

Foreign cultural policy in processes of transformation: perceptions of German-Tunisian cultural exchange

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ABSTRACT

Within the concept of German foreign cultural policy, this article investigates the engagement of the Goethe-Institut in transitional Tunisia through the eyes of cultural activists on the ground. Since the Arab uprisings, the new policy framework of the German-Tunisian "Transformation Partnership" has been established, and extended approaches of the Goethe-Institut have been defined. The starting point of this article is to analyze how local cultural activists on the ground perceive the Goethe-Institut, and whether the engagement of the Goethe-Institut responds to the identified local needs. By taking the theoretical concepts of public diplomacy and soft power, the study examines policy and practice of the Goethe-Institut in times of the Tunisian transition, its role as well as its partnership approach and engagement in the fields of qualification, participation and networking. The main findings are that the Goethe-Institut contributes to the development of the cultural scene in Tunisia mainly through supporting cooperation-based projects, qualification and cultural management training as well as supporting international exchange.

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Introduction

[T]he arts have their significance as a part of culture, even though this might be indirect. For when we talk about individual freedom and dignity, demand them, portray them in all their contradictions and display them in symbolic forms to enable other people to think about them more deeply and above all experience them directly, we do so mainly in the arts. The arts enable people to take up themes of individuality and social interconnections. In this way, the arts have an effect on society far beyond the sphere of artistic communication because they help to give people a meaning in life and determine human intents and purposes. This is why we need a cultural policy which sees itself as a social policy and thus enables, defends and plays its part in shaping art and culture (German Bundestag, 2007: 49-50, translated into English by Schneider, 2014: 19).

This quotation from the final report "Culture in Germany" edited by the German Bundestag in 2007 illustrates the rich variety of facets inherent in art and its influence on societies. Furthermore, using the arts as an instrument of public diplomacy and soft power in external relations bears the opportunity to promote social development and positive change through music, literature, theatre, dance or visual arts (Schneider, 2014: 23). Accordingly, the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, adopted in 2005, emphasizes the developmental components of culture (UNESCO, 2005). Both Germany and Tunisia were among the early signatories of this Convention in 2005, "which underlines the role and legitimacy of civil society in arts and culture as a central means for achieving the Convention's objectives" (Merkel, 2012: 8). These objectives include the formulation of national cultural policies as well as the adoption of measures to implement them.

In Tunisia, the momentum of the societal upheaval in late 2010 and early 2011, followed by a political change, transformed the possibilities for civil society engagement. In this process independent artists, cultural producers, activists and intellectuals played their role, for instance by rediscovering the public space for artistic actions (Hasenkamp, 2012: 109f), but also by asking "fundamental questions about the role of government in the field of culture and vice versa" (Merkel, 2012: 8). At the same time, external actors such as Germany also reinforced their foreign cultural policy towards the country and the MENA region in general to support these local movements as a part of international cultural relations. The "Arab Spring", as a historic caesura thus opened up new approaches and challenges for international cultural relations and an intensified dialogue within the cultural scene in Tunisia. In 2012, the German government responded to the democratic change and transition with the so-called German-Tunisian "Transformation Partnership". Through this partnership, since 2012, new priorities in foreign policy have been developed and additional fi-

nancial resources have been made available for German cultural quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations (quangos)¹ like the Goethe-Institut, in order to develop and implement new culture-specific programs aiming at encouraging and strengthening democratic practices and actors within the cultural sector. As the German Parliament argues, "[i]n order to do justice to the importance of art and culture for the individual and society, we need cultural policies which give a particular boost to cultural participation" (German Bundestag, 2007). Therefore, developmental processes and framework measures in cultural policy are important fields to be addressed by German foreign cultural policy engagement. The current state of the transition in Tunisia, however, creates great uncertainty in the local Tunisian cultural policy debate as the Ministry of Culture is in a period of internal restructuring and a new cultural policy concept does not exist yet (Helly, 2014: 4).

Against this backdrop, by using the theoretical frameworks of public diplomacy and soft power, this study investigates the engagement of the German quango Goethe-Institut as a main implementing actor of German foreign cultural policy in Tunisia under the framework of the German-Tunisian "Transformation Partnership" (Federal Foreign Office, 2015b). In order to examine what needs Tunisian cultural activists perceive and how the Goethe-Institut addresses these, the study applies a qualitative approach based on in-depth expert interviews with Tunisian cultural activists of independent initiatives, associations and the Ministry of Culture as well as representatives of the Goethe-Institut. After introducing the qualitative methodology and the theoretical frameworks of public diplomacy and soft power, some background information is provided in order to clarify how German foreign cultural policy is generally organized, and the framework of the "Transformation Partnership" in play since 2012 is introduced. Hereafter, ongoing processes in Tunisian cultural policy development and relevant players are portrayed. This is followed by a presentation of the

1 Other quangos of German foreign cultural policy are the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa), the Humboldt Foundation, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the German UNESCO-Commission and the German Archaeological Institute, among others.

Goethe-Institut as an actor before and after the revolution with its extended approach. In the core of the article, the perceived needs of Tunisian cultural activists are presented, and how they are addressed by the Goethe-Institut is also analysed.

In general, the engagement of the Goethe-Institut is greeted as it is seen to contribute towards the development of the cultural scene in Tunisia through supporting projects and capacity-building for local cultural activists. The cooperation and implementation of projects between the Goethe-Institut and Tunisian local activists is perceived on partnership level, with the Goethe-Institut being a facilitator which offers immaterial support and expertise as well as financial resources for cultural projects. However, the German-Tunisian "Transformation Partnership", as a new policy framework with its aims and extended work approach, lacks public communication, and a certain in-transparency in strategy and work approach is perceived.

Qualitative methodology: investigating perspectives of Tunisian cultural activists

In order to investigate the engagement of the Goethe-Institut with cultural development in transitional Tunisia, it is essential to know how its efforts are received and evaluated by the Tunisian cultural activists. The research starts from the hypothesis that the work of foreign actors should be guided by the local context, the interests of the local players and the support of local movements as central points of reference in order to effectively address local needs. Therefore, the views of Tunisian cultural activists are crucial to evaluate the German engagement. Thus, this paper applies in-depth expert interviews as a tool to provide insights about not only the results of the work of the Goethe-Institut in the field, but also on how the very target actors view the latter. The research follows two main questions: what needs do Tunisian cultural activists perceive and how does the Goethe-Institut address these?

