

#### A. Objectives and Methods

In the second phase of the research we implemented interviews to provide us with information **where to focus our intercultural tool development**.

Some questions guiding the survey were:

Who are the project managers of EU Projects?

What is their personal and organizational background? What do they need in terms of intercultural competencies or what do they think project managers of EU Projects would need, to be interculturally competent?

Did they encounter any challenging situations in their practice referring to an intercultural dimension? And if so, what kind of situations did they encounter? In which status of the project do these challenging situations usually occur?

Do EU project managers use culture concepts?

How do they practice communication and relationships with their partners and do they have any advice how to avoid conflicts in EU Projects?

Of course these are many questions, which could be developed for deeper understandings. But this was not what we were looking for. We wanted to concentrate more on the **development of tools** and the survey was supposed to give us a basic direction for that. Because of the interdisciplinary approach the intercultural field is very broad and we had to select the most important fields of intercultural project management, which seemed to be a precondition for good intercultural practice in transnational EU project management. At the end we had collected enough information to set the direction to develop tools for intercultural purposes in EU Project Management.

In total 19 interviews have been collected. Each interview took about 1 hour and was conducted through a basic manual. As a method the in-depth interview was chosen. The interview contained closed and open questions structured mainly in sequences as the interviewees **personal and organisational background, challenging situations, working practices and competences** on intercultural European project management. The interviews were realized from 4 interviewers concerning to the INTERTool team. Most of the interviews have been done through Calls via Telephone and Skype between April 10 and April 25, 2007. The countries, where the interviews took place were balanced distributed in to Northern, Southern, Western, Eastern and Central Europe. Although time agreements have been arranged in advance, it took some time to meet the interviewees in the "right moment". Some of the interviewees responded that the questions made them reflect on topics, which they had not yet consciously thought about. The interviewees were those who

answered already the questionnaires done in advance and who agreed to an interview (70% of the respondent agreed). Without intervention from our side, most of the interviewees were male (14 male/ 5 female) and all interviewers were female. But because our project is not a research project we didn't go further to that aspect although it was an interesting observation too.

The results of the interviews seemed not to satisfy what we were looking for. Therefore the INTERTool team decided to look for **specific cases** (see following chapter) as a supplement demonstrating certain intercultural challenges. To find "right" cases was challenging too, because most of the conflicts in PM are even not conscious or on the other side they can't be clearly identified as intercultural or they are hard to distinguish in to a personal or intercultural problem especially if we would consider the diversity factors as well.

## B. Personal and organisational background of the interviewees

Most of the interviewees (9) had lesser than 5 years EU Project Management experiences but some of them had experiences in international PM before not specific on EU Projects. 7 interviewees have more than 10 years EU Project Management experiences. A few have lesser than 10 years experiences in EU Project Management. All of them share experiences in different Educational and Social Programmes of the EU like Grundtvig, Leonardo, Socrates, ESF Equal,... and Management and Training Skills as well. Some had also Project Experiences on intercultural issues.

All organisations are working on adult education issues and beside they work with diverse target groups as children, teachers, migrants, cultural minorities, persons with physical and mental problems, women etc.

The organisations are involved in 3 to 10 projects per year. The majority of the organisations do not implement specific intercultural trainings for members or staff involved in European projects.

"When I take people along with me I tend to brief them. If I was doing this on a larger scale it would be good to brief people properly at the beginning on intercultural issues."

"We don't have specific intercultural trainings but we have a lot of direct experiences with cultural differences (Islamic people joining the same course with roman catholic people)"

### People experienced intercultural issues on different levels:

"...the intercultural issue is new to (N.N.<sup>1</sup>), with the new development of (N.N.)"

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<sup>1</sup> Name of countries will usually not be mentioned, only in case the sense will get lost, we

changed from a country of emigration to immigration. Immigrants are coming from Africa, Asian and Arab countries some of them are refugees. (N.N.) is becoming an intercultural society. People from (N.N.) apply for citizenship, because of the same language.”

“In our country we have minorities. We don’t have immigrants. For us the intercultural issue would mean to be able to work with cultural minorities. But our organization is not dealing with this. ... people are not much educated and there is a certain special strategy and policy to educate and integrate ....people. But in the education, neither in the University, nor in the business, in the service fields there is no interaction between cultural minorities and other citizen. This is why the intercultural topic is not very popular within the national context.

