



Supporting Alliance for African Mobility

WP7 SAAM

Intercultural Handbook

A legacy for future mobilities
between Africa and Europe

Introduction	8
1 The role of the tutor in international VET internships	11
1.1 The profile of the tutor in the sending organization.	11
1.2 The tutor as the character of a game	12
1.3 ICT and language skills.....	13
1.4 The role of the local tutor in intercultural preparation.....	14
1.5 The profile of the tutor in the hosting organization	16
2 From Erasmus to SAAM - history and evolution of mobility in Europe	20
2.1 Understanding international learning mobilities - A history of Erasmus+ and its evolution	20
2.2 Erasmus+ Mobilities for Learners: Objectives & Framework	21
2.3 International mobility: the expected benefits and the learning opportunities.....	23
2.4 Inclusion & Diversity: an attention to participants' specific needs.....	27
3 Intercultural learning	29
3.1 Culture and cultural identity	29
3.2 Interculturalism: What are we talking about?	31
3.3 Intercultural competences	33
3.4 The objectives of a good intercultural preparation and the risk of cultural shock	36
3.5 Culture Shock.....	37
3.6 Aspects to focus on for a good intercultural preparation.....	40
3.7 A focus on discrimination and how to deal with it.....	40
4 Narration and personal storytelling. How to avoid the danger of a single story, paraphrasing Chimamanda Adichie.	43
4.1 Building meanings through storytelling	45
4.2 The canonical narrative scheme	46
4.3 Storytelling for future legacy	48
4.4 Designing a digital story.....	49
5 Activities outlines: concrete methods to prepare participants before their departure	54
The culture onion	55
4 Storytelling exercises.....	57
The easy and the hard.....	59
My favourite story	61
You are the hero	63
Prevent the culture shock	64
Playing around with countries	66
The Elders' Council.....	67
Guess where I'm going!	69
Pre-departure Questionnaire	71
Cross-cultural checklist.....	74
The Iceberg of Culture	76
Abigail's Tale.....	78
Theatre Forum	80
About the authors	83
References Linkography, bibliography, official documents	84
Other resources	84



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Introduction

This document intends to be a guidance manual for teachers, regarding the work with students preparing to go on mobility in European countries. It gathers advice as well as activity ideas and proposals to help students get ready for this experience.

Both Africa and Europe are continents with diverse countries and cultures. Youth realities also vary depending on which part of Europe or Africa people live in. However, from an outside point of view, people tend to think that there is one African culture/reality and one European culture/reality.

For this reason, it is important to get the chance to discover each others through discussions on their own experiences/realities in Africa and what they think about youth realities in European countries.

To start such a discussion on these cases, you can find different activities on this guide to be used during the training.

The attempt we have made is to try to look at this guide from different perspectives, not only from that of the European extenders, but trying to put ourselves in the shoes of those who live and are culturally linked to Africa, especially by comparing the texts and activities.

While aware of some basic limitations, such as the use of European target languages in this handbook, in the creation of this manual we tried to have a post-colonial point of view: giving space to the voices and experiences of african people and trying to listen to them both through several trips to the land of Africa and with a cultural immersion in fiction and non-fiction literature of different cultural exponents and Nigerian, Kenyan, Senegalese politicians, of the last 70 years, just to name a few¹.

From a text by a young Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and her famous TED of 2009 we started to conceptualize the online preparation of students and consequently the drafting of this manual. “The danger of a single story” was the underlying theme that animated us.

What we wanted to avoid was that in the story of the participants’s experience of the SAAM project there would be a fall into clichés, so dear to mainstream communication, with the “good European”, be it person or organization, ready to help the “poor African” neither rich nor aware that it comes as a “good savage” in civilization. The risk of the single story is not that it is false or untrue, but it is partial: it tells only a part of the facts and, especially, devoids them of the complexity that surrounds them. What we often see when talking about Africa is the reduction and simplification of ethnic, linguistic and cultural complexity. A story that is often reduced to images of poverty, drought, war and death.

¹ “The choice of a language and the use assigned to it, it is central for the definition the people will give themselves in relation with their own natural and social environment - and also - with the entire universe” Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Decolonising the mind. The politics of language in African Literature

To reverse the trend we believed it was necessary that the same protagonists had the opportunity and the tools to tell their stories and show their land. Chimamanda starts her TED talk by saying “I’m a storyteller” and storytelling the tool that we would like students to master to bring new and complementary stories to the prevailing narrative, to prevent everyone becoming that one narrative.

The manual thus combines a **theoretical** and a **practical part**, with activities to be done in groups, both in presence and online. The theoretical part aims to be a progressive approach to the moment of the internship, and more generally the experience, in Europe through:

- a) knowledge and presentation of European youth mobility programmes and staff
- b) an overview of the role of tutors and accompanying persons in mobility projects
- c) attention to an intercultural approach, the emotional and cultural impact of mobility in Europe and the possible difficulties between the will to integrate and the want to defend one’s own identity
- d) storytelling at the service of students to tell many different stories of their country and their experience

The manual is therefore both an account of online preparation with European experts and a sharing of guidelines and practical activities to be carried out on-site before departure.

1

The role of the tutor in international VET internships



1 | The role of the tutor in international VET internships

The tutor has always played a strategic role, both in VET projects and in related Erasmus+ projects, halfway between a facilitator, a methodist and those archetypal figures that act as a bridge between one world and another, between reality and dream, between the world of the living and that of the dead.

After summing up the role played by the tutor of the Sending Organization in the SAAM project, we are interested in dealing with the role of the mentor in a more detailed way, which precedes and follows the adventure of African students in Europe, leaving out of this treatment all the “textbook” tasks that the tutor is assigned by the same Erasmus Plus program².

1.1 The profile of the tutor in the sending organization.

For the SAAM project tutor in particular, summarizing briefly, you can divide the intervention in 5 stages; In the first administrative phase, the tutor carries out the **interviews and selections of the participants** and, as soon as they have the precise list of the selected, they proceed to verify the possession of passports and undertakes the procedure and practices for the application of visas.

The second phase is when the tutor **details the timing and modalities of the mobility**, in agreement with the European host organizations. It is necessary to define the logistical aspects (accommodation, travel to and from school, use of kitchens, etc.) and the training objectives to be achieved during the stay and to prepare all the related documentation.

Once the first two phases are completed (the second phase can have varying durations depending on the relations with the embassies and between governments), we enter the third operational phase of trip planning, including **support for linguistic and intercultural preparation activities**. This phase can overlap temporally with the previous one, especially if the release times of the visa are lengthened. In all these early stages the tutor can be connected with the technical coordination of the coordinating organization of the project, especially regarding assistance in resolving the difficulties and setbacks that may arise in obtaining visas and passports.

The fourth phase, however, is **linked to the period of actual mobility abroad**. The tutor makes a quantitative monitoring to ensure that everything is carried out in accordance with the agreements made and in line with the training objectives by checking the hours spent, the signatures on the internship registers, etc. It also deals with qualitative aspects, facilitating the integration in the school or in the company, managing any problems with the host company and setting up periodic verification sessions with students to analyze the progress of the training experience.

² For the tasks and the role of the tutor of the sending organization you can refer to the Erasmus+ guide and to what the conventions report as activities to be monitored and carried out.

At the end of the mobility phase, he needs to make sure that all students are issued with the Europass certificate and provide a qualitative evaluation of the activity carried out.

In the last phase the work of the tutor, at the end of the mobility journey, is completed and they are back at home with the group. They will encourage and facilitate the **dissemination and sharing of the results of the mobility** itself, both with their teachers and companions, but also with the local companies, parents and stakeholders. Carrying out meetings and overseeing the communication campaign, on social media and traditional media, putting to value the narratives developed during the European experience.

1.2 The tutor as the character of a game

From this first examination it is clear that the tutor must be an authoritative figure from the relational point of view; this means that it must possess intrinsic requirements that make it such, not only a formal title attributed by others. If they were a player character (PG) of a Roleplay Game (Rpg) like D&D they would have a character sheet where some of the stats are maxed out, first of all Courage and Strength. It takes both to undertake such an adventure. Courage means to be ready to face the challenges that the project poses, to be able to manage embassies and passport offices, parents and students, schools and setbacks. It requires a strength that is not only physical -travel as well as preparing for travel can be very tiring-, but also mental, allowing you to stay focused and keep the goal in mind, often despite the difficulties that arise. Then you need communication and relationship skills. At the local level, it is necessary to build a close-knit, loyal and cohesive group and then to communicate profitably with parents, companies, and other teachers. At the time of the journey it is necessary to always communicate constructively and proactively with the actors who in the journey of our heroes will stand between them and the desired destination. They can assume the role of allies or enemies, suppliers of magical boons (a visa, a passage, information in an unknown city) or obstacles (a denial, a long check, a fine), depending on the situation.

Surely the tutor is a good listener; “we have two ears and a mouth, let’s use them in proportion”, says an anonymous Greek wise man. And the tutor must treasure this maxim and rather than go to the chair explaining and giving orders it is preferable that he keeps a position of a listener: of information, but especially of needs, of the signals that students can send also through non-verbal communication; the period abroad, in a different culture, crosses as we will then see (v. infra chapter 5) different stages, from euphoria to the moment of detachment. It is important that the tutor knows how to recognize the moment in which the children are and choose to intervene when needed, keeping in mind that the protagonists of the experience are the students and that it is useful that they live this experience also emotionally.

Here the tutor should not be conceived in this sense as a ‘snowplow tutor’, which paves the way and avoids any discomfort, displeasure or conflict that can be presented to students. It’s much more important to find moments to be able to talk to them about it, helping them find meaning in that experience. Emotions recollected in tranquility can not only generate poetry but self awareness too.

The two phases- making experiences and giving them meaning- need space to be able to bear fruit. In this sense the use of narrative tools such as reading, writing, the creation of videos and theatrical representation can be helpful to express, in a creative and analogue way, the experience lived and to convey it at the time of their return to their communities.

1.3 ICT and language skills

It is useless to beat it around the bush. The accompanying tutor in Europe will have to know the English language in the spoken and in the interaction at least to a level B1+³ mainly in order to manage the more formal situations, from the airport to the practical bureaucracy connected to the trip, then moving on to the relationship with schools or host companies - up to tutors and political representatives in the target countries, English will be the target language. French and other languages such as Spanish, German, Portuguese or Italian are a plus, but unless you are in one of those countries, they cannot be considered as substitutes for English. It will therefore be crucial that the tutor strengthens these skills in the training and preparation for mobility, also through the OLS⁴ platforms, completely free and accessible in asynchronous mode. This platform, first known and attended by the tutor, is a tool to be integrated in the onsite preparation of students before departure.

It is the use of the OLS platform that acts as a platform to underline how digital skills are also crucial for the tutor. Bridging the digital divide⁵, a mantra for the EU, and acquiring a level of confidence in the use of the main IT tools is one of the first assets for a young person who wants to enter and remain in the labor market. There are many support and investment programs to help develop and strengthen digital skills in a knowledge society that increasingly conveys content and gives employment through devices, PCs, ICT solutions, automation and artificial intelligence. Relations with public administrations and with the European Union itself are filtered by email, online forms, databases, portals for access and authentication through smartphones or electronic identities. And with all this, the tutor must measure himself within the framework of a project with the European Union.

The online training of SAAM WP7 goes precisely in the direction of indirectly increasing these skills, linking learning to the performance of tasks in reality, and to put in condition, technologically before and know-how immediately after, African VET schools, students and tutors, to move progressively independently in the use of web platforms of cooperation and content sharing.

³Language levels according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), B1+ in interaction. Can follow much of what is said around them on general topics, provided interlocutors avoid very idiomatic usage and articulate clearly. Can express their thoughts about abstract or cultural topics such as music or films. Can explain why something is a problem. Can give brief comments on the views of others. Can compare and contrast alternatives, discussing what to do, where to go, who or which to choose, etc.

⁴Since July 2022, the OLS platform has enabled language courses from level A1 to level B2 in the ENG, F, DE ES, ITA https://www.erasmusplus.it/istruzione_superiore/mobilita/online-language-support/e_languages, subject to registration and passing of final tests, the recognition and certification of skills achieved.

⁵The digital divide is a phenomenon that concerns the existing inequalities within the society in terms of usability of the internet connection and related opportunities and services. This leads to serious discrimination for the equality of rights exercisable online with the advent of the digital society. The digital divide is therefore increasingly causing a gap of another nature: socio-economic and cultural

The same applies to computer skills; If you do not face at least a tutor with an intermediate level of skills in the management of the internet, Office applications and email, you need to fill the gap through reinforcement actions, also drawing on the internal resources of the - the school or the VET centers.

1.4 The role of the local tutor in intercultural preparation

The crucial role of the accompanying tutor begins long before the trip, but at the time they acquire their authority towards the group. It is clear that for this to happen the tutor must be identified as soon as possible and involved in the preparation process from the beginning; it is to avoid, except for causes of force majeure, the choice of a last minute tutor, without knowledge of the students and without sharing with them a training agreement and the main rules of behavior.

First of all the tutor has to build a good climate within the group, especially when we find ourselves - we mainly have groups with subjects from different school complexes or even different cities- in a situation doubly challenging to do so while trying to build a relationship of mutual trust with the group.

A great opportunity for creating a good group dynamic is through the sharing of common experiences; the process of applying for passports and visas, but also meetings, the pact with families and the participation in the intercultural preparation path are moments when tutors and groups can compare and align on shared positions. They are useful moments to understand how students handle situations, what problem solving skills they have and how they cope with anxiety and negative situations; information which will be useful in real situations outside the home and which in this sense can be prevented by preparatory work.

The intercultural preparation phase, which mostly takes place in online training, also needs to be accompanied by local activities that precede and follow meetings with European experts. This is because we have experienced that several factors make it more difficult to exhaust the preparation through the exclusive use of digital platforms: the aforementioned digital divide, which often makes it difficult to synchronize the use of formative moments, the knowledge of a foreign target language at a level where it is possible to elaborate complex thoughts and fully understand messages on non-daily topics, the shyness or the little habit to express their ideas, maybe in a contradiction with the teacher or with the trainer that, as a rule, you do not contradict, even more so if you do not know who you are facing; for all these reasons, but also in order to build the already mentioned alliance between and within the group, it is good that the tutor takes care of accompanying the children in this intercultural path in collaboration with the European organization work package leader.

The scheme to follow is simple:

a) During the first training period of one hour:

the **minimum ICT requirements** to be met in order to benefit from online distance learning are explained to the tutors;

- the **possible activities to be carried out** are also shared with the tutors, providing step by step instructions on how to conduct the work, to make the preparation more effective and the involvement of the group more active;
- we share with the tutors what **the climate should be in the group**, with an approach that is welcoming, in an environment of non-judgmental work and respect.

