has, so far, happened in Denmark, The Netherlands, Finland, Norway, and Sweden.

However, it would be wrong to just stop here with the recognition of this terminological problem as being a matter of language(s) only. There is also a deeper-routed cultural issue at stake here. "Öffentlichkeit" does not mean "public" - it means "public sphere" and by equating "public" with "öffentlichkeit", "an analytic dimension is lost, namely that an essential aspect of public relations is that it is concerned with issues and values that are considered publicly relevant which means relating to the public sphere" as Jensen (2000) from Denmark argues. This line of thought is also developed in Germany, started by Oeckl (1976), and in the Netherlands started by Van der Meiden (1978). Their reasoning is that public relations is not only about relations with the public, but it is relations in the public (sphere) and for the public (sphere). Furthermore, as Ronneberger and Rühl (1992:58) theoretically argued, public relations is to be measured by quality and quantity of the public sphere, it co-produces by its activities. Quality and quantity of the public (sphere) have to do with "öffentliche Meinung" - which is to be translated as "public opinion". But this public opinion is not an aggregation of individual opinions as conceived in public opinion polling (Price, 1992). This public opinion as a benchmark for public relations is a type of political authority that devel-

oped in the nineteenth century in the opposition to monarchic rulers and was the foundation on which democracies were built (Habermas, 1962). Here public relations serves the same kind of democratic function as journalism does and they are both contributing to a free flow of information and to the development of the public sphere both in size ("How many people are involved in public life?") and in level ("What is the level at which we are discussing public matters?"). In this respect "public" and "public relations" can mean in Europe something different than it normally does in the United States.

This concern with "the public sphere" highlights the issue of legitimacy and legitimization as one of the central concepts of public relations in Europe (Jensen, 1997) and in the Delphi study emerged as a specific dimension and/or role of European public relations. We prefer to call it a reflective dimension of public relations, as we will discuss in the final section.

Here we can see that the attention to linguistic and cultural idiosyncrasies have direct relevance for the definition, dimensions and the domain of public relations. As long as the U.S. English language, the U.S. practice and the U.S. theory are the sole sources of conceptual work, the field of public relations will be short of global inclusiveness and validity it needs to become a true academic discipline and a profession (see also Motion & Leitch, 2000). This attention to non-U.S. sources of public relations thinking and practice is needed not only to enable non-U.S. based practitioners and academics being a part of the same field of theory and practice but also for the U.S.-based public relations as well.

We, therefore, believe that we must globalize the discussion on the fundamentals of public relations and start a true dialogue between continents in order to learn from each other. We therefore need to introduce alternative ways of thinking of public relations into our international handbooks, related to cultural differences and different theoretical approaches. But we also need to discuss used terms and theoretical approaches to the different terms in order to develop a global language.

2. The debate on relationships and communication

The previous point has a strong relationship with the second point of our document: the question whether public relations is all about relationships or all about communication. As Heath (2000) mentions in the preface of the Handbook of Public Relations, "the new view of public relations assumes that markets are attracted to and kept by organizations that can create beneficial relationships" (pp.3). In his view the paradigm of public relations is changing dramatically into the "underpinning assumption that public relations is a relationship-building professional activity that adds value to organizations because it increases the willingness of markets, audiences, and publics to support them rather than to oppose their efforts"(pp.8). For Ledingham and Bruning (2000) public relations IS relationship management. Also Hutton

(1999) described a new paradigm of public relations, aimed at "building relationships with publics". In the concluding paragraphs the proposed definition of public relations ("managing strategic relationships") is said to be breaking with "some long-standing ideas" that communication is the bedrock of public relations and that "communication is a necessary but no longer sufficient foundation for public relations; training in social psychology, anthropology, and other social sciences (not to mention new technologies) is necessary, in addition to business, management and perhaps industry-specific training." As it will become clear in our next section, we believe that it has no use to make a distinction between communication and relationships. From our research it is obvious that - at least in Europe - even public relations researchers cannot make any clear difference between communication and relationships (Van Ruler et al. 2000). What one sees as communication is what another uses the word relationships for.