The analysis focuses on one case study, the Goethe-Institut as a main player in German foreign cultural policy in terms of budget and the number of institutes around the globe². As a German cultural quango it is mostly responsible for cultural programming as an instrument of public diplomacy and soft power. Decidedly, the promotion of the arts in a narrower sense is a core area of the work of the Goethe-Institut (Federal Foreign Office, 2013). In Tunisia, it is

the main actor of German foreign cultural cooperation (Federal Foreign Office, 2015b). Limiting the analysis to one case study further allows gathering more focused data during the field research phase and conducting a precise analysis of the work of one institution.

Methodologically, this study follows a two-step approach. After introducing the theoretical concepts of public diplomacy and soft power, it presents a content analysis of publications related to the issues of German foreign cultural policy and the "Transformation Partnership". To this end, publications, policy papers, academic and journal articles, media and conference reports as well as websites relevant to the subject are analysed. These documents explicitly refer to the "Transformation Partnership" and the engagement of the Goethe-Institut, and were researched by using websites which are relevant in the field of German foreign cultural policy: Goethe-Institut, German Foreign Ministry, Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa) and German Commission for UNESCO and other initiatives. Furthermore the "ifa library" in Stuttgart, a scientific special library for foreign cultural and educational policy, was used for the research. It runs the online information portal "Culture and Foreign Policy", which assembles a constantly updated selective bibliography on the thematic of the "Transformation Partnership"³. Additionally, in order to gather further and up-to-date background information regarding the cultural engagement of the Goethe-Institut in Tunisia since 2011, two representatives from the Goethe-Institut were interviewed. These interviewees were chosen according to their institutional responsibilities within the "Transformation Partnership" projects. The guideline for these two interviews focused on: 1) the German engagement in Tunisia since the Tunisian Revolution; 2) the different programs of the Goethe-Institut in "qualification", "participation" and "networking" within the "Transformation Partnership", and 3) their evaluation of the Goethe-Institut's engagement in the Tunisian transition process with a focus on cultural development processes.

As a second analytical step, six one-to-one interviews with actors in the field were conducted based on a semi-structured guideline and analysed via content analysis⁴. The choice of the Tunisian interview partners working in independent initiatives, associations and the Ministry of Culture was done according to two criteria: they were identified on the basis of past cooperation experience with the Goethe-Institut and of engagement in relevant initiatives, associations or institutions in the field that are active in projects supported by the "Transformation Partnership". With the help of these criteria, six local interview partners were chosen from different initiatives, organizations

² The Goethe-Institut operates 159 offices worldwide (Goethe-Institut, 2015b).

³ For further information, see Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (2015).

⁴ All eight interviews were conducted in German, English and French between June and October 2014 (six interviews were conducted during the field research in Tunisia in October 2014, two others via telephone). For the evaluation of the interviews, the authors used content analysis as according to Mayring (see Gläser & Laudel, 2010, and Mayring, 2010). All interviews were recorded and transcribed, while all interviewees were guaranteed anonymity. Both audio and text material have been retained by the authors.

“GERMAN FOREIGN CULTURAL POLICY OPERATES WITHIN THESE THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND SOFT POWER. ALONGSIDE SECURITY AND ECONOMIC POLICY, CULTURAL POLICY IS THE THIRD PILLAR OF GERMANY’S FOREIGN POLICY ”

and institutional bodies⁵. The guideline for local Tunisian interview partners included three question blocks concerning: 1) their experience with the German-Tunisian “Transformation Partnership” since the Tunisian revolution; 2) the support of cultural activists or initiatives by the Goethe-Institut, and 3) their evaluation of the Goethe-Institut’s engagement in the Tunisian transition process.

The results of the interviews’ content analysis is presented in the last section before the conclusion. The four main identified local needs and the Goethe-Institut’s engagement responding these are analysed: 1) the need for transparency in framework conditions and policies, 2) the need for a mutual partnership approach, 3) the need for cultural management training as capacity-building, international exchange of artists and networking, and 4) the need for concepts for local cultural policy. The field research timeframe was 2014 to 2015.

Public diplomacy and soft power in processes of transformation

Basic principles of German foreign cultural policy

The concepts of public diplomacy and soft power are key issues in international relations. The focus of both is non-governmental organisations and citizens as actors of policy making. On the one hand, public diplomacy is a way of communication of international actors, aiming to build relationships and to influence the perception of a country abroad. This targets the strengthening of the relationships, by following and implementing own interests. Post-9/11, the concept of public diplomacy changed towards the development of mutual, long-lasting relationships, according to Auer et al (2015). On the other hand, the concept of soft power of Nye, which includes the components of culture, political values and political actions, aims to manipulate the “preferences of other actors (...) without [exercising] military or economic power (hard power)” (Auer et al, 2015). Influence of one country over another is at the core of both concepts.

German foreign cultural policy operates within these theoretical concepts of public diplomacy and soft power. Alongside security and economic policy, cultural policy is the third pillar of Germany’s foreign policy (Federal Foreign Office, 2015a). It aims to support cultural exchange between Germany and foreign countries. The general organization is decentralized, meaning the German Foreign Office initiating, coordinating and financing measures in the fields of culture, education, research and social welfare for instance. German foreign cultural policy is mainly implemented through quangos which are legally independent non-governmental organizations that are in charge of conceiving programs and projects. However, this stands in a certain contradiction to the framework contract with the German Foreign Office which pre-sets strategic guidelines. This system of outsourcing state cultural work in quangos was designed in order to decentralize decision-making in German foreign cultural policy after World War II, so to avoid imposing culture for the sake of state propaganda (Auer et al, 2015: 44; Federal Foreign Office, 2014a). According to Schneider, a challenge of German foreign cultural policy is that it operates between two poles at all times: the promotion of arts and culture for the sake of the autonomy of arts, on the one hand, and the promotion of cultural processes as a political instrument to further economic interests, on the other. The latter points to the economic self-interest, since political, social and cultural development in developing countries bears vast economic potential (Schneider, 2014: 23).