This moment will involve all the project tutors together with the European training contacts. If it is an international project, it will be possible to duplicate the training by dividing the tutors of different countries according to the preferred target language, English or French.

b) there will be a meeting with the European contact person for online training to share with the tutors the working steps and to understand if there are deviations from the planned program. This will be the **moment to put in place eventual corrective measures in the online training** if the infrastructural endowment does not allow a profitable job in synchrony. You can take into consideration different times, when there are more crowded moments in the use of internet bandwidth, or resort to asynchronous activities such as videos and tutorials usable offline, as well as activities to do with software and applications. The work done offline would then be uploaded to the platform/portal or even shared through repositories like dropbox or the Google drive to be viewed and receive feedback.

c) **The European trainer will offer students on average 3 preparatory meetings of 2 hours each.** Using slides, interactive tools, video stimuli, music, readings, will touch the topics of this publication and assign them tasks to be carried out between meetings. A fourth meeting will be scheduled upon return, as a time of evaluation and preparation for the dissemination of results.

d) Each tutor, following the instructions received, will play the role of facilitator towards his or her group in relation to certain tasks and preparatory work assigned to the class, for example, a SWOT analysis of their motivations and expectations, as well as more specific work on interculturalism, prejudice or cultural shock. In this sense, the online moment will be in a small frontal didactic part while more space will be dedicated to the exhibition and to the story by the participants of what has been developed between one meeting and another. **The tutor will organize at least N+1 local meetings** of about 90 minutes each, where n are the online meetings with the European contact person (e.g. 3 online meetings, 4 meetings in presence).

This hybrid approach makes online activities more effective, often requiring more time, including explanations, use of a target language, local language translations, use of the zoom rooms and that do not always take place in the ideal conditions of connection but also of use, with the consequent exhaustion of the available time, usually not more than 2 hours, without being able to reach the expected outcomes. The activities in the presence instead go in the dual direction of strengthening the bond and mutual knowledge and doing a deeper and introspective work.

1.5 The profile of the tutor in the hosting organization

"If you know how to welcome someone with much love, he opens himself to you and gives you everything; if you receive it badly, it closes and gives you nothing."

The hosting organization plays a crucial role in the successful integration of the group into the mobility project. Specifically, the business tutor, to borrow the vocabulary of the VET, is who has the task of facilitating the integration of the individual or group in the training reality or company, trying to remove any cultural obstacles, technical knowledge, or methodological approaches. Like a real guardian angel is the host tutor who also plays an important initiatory and mercurial role: it is necessary to present the activity and the organizational structure, make students aware of the company's vision and mission, explain the safety plan with the relevant criteria, the safety devices needed and then follow daily the progressive inclusion of students. It is important that you periodically, at least once a week, reserve a space to collect feedback from their experiences, so that you can correct during the work, in agreement with the sending tutor, problematic situations or relevant divergent objectives.

It is a multi skills figure, with a strong ability to listen and to be in relationship, to be able to have a vision of the company and to be able to transmit it, to understand the culture of origin of the students with the relative differences in approach and learning; it must also have **technical skills in the area of employment activity and know foreign languages at least at a B1 level** in order to interact with the group. It must be able to actively involve foreign students in the didactic-methodological aspects as well as to stimulate their students to interact and to propose themselves as peer educators. In essence it is a very present figure, it is an empathic facilitator of the process: The process of teaching-intercultural learning, which manages to combine theoretical and practical aspects.

It is good to choose this figure among those of greater experience in the company, both for the knowledge of the company and they must possess the ability to read the situations and dynamics in the group and between groups. Here, too, we do not go into the details of the formal requirements faced by the corporate tutor, but we see what their challenges will be.

Language and digital barriers are the main obstacles to entry into the Labour market almost everywhere, but also and above all, obstacles that can hinder the integration of students in a new environment. The company tutor should take care of receiving a curriculum vitae and a self-assessment form from the organization staying true to the facts; this is in the interest of both parties, since it is not a good idea to lie about this type of skills, which can be immediately found and verified, but rather to enable the parties to work to implement compensatory measures, such as a language course or ICT on the spot, the presence of an interpreter, the possibility of having guest students support other local students with that specific technical or linguistic skills.

The other theme is interculturalism. In the first weeks of the internship, the typical aspects of the target culture are attractive and exciting; starting from the third week, the intercultural aspects can become an obstacle in the success or even in the conti-

uation of the internship experience-as we will see better in the following chapters. It is necessary to know how to manage the cultural shock, a feeling of anxiety, bewilderment, disorientation and confusion that a person can feel in a different social and cultural environment; knowing the phenomenon becomes strategic for the corporate tutor, that can implement prevention actions and support to students, especially paying attention to welcome and recognize the emotional experience and any oppositional positions.

To recap

- Identify a senior figure as a business tutor, who is well acquainted with the company, its functioning, and who is able to welcome students, facilitate their integration and understand their needs.
- The tutor should have language skills in the target language of at least aB1 level and be an advanced digital user.
- A figure who must be able to prepare in a short time a recovery plan for any linguistic or ICT deficiencies that their students may encounter.
- Must know the topic of cultural shock and be able to share any difficulties and implement a strategy of prevention and subsequently containment.

What to prepare for an online meeting setting before departure

Participants should preferably have **their own computer station**, connected to the **internet** with **headphones** and/or earphones.

In case of a single environment where participants will follow the meeting all together **it would be advisable that they could participate from a fairly large screen** (wide screen at least 40”), have a stable connection, a camera on with speakers and a table; in that case you will need to have sheets and pens or at least a couple of computers to work in small groups.

It would be necessary **to have a short meeting with the tutor before the meeting** to share the program, exchange materials and the possibility for him to work together with the group before and between a meeting and the other, and finally have the list with the names and surnames of the participants, so you know who they are and how many are present. It would also be crucial to know how they will connect to set the jobs to do with them even in the live session.

With regard to language skills, participants could fill in a card with their English and French language skills, to set the meeting in one or the other language or, if necessary, in a blended mode.

The use of the Zoom platform will allow **participants to be divided into rooms to be able to carry out activities in small groups**, activities that will be then synthesized and presented in plenary. To do this it is crucial that everyone has their own computer station. Obviously any other equivalent platform is fine

Connections from smartphones. As a last ratio it is also possible to connect from your smartphone even if this in fact limits the possibility of taking part, for example, to Kahoots, Mentimeters and most of the activities to be carried out via platform. In this case we will calibrate a more frontal lesson and where the tutor will leave the task of carrying out some field activities with the students.

2 From Erasmus to SAAM - history and evolution of mobility in Europe



2 | From Erasmus to SAAM - history and evolution of mobility in Europe

This handbook arose from the Erasmus+ project SAAM: as a pilot project, it implemented international exchanges between African and European countries in the Vocational Education and Training field focused on both students and teachers. It also aims to support future mobility schemes in a similar Afro-European context.

For these reasons, this part will present an overview of Erasmus+ and its evolution to understand the context in which international learning mobilities take place nowadays, and therefore the underlying objectives in terms of learning outcomes for participants, and framework in terms of organizational aspects for involved VET centres.

It will also cover the key concepts underlying Erasmus+ (hard vs soft skills; formal, non-formal and informal learning; a classification of learning outcomes), and end with a focus on the “Inclusion & Diversity” strategy implemented to support participants with fewer opportunities.

2.1 Understanding international learning mobilities - A history of Erasmus+ and its evolution

To understand the very reasons the Erasmus programme was created and has been among the most successful initiatives by the European Union since then, it helps a lot to start with its name.

As cool as it sounds, “Erasmus” is not a highly intelligent type of Pokémon, nor the Latin name of a mysterious plant. It comes instead from the Dutch philosopher Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam who, as a humanist and theologian seeking knowledge during the Renaissance period, lived and worked in many places in Europe to gain new insights and expand his knowledge.

In 1987, the Erasmus programme was established to offer a similar opportunity to higher education students in the European Union: the unique chance, as part of their curriculum, to study in another university abroad during one semester or a full year. From about 3,200 participating students from 11 European countries in the first year, Erasmus has radically expanded its outreach over time:

Profile of participants: originally focused on higher education students, Erasmus has been progressively open to many more profiles and sectors, and now includes vocational education and training, school education, adult education, youth and sport. Nowadays, it is open to learners of very diverse statuses – students as well as apprentices, trainees or young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) – as well as educators themselves, who can improve their pedagogical skills through job shadowing for instance (teachers and professors but also youth workers, social workers, sports coaches etc).

Geographical outreach: while Erasmus+ was entirely focused on European Union member states at first, it has progressively built partnerships with non-member countries in its neighbourhood to offer even more opportunities to its participants. 34 countries are involved to this day as “Programme countries” which can take part in the full programme, but with “Partner countries” which can take part in specific actions, these are more

than 200 countries which are covered by Erasmus+

These evolutions explain why nobody really cares about the meaning of Erasmus as an acronym anymore: “**E**uropean **R**egion **A**ction **S**cheme for the **M**obility of **U**niversity **S**tudents” does not make much sense anymore. The programme reaches far beyond the European Union and even the European continent, and involves many more participants than university students alone. Which, coincidentally, also says a lot about what a hit this unique EU initiative has been since its creation, and has remained since then!

2.2 Erasmus+ Mobilities for Learners: Objectives & Framework

Regardless of your profile – student, apprentice, teacher, volunteer ... – as well as your destination or the duration of your mobility, Erasmus+ exchanges all fit in a general framework which helps understanding how each specific strand works.

A basic roadmap to avoid getting lost: the general framework of Erasmus+

Whether you are a young participant seeking an opportunity to travel and learn abroad, or a VET centre interested in stepping into the world of international exchanges, Erasmus+ has grown so much that it is extremely easy to get lost in it. That’s actually what the “+” stands for. So here are a few basic highlights to find your way in its institutional maze.

Key Actions: Erasmus+ is divided into different Key Actions (KAs) which reflect complementary levels of action and objectives.

- KA1, Learning Mobility of Individuals: it supports individuals, such as students and staff members, in their mobility experiences. It includes opportunities like studying abroad, doing internships, and participating in training courses;
- KA2, Cooperation among Organizations and Institutions: it focuses on cooperation between educational institutions and other relevant stakeholders and supports projects that promote innovation, share best practices, and improve the quality of education and training;
- KA3, Support for Policy Reform: it supports initiatives aimed at improving education and training policies at local, national, and European levels. It focuses on research, analysis, and dissemination of information to drive policy development and reforms.

Structure of a partnership: it remains similar in all KAs. An organization acts as a coordinator and as such takes care of applying for a project, managing its activities and budget, and reporting about it all at the end. Partner organizations are in charge of applying various parts of the planned activities.

The structure of a partnership gets a bit more specific when it comes to KA1 Learning Mobilities for Individuals, distinguishing:

- Sending organizations which are in charge of recruiting participants, preparing them before their departure, making sure they get the required support on site during their mobility experience, and supporting them upon their return, for instance to help them promoting their experience to find a job afterward;
- Hosting organizations which are in charge of providing learning opportunities during the mobility experience, typically by organizing their studies or finding a work placement, and supporting participants with all their needs, like administrative procedures or finding an accommodation;
- Coordinator: any of the above-mentioned partners, or another organization, can coordinate the project.

There is enough to tell about Erasmus+ to fill a 441 pages official guide (as of 2023⁶), so the next few paragraphs will get straight to the point.

VET within Erasmus+

If you are reading this handbook, it most certainly means you can focus on Key Action 1 Learning Mobility for Individuals in the VET field, and especially mobility opportunities for your VET students.

VET exchanges within Erasmus+ look a lot like university exchanges, with some specifics of course:

- VET students have the opportunity to undertake work placements or internships in companies or vocational training centres to gain practical experience in their chosen field and develop their vocational skills in an international setting.
- Duration: student mobilities in the VET sector can last from 10 days to 12 months.
- Funding: Erasmus+ covers travel costs and provides participants with an allowance (“Individual Support”) to cover living expenses abroad (e.g. accommodation, food, local transportation). It can also cover course fees to a certain extent if applicable, and provides linguistic support.

⁶European Commission, Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2023, Version 1 (2022-11-23). Online [<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/fr/document/erasmus-programme-guide-2023-version-1>]

2.3 International mobility: the expected benefits and the learning opportunities

Erasmus+ offers a wide diversity of international learning opportunities, both at university, in a professional environment or through non-formal learning settings. Regardless of the specifics of such mobility experiences, their international nature represents a unique and privileged context for the growth of the learners' competences.

To make sense out of the wealth of skills one can develop through an international mobility experience such as a transnational VET internship, the European Union policies in the field of education rely on a common conceptual framework.

Understanding its key definitions and categories represent an asset for all stakeholders involved in international cooperation in the field of education, as they provide:

- A common language for all professionals in the field, who often use different words or categories for similar concepts due to the national settings their work is embedded in;
- A reference for tutors to support learners in gaining awareness of the extent of their learning outcomes, both expected before a transnational VET internship and assessed afterward. Learners indeed very often underestimate or overlook the value of soft skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal settings;
- An official framework, promoted by European Union and national institutions in the EU especially, helping with the recognition of learners' skills by future employers especially.

Hard vs Soft Skills

A fundamental distinction involves the difference made between “hard” and “soft” skills:

- Hard skills refer to more technical competences, highly specific in nature and particular to an occupation or professional sector. They are objective and quantifiable and most of the time acquired through formal education, training or work experiences. Hard skills can easily be proven: you either can do bookkeeping, or you don't.
- Soft skills, also referred to as “transversal skills” or “life skills”, are more intangible personal qualities, traits, attributes, habits and attitudes and relate to personal and social competences. They are broadly applicable across different sectors and occupations.

HARD SKILLS	SOFT SKILLS
<p>Computer programming</p> <p>Foreign languages</p> <p>Graphic Design</p> <p>Data analysis</p> <p>Marketing</p>	<p>Public speaking</p> <p>Leadership</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Work ethic</p> <p>Teamwork</p>



While this fundamental distinction is not specific to Europe or the Erasmus+ programme, it is important to keep in mind and discuss with learners themselves. Learners indeed tend to focus on hard skills when targeting specific competences to develop before a learning experience, or evaluating their learning outcomes afterward, as these are more “obvious” and appear like the main expectations of future employers. This leads them to underestimate the value and extent of soft skills they may develop or have developed already, or to overlook them entirely. This happens with participants in international mobility such as transnational VET internships, despite the fact that intercultural skills especially, among soft skills in general, are an essential part of any international learning experience! However employers themselves are nowadays more attentive to soft skills than ever, as they help distinguish candidates with equal formal qualifications. For instance, a study in 2016 reported that 93% of employers consider soft skills as either “very important” or “essential”⁷.

“Formal”, “Non-formal” and “Informal” learning

EU policies in the field of education also put emphasis on a second key distinction between learning environments.

This is due on the one hand to the diversity of learning opportunities EU programmes offer, ranging from the famous Erasmus+ studies abroad to VET internships and even international volunteering.

On the other hand, this distinction is used to attract the attention to the value of all learning experiences: while learners tend to focus on their formal education when presenting themselves to future recruiters – traditional models of Curriculum Vitae still follow that trend – EU programmes promote the recognition of skills and knowledge acquired through any kind of learning experiences, and to value them equally.

This is why tutors, when supporting learners, must also make them aware of the full extent of their learning experiences, which can happen through:

- **Formal learning** refers to experiences taking place within formally constituted educational institutions such as school, university or training centres. Typically it follows a prescribed framework, a curriculum set by the national Ministry of Education for instance. International VET internships are part of this category.
- **Non-formal learning** takes place through planned learning activities where some form of learning support is present, but which is not part of the formal education and training system. Volunteering schemes or international youth exchanges are typical examples of non-formal learning. But experiencing a transnational VET internship can also involve non-formal learning! For instance, a trainee taking part in linguistic tandems organized by an NGO outside of their workplace is considered non-formal.
- **Informal learning** results from daily activities and experiences which are not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. It is often unintentional from the learner’s perspective, which is why many learners are not spontaneously aware of what they learn in informal settings. International VET internships can also offer informal learning opportunities, for instance if the trainee lives with a hosting family or in a shared flat.