When ranking the key concepts for building a definition of public relations the EBOK Delphi study produced the following results:

Figure 2. Key concepts for building a European definition of public relations

Communication	21	Stakeholders	11
Relationships	21	Environment	11
Publics	20	Integrity/ethics	10
Mutual understanding	20	Activity	10
Management	18	Society	9
Public trust	16	Information	8
Organization	15	Philosophy	8
Profession	14	Promotion	7
Mutually beneficial	14	Informing people/society	7
Building consensus	12	Avoiding conflicts	7
Strategy	12	Engineering public support	5

To our list the notion of legitimacy was added.

In the ranking list communication and relationships have the same number of supporters and, moreover, almost the same supporters.

In the second round we also brought this item back with a closed question whether public relations is all about managing communication, managing relationships, all about communicating about the organization into society, or something other besides:

• managing communication
• managing relationships
• communicating about the organization in or into society
• something else entirely.

We asked the participants to explain their choices. At first sight, we found an almost total division of views in this respect. No one opted for "communicating about the

organization into society", some preferred "communicating about the organization in society". Almost as many respondents selected "managing relationships" as did "managing communication".

The arguments for selecting "relationships" were: *"it is managing relationships with public groups", "it is all about managing relationships by informing, persuading, dialogue, negotiating", but also "it is to influence the behavior of parts of the important relationships".* These answers alerted us to the fact that relationships can refer to the relations between parties as well as to the other party itself. It also showed us that relationship building is not necessarily a merely reciprocal/symmetrical concept. Relationships are obviously a broad and complex concept.

The arguments in favor of opting for "communication" can be summarized as: *"Communication is the most important mean of public relations and relationships are the outcome of it".* Here we also encountered two views of this concept. One was: *"it is the management of communication to mix the activities of the advertisement and promotional fields in the best possible way".* This refers to public relations as "a tool of marketing", which was a view no one wanted to express explicitly, when asked for. The second view is diametrically opposed to the first: *"PR refers to managing communication by direct or indirect relationships, in order to gain the trust of public groups and to monitor their trust and the consequences it has for the organization. At the same time, PR is the management of information about what is going on inside and outside organizations, with the goal of anticipating future situations or to solve already established problems in a proper and less harmful way to the organization. This can only be done by establishing communication, i.e. relationships".* This statement comes close to the view that PR is "communicating about the organization within society", it also refers to "managing relationships". However, it was given as an argument for "managing communication". Some participants did not want to choose between these possibilities and, judging by the arguments put forward, it was obvious that none of the others considered this to be a natural division. It is therefore highly questionable if a debate - whether public relations is about management of communication or management of relations - is productive at all.

A confrontation of communication with behavior is in the light of the major part of the European social-scientific tradition also nonsense - communication itself being a form of behavior and at the same time being the essence of any kind of relation. An interesting point of discussion seems to be, however, what is meant by communication. We believe that this discussion is much more productive than having to choose between communication and relationships. In this light we believe that an interesting differentiation can be made between communication as a certain kind of behavior of people (behavior with signs and symbols) and communication as a process through time and space in which meanings develop and alter public sphere.

In our Delphi research project we have clearly found two views on the concept of relations, a one-way persuasive view and a two-way, interactive view, but we also have found

two views on the concept of public, which has to do with the concept of public itself: a summarized amount of people which can be segmented, and public as "public sphere", as is a common view in German and Scandinavian countries (see Bentele, Steinmann & Zerfass, 1996; Holmström, 1996; Jensen, 2000) and used to be in The Netherlands (see Van der Meiden & Fauconnier, 1994; Van Ruler, 1996).

We, therefore, believe that the discussion about relationships or communication is not productive. We, however, believe that we need to start a discussion on what we actually mean by relationships and communication. Looking at the discussion above, we believe that there are at least two different views of both concepts, as well as of the concept of public. The meaning of the concepts needs to be discussed thoroughly before we can start thinking on choosing for certain concepts at all.