[Germany] wants to secure German influence in the world, and to use education, exchange and dialogue to persuade people to view Germany in a favourable fashion, and adopt our values and ideas (Schneider, 2014: 23).

Maaß argues likewise that there are clear non-altruistic interests in supporting aims of foreign policy in the partner countries as well as promoting German values, norms and principles by using instruments of soft power (Maaß, 2015: 47f). Pamment adds that the promotion of the influence of Germany in foreign countries through cultural campaigns and projects is quite high on the agenda (Pamment, 2013: 5ff).

⁵ These were: the Cultural Innovators Network (CIN, a program by the Goethe-Institut); the *Forum des associations culturelles tunisiennes* (FACT, a Tunisian initiative); L’art vivant (a Tunisian association); the Ministry of Culture as Tunisian governmental body; the National Cultural Policy Group (NCPG, a Tunisian initiative); Tun’Act (a Tunisian association); the *Kulturakademie* (a program by the Goethe-Institut), and the *Centre des Musiques Arabes et Méditerranéennes* (CMAM, a Tunisian cultural institution).

Apart from the status quo of German foreign cultural policy, the recent processes of transformation in many countries, like in Tunisia, require practitioners and policy makers to rethink the international supporting concepts, frameworks, structures and aims. Local needs are changing due to altered political and social environments, caused by uprisings and civil society movements. Particularly in a process of transformation, specific attention and support from foreign actors is needed, apart from own interests and securing influence. The outstanding features of foreign actors in these situations are a relatively high flexibility of action and a possible prompt reacting time, compared to local established supporting structures.

This article argues that in processes of transformation the concepts of public diplomacy and soft power need to be reconsidered. In accordance to this, the strategy adopted by the Goethe-Institut in Tunisia and the findings of the case study are analysed in the light of these theoretical concepts.

The new policy framework of the Transformation Partnership

Reacting to the Arab uprisings spreading from Tunisia to North Africa and the Middle East, the German government announced support for democratic movements and a peaceful transition (Federal Foreign Office, 2014b). A policy document on German foreign cultural policy from 2011 (see Federal Foreign Office, 2011) set up a new focus on countries in transformation, in reaction to the incidents of the time. The support of "a solid democracy in a strong civil society" (Federal Foreign Office, 2011: 5; own translation) was stated as a main field of engagement. In 2012, the so-called "Transformation Partnership" between Germany and Tunisia provided a legal basis to this endeavour and intended to underline a strong German commitment to the Tunisian transition. This partnership also entailed regular government consultations, common memoranda of understanding and the implementation of key projects. Particularly, it provided newly defined working areas and additional financial resources for the political, economic and cultural sectors (Federal Foreign Office, 2011). The following priority topics and aims were defined: support of democratization

and rule of law, constitutional reform, strengthening of civil society and human rights, economy and employment, education, and culture and media (Federal Foreign Office, 2015c). For the Goethe-Institutes⁶ in

the region, each year about two million euros were allocated as additional funding (Federal Foreign Office, 2013: 74; Ebert, 2012: 11). In the public budget of the Federal Foreign Office, the subsidies for German-Tunisian "Transformation Partnership" in the cultural field were assigned to the quangos for the design and implementation of specific projects (Federal Foreign Office, 2014c). In the current legislative period, the funding is so far confirmed until 2017 (Federal Foreign Office, 2014b). Furthermore, the German Embassy in Tunis launched a website providing information in both Arabic and French about

the different projects that are implemented in Tunisia within the framework of the "Transformation Partnership" (see German Embassy Tunis, 2015).

"IN 2012, THE SO-CALLED 'TRANSFORMATION PARTNERSHIP' BETWEEN GERMANY AND TUNISIA PROVIDED A LEGAL BASIS TO THIS ENDEAVOUR AND INTENDED TO UNDERLINE A STRONG GERMAN COMMITMENT TO THE TUNISIAN TRANSITION"

Trends in Tunisian cultural policy development since 2011

With the beginning of the uprisings, independent, that is to say, non-governmental initiatives⁷ emerged which are, on the one hand, "still redefining their roles and strategies while struggling with the acceptance of new practices" (Helly, 2014: 4) but, on the other hand, have started working on a new cultural policy concept. At the same time, state institutions like the Ministry of Culture, Houses of Culture (art and social centres), museums and theatres remain structurally unchanged in many ways, working in the pre-revolution fashion which used to focus on "nation branding abroad and patronage networks and the priority given to heritage, tourism and large-scale cultural promotion events" (Helly, 2014: 4). This asynchrony between novel and progressive movements and political stasis is contributing to the "fragmentation, transformation and uncertainty" (Helly, 2014: 4), as main issues that need to be addressed. Since January 2014, during the term of the second technocrat government and the delegation of Mourad Sakli, a musician, as Minister of Culture (from January 2014 till February 2015), the cultural policy situation developed progressively⁸. Al-

6 In total there are 18 Goethe-Institutes in the region North Africa/Middle East, in the following countries: Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Palestine Territories, Saudi-Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and United Arab Emirates.

7 For instance: Ciné Mad'Art, Art Solution, Muzaq/Dream City, Laaroussa, Lefest, B'Chira Art Center (see Helly, 2014: 6f).

8 This idea emerged in interviews 1 (12 June 2014), 3 (10 October 2014), 4 (12 October 2014) and 7 (15 October 2014).

though a new government was democratically elected in February 2015, cultural activists still feel that it remains uncertain if the ongoing law reforms and the new state support for the arts and cultural sector will progress "because it depends on the person" (interview 4 with cultural activist, 12 October 2014)⁹ of the Minister of Culture and his goals and strategies.

To illustrate the current evolutions in the cultural policy, three very visible actors are portrayed: the Ministry of Culture, the National Cultural Policy Group (NCPG) and the Forum of Tunisian Cultural Associations (FACT) to represent both the state and the independent scene¹⁰. There is no single leading group or player operating in the redefinition of Tunisia's cultural policy for the cultural sector today; rather, there are several, like the above mentioned local groups and personalities that are working on this issue¹¹.