It is also not popular within the international context because we don’t have immigrants from abroad.”

“ I think that people from the developed EU countries, like Austria, Germany the Netherlands, they come with the perception that they have to learn us to show us good practices, good modus of work. They adapt to us. And we don’t have a big problem with them. But the western people who somehow are displeased with the (N.N.) mentality with the work of the organization, etc. It is more a problem of the people from the western EU than our problem.”

“All the EU Projects have a (western) European style and (western) European structure. Me as a partner I am adapted with this.

European style means to me: western people from the developed countries know the practice, they have the experience, they are good managers, they are disciplined, they are responsible, they are effective, they know the objectives, they have a restrictive thinking, work within this European project framework.”

### **What do Project Managers consider as benefits of transnational EU Projects?**

- Because there are more different experiences the result is of more value
- Transnational exchange leads to broadening one’s horizon
- Cooperation, multiculturalism, intercultural approach, citizenship, dissemination of good practice
- Interaction between different countries, cultures, points of view.
- To increase feeling of being European
- Context of the project and products are useful for the future for people
- Working in education
- Mobility
- Exchange of good practice
- Dissemination of lessons learnt from different environments
- Sharing experiences between countries
- Finding common ways of working to a common project Goal.
- Learning about others cultures and ways of working and learning to accept differences
- Input from more than one country and

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may also mention the name of the countries

- outputs applicable to more than one country
- Learning from each other (peer learning)
- Transfer of expertise
- Development of new products
- Managing diversity (national diversity)

### **What do Project Managers account as basics for successful cooperation in European Project Management?**

Some of the listed points are

- to understand and agree on common aims and goals
- to be clear about the competencies of individuals and partners
- to have respect and fairness in the working process
- to have mechanism to solve conflicts
- to use evaluation also for the working process and in a moderating function
- to have a supervisor or external coach from time to time
- to have a clear task division, brought about by a democratic process
- to have agreements to keep deadlines and appointments
- good team building as a basis (50%) (work, visits, time for communication)
- coordinator should be part of the whole and should have the courage to show and use his cultural and individual competencies (not give up own identity for consensus)
- develop common activities in the community (singing together)
- Cooperation, socialisation, European values, intercultural approach, European citizenship.
- Willing to communicate. To share ideas. To be open minded. Not always to stand on your own position or viewpoint. Listen to partners way and their ideas that you may not have come across before.
- Language skills can help (English as the common working language). When English is not your mother tongue terms can mean different things to different people. Also need to be able to understand each other in terms of common behaviour.
- Attendance of all partners to all the meetings.
- Partners who can work effectively together.
- Sufficient resources (funding) to allow for interpreters etc to attend alongside non English speaking partners.
- Understanding of differences in working practices.
- Willingness to listen to other peoples ideas.
- Support for the technology being used is necessary, otherwise if there is a problem that remains unresolved partners stop using the technology.
- Good co-ordinator is essential
- Need to work as a team and the group usually becomes like a family.
- Clarifying meaning of terms and definitions so everyone has a common understanding of what the project is about.
- Clear activity plan and monitoring activity against the plan.
- Clear aims of each meeting to match the activity plan.
- Clear tasks for each partner.
- Allowing partners to have their say and being open to new ideas and ways of working.

- the project leader is maybe the critical one in a project, even if a project is not so good designed or planned when it has a good project leader the project will proceed well.
- Intercultural issue is important, these competencies should be on the check list, to built in all the interactions, to be aware of the intercultural elements and to do some specific to strengthen intercultural interactions in European projects
- Open mind, open eye as coordinator and also as a partner. When you enter European projects you will meet different people different organizations, they all have their specifics, their conceptions and limitations and opportunities. You have to adjust to that and realize that they are not the same as you are. Don't put too much workload in one meeting. Make time for socializing. Mainly requires an open mind.

### C. Challenging situations in EU Projects

16 from 19 interviewees experienced a particular situation deriving from cultural differences. It seems that differences caused the main challenges during project work. But those who are accepting differences and be able to use them for producing synergies experienced mostly the creation of something new. Some interviewee stated that they learned through challenging situations and that they gained professionally too. **Challenging situations could have a positive learning effect on the partners.** Learning partnerships help to understand different cultural backgrounds.