⁷European Commission, Inclusion & Diversity Strategy, Version 1 (29/04/2021). Online [<https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-4177/InclusionAndDiversityStrategy.pdf>]

Typical learning outcomes through international mobility – The 8 EU Key Competences

When considering the full array of skills and learning settings presented above, international learning experiences can therefore develop an overwhelming diversity of competences. Recent studies have even reported a higher impact on learners taking part in transnational VET internships compared to their peers experiencing domestic internships, due to the special conditions and challenges of an internship abroad.

In the case of transnational VET internships, participants do not just learn job-specific skills on the workplace: by breaking away of their usual (and national, cultural) environment, they often experience a change of perspectives through their daily life in a foreign country, and gain in self-confidence, awareness of their own competencies, problem-solving skills due to the daily minor struggles of living abroad ... all in all, they are empowered.

For both tutors and learners discussing expected gains before a transnational VET internship or assessing actual gains afterward, it can therefore be extremely helpful to use the EU's "Key Competences for Lifelong Learning"⁸ as the reference framework to describe learning outcomes, which put hard and soft skills acquired in all leaning settings on an equal footing and categorize them as follows:

1. Communicating in a mother tongue: ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions both orally and in writing.
2. Communicating in a foreign language: as above, but includes mediation skills (i.e. summarising, paraphrasing, interpreting or translating) and intercultural understanding.
3. Mathematical, scientific and technological competence: sound mastery of numeracy, an understanding of the natural world and an ability to apply knowledge and technology to perceived human needs (such as medicine, transport or communication).
4. Digital competence: confident and critical usage of information and communications technology for work, leisure and communication.
5. Learning to learn: ability to effectively manage one's own learning, either individually or in groups.
6. Social and civic competences: ability to participate effectively and constructively in one's social and working life and engage in active and democratic participation, especially in increasingly diverse societies.
7. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship: ability to turn ideas into action through creativity, innovation and risk taking as well as ability to plan and manage projects.
8. Cultural awareness and expression: ability to appreciate the creative importance of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media such as music, literature and visual and performing arts.

⁸Eurostat, Country of birth linked to discrimination at work, 18 October 2022. Online [<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20221018-3>]

2.4 Inclusion & Diversity: an attention to participants' specific needs

One last special thing about Erasmus+: it aims to cater for everybody's needs and, to do so, provides specific mechanisms to help including participants who may have more difficulties in joining mobility programmes than their peers.

This specific focus falls under the European Union's "Inclusion & Diversity Strategy"⁹, which defines "young people with fewer opportunities", the broad target group which can benefit from specific inclusive mechanisms. These young people with fewer opportunities are youngsters who, due to their specific situation, face more obstacles than their peers to take part in Erasmus+. These obstacles can be:

- **Disabilities:** physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which may hinder someone's participation in society on the same footing as others;
- **Health problems:** health issues including severe illnesses, chronic diseases, or any other physical or mental health-related situation;
- **Educational difficulties:** individuals struggling to perform in education and training systems for various reasons, such as early school-leavers or NEETs (people not in education, employment or training), due not only to personal circumstances but also resulting from an educational system which creates structural limitations;
- **Cultural differences:** without facing any kind of discrimination, participants can still face obstacles due to a different cultural background, especially newly-arrived migrants;
- **Social barriers:** "social adjustment difficulties" such as limited social competences, anti-social or high-risk behaviours, or even family circumstances, for instance being the first in the family to access higher education;
- **Economic barriers:** economic disadvantage like a low standard of living, low income, or learners who need to work to support themselves or depend on the social welfare system;
- **Discrimination:** discriminations linked to gender, age, ethnicity, religion, beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, or a combination of these;
- **Geographical barriers:** living in remote or rural areas, on small islands or in peripheral/outermost regions, or even in less-serviced areas.

⁹European Commission, Inclusion & Diversity Strategy, Version 1 (29/04/2021). Online [<https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-4177/InclusionAndDiversityStrategy.pdf>]

The kind of mechanisms participants, or partner organizations supporting them, can benefit from, are diverse:

- **Dedicated financial support:** partner organizations can receive additional funding to cater for their participants' specific needs, for instance to provide reinforced mentoring to participants who need additional support from staff, or to cover costs linked to adapted travel and accommodation;
- **Preparatory Visits:** specific funding can be claimed to organize a visit of the hosting organization before the actual mobility experience, for both organizations and/or participants themselves. Such visits help in facilitating administrative matters but also in building trust between partners and participants, confidence in participants themselves, or assessing and taking into account the individual needs of participants;
- **More accessible formats:** Short-term mobility projects, in VET as well, are open in priority to youngsters with fewer opportunities who may feel overwhelmed at the idea of going abroad for several months, or may need a first short experience to prepare for a longer exchange later on. In VET, these short-term opportunities range from 10 to 89 days.

3 Intercultural Learning



3 | Intercultural learning

Transnational mobility programmes represent a unique and privileged context for the personal and professional growth of their participants due to their international nature in particular.

This international and therefore intercultural aspect, however, represents both an opportunity for an improved learning experience compared to studies or traineeships “at home”, but also an obstacle for participants as well as a risk for the learning experience itself if not handled properly.

That is why preparing to live in an intercultural setting, whether for a few weeks or several months, is a crucial step to prevent such risks and make the most of the value-added of an international context. Last chapter will provide hands-on recipes to lead activities with this objective, but a bit of theory and hindsight helps understanding the necessity of such activities, and adapting them to participants’ needs.

3.1 Culture and cultural identity

“How many times since I left Lebanon in 1976 to live in France, have people asked me, with the best intentions in the world, whether I felt “more French” or “more Lebanese”? And I always give the same answer: “Both!” I say that not in the interests of fairness or balance, but because any other answer would be a lie. What makes me myself rather than anyone else is the very fact that I am poised between two countries, two or three languages and several cultural traditions. It is precisely this that defines my identity. Would I exist more authentically if I cut off a part of myself?”
(Amin Maalouf)¹⁰

One culture comes into clearest focus when compared with another maintaining different practices. However, cultures are themselves multiple, so that to insiders, every group reveals itself not as homogeneous but rather a nested series of progressively smaller groups whose members are all too aware of distinctions between themselves. Starting from a common definition of Culture we recognised culture as a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or social group, encompassing all the ways of being in that society; at a minimum, including art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs.¹¹

It’s just related to the other that I can recognize the traits of my culture.

“Of course, of course, but my point is that the only authentic identity for the African is the tribe,” Master said. “I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because the white man constructed black to be as different as possible from his white. But I was Igbo before the white man came. Professor Ezeka snorted and shook his head, thin legs crossed. “But you became aware that you were Igbo because of the white man. The pan-Igbo idea itself came only in the face of white domination. You must see that tribe as it is today is as colonial a product as nation and race.”¹²

(Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie)

¹⁰Amin Maalouf, *In the name of identity*, Penguin Books, 2000. v.o. *Les identités Meurtrières*, ed. Grasset & Fasquelle, 1996)

¹¹ *Intercultural competences: A conceptual and operational framework.* (Paris, France: UNESCO, 2013).

¹²C.N.Adichie, *Half of a yellow sun*, Anchor, 1988, p. 35

Cultural Identity refers to those aspects of identity shared by members of a culture that, taken as a set, mark them as distinct from members of other cultures. Like most forms of identity, cultural identity is socially constructed – that is, people do something to create and then claim it, whether that be speaking a particular language, eating particular foods, or following particular religious practices. The quoted story of Maalouf confirms that individuals have multiple identities, and these change over time, being constructed and reconstructed through communication in intercultural interactions. It means that people cannot accurately be categorized as only individuals but as members of multiple groups as well.

Defining Culture: the Iceberg Model

Culture has a deep influence on people and has to be taken into consideration before going abroad. The Iceberg Model is very often used as a metaphor to explain the extent, depth and complexity of culture.

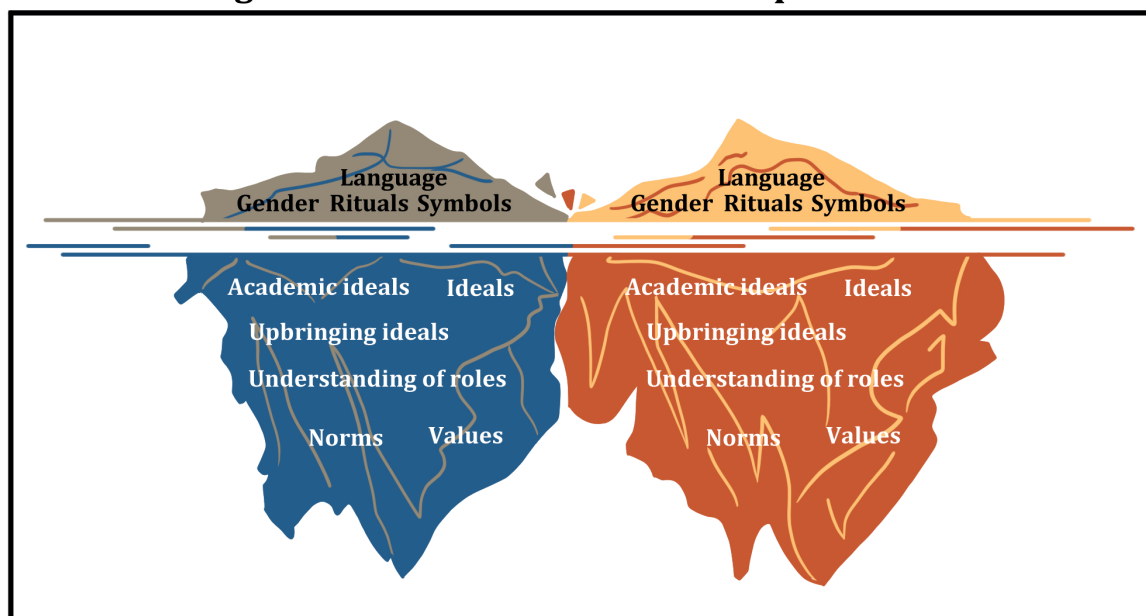
The tip of the iceberg, its emerging part, represents all aspects of culture which are immediately visible, feel “obvious” or explicit, such as language, law, arts, music, food etc.

The submerged part, on the contrary, represents aspects of culture which remain invisible, unconscious, even to those who belong to said culture: social norms such as expected behaviours in different situations (How friendly can I be with my boss? Can I talk about my private life at work?), values and ideals shared by a society (e.g. individualism vs collectivism), cultural references infusing diverse aspects of life in a society (e.g. idiomatic expressions) and so forth.

The visible part of the iceberg encompasses elements of a culture which are easy to identify both for people who belong to it and for “outsiders”. Its invisible part is all about the aspects people are not spontaneously aware of, both people who belong to said culture but even more so for people of a different culture.

3.2 Interculturalism: What are we talking about?

Iceberg model: Visible and invisible aspects of culture



International mobility represents one of the most radical experiences of “getting out of one’s comfort zone”. While this makes international mobility, such as transnational VET internships, extremely potent learning opportunities thanks to their intercultural component, it can be at the same time a source of difficulties for learners. A cultural shock; the unavoidable linguistic barrier, hardships to “fit in” a foreign culture and prejudices participants face on a daily basis are common experiences in all types of international mobility.

That is why it is important for both tutors and learners to get a good understanding of interculturalism and its implications for participants in international mobility schemes in order to make the most of it. Preparing for this specific aspect of international mobility helps reaping its full benefits while preventing its potential negative impact.

An intercultural encounter occurs when people and/or groups of people belonging to different cultures meet. Such encounters may take place either face-to-face or virtually through, for example, social or communications media. They may involve people from different countries, but also people from different regional, linguistic, ethnic or religious backgrounds in the same country, or even people who differ from each other because of their lifestyle, gender, social class, sexual orientation, age or generation, level of religious observance, etc.

An interpersonal encounter becomes an intercultural encounter when cultural differences are perceived and made salient either by the situation or by the individuals’ own orientation and attitudes. Thus, in an intercultural interaction, one does not respond to the other person (or people) on the basis of their own individual personal characteristics – instead, one responds to them on the basis of their affiliation to another culture or set of cultures.

Getting back to the Iceberg model, intercultural encounters happen when visible and/or invisible aspects of two different cultures “collide” in a situation. If not identified and discussed, such a collision can be a source of discomfort, misunderstandings or irritation. On the contrary, if handled well, this collision may be a great opportunity to learn from one another.

Multicultural

Multicultural is a term that essentially **describes the presence of different cultures within the same space**, but without much interaction between those cultural groups. People exist alongside one another, but not necessarily engage or interact with one another. It is mostly defined by the juxtaposition and coexistence of multiple cultures. For example, in a multicultural neighborhood where different cultural groups coexist, people may frequent ethnic grocery stores and restaurants, but without really interacting with their neighbors from other cultures. In most European countries, you will find multiculturalism because migrations lead to societies where multiple cultural identities coexist.

The term multicultural is then a **passive description that simply acknowledges the existence of many different cultural groups, all with their own cultural frameworks and their distinct cultural identities.**

It’s called **multicultural communication** when people from different cultural backgrounds, with different ways of communicating, are present but without having any influence on or adapting to each other. Multicultural communication is the prerequisite for the other two types of communication, **cross-cultural and intercultural.**

Cross-cultural

Cross-cultural concepts come from Hofstede's cultural dimension theory. The term cross-cultural primarily **refers to the comparison of different cultures, contrasting them against each other and identifying differences and similarities.** A framework used to distinguish between different national cultures and cultural dimensions, and their impact especially on a business setting. Examples of cross-cultural explorations can be when you want to understand variations between your own and other cultures on a specific aspect, for instance: how leadership is approached or how business negotiations are conducted.

Hofstede carried out an extensive survey investigating variations in values within different sectors in IBM. At the end of 20 years the study comprised more than 100.000 surveys from 50 countries and 3 continents. Hofstede identified six categories that define culture:

- Power Distance Index
- Collectivism vs. Individualism
- Uncertainty Avoidance Index
- Femininity vs. Masculinity
- Short-Term vs. Long-Term Orientation
- Restraint vs. Indulgence

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Individualistic/ Collectivistic	How personal needs and goals are prioritized vs. the needs and goals of the group/clan/organization
Masculine/ Feminine	Masculine societies have different rules for men and women, less so in feminine cultures
Uncertainty Avoidance	How comfortable are people with changing the way they work or live (low UA) or prefer the known systems (high UA)
Power Distance	The degree people are comfortable with influencing upwards. Accept of inequality in distribution of power in society
Time Perspective	Long-term perspective, planning for future, perseverance values vs. short time past and present oriented
Indulgence/ Restraint	Allowing gratification of basic drives related to enjoying life and having fun vs. regulating it through strict social norms

When it comes to communication, cross-cultural communication is therefore about **comparing and identifying the diverging communication styles of people from various cultural backgrounds.** It's not, by definition, about bringing cultures together and it does not actually focus on what happens in the interaction between them.

Cross-cultural competence refers to the knowledge, skills, and affect/motivation that enable individuals to adapt effectively in cross-cultural environments. Evidence suggests that a core set of competencies enables adaptation to any culture. Cross-cultural competence is not an end in itself, but is a set of variables that contribute to intercultural effectiveness. The concept is now popular in cross-cultural teams and in the matrix team.

The term cross-culture is often confused with intercultural—but the two words are not interchangeable. Let's see why.