First of all, the Ministry of Culture as a Tunisian state body is searching for ways to reform the cultural policy and to address issues like the "effective structural reform of the culture sector and its workers, as well as [advocating] for cultural rights, freedom of expression and freedom of media" (Aboudi, 2015).

In order to develop a cultural policy strategy, central elements and goals were identified, as stated in the Cultural Policy Profile of Tunisia in the International Database of Cultural Policies: legislative reforms, "[d]evelopment of partnership mechanisms with civil society [and the Ministry of Culture] towards empowering NGOs (associations) participation in elaborating programs (such as international events and festivals)", as well as the qualification of cultural professionals "and the enhancement of conceptual and executive knowledge and skills of cultural action" (Aboudi, 2015). Further key aspects, such as the decentralization of culture, means to provide access to culture in the whole country and not predominantly in the capital, and the strengthening of economic engagement within the cultural sector through, for example, the establishment of public-private partnerships, as well as structural improvement of cultural organizations, are also on the agenda¹². One achievement in this regard so far is a new law adopted in September 2014 making investments in culture tax-deductible¹³. Furthermore, civil society actors are increasingly involved into the cultural policy making by figuring as consultants in the Ministry:

I am an independent artist, I am not from the Ministry of Culture and I will leave this Minister. I am just here for that period. (...) We are a group of artists now working in the Ministry and it's important to make these connections (interview 3 with cultural activist, 10 October 2014).

This new cooperation has benefitted from the independent, non-party political government between 2014 and 2015, as the interviewee explains:

It is important to work in a non-political government and after the elections it will be a political government. It is important to work with this Minister because I know his strategy, his vision and I believe in it and I can work at the same time with an artist, because he is an artist too (interview 3 with cultural activist, 10 October 2014).

The Minister of Culture Mourad Sakli thus ended a tradition of artists seeing themselves instrumentalised by political parties, acting within the restricted governmental framework, true to the party principles instead of freely expressing themselves. For example, the independent artist Cyrine Gannoun was nominated in 2014 consultant to the Minister of Culture¹⁴. This participatory approach includes alternating guests, experts, artists and cultural policy actors who have been invited to a regular exchange of ideas about a future strategy in cultural policies – a method to guarantee mutual acceptance of the implemented policy:

Because it is important to not separate the Ministry and the artists. And we have so many bad experiences in other countries. When the Ministry makes its own cultural policy and doesn't let the artists participate, they will refuse it. They will say: "I am not considered by this proposition. I don't feel comfortable to work with that/them". It happened even with us before (interview 3 with cultural activist, 10 October 2014).

Besides the state bodies, independent advocacy groups for cultural policy within Tunisia's civil society are still continuing to emerge¹⁵. Whilst many newly formed associations are active in the cultural field, only a few are working directly on cultural policy issues. One example is the Tunisian NCPG that is part of

9 This idea emerged also in interviews 1 with representative of Goethe-Institut (12 June 2014), 3 with cultural activist (10 October 2014), 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014) and 7 with cultural activist (15 October 2014).

10 NCPG and FACT have been chosen because they are umbrella organizations for cultural policy advocacy which involve a wide range of representatives of cultural associations and players from all artistic sectors. The first FACT forum in 2013, for instance, involved 120 participants (see German Commission for UNESCO, 2014b).

11 Interviews 2 with cultural activist (27 August 2014), 3 with cultural activist (10 October 2014) and 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014).

12 Interview 3 with cultural activist (10 October 2014) and Aboudi (2015).

13 Interview 3 with cultural activist (10 October 2014).

14 Cyrine Gannoun is also the Tunisian coordinator of the National Cultural Policy Group (NCPG) under the program of Al Mawred Al Thagafy.

15 Interview 3 with cultural activist (10 October 2014).

the Arab Cultural Policy Group. Founded in 2011 by Al Mawred Al Thagafy in Egypt, the group works to support the development of governmental structures in cultural policy across Arab countries¹⁶. It also focuses on cooperation and exchange with the Tunisian Ministry of Culture, through delegating civil society representatives as consultants to ministerial decision-making processes, for instance. The initiative in Tunisia is still defining itself by "discussing different mechanisms to establish a lobbying group supervising the cultural policies" (Ettijahat, 2013: 9). Instead of institutional continuity through regular reunions with a stable number of participants, the NCPG rather follows a flexible way of working¹⁷.

A third player is the initiative Forum of Tunisian Cultural Associations (FACT)¹⁸, established in 2012 as an umbrella organization for cultural initiatives and associations, in cooperation with the German Commission for UNESCO under the project CONNEXIONS¹⁹. FACT was initially conceived as a conference that took place in June 2013 for the first time, with the German Commission for UNESCO as a partner, and produced recommendations for concrete work goals in cultural policy, later transmitted to the Minister of Culture (German Commission for UNESCO, 2014b). The purpose of FACT is to support networking and self-organization in the cultural field while also professionalizing as an independent organization (German Commission for UNESCO, 2014b). First steps were implemented to determine the NGO's legal status as an association in November 2014, thus enabling it to gain more credibility towards possible local and international sponsors. So far, the FACT's engagement entails the construction of a website, training for cultural associations to professionalize their work, artist residencies, cooperation with universities, extension of the NGO's relations with the European Union and international cooperation partners²⁰. This also includes finding a partner who supports the sustainable structural development²¹. Furthermore, FACT started the initial cooperation with the Ministry of Culture. An intended convention between the two is underway, representing another step toward the involvement and support of civil society actors with a public body²². The president of FACT stated that "it is a historical thing that an NGO and the Ministry work together. It is the first time in our history"²³.

16 Culture Resource (Al Mawred Al Thaqafy) is an Egyptian NGO founded in 2004 by Basma El Hussein which supports artistic creativity and cultural exchange in the Arab region. It is one of the leading independent Arab cultural organizations advocating for cultural policy. It established a General Assembly and an Artistic Board (see Al Mawred Al Thaqafy, 2012).

