Historically, the German language has been both a minority and majority language. From serving as a regional lingua franca within the Hapsburg Empire[1] to evolving into the language of oppression in Europe from 1919-1945, the popularity and prevalence of the German language have fluctuated significantly. Today, German is predominantly a language of education, tourism, and international commerce. It is the most widely spoken Muttersprache, or native language, within the European Union (EU).

While many scholars focus on the dominance and permeation of the English language in a globalized era of politics, this article will investigate the substantial rise of the German language from 2004-2014. The following questions will guide this analysis: first, to what
extent, if any, does the promotion of the German language contribute to the overall success of German foreign policy? Secondly, could Germany’s foreign cultural policy be perceived as expansionist? The resurgence of interest in, and the overall attractiveness of, the German language and German culture in recent years might indicate that English is not the only linguistically imperial tongue of foreign policy.

The purpose of this article is to investigate the political repercussions and foreign policy implications of an outwardly cultural phenomenon. Following this introduction, the paper’s first section will provide a historical basis for Germany’s current foreign policy objectives. The second section will detail the current data on the number of cultural institutions promoting the German language as well as the number of students learning German worldwide. The third section will conduct an analysis of German foreign policy as it relates to German language and cultural policy in order to determine how effective Germany’s culturally-driven approach to foreign policy is. The fourth and final section will conclude with suggestions regarding the implications of the rise in the popularity of the German language and will make recommendations for further investigation and research. This article will conclude with the assertion that the rise in the popularity of the German language is directly attributed to the success of German foreign cultural policies in the context of a broader, European foreign policy approach. This article will utilize primary source documents to demonstrate the active promotion of German language through German cultural institutions and federally funded international scholarship programs.

**Background: Value-Driven Außenpolitik**

After the Second World War, European nations moved away from the traditional power-driven, Realpolitik style of foreign policy and embarked on a diplomatic revolution to create a more harmonized, cooperative Europe. This new Europe would be value-driven and would strive to increase the welfare of its people rather than the power of individual states, indicating a transition from power politics to cooperative politics. As a result of the emphasis on cooperative politics, a value-driven foreign policy approach emerged as the principal model for European states. Germany in particular exemplifies this structural change from power-driven to value-driven politics because it uses language and culture as foreign policy tools to elicit political cooperation. The use of language and culture in this capacity denotes the transition away from power politics given the absence of brute military force and stringent economic sanctions in the pursuit of national interests. Germany has cast off its militaristic past and identified the promotion of the German language as “one of the most important tasks of foreign cultural policy.” The task of language promotion is coordinated and funded by the German Foreign Ministry, implying that German foreign
cultural policy, or *Kulturpolitik*, is an integral part of German foreign policy, or *Außenpolitik*.

While language plays a considerable role in the formation of a national identity, it also functions as an instrument of foreign policy. As evidenced by Wright (2004: 24), the different political, social, cultural, and economic levels of language policy have become increasingly interdependent, both vertically (transnational, national, regional) and horizontally (between different states or communities). Language policy specifically corresponds to “…the exercise of social control on linguistic diversity and linguistic variation through political channels”\[5\], which includes “…the codification of language practices by those who hold institutional power”\[6\]. In the case of German foreign cultural policy, the actors who participate in the vertical and horizontal processes of language policy and political policy-making hold institutional power because they are either (a) cultural agents of the state (e.g. language or learning institutions), (b) governments who provide legal frameworks (e.g. *Auswärtiges Amt*, or German Foreign Ministry), and (c) EU-specific institutions seeking to coordinate different national strategies for promoting national and heritage languages.\[7\] The differences in scales found across European language policy discourses aptly demonstrate the horizontal and vertical connections between political institutions and policy-making.\[8\]

The principal connection between German foreign cultural policy and European cultural policy can be found in the strategy paper drafted by the German Foreign Ministry (*Auswärtiges Amt*) “Auswärtige Kulturpolitik—Konzeption 2000” (Foreign Cultural Policy Doctrine 2000), a critical government document that details how German national interests and subsequent foreign cultural policy fit within a European context.\[9\] First, this document asserts that German foreign cultural policy is an integral part of German foreign policy.\[10\] Second, the text states that foreign cultural policy represents democratic values, the promotion of human rights, and the sustainability of development and growth.\[11\] Third, this “value orientation”\[12\] is placed in a European context: the paper claims that German foreign cultural policy “transmits culture from Germany”\[13\] as part of European culture.\[14\] Finally, the document suggests that the goals and principles it outlines demonstrate how German foreign cultural policy is “said to mark Germany as a state that is rich in culture and engaged in dialogue with the international community of states”\[15\].\[16\] This quote suggests that German foreign cultural policy activities are justified within a wider framework of European values, legitimizing Germany’s policies within a European context.\[17\]