3. The parameters of the field

The third issue we want to raise, has, again, a strong relationship with the former issues. In the first round we found many statements about the blurring of public relations with other fields, such as integrated communication management, marketing or even the realms of corporate executives. We wondered whether this was because public relations still has to mature or whether this is simply part of its evolutionary process. Two participants did not see any blurring, and for some participants this is purely a question of semantics. Nevertheless, others think that it is a matter of maturation, while a majority sees it as evolutionary, e.g. a broadening of public relations.

One of our questions in the third round was "Is public relations only worthwhile when organizations have problems?" The answers were very clear. Public relations is not just problem handling, it is also a preventive instrument. Arguments that were given, referred to the fact that it also advises individuals within the organization on how to handle their relationships, and on how to develop programs for organizations that *"foster good behavior in communications"*. Again, this stresses different roles for public relations. Taking the findings, in the last round we focused on this item and discussed the parameters of public relations.

What is part of public relations and what is not? And what actually is public relations? This question raised a strong debate in the Delphi project. Almost all participants stated that, although public relations is a tool for all managers and also a view on organization, it is, above all a management discipline itself, separated from other management disciplines, such as finance, personnel etc. Analyzing the deliberations of the participants, given in the first round on the question of the relationship with (other) management disciplines, we found the following dimensions of the concept of public relations. In the second round they are ranked as follows.

Figure 3. Dimensions of the concept of public relations and its ranking in the Delphi study

Highest rank	Item	Lowest rank
15	A professional management function that initiates or maintains relationships between an organization and its publics	0
6	The communication activities by which an organization can create and maintain long-term relationships with its stakeholders	1
5	A management function to gain public trust and social consensus about the goals of the organization	0
2	A philosophy of strategic management not being market oriented but society oriented	1
1	A tool of marketing to gain a favorable basis for relationships with stakeholders	15
0	A promotional activity to clarify certain goals or conduct of an organization/individual	3
0	A promotional activity to gain public support for the corporate body as a whole	1
0	An informational activity to keep the internal and external society Informed	5

Obviously there is almost total agreement for the view that public relations is not a tool of marketing or a one-way persuasive or informational activity. But, after having said that, it is not just or not only a professional management function, separated from other functions, because the first four items got often a second or third rank and hardly any lowest ranks. This shows that the concept of public relations is a complex concept itself, which cannot be seen as a uni-dimensional one.

In order to define the parameters of public relations more precisely we added five questions into the questionnaire of the second round. The answers were as follows:

Figure 4. The parameters of public relations

Question	Yes	No	Depends
Must internal communication be part of public relations	28	0	0
Should a PR professional have influence upon the strategy of the organization as a whole	26	1	1
Should a PR professional have influence upon the behavior of the employees	20	6	3
Should a PR professional be responsible for the content of the messages he communicates	17	7	4
Must marketing communication be part of public relations	13	13	2

We may conclude that according to the participants, it is impossible to do public relations without influencing the strategy of the organization and without the responsibility for internal communication. Whether the influence on the behavior of all employees belongs to public relations or not, is not clear for everyone; the same counts for responsibility for the content of the messages. There is a strong disagreement as to whether or not external communication includes communication with customers (which is marketing communication).

Because of the fact that the inclusion of marketing communication within public relations separated the participants, we asked them in the third round to comment on three questions on inclusion or exclusion: Should marketing communication be part of public relations and is public relations aimed at commercial publics as well? Or should marketing and public relations only co-operate in this matter? Or should they be separated according to commercial and non-commercial functions within the organization?

This question elicited long answers from many participants. For six participants it was very clear that public relations is also aimed at commercial publics. Most of the others refused to commit themselves and stated that "it all depends". The overall outcome of the discussion is that for most of the participants public relations can also be aimed at commercial publics and that public relations also does "marketing communication things". However, public relations and marketing are two functions that need to be kept separated but have to co-operate.

