



Short Communication

Public diplomacy and construction of communicational spaces. The Cuban experience

Sunamis Fabelo Concepción*

Titular Professor and Researcher, Research Center on International Politics (CIPI), Cuba

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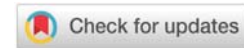
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***Corresponding author:** Sunamis Fabelo Concepción, PhD, Titular Professor and Researcher, Research Center on International Politics (CIPI), Cuba, Tel: 5352892775; E-mail: sunamisfc@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4752-2688>

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Global events, such as climate change, the food crisis, or the advance of the COVID-19 pandemic, show that the world needs new integrated dynamic processes. In dealing with the pandemic, exchanges between the scientific community, trained personnel, and the training of professionals, as well as the strengthening of local capacities to deal with the health crisis, the dispatch of health material, medical personnel, etc., have been very useful. However, the lessons learned from this and other crises, and the unexplored potential of cooperation based on shared interests in an increasingly interconnected world, have made it possible to assess the importance of dissimilar patterns of relationships and complementarity, ranging from the promotion of new strategies of entrepreneurship and cooperation to the need to leave installed capacities in the countries receiving aid to enable them to self-manage the various crises they face and promote the development of endogenous capacities.

However, in studies referring to communication sciences, there are not many analyses of communication in the field of science diplomacy in the context of the development of international relations. Thus, communication, diplomacy, and international relations are usually studied as independent or partially related niches, especially in their links with other fields. Given the effects of globalization and an increasingly interconnected world, and therefore the inevitable coexistence of cooperative-confrontational relations, it is becoming increasingly necessary to trace the common coordinates of such phenomena in search of common grounds for the development and construction of relations that are increasingly generative of relational environments.

This article presents an approach to studies on the promotion of communicational environments, in this case in the field of health. These studies open an important space for academic development both in the theory of communication and international relations, but especially in the very conception of public health, understood as a public good, given its potential for international cooperation [1] and therefore as a common space of interest and relationship. This is not a new topic, however, its approach oriented towards the construction of relationships, as well as a mediator in the treatment of conflict or especially confrontational situations implies a different, constructive approach to existing problems, whether they have survived over time or are just emerging.

The external projection of a country can be defined as those actions that are generated by a given nation in terms of its international links, even if they are not part of the official policy. Such a distinction has generated extensive debates when defining the practices of diplomacy with a surname, according to the specific field in which it is practiced (economic, scientific, cultural, sports, religious, etc.), while a concept has been developed that brings together all of these in the so-called public diplomacy [2].

Therefore, public diplomacy -including external projection- contributes directly, not only to the construction of the country's image but also to the conception of communication environments, conducive to the construction of relationships and spaces for dialogue, understood as communication environments and reciprocal contact channels, which are highly favored by communicational codes also common among these actors, beyond language or ideology. Their use,

management, and development constitute an invaluable tool as power resources to identify, influence, and build relationships based on respect and empathy. Undoubtedly, these elements point to essential guidelines for distinguishing between political and ideological differences and the real possibilities of moving forward together, for example, on specific issues such as health, climate change, or agriculture, but above all on the way in which these purposes can be communicated [2].

Thus, for example, the concept of international development cooperation (IDC) can be taken into account in terms of public diplomacy, external projection, and country image. From the perspective of external projection, IDC takes on new nuances when it comes to managing the actions carried out by governments and civil society entities, aimed at improving living conditions and promoting development processes in countries of certain social, economic, or political vulnerability, based on criteria such as equity, international solidarity, and mutual interest. In this sense, the confrontation of current global challenges, which require concerted interventions between different governments and actors around the world, to a large extent challenges the traditional Westphalian conception of the nation-state and pushes the field of international relations toward issues that have not been addressed before, such as the role of science, for example. The solutions to these challenges must be based on the interaction between actors and knowledge, which take advantage of, enhance and promote the strengths of each country, as well as its niches of innovation, talent, and competitiveness [3].

In the Cuban experience and its potentialities in the development of public diplomacy, scientific diplomacy, especially in the field of medical cooperation, assistance, and capacity building are important fields, which undoubtedly have a great impact on the country's external projection in terms of building relationships and communication spaces. There are many examples, some of which would merit specific studies on the articulation of communicational codes and their influence on the promotion of a communication environment that establishes truly important channels of dialogue. In all cases, it is possible to find sufficient arguments that demonstrate the role of scientific-technical development in the internal logic of Cuba's external projection.

Cuban experiences and projections attest to Cuba's potential in the field of science diplomacy. From the communicational perspective, it is important to highlight the spaces for dialogue that these spheres have made it possible to establish in complex situations, within the framework of sometimes markedly confrontational relations.

For example, in the framework of the complex relations between Cuba and the USA, one of the most important cases of Cuban medical collaboration was the creation of the Henry Reeve International Contingent of Doctors Specialized in Situations of Disasters and Serious Epidemic¹. This Contingent was created by Fidel Castro in 2005, to assist the victims of Hurricane Katrina in the United States [4].

¹Henry Reeve was a Cuban patriot of U.S. nationality and fought alongside the Cubans in the struggle for independence against Spain in the 19th century.

On the other hand, the collaboration established between both countries in the fight against Ebola in Africa should be highlighted [4]. Also, in the case of the Cuban vaccine CIMAvax-EGF for the prevention of lung cancer, it should be noted that recently the Roswell Park Institute in the United States gave way to a clinical trial in that country with the therapeutic immunogen and immunostimulant agent with recombinant human EGF, currently produced by the Center for Molecular Immunology of Cuba.

The same is true for the Cuban case of the national and international management of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its health protocols made it possible to achieve remarkable results that were put at the service of other countries. It should be noted that Cuba was the only country in the Latin American and Caribbean region with the capacity to develop so far three vaccines of its own (Abdala, Soberana 02, and Soberana Plus) and two vaccine candidates (Soberana 01 and Mambisa). The vaccines are already used, in addition to Cuba, in Mexico, Nicaragua, Venezuela, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Vietnam, Western Sahara, Syria, and Iran [5].

In the case of cooperation between Cuba and the European Union during the COVID-19 pandemic, Cuba sent health professionals to Italy. In addition, in the European context, it is important to take into account the articulation of policies that was achieved for the effective management of the crisis, which had in Cuba, as well as in European countries, important actors who managed the Cuban collaboration in European overseas territories located in the Caribbean. This led Cuba to strengthen its relations with CARICOM member nations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the beginning of the pandemic, several Caribbean countries requested an increased Cuban medical presence. As a result, several brigades left for Suriname, Jamaica, Dominica, Belize, St. Vincent, and the Grenadines, St. Kitts and Nevis, Honduras, Anguilla and Martinique, and others where they have been progressively incorporated, not to mention their collaboration in other regions. In that sense, it is important to highlight how France approved the entry of Cuban doctors to its overseas territories, in need of health professionals. This plan dates back to 2019 but came at an opportune moment. On the other hand, the president of France recognized Cuba's participation in the islands of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyana, and St. Pierre and Miquelon. Also, the British overseas territory of the Virgin Islands received 22 Cuban collaborators to strengthen medical capacity. Similarly, Cuban medical collaborators arrived in the British islands of Turks and Caicos [6].

Many other examples could argue the Cuban experience in scientific diplomacy, specifically in terms of medical cooperation. In all cases, Cuba's development in the field of health, capacity building, and the development of the biopharmaceutical industry have opened an important field of exchange and international relations between the island and the world. Despite difficult conditions, common interests and shared spaces have prevailed, creating important channels of communication between the parties. This has been good for the parties, but above all for the people, for the good cooperative

practices of health and development that have prevailed over differences.

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