Policy decisions “…are typically considered to be (properly) performed on a higher plane than that on which individual actions occur” (Stevenson & Carl 2010: 23). At the national
level, language is promoted through the specific cultural policies of a given state, or their agencies (such as the Goethe-Institut). Policies are also directive and direction in that they are (a) constructed to influence behavior and (b) to filter down from a body with more authority to one with less. Language policy, as previously stated, not only takes into account the amount of social control a given state can have over linguistic diversity, but also operates on a variety of different scales (local, national, EU-wide, international). However, given Germany’s history of National Socialism, the German government and government-funded cultural organizations have been careful to avoid creating a global perception of dominance or supremacy. Nevertheless, the ability to speak German and the promotion of the language itself is a means of building regional friendships and “increasing intercultural understanding.”

Language and culture are considered German foreign policy tools because the cultural organizations and institutions created to promote the German language and German cultural policy are federally funded. The federal funding of German cultural institutions aimed at language learning is highly significant because it suggests that the post-war European effort to harmonize politics through shared values and cooperation was in fact successful. On average, about half of Germany’s foreign cultural policy budget—about 200 million Euros—is used to create, coordinate, and promote cultural institutions. Cultural institutions like the Goethe-Institut (GI), the German Academic Exchange Service or Deutscher Akademischer Auslandsdienst (DAAD), the Central Bureau for Education Abroad or Zentralstelle für das Auslandsschulwesen (ZfA), and the Pedagogical Exchange Service of the Council of Ministers of Culture and Education (Pädagogischer Austauschdienst der Kultusministerkonferenz (PAD)) are dedicated to promoting German language learning and cooperative cultural exchange between Germany and other nations. Currently, around 15.4 million individuals are learning German as a second or foreign language worldwide, which demonstrates both the success of these cultural agents as well as the growing interest of non-native German speakers in the German language.

Current Statistics on German Cultural Institutions Worldwide

The Goethe-Institut (GI) is a federally funded cultural institution that promotes the study of the German language and encourages international cultural exchange worldwide. While the Goethe-Institut is pro-forma independent, de facto it works exclusively for the German government, collaborating with public and private cultural agencies alike. Founded in 1951, the original function of the GI was to train foreign German teachers in Germany. A mere nine years later, the GI became the frontrunner of all German cultural initiatives and institutes abroad, signaling an “intensification of Germany’s foreign cultural policy.”
2007, the German parliament increased funding for the Goethe-Institut for the first time in more than ten years, indicating an increase in the demand for and popularity of German language learning. The Goethe-Institut considers itself a promoter of German educational and foreign cultural policy and, as such, it operates as a leading actor of the cultural dialogue process in Central Europe. The alignment between European foreign cultural policy and German foreign cultural policy is highlighted in the Leitbild, or central focus statement of the Goethe-Institut (GI). In this statement, the GI claims that one of its main objectives is to “promote global acceptance of Europe” and declares multilingualism as vital “...for a deepened European unity.” While the GI’s focus is largely on European multilingualism, the active promotion of both German culture and German language-learning remains the chief motivator of this cultural institution. Evidence of this can be found in sheer number of Goethe-Institutes worldwide, amounting to a total of 159 cultural institutions in 98 countries.

The Deutscher Akademischer Auslandsdienst (DAAD) serves as the German national agency for “international academic cooperation.” Initiated by a single student in Heidelberg in 1925, the founding of the DAAD as a cultural institution pre-dates the Goethe-Institut. Following the complicated years of WWII, the DAAD was reestablished in 1950. The DAAD promotes academic exchange by sending lecturers and students abroad in order to promote partnerships with institutes of German studies. Additionally, the DAAD offers scholarships and academic grants to foreign (non-German) students to study in Germany. On average, the DAAD supports over 100,000 German and international students and researchers every year. Moreover, from the time of its foundation, the DAAD has supported more than 2 million academics in Germany and abroad. In 2013, the DAAD presented a new strategy, Strategy 2020, intended to expand three action areas within the network in order to attract more scholars to Germany. Included in this strategic plan is the federally supported goal of increasing the number of foreign students in Germany to 350,000 by 2020, compared to the 120,000 estimated in 2013. By identifying three action areas (Scholarships for the best, Structures for internationalization, Expertise for academic collaboration) on which to focus future efforts, recruitment, and funding, the DAAD is looking towards the future, a vision that would not be possible without (a) a history of success as a German academic and cultural institution and (b) a steady rise in students interested in learning German and studying in Germany, or the increasing appeal of the German culture to non-Germans.