Part of the refusal to commit on the inclusion of marketing communication has to do with the concept of persuasion, which was also included in the comments the participants gave in earlier rounds. We therefore asked in the third round how we should consider persuasion in the case of public relations. The question was: "Public relations is clearly not to be equated with propaganda, although persuasive strategies are used. Could you please give the borderlines between a persuasive effort on one hand and propaganda on the other hand or do you want to reject any persuasive effort as part of public relations?"

Figure 5. The concept of persuasion

No persuasion allowed	As little persuasion as possible	All persuasion is ok	Persuasion allowed on limited grounds
0	2	1	18

The limiting grounds have three dimensions:

• or some persuasion is only allowed when facts/arguments are used and not imagery or emotions
• or some persuasion is only allowed when it is used in the public debate or in a "negotiation connection"
• or some persuasion is only allowed when more sides are taken into consideration

However, some of the participants who strongly reject that public relations is also aimed at commercial publics and/or that public relations has to do with persuasion, do also see "public" as "public sphere". This could, therefore, refer to another approach to public relations, which we call "reflective".

The last question we proposed on the borders of public relations was the question of influence on organizational behavior. This item was mentioned in the first round by several participants as the most important task of public relations and was also part of the borderline discussion in the second round. We asked the participants: "Should influence on organizational behavior be part of public relations? Should public relations and personnel departments only co-operate in this matter? Or should they be separated according to external communication, which is the responsibility of public relations, and internal communication, which is the responsibility of personnel department? Or should only the aspects of internal information be part of public relations and should the attitude and behavior oriented aspects be part of the personnel department?"

For 15 participants it remained clear that public relations should have influence on organizational behavior. For all others, public relations should co-operate with the personnel department in this matter. No one argued regarding the implementation of this co-operation; at least no one chose one of the given options or rejected any of them.

Yet, there was a strong undertone in the discussion, brought in by participants who did not want to reduce this field into a profession, but preferred to see it as a view on organization. It became very obvious in the discussion on ethics. For all participants this is an item that needs to be debated, especially while business ethics are becoming more and more important. It was felt that public relations ethics is intertwined with or perhaps even the same as business ethics. For some participants public relations goes beyond ethical behavior as such, but must be focused on societal dialogue. One participant stated: "Public Relations is also a question of continuously adjusting the decision processes within the organization into society's changing norms and values, and therefore, public relations is to discuss in public social norms and values relevant to the organization, in order to make the organization reflect these norms and values in its decision processes, and finally communicate to the public that the organization's behavior is legitimate".

We, therefore, like to state that we cannot reduce public relations to a professional function within or for organization. We must also see public relations as a certain approach or concept of organization. This implies that public relations works outside as well as inside the organization and that it could be a professional function as well as a part of functioning of other professionals as well. We believe that practice as well as education is too focused on the professional function, without attention for public relations as a concept of organization.

4. Public relations as a separate research field

In the first two rounds, the participants unanimously stated that public relations must be a theory-based field in order to flourish. Many expressed the view that the field has a poor theoretical base. The data that we obtained from the research and education situation in various European nations, showed that public relations in these countries is not commonly studied at a scientific level. Very few European universities are actually carrying out research into public relations. We found very few well-developed research programs, other than one or two in Germany and England and to a lesser extent some in Austria, The Netherlands and Denmark. But also in these countries public relations is not highly stated within their universities. The recently developed European digital bibliography will provide us with more details of the scientific books and readers published in European countries. Until now, data of this kind is only available for a few countries. In addition, scientific journals seldom contain articles by European researchers. While this will partly be due to translation problems, we believe that part of the reason is also a lack of good research. Nevertheless, we also believe that it is partly caused by the fact that we differ in the answer of what is "good research". This has partly to do with the fact that the more important journals are all developed by US researchers and most of all aimed at empirical and, moreover, quantitative research. The fact that American researchers talk about qualitative research as "informal" research is informative in this respect.

However, it is obvious that in European countries neither practice nor science is very interested in theory development in public relations. We believe that this is partly due to the fact that the concept of public relations is reduced to a professional function in and for organizations.