**As illustrated in the interviews most challenging situations of intercultural issues occur at the beginning and during meetings of a project:**

“Stereotyping on certain cultures is mostly present in the beginning of a project (kick off meeting) I think they are related with the negotiating of the budget.”

“During meetings and managing tasks, there was a difference in understanding what the tasks were. The problems only come to light in the meetings and then we can't find common solutions in the time we have.”

“The best phase to come in with the intercultural aspect would be the beginning and then sometimes during the running of the project.”

As already observed in the questionnaires you could find a lot of cultural stereotyping (national stereotyping) within the interviews.

**Given examples in which intercultural challenges occurred have to do with**

- Leadership

- Teambuilding processes
- Working styles
- Communication
- Stereotyping

### **Cultural dimensions have to do with differences in working styles or practices and organizational cultures, as**

- Person oriented versus community oriented
- Autocratic versus democratic

“There was a conflict between two partners about the basic way to approach things, for example should everybody do everything and decide on everything, or is only the director of the institution the person who should take decisions. So actually there were more problems with internal ‘culture’ differences’ than between the partners.”

A question remains: Has this example to do with the intercultural issue?

It depends on what we will include to a definition of culture: nation, ethnic origin, social community, organisation, gender, ...or only nation, language and ethnic origin.

Society is not an isolated homogeneous cultural unit as everybody belongs to various cultures depending on personal development and experiences. Humans are diverse and therefore intercultural themselves. A person develops diverse cultural patterns throughout his/her life. It depends how conscious he/she will be about those patterns. Most of the people are conscious about the other but not about the own cultural patterns which leads to stereotyping.

“There was a conflict with a partner, but this was because of ‘instrumental use’. The partner did not really have the competencies needed in the project and felt ‘left’ out, which then led to ‘cultural’ stereotyping of the project coordinator.”

The Italian said: that’s no problem, let’s do it, without any idea. The Finnish partner answers: How do you want to do this? At the end the Italian partner was not able to do the job. So finally a German partner took over the task. The Italian got another task to do: to build the network community, this worked really well (Conclusion of Michael: don’t give the tasks to anybody. Italians for example are better at communication tasks than at organisation tasks)

“We had a meeting with (N.N.) partners as the coordinators. The meeting did not go well as they have different way of thinking, different way of discussing things. It was difficult to find common solutions. ...They have a strict hierarchical way of thinking and behaviour which causes problems.”

## D. Working practices

### A lack of skills or culture based problems?

As already mentioned sometimes it is not clear, if the given example can be related to a cultural challenging situation or if it is more related to a lack of professional skills (either hard or soft skills).

### Intercultural or Diversity?

Some European Project Managers seem to have a close culture definition, which excludes personality and even organisational dimensions.

“Sometimes it is just the personality of individuals which causes a problem and this is compounded by intercultural differences.”

It might have to do with the origin of the term interculture which intends to mean interactions between cultural communities (usually between nations and ethnic groups). This concept leads to stereotyping because it focuses only one dimension of culture and neglects the existence of cultural patterns everybody develops more or less unconsciously throughout life. Whereas the term interculture focuses more on a horizontal (cross-cultural) level, the Diversity approach is focusing more on the transversal level, which includes organisational and personality dimensions in the culture definition.

Sometimes it might be confusing because of the unclear use of both terms and I tried to get answer from experts as the following statement shows:

“Intercultural Management bezieht sich nur auf das managen von und zwischen verschiedenen Kulturen.□□Diversity Management ist ein horizontaler Ansatz und bezieht die verschiedensten Facetten eines Individuums mit ein (Alter, Geschlecht, Herkunft, Hautfarbe, sexuelle Orientierung, Behinderung, Religion, das sind die primären Dimensionen, es gibt aber auch noch die sekundäre und die organisationale Dimension sowie die eigene Persönlichkeit im Diversity-Ansatz. Mehr dazu von Anita Rowe und Lee Gardenschwartz”.□... □Asli Weheliye□(Heinrich Böll Stiftung/ Email 11/15/06)

Maybe a combination of both, the intercultural and diversity approach, with a clear separation in terms of different meaning would be a good guidance to deal with intercultural aspects in EU project management.