Intercultural

Whereas multicultural and cross-cultural are more passive descriptions of situations where different cultures exist alongside each other and are compared, **the term intercultural implies an active description of the actual interaction between people. It focuses on what happens when people from different cultures meet.**

The term implies collaboration and a quest for mutual understanding between cultures and as such it moves beyond the cultural segregation inherent in the descriptions of multicultural and cross-cultural relations.

Intercultural communication is subsequently a communicative interaction between people from different cultural groups. It highlights the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural perspectives and the development of a shared meaning for effective collaboration. In such an interaction, everyone involved has the possibility to learn from each other, develop and grow together.

Intercultural describes communities in which there is a deep understanding and respect for all cultures. Intercultural communication focuses on the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms and the development of deep relationships. In an intercultural society, no one is left unchanged because everyone learns from one another and grows together.

3.3 Intercultural competences

Intercultural competences are effectively recognised as fundamental citizenship competences for living in pluralistic democratic societies and important for forming interculturally responsible citizens.¹³

Intercultural competence is defined as the **ability to interact effectively and appropriately in situations of cultural pluralism, based on intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes.** It is a **knowledge in action**, matured in different fields, which is used in contexts characterized by cultural differences.

It is not a question of possessing a mere cultural competence, that is, a familiarity with the characteristic features of particular cultural groups which facilitates their interaction, but above all to have knowledge of the type of problems that arise when subjects of different culture interact, of the adoption of receptive and encouraging attitudes to relationship and effective management of interactions, of any intercultural encounter.

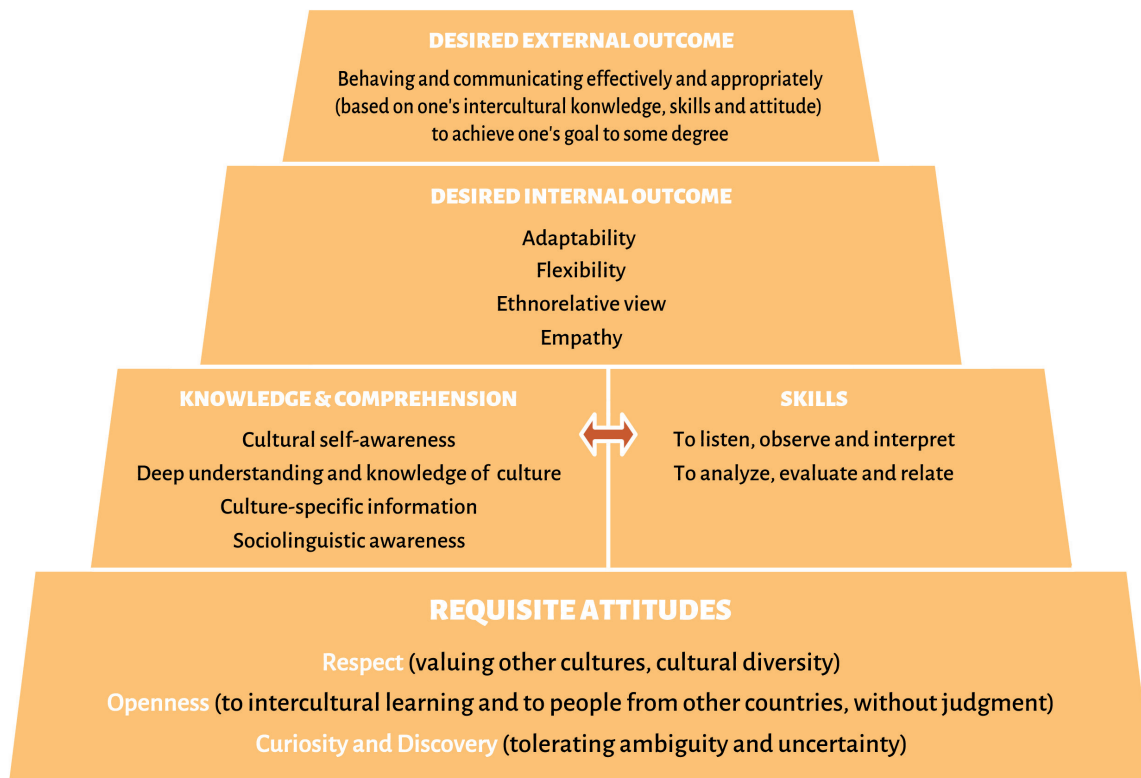
In this sense, **intercultural competences have a dynamic nature**, that is, they are presented with different degrees of maturity, depending on the different skills, abilities, attitudes, cognitive strategies and behavioral strategies of the subjects.

Darla K. Deardorff developed a **Model of Intercultural Competences**¹⁴ that summarizes the process that an individual follows to be interculturally competent.

¹³At European level, two important references are:

- the Council of Europe Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, updating the 2006 Recommendation;
- Council Conclusions of 22 May 2008 on Intercultural Competences.

¹⁴Darla K. Deardorff in Journal of International Education, fall 2006, 10, 241-266.



It's a priority that you first develop **Attitudes, Knowledge** and **Skills** at Individual level:

Requisite Attitudes like:

- Respect (valuing other cultures);
- Openness (withholding judgment);
- Curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity).

We can also add Knowledge & Comprehension like:

- Cultural self-awareness;
- Deep cultural knowledge;
- Sociolinguistic awareness.

and Skills:

- To listen;
- To observe and evaluate;
- To analyze;
- To interpret and relate.

Developing this first set of knowledge, attitudes and skills is preliminary to the next step. The desired internal and external results can be achieved by fulfilling the previous requirements. In this process there may be a gradual improvement of intercultural competence, but also the not complete mastery of all the elements that compose it and therefore the same starting attitudes are continually strengthened and improved.

We can also see it as a pyramid based on personal attitudes and at the top the desired external relational outcome.

Understanding your culture to develop intercultural skills

Intercultural competences are required to achieve harmonious interactions and successful dialogue. That is why a strong emphasis on the topic of interculturalism is indispensable to prepare participants before an international mobility experience. Equipping learners with the right intercultural skills involves exploring the participants' perceptions of their own culture and the culture of their future hosting country, but also discussing specific "tips & tricks" one should keep in mind during their stay abroad.

Such "tips & tricks" can be discussed through concrete activities with a group or single individuals which will be detailed in a later chapter focused on activities outlines. Generally speaking though, they fall under one of the following categories of intercultural competences defined as a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action which allows to:

- Understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself;
- Respond appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people;
- Establish positive and constructive relationships with such people;
- Understand oneself and one's own multiple cultural affiliations through encounters with cultural "difference".

The involved **attitudes** include:

- Valuing cultural diversity and pluralism of views and practices;
- Respecting people who have different cultural affiliations from one's own;
- Being open to, curious about and willing to learn from and about people who have different cultural orientations and perspectives from one's own;
- Being willing to empathise with people who have different cultural affiliations from one's own;
- Being willing to question what is usually taken for granted as 'normal' according to one's previously acquired knowledge and experience;
- Being willing to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty;
- Being willing to seek out opportunities to engage and co-operate with individuals who have different cultural orientations and perspectives from one's own.

The **knowledge** and understanding which contribute to intercultural competence include:

- Understanding the internal diversity and heterogeneity of all cultural groups;
- Awareness and understanding of one's own and other people's assumptions, preconceptions, stereotypes, prejudices, and overt and covert discrimination;
- Understanding the influence of one's own language and cultural affiliations on one's experience of the world and of other people;
- Communicative awareness, including awareness of the fact that other peoples' languages may express shared ideas in a unique way or express unique ideas difficult to access through one's own language(s), and awareness of the fact that people of other cultural affiliations may follow different verbal and non-verbal communicative conventions which are meaningful from their perspective;
- Knowledge of the beliefs, values, practices, discourses and products that may be used by people who have particular cultural orientations;

- Understanding of processes of cultural, societal and individual interaction, and of the socially constructed nature of knowledge.

The **skills** involved in intercultural competence include skills such as:

- Multiperspectivity – the ability to decentre from one’s own perspective and to take other people’s perspectives into consideration in addition to one’s own.
- Skills in discovering information about other cultural affiliations and perspectives;
- Skills in interpreting other cultural practices, beliefs and values and relating them to one’s own;
- Empathy – the ability to understand and respond to other people’s thoughts, beliefs, values and feelings;
- Cognitive flexibility – the ability to change and adapt one’s way of thinking according to the situation or context;
- Skills in critically evaluating and making judgments about cultural beliefs, values, practices, discourses and products, including those associated with one’s own cultural affiliations, and being able to explain one’s views;
- Skills in adapting one’s behaviour to new cultural environments – for example, avoiding verbal and non-verbal behaviours which may be viewed as impolite by people who have different cultural affiliations from one’s own;
- Linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse skills, including skills in managing breakdowns in communication;
- Plurilingual skills to meet the communicative demands of an intercultural encounter, such as the use of more than one language or drawing on a known language to understand another (intercomprehension);
- The ability to act as a mediator in intercultural exchanges, including skills in translating, interpreting and explaining.

3.4 The objectives of a good intercultural preparation and the risk of cultural shock

Just imagine: you are planning your dream vacations in the country you have always wanted to visit. You idolize it, its people are the best, its food is just extraordinary, the beauty of both its cities and landscapes cannot be described in words. And you’re finally going!

You have read so much about this country, watched so many movies happening there, discussed with so many people who travelled there already and had the best memories to share and you may ask yourself: why prepare anything other than basic logistics? What could go wrong?

And then comes the landing: the airport is a nightmare, you never imagined a country with a reputation of orderly people could be so messy. And filthy! When arriving in the city centre, the first thing you notice is how littered the streets are. And homeless people? How could that happen in such a rich, developed country?! Your vacations feel like a waste already. A harsh, painful disillusion ... you’d rather have never known what reality looks like. You just experienced a very common type of cultural shock!

Intercultural preparation, between preventing risks ...

The example above may be the most common type of cultural shock and, fortunately, the most harmless. And yet, even in a touristic context, such a cultural shock can get a

lot worse. In extreme cases, consequences can be as severe as what has been described as the “Paris syndrome”, with psychiatric symptoms such as delusional states, hallucinations, feelings of persecution, anxiety, as well as psychosomatic manifestations such as dizziness, tachycardia, sweating ...

This is what can happen with simple, short vacations abroad: unrealistic expectations, unmet on site, having a bad impact on the overall experience. Now, extend it to an international mobility experience ranging from a few weeks to several months, sometimes up to a year! In VET internships, the expectations that can lead to severe disillusion are not only about the country in general, but also about its work culture, the missions the participant is hoping to accomplish, the activity of the company where the work placement is happening.

As a result, the risk of a cultural shock is higher, while there is a lot more at stake than with vacations: the learning experience itself can suffer from it and, therefore, the participants and its future professional perspectives especially.

... and cultivating benefits

On the other hand, even when everything goes well, the intercultural preparation can foster a more efficient learning experience.

With a more accurate image of the country they will be living in for some time, participants can for instance enjoy their experience better by “fitting in” more quickly: they know who can support them, where they can meet their peers and build friendships, what customs to follow to avoid awkward situations, how to communicate more efficiently in a foreign language and/or with people with a different cultural background ...

3.5 Culture Shock

In the journeys abroad that exceed the week/ten days of duration, we can witness the onset of a phenomenon that in literature is known as Cultural Shock. When you leave the tourist dimension of the experience and start to go through activities and indigenous rituals, when you find yourself acting like a local, following procedures and respecting rules, habits, attitudes of cultures different from ours, we can run into this attitude.

Culture shock is the process of adjustment to an unfamiliar culture. It is a more or less sudden immersion into a state of uncertainty - in which you become unsure about what is expected of you and what you can expect from other people.

It can occur in any situation where you are forced to adjust to an unfamiliar system in which many of your previous ways of doing or understanding things no longer apply.

According to the acculturation model, people will initially have a honeymoon period, and then there will be a transition period, that is, cultural shock. This period may be marked by rejection of the new culture, as well as romanticizing one’s home culture. But then, with some time and perhaps help from local people or other culture brokers, people will start to adapt (the dotted line depicted some people hated by new cultures instead). And refers to some people returning to their own places and re-adapting to the old culture.

The five stages of the culture shock

Five stages of culture shock can be identified:

1. Honeymoon

This is where the newly arrived individual experiences the curiosity and excitement of a tourist, but where the person's basic identity is rooted back at home.

2. Disorientation

This stage involves the disintegration of almost everything familiar. The individual is overwhelmed by the requirements of the new culture and bombarded by stimuli in the new environment.

3. Shock

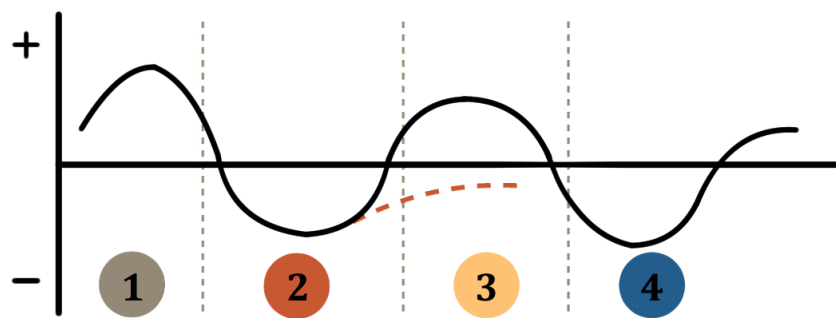
This stage is associated with the experience of anger and resentment towards the new culture. Stress, anxiety, irritation and hostility are common.

4. Adaptation

This involves the integration of new cues and an increased ability to function in the new culture. The individual increasingly sees the bad and the good elements in both the new culture and the home culture.

5. Adjustment

In this stage, the individual has become comfortable in both the old and the new culture. There is some controversy about whether anyone can really attain this stage.



Acculturation curve and culture shock

Cultural conflict

One possible, ultimate and extreme degeneration of cultural shock is cultural conflict. Cultural **conflict** is **a type of conflict that occurs when different cultural values and beliefs clash**. Broad and narrow definitions exist for the concept, both of which have been used to explain violence-including war-and crime, on either a micro or macro scale.

Culture is always a factor in conflict, whether it plays a central role or influences it subtly and gently. For any conflict that touches us where it matters, where we make meaning and hold our identities, there is always a cultural component.

Jonathan H. Turner defines cultural conflict as a conflict caused by “differences in cultural values and beliefs that place people at odds with one another.”

The aforementioned iceberg's theory demonstrates that not taking into account everything below the surface can lead to misunderstandings and, if not handled properly, can cause conflicts. In order to understand the conflicts that have cultural roots, we must return to the concept of culture and to the characteristics of culture itself. Each of us belongs to multiple cultures that give us messages about what is normal, appropriate, and expected. When others do not meet our expectations, it is often a cue that our cultural expectations are different. We may mistake differences between others and us for evidence of bad faith or lack of common sense on the part of others, not realizing that common sense is also cultural. What is common to one group may seem strange, counterintuitive, or wrong to another.

Michelle LeBaron helps us with a clever synthesis of what cultural characteristics can affect a relationship and lead to conflict.¹⁵

- First, “culture is multi-layered,” meaning that “what you see on the surface may mask differences below the surface.”
- Second, “culture is constantly in flux,” meaning that “cultural groups adapt in dynamic and sometimes unpredictable ways.”
- Third, “culture is elastic,” meaning that one member of a cultural group may not participate in the norms of the culture.
- Lastly, “culture is largely below the surface,” meaning that it isn't easy to reach the deeper levels of culture and its meanings.