We have found that the picture is the same when it comes to education. The field of what is internationally known as public relations, is taught at universities all over Europe. It seems to be accepted in many countries but mainly at the undergraduate level or as an optional subject at the graduate level. It is taught in a variety of faculties from business to agriculture. It usually goes under the name of corporate communication, integrated communication (often in relation to advertising), communication management or information studies, but also under other names. Fewer countries have Master's degrees in public relations/communication management, and it is certainly not accepted as an academic discipline in its own right. Clearly, public relations is mainly accepted at Bachelor level, not at the more strategic and intellectual Master's or Ph.D. levels. This corresponds with the state of the art of theory building that we have identified in this research project. We assume that the deans of European universities do not see public relations as an interesting theoretical field, not at a management level nor at an organizational/societal level.

The researchers and educators do not form a critical mass themselves either. This has to do with cultural/theoretical differences but also with the approach to the theoreti-

cal field. As long as it is seen as an activity at the tactical level, it will never get attention. But perhaps the focus on public relations as a management function is not a very helpful one as well, because many researchers are more interested in the societal function of public relations.

It is obvious that public relations is not (yet) developed into a research field or a teaching field at high level. We believe that this has to do with a lack of identity of public relations. It used to be studied as a phenomenon in society but practice and education are more interested in public relations as an instrument for the benefit of an organization.

5. The definition of the field

In the first round we have asked the participants to give their definition in use. In the second round, we asked the participants to decide which key concepts - found in the given definitions in the first round - should definitely be part of a definition of public relations. If we try to form a sentence of the key concepts, mentioned by 2/3 of the participants, then we get the following one:

> *"PR is the (maintenance of) relationships (with) publics (by) communication (in order to) establish mutual understanding".*

This is a very common, Anglo-American grounded, definition of public relations, found in many textbooks and delivered by many national associations. Clearly, the majority of the participating European public relations (educational and research) specialists hold a very common and very much debated definition of public relations, when asked for.

We continually returned to these familiar Anglo-American oriented concepts in trying to find a common view. This was not very helpful to find an answer to our research question. Therefore, it seemed more promising to try to overlook all the answers that were probably recited verbatim and that may have been very idealistic. Instead, we would concentrate on public relations as a phenomenon with certain distinct characteristics. In this way we could first try to find a description of this field's domain. Not until this had been done could we think about professionalization, nor could we talk about the skills, knowledge, tools or theories that needed to be developed. We forced ourselves not to spend too much time searching for common denominators, but rather to focus on different aspects, which we could connect to each other. Doing this exercise we hoped to find the "true" dimensions of the domain and find out whether or not there is a distinct entity that we could call "typical European public relations".

The first two rounds generated a wide variety of views on public relations per se as well as on certain roles for public relations within (or on behalf of) an organization and in society at large. After studying the answers and searching for a description of the characteristics of the domain, we clustered all of the statements and ideas into four

characteristics. We examined these clusters in the third round discussion, in order to find out whether they can be used to define European public relations. We asked the participants the following question. "According to our interpretations of the outcome of the Delphi study so far, public relations seems to have four characteristics. Do you agree that we can see these four as distinct roles of public relations rather than as mutually exclusive views? If not, please give your reasons. If you agree, are there any additional roles bordering on public relations that you think should be included? Please comment on this and give reasons for your choice".

Figure 6. The four characteristics of European public relations

1. **Reflective:** to analyze changing standards and values and standpoints in society and discuss these with members of the organization, in order to adjust the standards and values / standpoints of the organization accordingly. This role is concerned with organizational standards, values and views and aimed at the development of the mission and organizational strategies.
2. **Managerial:** to develop plans to communicate and maintain relationships with public groups, in order to gain public trust and/or mutual understanding. This role is concerned with commercial and other (internal and external) public groups and with public opinion as a whole and is aimed at the execution of the organizational mission and strategies.
3. **Operational:** to prepare means of communication for the organization (and its members) in order to help the organization formulate its communications. This role is concerned with services and is aimed at the execution of the communication plans developed by others.
4. **Educational:** to help all the members of the organization become communicatively competent, in order to respond to societal demands. This role is concerned with the mentality and behavior of the members of the organization and aimed at internal public groups.