## What do Project Managers see as a cultural challenging situation?

“Bad planning of a meeting left me and a colleague stranded at midnight without accommodation and no one present to help. Cultural differences in (N.N.) came as a shock to the system, as it was very different to what I expected.”

“When going to a country where few people speak English and can't understand any of the language I feel a bit intimidated and travelling can be difficult.”

“Too much travel for social activities. The host doesn't see it as a problem as they are used to travel by bus. On this occasion 10 hours in a mini bus in one day on rough roads, which aggravated the medical condition.”

“Partners leaving the room when they want. No contribution to the meeting/group.”

“People speaking amongst each other when the chair is speaking. This may be acceptable in some countries but not in the UK. Many such, comprehension of professional cultural perspectives, eg 'west' Europe vs. 'CEE'”

“They feel they are better than others. Cultural background is that they are used to work on their own.”

“One partner kept missing meetings.”

“In many of the projects, people use their laptops looking at e-mails whilst someone else is presenting. This would be considered very rude in the UK.”

“In Leonardo people are used to work in transnational projects. In pilot projects we have new people who are not familiar with intercultural projects. They are usually experts from their countries. They don't speak another language. They don't know how to interact with partners. They have different ways of working, of organising meetings. Most of the time it depends on the person. They can't understand why others work in the way they do. One example is of a partner, who never remembered what he was asked to do for the next meeting.”

“Some partners are too autocratic and just enforce their own way of doing things. They appear to respect you and give you the time to talk but then do their own thing regardless of what you said. There should always be a time in the meetings where people could have their say and the issues raised be listed as items to resolve or addressed.”

“The participants of eastern European countries are afraid to talk about their local situation (afraid that they might bring their organization in danger if they speak about different aspects or also problems)”

## Differences in budget distributions seems to produce the perception of being treated unequally:

“In a Grundtvig project the (N.N.) partner quit the project because of the low budget. I have the impression that some people are doing a project only because of the money. A project is also something I can learn for myself, to increase my know how and knowledge....So this is also something western partner didn't quit but eastern partner quit.

In another situation the partner from (N.N.) just show up at the meeting because the budget was low. They have got € 10.000,- for the project which is not much for them so they did not contribute to the work of the project just take part on discussions of the meetings. We on the other side have got € 6.000,- and should take over 90% of the work of the project. Then the (N.N.) partner asked me to take over the leadership because I was the most experienced. But the relation of workload and paying was not fair. Just because the rates are lower than in other European countries. This causes conflicts and people are getting discouraged. But the conflict are caused by the European commission (e.g. if most the people in a project are from western EU countries the budget is cut with 10% if most of the people in the project are from Eastern EU countries the budget is cut with 50%. And then the problem arises and then some people quit, because the differences are too big. Maybe differences in the payment should exist but not that big.”

“Especially in kick off meetings, while partners are discussing also the distribution of the budget, problems arise. The budget is not equal distributed among partners, the statistics are not related with the reality and this cause problems within a partnership because some of them have a much higher budget then we have. We have to do a lot of work without being paid.”

## Different development stages

Some interview partner from the CEE stated out that e.g. Adult Education has a completely diverse status in all over Europe. These different stages and circumstances should be taken into regard during planning phases.

Who doesn't know the Globe will be consumed by it.  
“Wer den Globe nicht kennt, den frisst er!”  
(Ruth C. Cohn of TCI - Theme Centered Interaction)

With GLOBE, the Theme Centered Interaction by Ruth C. Cohn the diverse circumstances of the participants (national, organisational, personal,...) are meant which should be taken in consideration during planning and development phases of a project. If a project leader or any participant does not take in consideration the diverse local circumstances of the partners, conflicts and frustrations might occur and will have unpleasant effects on the project development. Projects can fail, if they do not consider everybody's aspects, perspectives and approach to a specific project theme.

“In some countries the journey could take the whole day to get to your arriving point. Travelling 400km it took me 1,5 day. You see it also reflected in the culture. Infrastructure has an influence on how people work.”