17 Interview 3 with cultural activist (10 October 2014).

18 The NGO has its president in Tunis and three decentralized regional representatives (North, Central and South Tunisia) for coordination and administration outside Tunis to promote the decentralization.

19 CONNEXIONS is a project dedicated to the Arab region to support democracy and cultural participation. It facilitates capacity-building, encourages the exchange of experiences and knowledge-transfer as well as networking (see German Commission for UNESCO, 2014a).

20 Interview 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014).

21 To this end, FACT is negotiating with the Norwegian organization Mimeta. Mimeta was founded in 2006 and operates in 20 different countries in the field of culture and development aiming to give access to free artistic expression. For further information, see Mimeta (n.d.).

22 Interview 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014).

23 Interview 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014).

24 As there is only scarce material available concerning projects and work of the Goethe-Institut before the revolution, this article will put a stronger emphasis on the period after 2011.

25 This idea also emerged in interview 1 with representative of Goethe-Institut (12 June 2014).

The Goethe-Institut and its intensified engagement

Before the uprisings: classical cultural exchange

The Goethe-Institut has a long tradition in Tunisia starting in 1958 with the opening of its Tunis office. Since then, its activities mainly focused on language courses and cultural activities with Tunisian partner organisations such as the organisation of exhibitions and films, music and theatre cultural programs, as well as thematic discussions (Junghänel, 2008)²⁴. Before the revolution, the possibilities for initiatives and campaigns of the Goethe-Institut were limited due to the restrictions imposed by the political regime, and the co-operation with Tunisian partners or the work in public space were difficult to implement. Accordingly, co-operation with Tunisian partners as well as working in public space were difficult to realise. Therefore, the work of the Goethe-Institut was limited to using its own building as a politically neutral ground. This confined space offered a place for dialogue and free expression for repressed artists under the Ben Ali regime which was, although only accessible for a small audience, of high relevance in a country where censorship prevailed (Bohrer, 2013). The Goethe-Institut's director Christiane Bohrer (2011-2016) declared that the cultural program work before 2011 focused on German contributions for big film and theatre festivals mainly organised by the Tunisian state (Bohrer, 2013) – it thus followed a tradition of cultural representation.

After the uprisings: extended approach within the "Transformation Partnership"

With the Tunisian Revolution and the establishment of the German-Tunisian Transformation Partnership, the quango Goethe-Institut set up new cultural programs and received additional resources from the German Federal Foreign Office (Ebert, 2012: 11)²⁵. In this respect, the Goethe-Institut published a conceptual framework paper on the institute's management in the Middle

East and North Africa (MENA) region in 2011, and the publication "Transformation and Partnership" in 2012 which presents different projects within the "Transformation Partnership" (Goethe-Institut, 2011b & 2012b). Both indicate an extended approach and a strategic development of the policy of the Goethe-Institut's work in the region. On a strategic level, the "Transformation Partnership" not only means an additional budget deployed for projects relevant for transformation. The specific task of the Goethe-Institut within the "Transformation Partnership" is generally integrating in its educational mandate (Goethe-Institut, 2011a). The newly extended approach is the support of democracy through culture. This is stated in the document dating from 2011 which presents a regional policy paper that defines the extended approach of the Goethe-Institut, aiming to "identify and follow culture-specific ways for the promotion of democracy" (Goethe-Institut, 2011b: 1, own translation). In this document, five fields of activity were defined to implement these program lines: participation in cultural policy, qualification and training in the area of culture and education, support to civil society, support of extracurricular education as well as support of creative production and documentation (Goethe-Institut, 2011b: 1). The overall concept is to enter into a dialogue at eye level to implement fair, cooperation-based partnerships through the projects. The Goethe-Institut seeks to support local groups and movements which are working to establish cultural projects and infrastructure on the ground through grassroots movements (Goethe-Institut, 2012b: 11). Hasenkamp, former head of arts MENA region at the Goethe-Institut Cairo, points out that the involvement of civil society acts as a self-evident, essential corrective – and requirement – for social stabilization in transformation processes (Hasenkamp, 2012: 110). In 2012, a new online presence, "Transition and Partnership", accessible in French and Arabic, was launched by the Goethe-Institutes in Egypt and Tunisia in order to provide information about the new initiative, highlighting programs developed in the fields of participation, qualification and networking (Goethe-Institut, 2015c). Since 2012, the Goethe-Institut Tunis releases an annual review of its program's work, including a statement on the program lines and the general approach²⁶.

A compilation of the specific engagement in the field

Within the "Transformation Partnership" programs in the fields of "qualification", "participation" and "networking", the Goethe-Institut has both supported particular outstanding events, like the first human rights film festival "Human Screen Festival" in 2012, and sharpened its profile, above all in edu-

cation and training in cultural management under the program line "qualification" (Goethe-Institut, 2012a: 34). Several capacity-building measures were conducted in the framework of the program *Kulturakademie* ("Cultural Academy") with young cultural activists as a main target group. Between 2012 and 2013, the project *Théâtre Demain* trained young theatre technicians (Goethe-Institut, 2012a: 38 & 58f; 2013: 18f & 30f; 2014: 8f). *MezmarouN'*, a long-term project that started in 2012, supports the preservation and integration of the ancient Tunisian architecture. To this end, German and Tunisian experts cooperate to develop recommendations for the architectural cultural heritage and make use of it for cultural and educational purposes (Goethe-Institut, 2012a: 46f; 2013: 32-35; 2014: 34-37). In order to contribute to work mobility, intensive language courses in German were provided to specific target groups such as Tunisian engineers in 2012 and 2013 (Goethe-Institut, 2012a: 40; 2013: 40).

An example for the program line "participation" is the women's radio program *galtelhom osktou* which was supported in its initial phase from 2013 to 2014 (Goethe-Institut, 2013: 42f; 2014: 18f). Exchange and encounter are linked to the program line "networking", which stimulates mobility as a main focus within the "Transformation Partnership". In this regard, the Goethe-Institut is active with the mobility fund Moving MENA that enables artists to travel to Germany by providing travel and accommodation expenses, daily allowance and VISA assistance (Goethe-Institut, 2012a: 54f; 2014: 28f). Another project initiated in 2012 in the field of culture is the Cultural Innovators Network (CIN), which encourages young activists from the civil society sector of the whole Mediterranean region to engage in mutual exchange and discourse for the development of sustainable processes of social change (Goethe-Institut, 2015a).