The Zentralstelle für das Auslandsschulwesen (ZfA) is part of the Federal Office of Administration in Germany. The ZfA supervises over 1,200 schools worldwide, 140 of which are German schools. In close cooperation with the federal states of Germany, the ZfA provides these schools with educational personnel, as well as with financial and pedagogical
assistance: the ZfA employs about 2,000 teachers worldwide, with 36 educational institutions in 18 countries. In addition to providing teachers with job placement and funding worldwide, the ZfA also supports around 1,100 schools where the German Language Certificate (DSD) can be acquired. More impressive is the number of DSD examinations internationally available—59,000 examinations worldwide, including 7,400 examinations at German schools abroad and 20,400 examinations for a language certificate available at other schools, with a total of 432,300 pupils attending ZfA-supported schools abroad. Since the establishment of the ZfA in 1968, the numbers of German and non-German pupils enrolled in these federally-funded schools abroad have grown substantially, indicating yet again a growing demand for German language education in young adults, university students, and elementary school-aged children.

Lastly, another one of the most respected and successful cultural agents of German foreign cultural policy is the Pädagogischer Austauschdienst der Kultusministerkonferenz (PAD). The PAD is a public organization that works on behalf of the federal German states in order to promote international exchange and cooperation in the educational sector. German foreign cultural policy and German educational policy are inextricably linked, as evidenced by organizations like the PAD. Established in 1951, the PAD enabled teachers to train in schools abroad as foreign language assistants. In 1956-57, the number of foreign language assistants was 256. A mere ten years later, this number increased to 794 and in 2010-11, the numbers jumped yet again, to 1,071. Through an initiative organized by the German Federal Foreign Office in 2008, Schulen: Partner der Zukunft (PASCH), or “Schools: Partners of the Future” the PAD, Zfa, DAAD, and the Goethe-Institut collaborated to determine the best way to sustain a global interest in modern-day Germany and the German language. The result of this collaboration was PASCH, a global network of about 1,500 schools dedicated to prioritizing German culture and language learning— more than 500 of these schools are supported by the Goethe-Institut. Moreover, this network aims to build active and long-term links to Germany to foster greater intercultural understanding through international education.

As evidenced by the numbers on German language learners worldwide, the commitment of each of the above-mentioned cultural institutions to the promotion of German culture and language is exceptional in terms of global reach. More importantly, each of the aforementioned cultural institutions receives funding from the German federal government, suggesting that these institutions are not exclusively cultural, but also political. Public spending on cultural initiatives, including funding provided to German cultural institutions, was about 9.1 billion Euros in 2009, 13.4 percent of which was provided by the federal government. As of January 2015, Germany’s federal foreign policy budget encompassed
299.5 billion Euros, 817 million of which were allocated to German foreign cultural and educational policy. It is important to note that the 2015 funds allotted to the foreign cultural and educational policy division of the German Foreign Office were specifically intended to support German language learning and promotion worldwide. There is thus an apparent link between German language cultural policy, Kulturpolitik, and German foreign policy as a whole.

**Discussion: Comparative FP in Context of Analysis**

To revisit: the cooperative, value-driven approach to foreign policy that emerged after the Second World War has been incorporated at the supranational and national level throughout the European Union. Germany in particular has distinguished itself in this regard by developing comprehensive cultural and educational programs to actively promote and institutionalize German language and culture. To entrench this institutionalization of culture, Germany has designated these cultural programs and institutions to function as cultural agents, both in Europe and abroad. In an attempt to analyze the political intent of Germany’s foreign cultural policies, the following paragraphs will discuss the promotion of German interests in the context of European foreign policy. Secondly, the institutionalization of cultural policies as an exercise of soft power politics to evaluate the overall success of German cultural and educational polices in the context of a broader foreign policy objective will be considered. Third and lastly, this section will briefly contemplate the argument for the potential latent expansionist agenda of German foreign cultural policy.

To understand how German foreign cultural policies are aimed at a long-term institutionalization of German language and culture, the role of European cultural policy must first be clarified. As briefly referenced above, Germany’s approach to foreign policy is embedded in a European foreign policy context insofar as shared values and cultural interests are integral to political cooperation. Evidence of this can be found in the strategy paper “Auswärtige Kulturpolitik—Konzeption 2000” (Foreign Cultural Policy Doctrine 2000) where German foreign cultural policy contributes to creating “openness, cosmopolitanism, credibility, and reliability as well as indispensable networks of political and economic cooperation.” This excerpt thus identifies a long-term German interest in using cultural policy as a means to ensure political and economic cooperation.