Since culture is so closely related to our identities (who we think we are), and the ways we make meaning (what is important to us and how), it is always a factor in conflict. Cultural awareness leads us to apply the Platinum Rule in place of the Golden Rule. Rather than the maxim “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” the Platinum Rule advises: “Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.”

¹⁵Michelle LeBaron, Venashri Pillay, *Conflict Across Cultures: A Unique Experience of Bridging Differences* (2006), Paperback

3.6 Aspects to focus on for a good intercultural preparation

Finally, to achieve the above-mentioned general objectives, a good intercultural preparation aims at fostering participants'...

- **Cultural Awareness:** developing an understanding and appreciation of different cultures, traditions, and ways of life to recognize and respect cultural differences, which is essential for effective communication, collaboration, and integration in a foreign environment;
- **Overcoming Stereotypes:** challenging and breaking down stereotypes that individuals may have about other cultures to promote a more open-minded and inclusive mindset, allowing participants to approach their mobility experience with fewer biases and a greater willingness to learn from others;
- **Communication Skills:** learning to navigate language barriers, nonverbal cues, and different communication styles to help build connections, foster meaningful interactions, and avoid misunderstandings while abroad;
- **Adaptability and Flexibility:** learning to adjust to new environments, lifestyles, and ways of doing things, in order to navigate cultural differences, handle challenges, and embrace diversity with resilience;
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** developing an understanding of the values, beliefs, and norms of the host culture, in order to interact respectfully and appropriately with locals and experience positive cross-cultural experiences.
- **Personal Growth:** supporting personal growth and self-awareness by encouraging participants to reflect on their own cultural identity, values, and biases, enabling them to develop a broader perspective and a deeper understanding of themselves and others.

3.7 A focus on discrimination and how to deal with it

Europe has come a long way since its colonialist past and yet, in an intercultural setting, participants still face a higher risk of being discriminated against especially because they come from abroad.

Discrimination can take many forms, that the European Union prohibits and fights against through a wide-reaching legislation. The European Union founding treaties themselves make equal treatment a right and prohibit discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age, or sexual orientation. Despite such efforts, the country of origin of people especially remains a common source of discrimination all over Europe. The Eurostat agency reported for instance in 2021 that

“the share of employed people reporting discrimination at work varies according to the country of birth. In the EU, the highest percentages for both men (7.7%) and women (8.8%) feeling discriminated at work were registered among those born in a non-EU country, followed by those born in another EU country (5.4% for men and 7.5% for women). By contrast, the percentages of employed people born in the reporting country feeling discriminated at work were much lower: 3.2% for men and 5.8% for women.”¹⁶

The intercultural preparation is therefore a key moment when it comes to setting the conditions for preventing any type of discrimination, and that specific aspect should be included in the preparation’s basic steps, for instance as follows:

- 1.** Defining the needs and tasks of the participants: besides the practical aspects of staying abroad, it is very important to identify the cultural, social and personal needs of the participants before the mobility, in order to plan how to meet those needs during the mobility without creating barriers;
- 2.** Preparing the mentors: the mentor supporting participants on-site should be prepared to manage conflicts through their mediation and reconciliation abilities;
- 3.** Hosting organization: Predicting critical situations: the host organization knows its society best and should therefore assess, in advance, when and where participants are at a higher risk of being discriminated against. On that basis, it should plan appropriate strategies in advance, like identifying who among the staff should intervene in specific critical situations;
- 4.** Meeting with the hosting organization: an online meeting for participants and future hosting organization to meet is indispensable for many reasons, preventing discrimination included. The hosting organization should especially inform participants of all of the above-mentioned aspects.

¹⁶Eurostat, Country of birth linked to discrimination at work, 18 October 2022. Online [<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20221018-3>]

4 Narration and personal storytelling



4 | Narration and personal storytelling. How to avoid the danger of a single story, paraphrasing Chimamanda Adichie.

The danger of a single story

"All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience, and to overlook the many other stories that formed me.

The single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."

(Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie)¹⁷

Avoid the danger of a single story. Between dominant thinking and stereotypes the risk of a mainstreaming narration of the experience in Europe is just around the corner. Above all, avoid that there is a single story, homologated, the one I expect others to want to hear about my internship experience, and that this can become the story of all.

For this reason it is fundamental to face the history of himself and his own experience by mastering the narrative tools and knowing the stories of others who were able to tell Africa in an unconventional way, breaking the dominant and unique narrative.

"For too long, Africa has been treated as a buzzword for poverty, strife, corruption, civil wars, and large expanses of arid red soil where nothing but misery grows. Or it is presented as one big safari park, where lions and tigers roam freely around our homes and Africans spend their days grouped in warrior tribes, barely clothed, spears palmed, hunting game, and jumping up and down with ritualistic rhythm to pass the time before another aid package gets delivered. Poverty or safari, with nothing in between".¹⁸

(Dipo Faloyin)

Storytelling

The narrative dimension is closely related to the entire mobility experience. The transformative power of stories and narratives¹⁹ comes to our help and above all can be a valuable tool of awareness and empowerment for young people who are preparing to face a journey of mobility from Africa to Europe; The storytelling we go to use, in its different forms, throughout the journey as a narrative tool primarily but also to be able to describe the evolutionary parable of the subject in mobility.

¹⁷The danger of a single story is a TED talk made by Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in 2009. It has become one of the most viewed TED Talks of all time, having amassed over 33 million views.

¹⁸Dipo Faloyin, Africa is not a country. Breaking stereotypes of modern Africa, Harvill Secker, 2022

¹⁹Bibliography about stories: Bandura, A (1977). "Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change". Psychological Review. 84 (2): 191–215. Psychologist Albert Bandura has defined self-efficacy as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task. One's sense of self-efficacy can play a major role in how one approaches goals, tasks, and challenges. Beaudéan C., Sylvain Kahn (a cura di, 1997), L'orientation face aux mutations du travail, Syros, Parigi. Bruner J. (1992), The search for meaning, trad. en., Bollati Boringhieri, Torino. Bruner J. (2002), La fabbrica delle storie, Laterza, Bari-Rome. Erikson E. H. (1984), The cycles of life. Continuity and changes, trad. it., Armando, Roma. Habermas J. (1998), The inclusion of the other, trad. it., Feltrinelli, Milano. Smorti A., (1994), The narrative thought, Giunti, Florence. Cognitivist Jerome Bruner in an immensely insightful piece titled "Two Modes of Thought," writes: "There are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality. The two (though complementary) are irreducible to one another. Efforts to reduce one mode to the other or to ignore one at the expense of the other inevitably fail to capture the rich diversity of thought. Each of the ways of knowing, moreover, has operating principles of its own and its own criteria of well-formedness. They differ radically in their procedures for verification. A good story and a well-formed argument are different natural kinds. Both can be used as means for convincing another. Yet what they convince of is fundamentally different: arguments convince one of their truth, stories of their lifelikeness. The one verifies by eventual appeal to procedures for establishing formal and empirical proof. The other establishes not truth but verisimilitude." In Italy the works of Andrea Smorti and later of Federico Batini, Simone Giusti, Gabriel Del Sarto, Andrea Fontana have led the narrative thought to be an instrument of self-knowledge, of professional self-narration, even at the service of the company's narration in a sort of storytelling.

This process of giving meaning to the experience of each allows to confer a value to the experience, in relation to the individual path of growth, with respect to the objectives of the organization and finally provides an original and specific product contribution to the ecosystem of stakeholders (families, stakeholders, peer group, etc.)..

Mastering storytelling, knowing how to communicate through stories and recognize their effects is an organizational and managerial skill, but it is above all a life skill (v. cap. 3). It's a skill, that of the use of narrative thinking, that related to narrative production skills can help me to acquire a greater - more awareness, to better understand others and to communicate what I want in an effective and targeted way.

Narratives

The narrative can be defined as “a cognitive process through which we structure, in temporally significant units, units of experience, giving them an order and relationships”. It's a process that is repeated even when we listen to a narration, see a film, and just think of the filling operation that is done when we place missing data in a narrative sequence heard through imagination.

The role of narrator has been central for centuries in the oral diffusion, just think of the aedi, the bardi or the African Griot²⁰real singers with the task of transmitting to the people their origins and their culture through the oral story accompanied by singing and dancing.

Narrative thinking acts tacitly in any personal, professional or organized situation. This thought is linked to the events and actions of the protagonists, their intentions, their desires and beliefs. And in relational contexts it is precisely by correlating actions and intentions of the story that I can use to change the narrative or paradigmatic thinking, depending on whether I want to deal with the uniqueness, the singularity of the individual or abstraction and generalization.

We are interested here in focusing on the dimension of individual reflection and re-vision of subject and group practices that allow the sharing of new knowledge and problem solving styles. Stories are particular types of discourses that open up space for the possible and the imagination. In the experience of mobility, because this leaves traces and leads to a change, it is necessary that the narrative tools are sharpened to be able to capture, welcome and transmit the experience, so that we can grasp the value of the difference that is not only technical but also cultural, that we have in mind the target that we turn to and the effect that we want to generate with our history.

²⁰The term Griotis is actually a French term of the seventeenth century. The griots were of paramount importance in pre-colonial African society, encouraging people or calming them, according to needs, performing a function similar to that of modern psychologists. During the battles, they were leading the armies to be able to narrate the most valiant episodes to the descendants, giving the heroes a place in the collective memory.

4.1 Building meanings through storytelling

Through narrative thinking we are able to share our cultural heritage in the form of stories, frames, which are part of a common culture. This leads us to have a sort of shared cultural code made up of protagonists, images, stories, even jokes or memes to which each of us connects thoughts and emotions.

However, the same image does not work in every culture. If I speak of the ‘bad wolf’, of Romeo and Juliet, of Sherazade, of the vain giraffe, we will not all have the same reactions. For some they will be evocative images of a fairy tale heard since children, of a novel read in adolescence, while others will not say anything at all or will at most be an echo of a distant culture. Common references and meanings (e.g. the wolf is bad, it is an animal that frightens, in the Western tradition while in the African one it is even defined wise; the sly fox for Western culture takes on other meanings in Africa, as well as the serpent²¹). Through storytelling with these characters we generate and share meanings, we experience emotions, we learn to manage them, we understand our and others’ actions, we learn and transmit a repertoire of behaviors to keep in mind (you don’t go alone in the woods, you don’t trust a lion, etc.). In an intercultural dimension this sharing of meanings can generate misunderstandings and even contradictory feelings. Gabriele Romagnoli tells these sometimes opposed meanings well, having lived as a European in different continents, from the USA, Africa to the Middle East, as a color or even a day of the week can have different meanings depending on where you are (think of the feast day, Friday in the Islamic world, the Sabbath in the Jewish world, Sunday in Christianity, black is mourning in the West, a sign of celebration in the Arab world) and even tears for the death of a son, loss that in Western culture is so unacceptable, painful that not even has a name—you say widower, you say orphan, but there is no word to describe the parent who loses the child-; here if in Rome those tears of a mother are of pain for the irreparable loss in Beirut can become tears because the same mother did not offer her son for the Hezbollah cause, it was not sacrificed, as happened to the mothers of other martyrs²². But we also think of concepts like depression and anxiety, which in African culture often do not find a linguistic equivalent and we must use paraphrases to describe these two states (Yoruba says the heart is weak to talk about depression and the heart is not at rest, to talk about anxiety).

²¹The African tale: The ungrateful lion; R. Beneduce, R. Collignon (edited by) *Il sorriso della volpe. Ideologies of death, mourning and depression in Africa. Interesting to deepen the role of the snake in fairy tales.* In Laminì, African fairy tale collected and told by MAMADI KABÁ, Farafinà Todì: African fairy tales and tales of the Republic of Guinea, L’Harmattan Italia, Turin, 1996, a very poor boy finds as a friend a snake able to fulfill his wishes. The mother kills the snake, making the child poor, even without a friend. In Western culture the snake is the archetype of evil and temptation, but think about the role of the snake in the contemporary saga of Harry Potter, his relationship with reptiles that in addition to representing the dark side, They also find moments of positive representation or at least humanized: think of the boa constrictor at the zoo before Harry’s 11th birthday or the same words that the magic hat reserves for Slytherin when Harry is about to choose his own home. Harry speaks the language of snakes and we find them all over the story, in the chamber of secrets and all the way with Nagini. Even in *Fantastic Beasts*, snakes are the protagonists. Newt Scamander describes the runespoor. It is a three-headed snake from Burkina Faso. Reptilians who have managed to converse with this animal have discovered that the three heads of the snake have different functions. In particular, the head on the left is the one that makes the decisions, the central one is the dreamer, while the right one criticizes and judges the other two.

²² Gabriele Romagnoli, *Solo bagaglio a mano*, Feltrinelli, 2015. Spanish edition *Viajar ligero: La vida con equipaje de mano*, Ático de los Libros, 2017

It is therefore necessary when sharing a narrative to keep in mind the audience and the recipients of the story and how much our story may have meaning or effective humor for the target culture.

For the narration to be effective it is necessary that it moves us elsewhere, that it knows how to move in space, in time, that it creates in us what is defined as a listening narrative trance (storytelling trance experience) and lets us immerse ourselves in the story by recognizing ourselves in the events of the protagonist. When the story works we also manage to suspend our disbelief and believe in flying brooms, magic potions, galactic spaceships, aliens, elves or zombies. Storytelling is precisely for this reason a life skill, because it is an indispensable skill to read, understand and live in the world, and that helps us give meaning thanks to editable stories made of many - many small stories.

It is therefore inevitable that our stories about the world, the narratives we convey to explain the reality that surrounds us, may clash with the stories of others. We are conditioned by different socially available narratives, imprisoned in cultural narratives that we often think are 'objective'; the sooner we are aware of this, the sooner we begin to understand the mechanisms for producing them, and the sooner we can use them to co-communicate and negotiate meanings.

4.2 The canonical narrative scheme

In Western culture, as well codified by Propp, there is a structure, a format in the narrations, which has been found for centuries declined in the founding stories as well as in the magical fables, which present a similar structure that is repeated²³. There is below the specific of each fairy tale, according to Propp, a deep structure from which emerge the common roots that are concretized with the presence of some fixed characters, with their specific function, and with some constants in the structure and unfolding of the action.

The 7 types of characters that Propp identifies are

- the Hero
- the Antagonist
- the Giver of the magic means
- the Helper of the hero
- The False hero
- The Principal
- The Character sough-after

²³Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, Paperback, 1968 Propp looks for the genetic reasons of the fairy tale in a remote time highlighting the relationships with myths and magical rites. Fairy tales containing prohibitions are linked by him to taboos and prohibitions imposed in primitive societies, or to the initiation rites of tribal societies. As well as the magical 'helpers' animals of the fairy tale are totemic animals, or the 'trials' faced by the hero are totemic rituals related to the 'journey into the distant kingdom' of the afterlife. The fairy tale, according to Propp, is the memory of ancient traditions of a society of totemic hunters whose elements have transformed, have lost their original motivations and on which have layered meanings and interpretations 'modern'.