Responding to local needs: insights and perceptions of Tunisian cultural activists

To answer the research question of this paper, this part of the article investigates the perception about the Goethe-Institut as described by Tunisian local cultural activists and stated by representatives of the organization. Emerging from these inside views, local needs are presented and aligned with the responding engagement of the Goethe-Institut²⁷.

The need for transparency in framework conditions and policies

The autonomy of the Goethe-Institut and its independence from the German government is generally viewed as positive by Tunisian cultural activists²⁸. Still, however, the interviews with Tunisian cultural activ-

26 Interview 1 with representative of Goethe-Institut (12 June 2014).

27 The order in which the identified needs are presented does not imply any hierarchy related to their significance.

28 Interview 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014).

“ACCORDING TO THE GOETHE-INSTITUT, THE APPROACH FOR DEVELOPING PROJECTS IS PRIMARILY TO ASSESS THE DEMANDS AND NEEDS IN THE TUNISIAN CULTURAL SECTOR. LOCAL ACTORS CRITICIZE THAT THIS APPROACH OF ASSESSING NEEDS AND DEVELOPING COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIP WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS LACKS TRANSPARENCY”

ists unveil a discrepancy in the public communication of the new policy framework of the German-Tunisian “Transformation Partnership” in general and regarding additional financial resources for projects: “I don’t remember that I heard that they increased the budget. I don’t feel that they have more projects and more money” (interview 3 with cultural activist, 10 October 2014)²⁹. In the same vein, the Goethe-Institut’s extended approach after the Tunisian Revolution has not been clearly perceived by Tunisian cultural activists: “I don’t think that there is any new change” (interview 3 with cultural activist, 10 October 2014); while others consider the Goethe-Institut to be “really active since the revolution” (interview 5 with cultural activist, 13 October 2014)³⁰.

According to the Goethe-Institut, the approach for developing projects is primarily to assess the demands and needs in the Tunisian cultural sector through meetings and “based on discussions with partners” (interview 1 with representative of Goethe-Institut, 12 June 2014, own translation) and familiarisation with the cultural infrastructure. NGOs and actors then considered “interesting” (in the words of the same interviewee) by the Goethe-Institut representatives are given the opportunity to collaborate. Local actors criticize that this approach of assessing needs and developing cooperation and partnership with civil society actors lacks transparency³¹. Additionally, some interviewees suspected the institute to have an approach based on strong personal interests, and suggested to rather involve “a kind of commission including Tunisian researchers, Tunisian artists and independent Tunisians” (interview 3 with cultural activist, 10 October 2014)³² to identify needs and set up programs. On the other hand, they perceive that access and participation become easier once a relationship with the Goethe-Institut has been established³³.

The need for a mutual partnership approach

In general partnerships with the Goethe-Institut are greeted. An interviewee summarised that as “a new NGO/association, we were really lucky that they [the Goethe-Institut] believed in us and helped us start” (interview 5 with cultural activist, 13 October 2014). Once partnerships are established, Tunisian cultural activists laud the equality in the approach to developing joint projects for implementation³⁴. This goes hand in hand with one of the biggest needs identified by Tunisian actors in terms of international cultural exchange: the establishment of a sustainable and long-term mutual partnership approach that creates a win-win situation³⁵. Due to the good international reputation of the Goethe-Institut, these partnerships are perceived as particularly attractive by local actors since they increase their credibility before other potential partners³⁶. Likewise, a credible belief in the cooperation and the actors is seen as important³⁷. In this respect, especially against the background of the colonial history, Tunisian interviewees emphasize the importance of interaction between European cultural institutes and Tunisian civil society at the eye level, with interests and ideas coming from both sides to establish a “two-way, not one-way exchange” (interview 7 with cultural activist, 15 October 2014). The interviewee further stated that he endorses the “approach that goes towards encouraging real exchange projects where for instance young people from Germany and people from Tunisia work together on one project” (interview 7 with cultural activist, 15 October 2014).

The self-perception and aspiration of the Goethe-Institut is to be a facilitating and moderating partner who primarily provides immaterial support and expertise, as stated by a representative of the institute³⁸. In contradiction, Tunisian cultural activists perceive the Goethe-Institut’s role primarily as an additional

29 This idea emerged also in interview 7 with cultural activist (15 October 2014).

30 These ideas emerged also in interviews 2 with cultural activist (27 August 2014), 3 with cultural activist (10 October 2014) and 5 with cultural activist (13 October 2014).

31 Interviews 2 with cultural activist (27 August 2014), 3 with cultural activist (10 October 2014) and 5 with cultural activist (13 October 2014).

32 This idea emerged also in interview 2 with cultural activist (27 August 2014).

33 Interviews 5 with cultural activist (13 October 2014) and 8 with representative of Goethe-Institut (15 October 2014).

34 Interviews 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014) and 5 with cultural activist (13 October 2014).

35 Interviews 2 with cultural activist (27 August 2014), 3 with cultural activist (10 October 2014), 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014) and 5 with cultural activist (13 October 2014).

36 Interviews 8 with representative of Goethe-Institut (15 October 2014) and 5 with cultural activist (13 October 2014).

37 Interview 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014).

38 Interview 1 with representative of Goethe-Institut (12 June 2012).

or only financial resource, as a sponsor that "just (...) give[s] money for projects and the result" (interview 3 with cultural activist, 10 October 2014)³⁹.

The need for cultural management training as capacity-building, international exchange of artists and networking

As noted by both the Tunisian and the German interviewees, qualification and professional training, particularly in fundraising, proposal writing and project planning, are two of the most crucial needs for newly established cultural associations and artists in Tunisia: "The main point is how to give training to the young associations, because training it's the most important thing, to build our [cultural infra]structure" (interview 4 with cultural activist, 12 October 2014)⁴⁰.