As mentioned in the previous section, the GI affirms that one of its main objectives is to “promote global acceptance of Europe” and declares multilingualism as vital “...for a deepened European unity.” The promotion of decidedly European interests is thus embodied by “…the principal national representative organ of German foreign cultural
policy as one of Germany’s main national interests.” The promotion of German national interests is thus presented in a way that also furthers the interests of the European Union, which in turn justifies and serves the interests of German foreign cultural policy (Stevenson & Carl, 2010: 101). One of these German national interests is that of language promotion because, as stated in the “Auswärtige Kulturpolitik—Konzeption 2000” strategy paper, language “…opens up routes into German culture…strengthens the German language’s position in European institutions…creates sympathy for and ties with Germany” and “…helps secure Germany’s economic position in the world.” It can therefore be concluded that the German language is the medium through which cultural, political, and economic ties to/with Germany are established.

The extent to which German foreign cultural policy is embedded in a wider European foreign policy framework is evident as there is significant overlap between European-wide foreign policy objectives and German foreign policy objectives. The nature and intention of the cultural institutionalization furthered by Germany, however, remains unclear. German foreign policy interests are constructed by Germany as European cultural policy interests, which legitimizes German foreign cultural policy interests as EU interests, effectively dismissing any suspicion of a hidden supremacist or German expansionist agenda. However, with the application of a soft power lens, the presence and purpose of German cultural institutions is decidedly political. Nye (2009) identifies two kinds of power: hard and soft. Hard power refers to coercive tactics (such as military intervention or economic sanctions) used to affect others in order to get a specific, desired outcome. Soft power, by contrast, refers to the ability to persuade others to do what one wants. This persuasive power is based on attraction, specifically cultural attractiveness, as referenced in the above paragraphs, which is “associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions” (Nye 2009: 63). While cultural attractiveness is often confused with Nye’s (2004) concept of soft power, the cultural attractiveness of a given country can become a source of soft power depending on the policy objective, context, and methods of implementation (Watanabe & McConnell 2008). The following paragraph will employ these three conditions as evaluative criteria to determine whether or not Germany’s foreign cultural policy has been successful.

The German federal government has explicitly stated that cultural relations and educational policy constitute a vital pillar of Germany’s foreign policy objectives. The context in which this political objective is understood is that of European foreign policy which, as previously stated, operates under a value-driven, cooperative model of politics. Regarding the methods of implementation, Germany has constructed, funded, and consistently supported cultural institutions like the Goethe-Institut or DAAD to promote German language and culture
worldwide. Given these three conditions, the institutionalization of German cultural policy can be viewed as an exercise of soft power. This is important to distinguish as the cultural institutionalization underlines the political nature of German foreign cultural policy and stresses the active promotion of German language and culture as a means of increasing cultural attractiveness which in turn increases soft power capability. Taking into account the observation of soft power politics, combined with the overwhelmingly positive statistics of German language learners worldwide provided above, the overall success of Germany’s foreign cultural policy as both an aspect and instrument of foreign policy is conclusive.

While the context and nature of Germany’s foreign cultural policies have been assessed, the motivation behind these policies has yet to be determined. Language itself is a powerful tool that has the capacity to “…constitute a major part of the ways in which ‘real historical actors’ situate themselves in relation to others” (Stevenson & Carl 2010: 18) in order to “…develop, promote and defend both individual and shared interests, ... or [to] strive for influence and power” (Stevenson & Carl 2010: 18). Language is thus both a material and symbolic resource. But has Germany intentionally promoted German language learning as a way to increase their influence and political power? The term associated with this phenomenon is “cultural imperialism”, which describes the “exercise of domination in cultural relationships in which the values, practices, and meanings of a powerful foreign culture are imposed upon one or more native cultures.” Given the information presented in the previous sections, neither Germany nor its corresponding foreign cultural policies fit this description, rendering the idea of a hidden expansionist agenda highly unlikely.

In sum, if Germany’s leading model for foreign policy is a Eurocentric, value-driven one, it can be concluded that German foreign policy is, as stated by the German federal government, a successful peace policy. Since 1949, this approach to foreign policy has proven an effective and innocuous model for Germany. In lieu of an imposing military, Germany’s hard power resources are primarily economic, obliging Germany to compensate for the deficit in hard power by investing in a more long-term strategy: using language and culture to attract others, thus enhancing Germany’s global image and perceived level of influence in foreign affairs. Germany’s particular style of foreign cultural policy, then, in both design and implementation, can be viewed as an effective instrument of foreign policy.