As well as the characters are limited, the functions attributed to them are also limited. The Removal, the Prohibition, the Infraction, the Damage, the Trap, the Trauma, the Test, the Fight, the Victory, the Return of the hero are just some of the functions covered by the characters. To understand how this canonical narrative scheme is widely in use just imagine it for explanatory purposes only to a great classic of Western cinematography for children, The Lion king, to grasp the characters and some of the functions listed here-(e.g. removal from herd lands, ban on seeing the elephant graveyard, the trap set at Simba by his uncle Scar and the infraction committed, the trap of the gorge between the mountains and the hyenas, and all the subsequent tests that Simba must face in its growth path, etc.). The same pattern is found in much of Western cinematography, success stories, political or business narratives.

It's interesting to try to read the stories that surround us through the lens of the canon narrative scheme trying to capture even in short television commercials the structure

- Protagonists
- Work to be done
- Trauma to be processed
- Opponents who manifest themselves
- Conflict
- Treasures to be attained
- Magic/power objects
- Helpers of the protagonists
- Victory and final settlement or wedding

Program the characters

Our exploration of narrative themes and storytelling covers in this context a precise function that is to give testimony of the experience carried out to different targets: companions who have remained at home, family, friends, but also institutions, local ones like continental ones. Behind the story there must be an intention and the protagonists of the stories to tell in order to be interesting, to attract us, to make us interested in their fate, they must be defined in their psychological traits and must follow a dynamic path of development throughout history. Unless you choose against a narrative of static type, where the protagonist does not change and does not evolve over the course of history but rather remains firm with respect to the context and resists change, the protagonists change themselves through experience. To describe and make the change perceived, it is therefore necessary to start from a fixed point, from the initial description of the protagonist.

It is a question here of outlining the characters from a psychological point of view, giving them, in addition to the physical traits characterizing, a personality, a character, an inner experience, often an agon, a problem, a trauma or a tension that exposes him to research and change. Even if a metamorphosis should not be realized, our protagonist follows the scheme that is called Arc of transformation of a character. It is an archetypal climax that is found in the narrations: from a situation of stasis, of stillness, a triggering incident happens and our protagonist is awakened and called to action. Initially it tries to resist the call, sometimes it refuses it in order then to cross the threshold and to undertake the advert; He awaits trials and breakthrough moments that at the end and only after facing the final tests allows the hero to transform and renew himself, solving the initial trauma and completing the quest. The evolutionary path is not linear but follows curves and ups and downs, with undulations and emotional peaks. Also in our

narration it is necessary to wisely foresee and distribute these peaks alternating between them and drawing from the rose of emotions those you want to stimulate and evoke in your audience: fear, hope, joy, anger, envy, love.

4.3 Storytelling for future legacy

The tale of the internship in Europe can use different media. The cognitive implications of written stories and the evocative impact of a narrative for the listeners can go through different canals, from the auditive one to the sensorial, the olfactory and the visual ones. The story we hear, but also the objects, the foods, the smells, they create memories that are engraved on deeper levels of the memory and have an impact on our motivation, our emotions and our behaviour, as neuroscience taught us.

To enrich the storytelling we can lean on different learning and monitoring tools, the same tools often used, and useful, in other internships. There's a first level of the narrative that fulfills an instrumental function and comes from a descriptive and informative part of the internship conducted. To keep track of the experience lets the school and the host company have evaluation elements; in this sense tools as ex-ante evaluation forms, monitoring forms during the process and post-evaluation forms represent starting materials to analyze the expectations of the students and to verify how their expectations were satisfied or not.

Adjacent to these there are also tools like the Logbook (Daily Diary), which is widely used in company experiences, at home and abroad, to facilitate the memorability of the experience; even if they are often focused on the tasks completed, the things they learned and the skills acquired, they represent the base for basic info collection on what they have done. At a further level, to let the students give meaning to the experience it is necessary to find a space for a contemplative dimension. The students need to be able to re-examine the internship activities in critical terms, asking themselves and evaluating how these activities have contributed to a personal enrichment on both the learning level of knowledge and skills regarding their own educational path and the orientation level for future working and studying options.

To this we add the ability to link and recollect what was learned in a formal way to the study course with the experience on the field.

If we aim for the ambitious goal of making the students ambassadors of the experience for their peers and the local community, it is necessary that the narrative produced includes all these dimensions, technical and metacognitive, with a storytelling that is more emotional and evocative. The act of telling a story, going beyond the simple act of recollecting the experience by telling the sequence of the events, shapes and sharpens the reflective skills, it creates connections between the activities conducted in their own school and the ones conducted in the European company; it also help to find connections between what they have learned during lab work as well as in the casual settings, and what they have learned through their own and others' experience. To support the accomplishment of this goal both the intervention of the accompanying tutor and the hosting tutor are crucial to lead the students towards the critical analysis of their work.

Let's start with writing, but as said before there are different media that are used today to tell the story of the internship. Among these the use of videomaking and digital tools is becoming more and more popular.

The visual languages have their own clear power and immediacy, they allow to be con-

sumed and shared easily through the web and social media, but they can also easily leave people indifferent and be forgotten just a few seconds after they're watched. Because of this it is crucial that behind a visual story we put the same planning and narrative ideation that we would use when we write a book or a story.

4.4 Designing a digital story

To bring the narrative of our experience from a textual dimension to a digital one is an exciting and creative process, full of possibilities both educational and experiential. Even if today a lot of video recording and editing softwares are easily accessible to everyone, even for free, this does not mean that designing and realizing a digital story is immediate and also effective in producing interesting results. The base of digital storytelling, to briefly summarize, consists of elements that represent its essence; these elements are a useful reference to start with, being aware of the infinite variations possible of artistic and stylistic aspects, and the different taste levels that represent and make a difference in a digital narrative.

The seven basic elements can be summarized in:

1. **Point of view:** stories should be personal and genuine, and told in first person
2. **Telling the story of something that is worth telling** (the dramatic question), no ordinary lists
3. **A valid emotional content that is engaging:** if you don't point at something important
4. **Your own voice, an important element:** several authors only use music or images, but the effect is not the same
5. **The power of the soundtrack,** which can anticipate what is going to happen.
6. **Less is more!** All the ingredients (the voice, the music, the images) must be used to interact with each other in an effective and cohesive way. Usually we don't realize that things can be said with just a few images
7. **Rhythm:** it's the secret of storytelling, side by side with vitality. Good stories breathe. Another interesting cognitive artifact is the "visual portrait of a story", meaning a temporal-diagrammatic view of the most important emotional moments in a story

The strength of the experience lived by the students in the European internships represents itself the added value of truth requested in designing a narrative that often makes the stories unique and interesting. The more we can identify a message to convey in the writing stage, building climax and pathos typical in stories, the more the experience told will come out engaging for the audience. The character will have to retrace the Voyage of the Hero, encountering challenges, overcoming difficulties, bridging alliances and arriving in the end at the desired destination. Now we can see how important all those collecting tools are, gathering emotions and expectations as well as monitoring the results is the foundation for being aware of their own evolution as a person during the internship. This is going to translate into the narration as the evolution and resolution of the character. The development that each student accomplishes in the 4/8 weeks of the internship should be represented in dramatical form through digital tools. While writing a story it's necessary to keep in mind that a story is interesting when there is an alternation of emotions. No one would like a movie, or a tv show or a novel, when everything goes well for the protagonist and nothing bad happens to them. We would find it extremely boring and we would lose interest fast. The characters that work always have an initial trauma that sets them in motion, a goal to achieve, a revenge to take on. Without this initial push it's difficult to find the energy that moves the story. Ask yourself during the emotional designing of the characters what moves

them, what kind of motivation there is behind their choice to start the journey, and what “treasures” they want to bring back home and why.

Languages to be used

The intercultural context that is the background to this narrative and the transnational mobility projects themselves leads us to touch on the theme of language, but even more on the languages and words to use. In narrative design we want to transport our listeners or spectators in a world and words together with linguistic styles are the keys to that world. The idioms, the rhetorical effects, the underlying values and feelings that we adopt in the story are broadly traceable to at least seven main styles:

- a) the military style
- b) the medical style
- c) the sports style
- d) the political style
- e) the loving style
- f) the religious style
- g) the economic style

As you can understand, the act of telling is a technical, artificial and strategic activity starting from the choice of the media through which the story is conveyed. The channels used to convey the story are then divided into three large strands

- the paper channel
- the relational channel
- the digital channel

Already the story that we make of our own life and experience is more or less consciously modified by us to adapt it to changing needs and make it consistent with our present. Choose how it also means taking care of aesthetic details that give internal coherence to the story. The narrative coherence serves to manage the repetition of the story, its re-narration and dissemination, which can go on even beyond us and beyond us, serves to prevent mystification, even involuntary modifications. The story thus narrated will always be framed in a historical time, in a space that is physical or virtual and in a specific culture. Precisely on this last aspect our story destined to audiences of different cultures must be structured in order to be reshaped according to the recipients always safeguarding the core-story (a story for the members of the European Commission or for the elderly of the village of Mali from which the students in mobility come may have different media and times of the story).

In this sense we have seen that telling stories needs a very precise narrative technicality and to create effective stories that capture, that are memorable, we need a multidimensional action that

- able to frame the narrative and biographical moment of our audiences, understanding the moment in which they live (tragic, dramatic, romantic, etc.)
- the motivation of the narrative and the basic themes, managing to design the story according to the canonical narrative script
- is able to dynamize history through narrative styles, storytelling techniques, dramatization actions
- is able to choose the media most suitable for the audience (web, paper, relational, etc.)

Narration and personal storytelling can indeed be powerful tools for individuals to share and document their experiences abroad and help prevent prejudice both before and during their mobility. Here's how they can be valuable:

- 1. Cultural Exchange and Understanding:** Sharing personal stories and narrating one's experiences abroad allows individuals to convey the cultural nuances, challenges, and the beauty of the host country. This can help break down stereotypes and promote a deeper understanding of other cultures.
- 2. Humanizing the Experience:** Personal narratives humanize the experience of living in a different place. They allow individuals to see the real lives of people in other countries, making it more difficult to stereotype or prejudge them.
- 3. Preventing Prejudice Before Mobility:** Before embarking on a journey, personal narratives and stories can help prepare individuals for the cultural, social, and logistical aspects of living in a different place. By hearing from those who have been there, individuals can approach their mobility with more realistic expectations.
- 4. Community Building:** Narration and storytelling can create a sense of community among those who have had similar experiences abroad. This can provide a support system for individuals planning to go abroad or those who are currently abroad, helping them navigate challenges and learn from one another.
- 5. Learning from Others:** Narratives and stories from others who have been abroad can provide valuable insights, advice, and practical tips to those planning a journey. This information can help individuals better prepare for their mobility.
- 6. Challenging Stereotypes:** By sharing authentic stories, individuals can challenge and dispel stereotypes and biases. This can contribute to a more inclusive and open-minded society.
- 7. Reflection and Personal Growth:** Personal storytelling can also be a means of reflection and personal growth. Individuals can gain insights into their own cultural biases and prejudices by sharing and reflecting on their experiences.

5 **Activities outlines: concrete methods to prepare participants before their departure**



5 | Activities outlines: concrete methods to prepare participants before their departure

In this last section we propose a collection of activities, didactic cards, role-playing games that have been partially used and tested in the months of preparation of the project both online and in the field. Cards and activities are a starting point and can be adapted by local trainers based on the needs and culture of the group.

Teaching intercultural competences

Typically intercultural competences are gained through a combination of experience, training, and self-reflection. Despite the fact that much of what becomes intercultural competences can be acquired through personal experience, many programs have been designed to provide formal teaching or training, and they often help substantially. Understanding one's own culture and understanding cultures as human constructions are both necessary steps in learning to cope intercultural interactions and usually precede learning about other peoples, other cultures, other ways of being.

Learning is circular: there is no better way to discover the socially constructed nature of one's own culture than to be faced with an-other culture having quite different assumptions. The practice and learning of intercultural competences never ends but is a lifelong pursuit, evolving over time through the accumulation of experience, training, and thoughtful reflection upon both.

Ultimately, the goal must be to **teach concrete skills for successful interaction with members of different cultures**, the “intercultural communicative competence”.

ACTIVITY 1: The culture onion

Topic: Culture

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Group Size: from 3 to 15

Setting: Offline/Online – Indoor/Outdoor

Material: 5 different definitions of culture

Objectives

To enable learners to reflect on their own understanding of culture.

To introduce a model of culture and cultural influences.

To raise awareness of both visible and non-visible components of culture.

Step-by-step Method

A. Provide the learners with the five alternative definitions of culture.

Which definition(s) of culture do you prefer? You can choose as many as you wish.

- 1.** Objective visible artefacts such as rituals, superstitions, heroes, myths, symbols and taboos.
 - 2.** Basic truths about identity and relationships, time and space, ways of thinking and learning, ways of working and organizing, and ways of communicating.
 - 3.** Ideals shared by group members to which strong emotions are attached.
 - 4.** The 'right' and 'wrong' ways of doing things. The rules people live by in practice.
 - 5.** Subjective behavioural orientations to do things in one way, rather than another. They are most noticeable in relationship styles, thinking and learning styles, organization and work styles and communication styles.
- B.** Ask the learner to reflect on which definition(s) he or she prefers. They can choose as many as they wish.
- C.** Ask the learner to indicate his or her preferred choice(s), giving reasons for the decision.

Observations and suggestions for discussion

Comments

This is a simple exercise that explores ‘Why is culture important?’ and clarifies its visible and less visible elements. Many learners will opt for one or perhaps two of the statements, rather than seeing each one as part of a larger concept of culture. In fact, each of the descriptions reflects one aspect of culture. Discussion will benefit from using the Iceberg graphic (Introduced in Reading 1) to explore how each of the statements fit together. The aim is to form a more comprehensive understanding of culture as a framework of values, attitudes and behaviours.

Reference: Critical Incidents for Intercultural Communication

ACTIVITY2: 4 Storytelling exercises

Rationale Here below a sequence of exercises to familiarize yourself with storytelling and at the same time reflect on your cultural objects.

Topic: Storytelling

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 20' individual part, 30' to share in group

Group Size: 8/10

Setting: Offline/online

Material: an object to be described. A paper and a pen

1) THE SECRET OBJECT

Step-by-step method

Take an everyday object, one you know well that represents something about you and your culture.

- a) Describe its characteristics as if you were to describe it to
 - a blind person
 - a child
 - a lab technician
 - a friend
- b) Take the object, close your eyes, start to touch it and describe it as if it was your hands talking. What feelings does it give you? Where does it come from? What would he want to be if it was something else?
- c) Imagine to be in an European market, one of those street markets that are also common in your city, and you have to convince passers-by to buy the object, highlighting its best qualities.

Try to be effective, people walk through many stands, they can be distracted, try to catch their attention with few efficient phrases.

2) THE COME BACK STORYTELLING

Step-by-step method

Repeat the storytelling experience with an object that made an impression on you during your stay abroad; choose something that caught your attention and touched an emotional cord. Food, clothes, utensils.

Repeat steps a), b), and c). Add a step d) trying to sell that object in your local market.

How does the language change?

What does it change in your gestures and your paraverbal language?

3) EMOTIONAL STORYFOOD

Step-by-step method

- a) Each participant chooses one food they love from their country without disclosing it to the others.
- b) Describe it in no more than 10 lines without naming it and without mentioning any ingredient, just talking about shape, smell, colours, places and linking it to a specific memory.
- c) Taking turns we describe the dishes and the other participants write what they felt through the story, what memories, what emotions.

Can they see a specific dish popping out from the story? Why?

- d) Once everybody has shared all their stories, every participant reveals their dish.

Debriefing: What did I feel during the story? How would I have described that dish?