[W]e started from the idea that, for the last maybe 10 or 20 years, this particular subject, I mean, training a cultural manager, has been neglected in Tunisia and we are now getting aware of the need to have more support, particularly to young people who are willing to engage in cultural projects. So this is quite a positive initiative taken by the Goethe-Institut. And I think it's opening the eyes of our rulers and our Ministry to this lack (interview 7 with cultural activist, 15 October 2014).

The engagement of the Goethe-Institut in capacity-building is positively perceived, particularly in relation to access to international funding and its facilitation through know-how and professionalization⁴¹. Nonetheless, a representative of the Goethe-Institut still sees a strong need on the ground to simplify access to local and international funds⁴².

One of the qualification programs of the Goethe-Institut is the *Kulturakademie*, which offers a demand-orientated cultural management training for "multipliers" (in the words of interviewee 8, a representative of Goethe-Institut) each year, aiming at contributing to their professionalization in project management and implementation⁴³. With this academy, the Goethe-Institut thus addresses the lack of training opportunities in the Tunisian academic, art and cultural sector

identified by the interviewees. Furthermore, a representative stated that "[a]bove all we strengthen the role of the cultural activists (...), we encourage them to develop their ideas and projects and shape their country" (interview 8 with representative of Goethe-Institut, 15 October 2014). According to the Goethe-Institut, ideally, professional cultural managers are taking an active part in shaping the local cultural sector with their own project ideas, with growing autonomy and independence in project management⁴⁴. Both Tunisian and German interviewees particularly saw the focus on the promotion of young target groups as a crucial and an important task⁴⁵. Furthermore, they stated that young artists and managers bear the potential to become future leaders, which is of particular significance against the backdrop of the Tunisian demography: around half of the population in Tunisia is under 30 years old and well educated⁴⁶.

Aside from practical training, academic training and research in cultural management and cultural policy are urgent needs in Tunisia and the MENA region: as the interviewees explained, most of the people working on issues of cultural policy in Tunisia are professionally trained in arts but not in cultural management and policy, also due to the absence of relevant bachelor or master programs at local universities⁴⁷.

Local cultural activists pointed at international exchange projects as another need. Therefore, the Goethe-Institut's initiatives in creating networks such as the implemented Moving MENA program and the Cultural Innovators Network (CIN) are seen as particularly positive, seeking to address a deficiency through the creation of sustainable artist networks. This practice helps raise awareness for cultural diversity and supports international cooperation between cultural activists⁴⁸.

The need for concepts for local cultural policy

For Tunisian cultural activists, a crucial basis is the re-definition and embedding of their local conceptual cultural policy which is a prerequisite to implement local structures supporting the cultural scene in the long term. This requires mutual exchange, coopera-

39 This idea emerged also in interviews 1 with representative of Goethe-Institut (12 June 2014), 3 with cultural activist (10 October 2014), 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014) and 5 with cultural activist (13 October 2014).

40 This idea emerged also in interviews 1 with representative of Goethe-Institut (12 June 2014), 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014), 8 with representative of Goethe-Institut (15 October 2014) and 7 with cultural activist (15 October 2014).

41 Interviews 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014), 5 with cultural activist (13 October 2014) and 7 with cultural activist (15 October 2014).

42 Interview 1 with representative of Goethe-Institut (12 June 2014).

43 Interviews 1 with representative of Goethe-Institut (12 June 2014), 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014), 7 with cultural activist (15 October 2014) and 8 with representative of Goethe-Institut (15 October 2014).

44 Interview 8 with representative of Goethe-Institut (15 October 2014).

45 Interviews 2 with cultural activist (27 August 2014), 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014) and 8 with representative of Goethe-Institut (15 October 2014).

46 Interviews 2 with cultural activist (27 August 2014), 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014), 6 with cultural activist (14 October 2014), 7 with cultural activist (15 October 2014), 8 with representative of Goethe-Institut (15 October 2014). See also German Corporation for International Cooperation (2015).

47 Interviews 2 with cultural activist (27 August 2014), 3 with cultural activist (10 October 2014) and 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014).

48 Interviews 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014), 5 with cultural activist (13 October), 6 with cultural activist (14 October 2014) and 7 with cultural activist (15 October 2014).

“THE GOETHE-INSTITUT’S WORK AFTER 2011 SHOWS THAT CULTURAL EXCHANGE HAS BEEN RETHOUGHT AND A NEW FOCUS ON PARTNERSHIP-BASED APPROACHES HAS BEEN DEVELOPED, WITH THE AIM OF BOTH SIDES BENEFITTING”

tion, knowledge about best practice examples and evaluation⁴⁹. In this respect, the Goethe-Institut is not the most visible actor providing support, which is attributed to the fact that most current initiatives in the narrower cultural policy context are so far not directly supported by the local Goethe-Institut as in the case of the *Forum des associations culturelles tunisiennes* (FACT) and the National cultural policy group (NCPG)⁵⁰. In general, some Tunisian actors would like the Goethe-Institut to support these initiatives⁵¹. This would enable the Goethe-Institut to play a more significant role regarding cultural policy initiatives, especially since its 2011 conceptual framework paper mentioned participation in cultural policy as one field of engagement. In order to put this into practice, the common way of cooperating with the local Ministry of Culture on the basis of a standard framework between the Ministry and European cultural institutions is practiced⁵². The collaboration between the Goethe-Institut and the Ministry of Culture takes mainly place in joint projects and by providing advisory service. The Goethe-Institut intends to give further support, assisting in cultural infrastructure reforming measures of the Ministry and consultancy for cultural policy reforms in the public sector, as stated by a representative of the Goethe-Institut. One example for the latter are the state-wide large-scale “lighthouse projects” of the Ministry of Culture, which intend a reform and strengthening of public Houses of Culture, public libraries and public cultural heritage projects⁵³.