Not all participants were in favor of including these four characteristics within the scope of public relations. One preferred another way of clustering the field. *"I prefer techniques, strategy, ethics and departmental organization"*. Another approves of the clustering, but questions its basis. *"This could be it, but I cannot follow the reasoning"*. Two participants questioned the reflective role: *"I don't understand the term reflective: do you mean communicating opinions , intervention in the public sphere or debate? Or communication to build a politically acceptable identity?"* However, all of the other participants agreed that these four characteristics were typical of European public relations. Furthermore, they regard them as definitive characteristics and perhaps even as interrelated dimensions of a European concept of public relations. *"I agree; the evaluative dimension of PR is very important; is this included in the reflective role?"; "I am happy to see these roles as inclusive within my world view of PR; I would like to think that the managerial role is dominant, but I believe that many practitioners still have an exclusively technical role"; "Yes, I think we can see these as the dimensions of PR"*.

It is obvious that, within this public relations community, these roles are acceptable as a mean of defining the domain. According to statements from several European countries, like Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden, it seems to be questionable whether public relations is seen just as maintaining relationships with certain public groups or is (also) seen in Europe as the public relationship any organization has with "society" and the "license to operate" any organization needs (see Jensen, 2000; Ronneberger & Rühl, 1992). This questioning stressed the attention for the reflective and educational roles and almost all other participants accepted this.

All disciplines and professions we know struggle with the multiplicity of often contradicting definitions. This multiplicity is sometimes explained away as a result of infancy and sometimes as a result of maturity of a field. In that respect, public relations is not different from any other academic social discipline or from any profession in practice.

In *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication* that has just been published, Stanley Deetz (2001) approached the question "What is organizational communication" by explicating three different ways that are available for conceptualization. By transposing his presentation to the question "What is public relations?" we can do one of the following three things (see also Verčič et al, 2001).

First, we can focus on the development of public relations as a specialty in departments of public relations and public relations associations. As Deetz expects for his field of interest, we can also expect for public relations that adopting this approach would bring us to a classic complaint that there are as many public relations definitions as there are people practicing and teaching it: "It is not surprising that these reviews often contain laments about the disunity of the field. This may well be an artifact of the organizing principle used."

A **second** approach to conceptualizing public relations focuses on a phenomenon that exists out there. This was the approach adopted by both Hutton in his article and by us in our EBOK Delphi research. But by confronting our results in the previous section, we have to admit that there is no unified phenomenon out there and that public relations "is not one phenomenon with many explanations; each form of explanation may conceptualize and explain different phenomenon. Fixed subdivisions are always a kind of theoretical hegemony." (Deetz, 2001: 5). Public relations as a phenomenon may indeed differ between social spaces (e.g., continents) and looking for the lowest common denominator is worthless.

A **third** way Deetz proposes is to approach the issue of public relations as a way to describe and explain an organization. That is exactly what other managerial disciplines and professions are doing: finances describe and explain organizations from a financial perspective, lawyers from a legal perspective, marketing from a market perspective. What we need to find for public relations is "a distinct mode of explanation or way of thinking about organizations." What we need to develop is a public relations theory of organizing and organization.

What is the specific characteristic of public relations approach to organizing and organization? Relationships are not, since they are claimed by general management,[iii] marketing,[iv] social[v] and organizational[vi] psychology and many other disciplines. What distinguishes the public relations manager when he sits down at the table with other managers is that he brings to the table a special concern for broader societal issues and approaches to any problem with a concern for implications of organizational behavior towards and in the public sphere. It is precisely this concern that is implicit in definitions of public relations as "relationships management" and as "communication management", in both "image management" and "reputation management", and is fundamental for understanding of some of the fundamental concepts like "stakeholders", "public(s)" and "activists". In Europe this is specially contained in the reflective and educational dimensions of public relations (the second one pertaining to the development of social and communicative competence of and in an organization and not to a dissemination of information), but in the U.S. it has special features in situations concerned with "non-discrimination", "non-harassment" and different kind of "non-isms" (like "non-ageism"), which all seem very different to how the underlying similar problems are dealt with in Europe.