4) THE COME BACK STORYFOOD

Step-by-step method

Take a dish that you encountered during your European experience. A food you tried that has made an impression on you, not necessarily the most tasty thing, it could also be something you didn't like. Write a short story, max 15 lines, without mentioning the food, just telling who was with you, how it was presented to you, what color it was, how it smelled, what expressions were made by the people eating it and by you. Did they ask you if you liked it? What did you answer? What have you been surprised about? Give it a made-up name and describe it.

How was your encounter with the culture of your host country through food? How much were you open to the knowledge of the culinary traditions in the new country? How much did you miss your own cuisine, and the dishes you are fond of?

Comments: This sequence of exercises is useful to practice describing common objects but also feelings and emotions. They also allow students to reflect on the symbols and traits typical of their culture; this awareness is important to be able to recognize symbols and objects of value of the target culture.

Hint for the facilitator: these first storytelling exercises should gradually bring students into contact with their emotions. Try to give them the space and time to find the best way to learn to recognize and describe them and not to force sharing for those who don't feel like it.

ACTIVITY 3: The easy and the hard

Topic: Storytelling

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 30 minutes

Group Size: individual exercise

Setting: Offline/Online

Material: a draft of questions (below)

Objectives

Pay attention to the aspects of our life that we take for granted;

Knowing how to tell the basic elements of our activity;

Know how to recognize their own peculiar characteristics, both personal and professional

Step-by-step Method

The facilitator starts with a quote from a novel “This is water” by David Foster Wallace

“There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says “Morning, boys. How’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes “What the hell is water?”

The task we ask to do it’s to try to look through the water of your business, of your skills, of your potential following these questions.

Starting from your educational and professional experience what are the aspects of you that you tend not to see or underestimate? You can refer to technical-professional, relational, organizational, organizational aspects. Write at least three.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

After identifying them for each of them try to tell it in 500 bars as if it were a product to be advertised

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

ACTIVITY 4: My favourite story

Topic: Storytelling

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 30 minutes

Group Size: individual/couple exercise

Setting: Offline/Online

Material: The canonical narrative scheme to fill

Step-by-step Method

1. Facilitator asks each one in the group to think about a movie, a novel, a commercial that they love.
2. After finding it, they try to describe and analyze it following the grid of suggested questions of the canonical narrative scheme.
3. Each participant writes a short text analyzing all these dimensions
4. What are the main characters? They tell stories in small groups (10 minutes). Each narrator summarizes his own story emphasizing the pivotal aspects of the story. Some possible questions for the narrators: what do you like about this story? What does it tell you about yourself and how to deal with difficulties?

Variation Starting with the original story, try now to insert a twist in the plot. Draw on your imagination and the stories you already know! Write the turn and how it changes and ends the story; it's basically your alternative ending.

CANONICAL NARRATIVE SCHEME

Character	<p>What are the main characters? What are they looking for? In which way they are unique?</p>
Enterprise	<p>What is the destiny to be fulfilled? What they bring to others? How are they considered by others?</p>
Challenge	<p>What are the test areas? What happens if you lose the challenge?</p>
Opponent	<p>What hinders the protagonist?</p>
Trauma	<p>What do they fight for? How?</p>
Treasure (reward)	<p>What is at stake?</p>
Magic items	<p>What are the tools of power? What allows the advancement of the story?</p>
Helpers	<p>Who or what helps the protagonist?</p>
Final wedding	<p>How is it going to end?</p>

Comments

Was it easy to find all the clues? How does the story change after a more detailed analysis? Is there a constant narrative in the stories we like? Does the same story work with the new plot?

ACTIVITY 5: You are the hero

Topic: Storytelling

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 30 minutes

Group Size: individual exercise

Setting: Offline/Online

Material: a form to fill

Step-by-step Method

The facilitator could start with a quote from a novel, a song or from a Show. Then propose some reflection topics:

1. When was that time when you felt like a hero? Take a concrete episode and take it
2. What actions had brought you there?
3. Try to help by following the trail below to tell what kind of hero you are/have been

The great defeated opponents	The elaborate trauma
The continue challenge	The extraordinary feat

ACTIVITY 6: Prevent the culture shock

Topic: Culture

Difficulty: Intermediate

Duration: 60 minutes

Group Size: from 3 to 15

Setting: Offline/Online – Indoor/Outdoor

Material: The Culture shock checklist, blackboard, pens

Objectives

To Increase awareness about possible culture shock during the internship

To summarize useful strategies for managing culture shock and enhancing the process of cross-cultural adjustment.

To provide an opportunity to explore specific behaviours that describe how each strategy can be put into practice.

Step-by-step Method

1. Facilitator presents to the group the culture shock concept and how it articulates (see the third chapter) 5 min
2. The facilitator asks the group to imagine the worst intercultural scenario for their mobility: what could happen? Which situations could be more dangerous for them? Is there something they fear more than others? Brainstorming 15 min
3. Now give to the learners a copy of the 'Culture-shock Checklist' handout
4. After reading, work through the list of skills and behaviors with students, identifying specific strategies to address the cultural shock that could be particularly applicable in the country and culture of destination. 20 min
5. How can I best prepare to anticipate possible cultural shocks?

Culture-shock Checklist handout

Read each of the following strategies and techniques for dealing with culture shock. On the right hand side, write down some specific behaviours that describe how you can put each strategy or technique into practice. The first two have some examples already inserted.

STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES	How you can put this in practice
Anticipate it: do not let it take you by surprise	For example, make a list of all the things likely to cause me culture shock
Find out as much as you can about where you are going before you leave	For example, attend a country-specific briefing. Read a cultural awareness book
Identify familiar things you can do to keep you busy and active	
Fight stress, do not deny your symptoms and do not give in to them	
Monitor your drinking and eating habits	
Give yourself time to adapt. Making mistakes is a normal part of learning	
Discuss your experiences with your colleagues	
Expect the same symptoms when you come home	
Think about the positive aspects of culture shock	
Retain a sense of humour!	

Comments

Cultural shock can be a serious obstacle to adaptation for students moving abroad for significant periods. This activity provides a practical checklist of useful strategies to help students manage the symptoms of cultural shock and rapid adaptation to the new environment. It also allows students to identify useful ways to put these strategies into practice.

Tips This activity should be done just before departure, when the details of the training course are clearer, you know the city, the host VET school and in general the destination culture.

Variant: In this activity students may tend to overestimate their ability to adapt to situations or prefer, for cultural or gender reasons, not to show signs of weakness. If the trainer realizes that this can be a cultural problem he shifts the question of how you could help someone who...

Reference: Intercultural Training Exercise Pack

ACTIVITY 7: Playing around with countries

Topic: Culture

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 20/30 minutes

Group Size: from 3 to 15

Setting: Offline/Online – Indoor/Outdoor

Material: Pen, sheet of paper

Objectives

To Increase awareness about possible culture shock during the internship

To summarize useful strategies for managing culture shock and enhancing the process of cross-cultural adjustment.

To provide an opportunity to explore specific behaviours that describe how each strategy can be put into practice.

Step-by-step Method

The trainer splits the participants into 3 groups.

Each group will receive the name of 3 countries: (1 from Africa, 1 from Europe, 1 from Asia). The goal is to discuss in group and write as much as they can about each country. They can write things they know, place, celebrities, but also stereotypes about their habits (no web check).

Write for each country the highest number of characteristics typical

They have 5 minutes for each country.

Then each group shares the results with the others.

Comments

How did they discovered these informations? Have they experienced it or it's just things they heard? Are there any prejudices about any country?

ACTIVITY 8: The Elders' Council

Topic: Culture

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 30 min to 2H, depending on group size

Group Size: 2 to 20

Setting: Offline - Indoor or outdoor - Preferably in an informal setting (chairs arranged in a U-shape or circle)

Material: (Optional) Paper and pens to take some improvised notes, collect questions

Objectives

Helping participants preparing thanks to the experience of former participants: reassuring them regarding their fears, sharing some tips to prepare ...

Step-by-step Method

1. Former participants in an international mobility share about their own experience in front of participants to an upcoming international mobility. The setting should remain informal to encourage the free expression and exchange among participants as peers.
2. The youth worker supporting participants can however structure the session by first inviting each participant with a former international experience to answer the following questions, in turn:
 - Where did you go? What did you do there?
 - Why did you wanted to go abroad? Why did you choose that specific opportunity?
 - How did you prepare before leaving the country? How long did you need to feel ready, if you ever felt that way? Who helped you?
 - What surprised you the most during your first days in your hosting country? Do you remember a funny anecdote? Did anything go wrong because of such surprises?
 - Did you experience difficulties during your stay abroad? In your personal life, in the tasks you carried out through your internship/volunteering/job? What helped you coping with them?
 - How did you feel when coming back home, on the first days? Was it easy or hard to settle back?
 - What did you learn during your stay? Both personally and professionally?
 - Do you have specific advice or tips for people preparing to go abroad like you did?

3. After each testimony by a former participant in international mobility, invite the future participants to ask questions of their own. Then turn to the next testimony.
4. Encourage all participants to exchange contacts to support each other's afterward, to keep discussing these topics. Some participants may indeed feel more comfortable asking or answering questions in a more private setting.

Comments

The youth worker or a chosen participant can act as a rapporteur throughout the session, taking notes of important keywords standing out from the discussions on a blackboard or flipchart. The session can then be concluded by analysing together with all participants which keywords are shared by any answers, and therefore the most important to keep in mind for everybody!

ACTIVITY 9: Guess where I'm going!

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 30 min to 1H30, depending on group size

Group Size: 2 to 20

Setting: Offline - Indoor or outdoor - Preferably in an informal setting (chairs arranged in a U-shape or circle)

Material: (Optional) Paper and pens to take some improvised notes, a world map or map of the continent participants will travel to

Objectives

Inviting participants to explore and discuss their own knowledge and prejudices regarding their future hosting country.

Step-by-step Method

1. Gather a few participants preparing for an upcoming trip abroad, but ask them in advance to not share where they are going with the others.
2. Explain them that you will play a guessing game together: each participant will try to get the others to guess where they are going to by giving clues but without mentioning the country explicitly (nor the name of the city, region ...). You can play this game with countries if participants are going to different ones, but you can also adapt and play it with regions/cities if they are going to the same country.
3. In turn, each participant has a few minutes to try to have the others guess their future destination. The participant has to give clues about their destination's culture, national dishes, famous sports teams, artists, language ... If you have an adapted map, invite the guessing participants to point their guess on the map.
4. When all participants have gone through this guessing game, debrief together the following questions:
 - Was it easy to guess? Did you all share the same knowledge and perceptions about the discussed countries?
 - Do you think all of it is true? Did you use stereotypes to have the others guess more easily? Which are which?
 - Do you feel you know enough about your own destination, after trying to have other people guessing with your own knowledge?

Comments

Typically, participants will use stereotypes to win the game more easily, because they are often shared by their peers, such as “People love eating frogs in this country”.

This is a great opportunity to discuss and nuance these stereotypes by inviting participants to reflect upon them. For instance, France is famous for eating frogs, but very few French people actually do, and participants going to France do not have to worry about that, but should remain aware they will certainly not find the same food as at home.

Overall, such a discussion can lower the risk of a “cultural shock” that can stem from the contrast between a participant’s expectations towards a country and the reality they will experience on-site.

ACTIVITY 10: Pre-departure Questionnaire

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 1H (Individual homework) to 2H (with a group debriefing)

Group Size: Individual homework; Optional: Group debriefing (from 2 to 10 participants)

Setting: Offline/Online – Indoor/Outdoor – Preferably in an informal setting (chairs arranged in a U-shape or circle)

Material: Online or Printed version of the below questionnaire, Pens & Paper.

Objectives

Helping participants to get to know the country they are going to, as well as their own fears and expectations about their upcoming trip and internship.

Step-by-step Method

Before their departure abroad, participants need to (1) discuss their own objectives, fears and expectations regarding their mobility abroad in general and their internship in particular and (2) get to know basic facts about the country they will travel to.

This is a key step to prevent a “cultural shock” that may arise if their expectations are very different from the reality they will experience, both on the workplace and in their daily life. For instance, tourists visiting Paris with a typical – and cliché – view of the city as “the most beautiful and romantic place on earth” are very often disappointed when they realize Paris is as dirty as the average capital city anywhere in the world.

To help participants explore these topics, go through the first step explained below at the very least. You can then combine it with further steps if time and setting allows it.

- 1. Self-exploration Questionnaire:** Give each participant a questionnaire based on some or all of the guiding questions listed in the comments below. Ask them to fill it at home, while taking the time to reflect individually and do some research online if needed. The questionnaire can be printed, or turned into an online form to make further steps easier.
- 2. Optional Debriefing:** once each participant has filled the questionnaire, you can go further and discuss their answers. It can be done through an individual meeting with the tutor or, even better, a group meeting gathering several participants preparing to go abroad.

You can use some or all of the questions below to lead discussions:

- What are the key facts about your future host country? The things everybody should know before travelling there, to be well-prepared?
- Did you discover new things about this country? If so, were they good or bad surprises?
- What are you afraid about when you think about your future daily life in that country? How likely are these fears to become real? Can you think of ways to overcome such difficulties? Can other participants provide tips?
- Can other participants complete that picture? Maybe some who travelled to that country in the past, or have friends or family there?
- List all stereotypes that you, or most people, have about that country and its people: how true or false do you think they are?

Comments

The questionnaire can be broken down into three categories: “My future host country”, “My future internship”, “My fears and expectations”.

My future host country

- **History:** What historical facts and events are usually used to define the country? What is the most significant historical event in its recent history, i.e. in the last few decades? Does it share a common history with your own home country?
- **Geography:** What key geographical aspects can describe the country best, e.g. size, bordered by a sea or not, mountainous or not? What makes the area you are going to specific compared to the whole country, e.g. rural or urban, populated or deserted?
- **Culture and traditions:** How diverse is the population, in terms of religion, language, ethnicity etc? What are famous traditions in that country, e.g. national celebrations, customs? Does the area you will go to have specificities in that regard, e.g. different celebrations?
- **Economy and politics:** What is the currency there? What sectors are predominant in its economy? How do politics work nowadays?
- **Strengths and weaknesses:** What are considered as the country’s main strengths and weaknesses? E.g. an industrial power exporting lots of goods, but its political institutions are unstable. Does the area you are going to share the same difficulties and opportunities, or different ones?

My future internship

- **Company and Workplace:** What is the company specialized in? How big is it? How many co-workers will you meet on a daily basis?
- **My role:** What tasks are you expected to perform there? Do you know what a typical

day will look like already?

- **My skills and contributions:** What specific competences are you bringing to the company? Are there some tasks you would really like to try out?
- **My future plans:** What skills would you like to learn or improve during your internship? How will it help you with your future plans, i.e. to find a job or better define your career plans?

My fears and expectations

- On the workplace and in your daily life in that country, what are you looking forward to? What are you afraid of?
- Do you know how to make the things you are looking forward to happen, e.g. who to ask, where to go?
- Do you know how to cope with the difficulties you are afraid of if they do happen? How can you prepare before the trip itself? Who or what can help you on-site?

ACTIVITY 11: Cross-cultural checklist

Topic: Inter-Culture

Difficulty: Intermediate

Duration: 30-45'

Group Size: from 3 to 15

Setting: Offline/Indoor

Material: the cross-cultural checklist²⁴

Rationale: The purpose of this activity is to understand how to behave in intercultural situations, and to identify areas where the student needs to strengthen. It's also a way of anticipating possible difficulties and imagining possible approaches and practical solutions.