Conclusions

Language promotion in particular has proven an effective medium to increase the global interest in modern-day Germany. The rise in popularity and prominence of the German language has been substantial over the last ten years, as evidenced by the German federal budget numbers and statistics on German language learners worldwide. While the latent
expansionist agenda argument mentioned above proved improbable, there appears to be a
definite strategy driving Germany’s foreign cultural policy, beyond buoying European
cultural and policy interests. Utilizing Nye’s (2009) concept of soft power to shed light on
the underlying incentives driving German foreign cultural policy was most appropriate given
the significant increase in the (global) interest in German language and culture, as well as
the considerable increases in the German federal budget for cultural and educational policy.
As demonstrated by the facts and figures, it seems Germany is on the rise, but this time its
assets are cultural.

Implications of Current Trends

One of the main objectives of this article was to determine whether or not an emerging
trend could be identified regarding the resurgence and re-popularization of the German
language. Given the information provided by the German federal government and multiple
cultural institutions, it can be concluded that German language and culture is on the rise,
their prominence signified by the global interest in and overall cultural attractiveness of
Germany. Following this, the political implications of this emerging trend were discussed in
the analysis section, which employed a soft power lens to explain why these cultural policies
could not be as successful as they have been without a hidden political agenda. Assuming
that increasing Germany’s soft power stockpile is in fact a motivator behind German foreign
cultural policies, one might say that the emerging trend is not a purely organic one, but
rather one constructed and steered by German national interests in an attempt to bolster
Germany’s image worldwide. Regardless of the intentions driving the success of these
policies, however, German foreign cultural policy is a fundamental element of German
foreign policy and as such, contains political dimensions.

Directions for Future Research

Regarding future research, it is recommended that this emerging trend be closely
monitored in order to determine the exact nature of German national interests in promoting
the German language and culture. While Germany’s interest in promoting language and
culture has been shown to be in the name of a value-driven, peace-promoting foreign policy,
particular attention should be paid to the strategy plans created by the German federal
government and their cultural agents like the Goethe-Institut, as these plans aim to
significantly increase the number of German language learners and scholars worldwide by
2020. Furthermore, future research should also focus on the importance of language and
culture in relation to foreign policy success as language, policy, and culture have become
increasingly interdependent in this highly globalized era of politics.
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2. The term “linguistic imperialism” references Said (1993:3-8), who explains that the role of culture in the modern imperial experience is a privileged one and that imperialism itself has always been situated in a kind of cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices.  
7. Ibid., 84-85.  
8. Ibid., 83.  
13. Ibid.  
18. Ibid, 23.  
19. Ibid.  
22. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
31. The Goethe-Insitut headquarters are located in Munich, Germany, with corresponding partners and offices in Berlin. Offices located outside of Germany and Central Europe operate on a partnership basis, however, the programs of study are designed by the Head Office in Munich. For more information: https://www.goethe.de/en/wwt.html
33. DAAD, 2015, https://www.daad.org/about
34. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
43. Federal Office of Administration: Central Agency for Schools Abroad, 2015:
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http://www.bva.bund.de/EN/Themen/German_schools_abroad_zfa/node.html

44. See “Infoblatt des Zfas: Zfa in brief”, 2015:

45. KMK-PAD History, 2013:

46. KMK-PAD History, 2013:

47. PASCH FAQ: http://www.pasch-net.de/hil/faq/enindex.htm

48. See “The Culture and Media Policy of the German Federal Government” 2014,

49. See “German Foreign Policy Budget” 2015,
http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/AAmt/AuswDienst/Haushalt_node.html


53. “Sprachförderung erschließt den Zugang zur deutschen Kultur...festigt die Stellung der deutschen Sprache in den europäischen Institutionen, schafft Sympathie für und Bindungen an Deutschland...hilft die Förderung der deutschen Sprache im Ausland nicht zuletzt auch, die wirtschaftliche Position Deutschlands in der Welt zu sichern.” In: Auswärtige Kulturpolitik — Konzeption 2000, pg. 11.

54. Institutionalization includes education, which can be both formal and informal, the formal applying to universities and schools (teachers and students) and the informal applies to everything else, such as private consumption. See Nakane, Otsuji and Armour, Languages and Identities in a Transitional Japan: From Internationalization to Globalization. (Routledge, 2015).

55. Stevenson & Carl, 2010:100.


57. “Institutionalization” is identified as the creation of global or standard settings, or “social rhythms” which are capable of producing long-term soft power effects in the form of social habits. See: Lee (2009: 211)


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