Conclusion: potentials of the Goethe-Institut in promoting cultural exchange in times of transition

The Goethe-Institut is a visible actor in the cultural scene in Tunisia. Since the Tunisian Revolution, its engagement has been reinforced under the new German-Tunisian “Transformation Partnership” leading to an extension of its work. It has been reacting to local needs and the altered political and social context to encourage democratization through culture-specific

engagement. Therefore, new cultural programs have been created that extend far into the civil society sector. Comparing with the pre-revolution activities, a shift from classical contributions by German artists in Tunisia, or vice versa, to cooperation with Tunisian partners can be observed. The continuation and extension of its endeavours since 2011 is especially based on a support of local actors through qualification, training and networking.

In the eyes of Tunisian cultural activists and German actors on the ground, current needs in the Tunisian cultural sector include cultural diversity, long-term eye level partnerships with international organizations and empowerment of local actors. Furthermore, concepts of local cultural policy, decentralization, reallocation of and access to resources, cultural infrastructure, redefinition of government structures, capacity-building, youth and education are evaluated as issues to be addressed in Tunisia. In general, the engagement of the Goethe-Institut addressing these needs is being welcomed and appreciated by the local cultural activists. By offering professional cultural management training as capacity-building, supporting international exchange of artists and networking, the Goethe-Institut is playing an important role in strengthening and empowering Tunisian cultural activists, especially young target groups. This approach is positively perceived as a contribution to transition. Particularly as a self-defined mediator and facilitator, as a partner who offers immaterial support and expertise, the Goethe-Institut is able to be a strong player in facilitating knowledge and consultancy for local cultural activists, although it is also perceived as a sponsor that provides financial resources.

The equal partnerships are built on dialogue at eye level with both the Tunisian as well as the German side benefiting whilst developing joint projects. Tunisian actors laud the freedom in their work without a foreign actor imposing them content-wise. As the interviewees stated, the Goethe-Institut is seen as able to be a reliable partner in transformation processes not only because of its longstanding experience and expertise, but also because it enjoys a good reputation resulting from its independent status. In conclusion, parameters identifying fair international cultural coop-

49 Interviews 2 with cultural activist (27 August 2014), 3 with cultural activist (10 October 2014), 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014) and 7 with cultural activist (15 October 2014).

50 Interviews 1 with representative of Goethe-Institut (12 June 2014) and 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014).

51 Interview 4 with cultural activist (12 October 2014).

52 Interview 1 with representative of Goethe-Institut (12 June 2014).

53 Interview 1 with representative of Goethe-Institut (12 June 2014).

eration and culture-specific support in times of transition are transparency, flexibility, openness, mutual dialogue and frank debate. However, the interviewees state a discrepancy in the public communication of the new policy framework of the German-Tunisian "Transformation Partnership", as they could not well observe the change and extended work approach after the Tunisian Revolution. The assessment of needs, and the strategy of developing cooperation and partnership are thus not perceived as transparent.

Putting the findings of the case study of the Goethe-Institut in relation to the concept of public diplomacy and soft power in the context of the "Transformation partnership", a shift from the classical concept of expanding and securing influence of Germany in another country can be observed. The Goethe-Institut's work after 2011 shows that cultural exchange has been rethought and a new focus on partnership-based approaches has been developed, with the aim of both sides benefitting. Local ideas, interests and needs, like cultural management training, are the principles of the work of the foreign actor. Putting the focus on capacity-building and self-empowerment is a strategy that supports local developments, apart from own interests. On the other hand, the strategy adopted by the Goethe-Institut in Tunisia does contribute effectively to the exercise of soft power, bringing benefits to the funding state like expanding a positive image of the Goethe-Institut's work as well as of the country. The latter despite not being very transparent in the communication of aims and agendas of the "Transformation Partnership" and in the selection of partners, as well as being primarily perceived as a sponsor. Nevertheless, the case study shows that the perceptions are slowly changing towards a more partnership-based public diplomacy and soft power. Supporting transformation processes can hardly be effective when own interests are predominant, but a notable shift in the practice is still to be achieved.

Reflecting, after four years of implementation, on the overall effectiveness of the new policy framework of the "Transformation partnership", which includes also the sectors of economy and security, Asseburg et al state that the influence in Tunisia is quite minor and mainly based on support in budget and equipment. They particularly claim a new focus and a reorientation of the policy framework giving priority to civil society actors and to focus on specific groups rather than supporting widespread actions. A more specific political exposure of Germany would increase sustainable support and stabilization (Asseburg et al, 2016: 38ff). Also, Maaß argues, on the impact of the cited policy document on German foreign cultural policy from 2011 (Federal Foreign Office, 2011), that notable change in the practice has not really been achieved (Maaß, 2015: 51). This shows that there is the need of adopting policy concepts, especially for processes of transformation, and formulate new criteria and rethink the existing working paradigms. The questions on how policies are set up, how coopera-

tion is built and how exchange with foreign partners is practiced are not yet answered. This is also stated by Hampel, who claims for the implementation of principles for a "fair cooperation" which are not yet practiced, even though often declared by German actors working in the field (Hampel, 2015). Applying the argument of Asseburg et al (2016) on German foreign cultural policy in processes of transformation, cultural activists as a strong civil society group can be one of the focuses of Germany's engagement. Also, Hasenkamp envisions a crucial role of civil society for social stabilization (Hasenkamp, 2012: 110).

In conclusion, this research can be seen as a first step towards an idea of rethinking German foreign cultural policy in processes of transformation and developing new, transparent and partnership-based concepts of international cultural relations with transformation countries that are based on local competences, local needs and managed by local actors. Lastly, apart from international cultural cooperation and support, a redefinition and embedding of local conceptual cultural policy, which is a prerequisite to implement local structures supporting the cultural scene in the long term, is of high relevance for a local framework enabling cultural, social and democratic transition.

INTERVIEWS

Interview 1 with representative of the Goethe-Institut via telephone between Tunis and Marseille, 12 June 2014.

Interview 2 with cultural activist via telephone between Tunis and Dresden, 27 August 2014.

Interview 3 with cultural activist in Tunis, 10 October 2014.

Interview 4 with cultural activist in Tunis, 12 October 2014.

Interview 5 with cultural activist in Tunis, 13 October 2014.

Interview 6 with cultural activist in Tunis, 14 October 2014.

Interview 7 with cultural activist in Tunis, 15 October 2014.

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