Objectives

- To identify important cultural information that learners may wish to learn before they go overseas.
- To illustrate the importance of having a framework for understanding the cultures that learners encounter.

Step-by-step Method

1. Give the learner a copy of the 'Cross-Cultural Checklist' and ask them to work through each question in turn.
2. Where the learner answers 'Yes', ask them to identify how they anticipate things to be different in the other culture.
3. Where the learner answers 'Don't Know', ask them to identify ways in which they might find out the answer to this question.

Observations and suggestions for discussion

Comments

The answers to each question are, of course, wholly dependent on the specific culture around which the checklist is undertaken and, of course, the cultural origin of the learners themselves. Not all the questions will be relevant in all situations.

Reference: Intercultural Training Exercise Pack

²⁴CultureWise (n.d.). Cross-cultural checklist. In Intercultural Training Exercise Pack (pp. 5-7). <https://www.culturewise.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Cultural-awareness-training-exercise-pack.pdf>

NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Should I expect differences in what is thought of appropriate "personal space"?			
Should I anticipate differences in the way my counterparts use touch?			
Is there anything particular I need to be careful about in giving or receiving business cards?			
Should I avoid any particular gestures?			
Should I expect differences in the level of acceptable eye contact?			
Do I know what body language is taboo?			
COMMUNICATION	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Should I anticipate different attitudes about the acceptability of asking personal questions?			
Should I anticipate different attitudes toward the acceptability of humor and emotions?			
Should I anticipate different attitudes towards the acceptability of interrupting?			
Should I anticipate different attitudes toward addressing difficult issues directly?			
Do I know what style of feedback is acceptable?			
Should I anticipate different expectations about the expression of criticism?			
Do I know the range of ways in which disagreement is likely to be expressed?			
Should I anticipate different expectations about the use of silence?			
Should I anticipate different attitudes toward small-talk?			
Should I anticipate different communication styles to be in use?			
Should I anticipate different attitudes toward the importance of saving face?			
Should I anticipate different use of tone or pitch when speaking?			
Should I anticipate different attitudes toward displays of affection?			

ACTIVITY 12: The Iceberg of Culture

Difficulty: Intermediate

Duration: 1 h

Group Size: up to 25

Setting: Offline/Online – Indoor/Outdoor – Preferably in an informal setting (chairs arranged in a U-shape or circle)

Material: Pens & Paper or a Whiteboard.

Objectives

Raising awareness on intercultural differences, how people’s “cultural glasses” influence their interpretation of or behaviour in certain situations, and why intercultural communication is important to avoid these differences ending up in conflicts.

Step-by-step Method

1. Ask participants to think about one object that represents their culture, and explain why.
2. Explain the concept of iceberg of culture (see in the above chapters), and draw a blank iceberg on a flip-chart or whiteboard. Ask the students to place their object at the right place on the iceberg.
3. Start a discussion by going through the following guiding questions:
 - What is the relationship between the visible and invisible aspects of culture? For example, religious beliefs are clearly manifested in certain traditional holidays or outfits, while principles of modesty may influence certain styles of dress.
 - How do objects represent values and beliefs that are not visible? Write these on the part of the iceberg that is under water.
 - Take some time to try to fill the iceberg of the participants’ own culture. You can help them by asking for examples illustrating the following aspects:

Visible: Symbols, Outfits, Music, Food, Celebrations (religious or national/secular), Literature, Language, Traditional greetings, Architecture

Invisible: Values, Religious beliefs, Attitudes towards child raising, Attitudes towards age, Work ethic, Role of family, Concept of justice, Conception of beauty, Family traditions, Personal beliefs, Sexual identity, Political views.
- Draw a new iceberg, ask participants to pick a foreign country, and fill the iceberg on that basis.

- Finally, ask them to reflect about:
 - How can the same (invisible) value inspire different (visible) behaviours in different cultures? For example, how are older people honoured in different cultures? By giving them a seat on the bus? Carrying their shopping? By helping them cross the street? By inviting them to come and live with you? By placing them in a retirement home?
 - How can different (invisible) values in different cultures lead to different (visible) behaviours? Is it wrong? For instance, it can be considered polite to hold the door to a woman in some countries, and sexist in others.

Conclusion: You can finally invite participants to look out for the “invisible” parts of their own cultural iceberg as well as the others’ to prevent a cultural shock or conflict. For example, when we encounter another culture, we tend to interpret the observed behaviour based on our own iceberg, our own set of values and beliefs, which can produce a cultural shock: we are incapable of understanding and accepting these behaviours.

It is therefore important to keep in mind that the observed behaviour draws on values that are not clearly visible but may be perfectly fine in their own context. For instance, with the above-example: a participant may find it sexist at first to observe that men hold the door to women every day in their host country, before realizing that both men and women do it for people regardless of their gender because this is considered basic politeness.

ACTIVITY 13: Abigail's Tale

Difficulty: Intermediate

Duration: 30min to 1H

Group Size: 5 to 20 participants

Setting: Offline/Online – Indoor/Outdoor – Preferably in an informal setting (chairs arranged in a U-shape or circle)

Material: Printed text of “Abigail’s Tale” (ENG [here](#)²⁵; FR [there](#)²⁶), Pens & Paper.

Objectives

Discussing how one’s interpretation of a situation is influenced by their cultural and individual backgrounds, and the assumptions emerging from these. The discussion is an invitation to participants to prevent intercultural misunderstandings and potential conflicts by considering other people’s perspectives.

Step-by-step Method

Abigail’s Tale is a short story that shows how people view the world from different perspectives, have different values and reach different conclusions out of the same information.

1. Give participants a printed version of the story and a few minutes to read it on their own. Alternatively, you can simply read the story aloud to the whole group.
2. Give participants a few minutes to reflect individually for now, and rank the characters from the story from the guiltiest to the least guilty: Who do they blame the most? Who is the victim in that tale? How do they rank the others “in between”?
3. If you have enough participants, split them in smaller groups of 2 to 5 each, depending on the total number of participants. Give them 5 more minutes to share about their individual lists, and then agree on a common ranking, still listing characters from the guiltiest to the least guilty in their eyes.
4. Invite all participants or groups (if you took step 3) to share their own conclusions. Check the differences and similarities between all rankings with them.

²⁵https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/toolbox_tool_download-file-1291/Abigail's%20Tale.txt

²⁶ <https://intercult-project.eu/intercultural-trainers-kit/francais/promouvoir-la-comprehension-mutuelle-et-le-dialogue-culturel/methodes-denseignement/abigail/>

5. Time for a debriefing! Take the remaining time to discuss with all participants some of the following questions:
- How did participants rank the characters, what criteria did they use?
 - Was it easy or difficult to agree on a common list as a group? What helped or was an obstacle? Did they notice differences in their individual interpretations of the story?
 - Did participants strictly stick to facts, or did they interpret the story further to be able to come to some conclusions?
 - Would they change their list if Abigail was 13 years old? What if some characters were foreign? What if genders were reversed, and Abigail was a man while the other characters were women?
6. Here are some conclusion that you can address during the debriefing or to wrap up the activity:
- Typically, participants will realize their individual rankings rely on their own values, leading them to assumptions about who is “bad” and “good” in this story. Different values lead to different conclusions, even if looking at the same story.
 - Sharing a similar culture means sharing similar values to a large extent, which helps understanding each other’s’ viewpoints and coming to similar conclusions: people have similar “cultural glasses” through which they interpret reality and judge it.
 - On the contrary, people from different cultures will often struggle to agree because their judgements rely on different premises. For instance, participants from a culture valuing family ties above all will blame the mother for not helping her daughter, while participants from a culture valuing individual freedom will be more tolerant towards the mother.
 - There is often no “universal truth”, meaning that in an intercultural context, it is important to discuss one’s own cultural background as well as the others’. Such a dialogue allows a better common understanding: it does not mean agreeing on everything, but it helps understanding and respecting other people’s own viewpoints, recognizing them as valid in their own context.
 - “Culture” is not all about nationality: participants from the same country will often not entirely agree on their rankings, because of cultural differences between regions, religions, socio-economic situations ...

Comments

You can choose to not print the story and only reading it aloud to the group: in this case, you can also discuss how this influences results, since participants have to rely on spontaneous reactions, assumptions, judgements, and can’t have a detailed look at the facts

ACTIVITY 14: Theatre Forum

Difficulty: Advanced

Duration: 2H to 3H depending on the group size

Group Size: 6 to 20

Setting: Offline – Indoor – Chairs arranged in a U-shape or theatre, preferably without tables, in a room big enough to hold a small theatre play

Material: Pens & Paper for reflections; Optional: some accessories for the theatre plays

Objectives

Helping participants coming up with strategies to cope with conflicts that may arise during their stay abroad due to stereotypes.

Step-by-step Method

Forum theatre is a type of interactive theatre: it provides a method to invite spectators to engage with and influence the performance as both spectators and actors, termed “spect-actors”. Issues dealt with in forum theatre are often related to areas of social justice, with the aim of exploring solutions to oppression featured in the performance through an interactive debate.

The steps below describe a very simplified version of forum theatre which can help participants anticipate intercultural conflicts – and outright discrimination among them – and brainstorm solutions to solve such conflicts peacefully.

It follows three main steps: (1) participants create and play a short scene portraying such a conflict a first time, uninterrupted, then (2) participants play the scene a second time but spectators (other participants) can interrupt the scene to replace the main character and suggest a way out of the conflict and finally (3) a debriefing round allows everybody to elaborate and go further.

1. Setting the context (15min)

You should first introduce the topic:

- Define or discuss with participants what stereotypes are and how they can lead to discrimination;
- Explain that people abroad may have stereotypes about them, creating conflictual situations, and that everybody can be discriminated against: on the basis of gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, political opinions, social background ...

- Tell participants that such conflicts can very often be prevented or solved with the right attitude, but it is hard to react appropriately if you are not prepared, for instance because you react spontaneously with anger when you are hurt.

Then explain that forum theatre will help them to imagine and anticipate intercultural conflicts they may be facing when staying abroad, and to come up with solutions to avoid or solve them.

2. Improvising a short scene (30 to 45min)

Make small groups of at least 3 participants in each.

First, each participant should take 10min to reflect about a time in their life when they faced stereotypes against themselves or people they know. Typically, it can be a situation when participants were discriminated against for any reason, or such a situation they have observed without being the victim.

Secondly, ask each group to share about their personal stories, and then reflect about their similarities. Are there specific obstacles in common?

Finally, each group should come up with a simple scenario representing such a situation, ending “badly” for the protagonist. The scene should be 5 to 10min long only, and represent a realistic situation while remaining fictional: no need to re-enact an actual story entirely, so that participants can be more comfortable sharing about it afterward.

For instance: a participant may remember a time they were called “lazy” at work because of stereotypes about people from their home country, while another one may remember a situation when a waitress refused to serve them because they wore a religious piece of clothing. Stereotypes based on their appearance are the common cause, and a scene can be improvised on this basis.

3. Exposing reality: playing the scene a first time, with the worst possible outcome (10min per group)

Each group plays their short scene once in front of the others, without any interruption, until its “bad” outcome.

For instance: an intern is so uncomfortable because of a colleague telling racist jokes on the workplace every day that they quit before the end of their internship.

4. Improving reality: playing the scene a second time and letting participants change the outcome (15-20min per group)

Each scene is then played a second time. During that replay, any member of the audience – the other group(s) – is allowed to shout ‘Stop!’, step forward and take the place of the protagonist to act differently: the other actors then improvise the rest of the scene based on this new behaviour from the protagonist. If the audience has a lot of ideas, the facilitator can suggest to rewind the scene and start again to try something different.

The protagonist will typically be a person who is capable of acting differently: participants should not try to replace the “bad” characters, the people who would not change their behaviour spontaneously in real-life.

For instance, in the above-mentioned example, the colleague telling racist jokes will not stop spontaneously: the protagonist is the intern, who can choose to react in different ways. Instead of quitting, the intern can choose to go to the boss to address this issue and start a dialogue with the colleague, or calmly answer to the jokes by explaining that they are funny but not true in their experience and that makes them uncomfortable on the workplace.

5. Debriefing about the whole experience (15-20min)

Finally, participants sit in a circle to reflect critically about the exercise. They should step back from the concrete scenes and be invited to identify the tactics which were experimented during the replay and can work in real life, if participants encounter such conflictual situations during their trip abroad.

For instance, a few key outcomes on the topic of conflicts based on discrimination are:

- Reacting with quick anger usually makes things worse for the protagonist: it is therefore important to keep a cool head, and start a peaceful dialogue, for example by explaining calmly why the situation is hurtful to them.
- An external mediator may sometimes be needed: it is then better to ask the boss, or somebody from human resources, to start and facilitate a dialogue.
- It is useful to be prepared to expose stereotypes about your own culture and why they are false. It can be as simple as exploring stereotypes other cultures have on your own country, and thinking of arguments to debunk these stereotypes. E.g. “People in my country are not lazier than anywhere else just because they are typically late in your eyes: in my country, it is considered acceptable to arrive 15min late to a meeting”.

Comments

The tutor should play the role of the facilitator (often known as a ‘Joker’) to enable communication between the players and the audience. It is the Joker’s responsibility to keep interventions within the realm of reality in order to support tactics that can be achieved in real life. The Joker can also choose to stop a scene when it is replayed and when there is an opportunity to change the outcome but the audience does not spontaneously see it.

Forum theatre is a really powerful tool for dialogue on social issues. You can explore more about the full-fledge methodology here: <https://star-e.icja.de/engaging-young-people/training-methods/forum-theatre>

About the authors

Mirco Trielli is a trainer of international and intercultural exchanges for YES Forum. As Project Manager he has been involved in European and international projects for over 20 years. Trainer and professional consultant, he works daily with young people from different social backgrounds. In his role as director of Zefiro Training Agency, he oversees training programs that focus on effective communication, skills for the labour market, intercultural issues, and participation in various contexts, including those outside Europe.

Elie Demerseman started his journey at the YES Forum in 2016 with EVS, before working at its secretariat for several years. Through several European projects he built an expertise as a trainer and facilitator in international youth activities, with a strong focus on inclusion. Since he moved back to his natal France in 2019, Elie supporting YES Forum as an external Trainer & Facilitator. He has in the meanwhile developed a local activity as a freelance Consultant in EU projects in order to support grassroots NGOs in getting access to European funding in his area.



Empowering
young people

Founded in 2002, YES Forum is a European network of organisations working with and for young people with fewer opportunities. By promoting their social inclusion and developing their professional skills, we act to improve the life chances of vulnerable young people. YES Forum aims to create positive change to combating poverty and inequalities across Europe. Our network is composed of 40 member-organisations that act on national and regional levels and are located in 19 European countries (out of 17 EU MS). The members of the network offer (youth) social services, education, training and qualification, youth work. They work with young people that are most likely to experience social exclusion.

Throughout the network's 20 years of existence, we have established ourselves in a unique position; bringing young people and professionals, who work directly on the field, into dialogue with policy makers and EU institutions. We act as a bridge that gives the means to young people to have a voice in decision-making processes that influence their lives. We work towards providing young people with the needed skills that allow long-term development growth.

By providing formal and non-formal learning, the YES Forum promotes social inclusion and active participation of young people with vulnerable background in society, thus contributing to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. The YES Forum focuses on education and training, youth employment, youth participation and social inclusion.

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