A bridge that may bring us from different approaches to public relations together is our common approach to organizing and organization. In that respect Olasky's alternative exposition of the U.S. public relations history may be a very valuable starting point - by differentiating "public" from "private" relations. Public relations practitioners and academics approach to organizing and organizations from a "public" perspective, being concerned with phenomena of reflexivity (of organizational behavior) and legitimacy.

Seen from this standpoint public relations is not just a phenomenon to be described and defined. It is first of all a strategic process of viewing an organization from an "outside" view. Its primary concerns are organization's inclusiveness and its preservation of the "license to operate". As marketing is viewing organization from a market view, public relations is viewing organization from a public view (meant as "public sphere"). We, therefore, like to broaden the relational and communicative approaches to public relations with or into a public or reflective approach of which the relational and communicative approaches of public relations can be seen as parts.

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Appendix: list of participating countries

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Yugoslavia.

After we completed the Delphi, Greece, Malta and Turkey also joined the EBOK project.

i Until 1990s, Slovenian term for public relations was "stiki z javnostjo" - literally meaning "contacts with the public". In early 1990s Dejan Verčič proposed a new term - "odnosi z javnostmi" (literally maning "relations with publics"), causing a public outcry from the side of Slovenian language purists who argued that the term "public" can not form a plural in Slavic languages. The term "odnosi z javnostmi" received its legitimacy when Dejan Verčič completed a Masters Thesis on public relations at the University of Ljubljana in which he successfully defended the term: Dejan Verčič, Odnosi z javnostmi: nastanek, zgodovina in teorije [Public Relations: Origins, History and Theories] (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, Faculty of Social Sciences, unpublished Masters Thesis, May 26, 1995).

ii Which is the basis for the definition offered by James G. Hutton, op. cit.; se also Edward L. Bernays, The Late Years: Public Relations Insight 1956-1986 (Rhineback, NY: H&M Publishers, 1986), pp. 35; George Cheney and George N. Dionispoulos, "Public Relations? No, Relations with Publics: A Rhetorical-Organizational Approach to Contemporary Corporate Communications," in Carl Botan and Vincent Hazleton, Jr. (eds.), Public Relations Theory (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1987), pp. 135-157; Robert S. Cole, The Practical Handbook of Public Relations (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981), pp. 4; James E. Grunig, "A Situational Theory of Publics: Conceptual History, Recent Challenges and New Research," in Danny Moss, Toby MacManus and Dejan Verčič (eds.), Public Relations Research: An International Perspective (London: International Thomson Business Press, 1997), pp. 3-48; Jon White, How to Understand and Manage Public Relations: A Jargon-Free Guide to Public Relations Management (London: Random, 1991), pp. ix;

iii This was the defining characteristic of the management discipline from its very foundations, see: Chester I. Barnard, The Functions of the Executive (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1968; orig. 1938); for a recent exposition of the same argument, see: John Kay, Foundations of Corporate Success: How Business Strategies Add Value (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995).

iv Regis McKenna, Relationship Marketing: Successful Strategies for the Age of the Customer (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1991) - public relations academics and practitioners are making a serious mistake when they are suppressing marketing conceptualizations of their field as relating to all, not only market-oriented relationships, and seeing this as "encroachment" - it is not on us, public relations devotees to define what some other discipline is to think and do.

v Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson, Handbook of Social Psychology (New York: Random Press, 1985, 3rd ed.).

vi Daniel Katz and Robert L. Kahn, The Social Psychology of Organizations (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978, 2nd ed.); for even a more relationship-oriented approach to organizational psychology, see: Karl E. Weick, The Social Psychology of Organizing (New York: Mc-Graw-Hill, 1979, 2nd ed.).