“It was a career counselling project, where the outcome of the project could not brought back with the same results like in (N.N.) There the project participants had already a background for this topic, whereas in (N.N.) and in (N.N.) there is no background, no sensibility for the topic within the country, it's still on the development phase. Result was a training course: But in (N.N.) there are no structures for this kind of courses, people are not yet open for the topic...”

“Life long learning in (N.N.) is already very developed but the system of supporting elderly people is not that developed in (N.N.) and (N.N.),...creativity played an important role to find a common level so that everybody can take part on the projects.”

“I was questioning the budget distribution and I wanted to talk about it but the reaction of the other partners was to put me down.”

“I have heard many times that EU managers have a need for multifunctional partners and I agree with them. But this is hard to find in (N.N). Me myself I am very adapted to this and I am a very desired partner for western EU countries. So I have no difficulties with partners from western EU countries. I have already the western style I suffer mostly in my own environment because I don't have many staffs with these competencies around me.”

## **Stereotyping**

We all have stereotypes but we have to be aware of them.

“We should be not so afraid of our stereotypes, because stereotyping is a way how the things functioning. You categories things and you intend to put new experiences in to old categories. That is efficient and this is nothing to be ashamed of. You just have to be aware of it. My idea is if you put people through exercises where they have to base some judgement on their own sets of criteria or their rules their own general cultural aspects. If you can manage to see yourself as different then you will also be able to accept that others are different.

Sometimes it can be beneficial to ask people to look at different cultures within their own country. People in the North are different from the South from the East or West of a country. The intercultural issue is not necessarily international issue it can be also a national issue.”

One interviewee emphasises: “Make use of stereotypes in the beginning of project!”

Cultural Stereotyping is mostly a generalization about the attitudes and behaviour of people from a specific group or nation. Nationality is usually seen as a cultural unit

within political boundaries. But in many cases Nationality is artificial and an elite class usually constructed national culture. But as humans are learning to survive through adaptation, people behave in some cases as they are supposed to behave – although migration and globalization finally disenchant the myth of a genuine national culture, which is a relict of the last Centuries.

*"Why should I be a minority in your republic when you can be a minority in mine?" -- Anonymous activist, former Yugoslavia*

for further information see also

**Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press, December 1983.**

It offers a theory of nationalism, which focuses on the social origins of the phenomenon. The author examines several aspects of social organization in industrialized society in developing his theory regarding the relationship between national culture and the state.

“Our country has not a very good image in Europe because of the Gipsies but not only because of them sometimes at the beginning of a project we have to convince that we are a reliable partner and sometimes it is a challenging job for us.”

“Coordinator should try to get a profile of the partners, which competencies they have for example give Italians communication tasks and Fins organizational tasks.”

Note: This Project Manager could fail if he/she sticks to that concept in general. Project reality shows that cultural generalizations cannot be taken for granted.

Stereotypes could also be expressed unconsciously as the following statement shows. The very positive contribution neglects the presence of female as coordinators. It could be misunderstood. Cultural awareness needs an awareness of diversity and equal opportunity too. To avoid discriminations a gendered language should be used:

“The project that is working the best is one where the co-ordinator is very good. He manages the project well. He is very keen and committed to the aims of the project and also very keen to get the most out of the cultural aspects of the project. It is important to get the balance right.”

### **Different concepts of time and space**

“We had a partner from (N.N.) and it seems that in their culture you may have an appointment at 9.00 and it is possible to show up at 10.30. It seems to be acceptable And they were surprised that we were surprised that they showed up so late. For them it was completely normal, because they had reasons (disabled child, they had to stay with it, because they went to bed late in the evening and the child had to sleep longer) but there were no need for an excuse. That was completely new for me, but you have to get adjust to that. We would expect people to inform us in advance don't start at 9 start at 10.30. But in their few of looking on things this was completely normal. These kinds of differences you will have all over Europe of course. I don't know what will happen in their country if the others were still waiting

for you they seem to expect that.”

The following example shows how diverse political concepts in history might effect peoples perspective on future and working on it. It shows how time and space concepts might differ from each other and could cause challenging situations.

“The people in (N.N.) need to make afford, need to work on themselves, need to work on a certain perspective and not only on the day to day basis.”

“In our political history we had 5 year planning (governmental planning) and an every year planning on the organizational level. So every year the organizations had to present a new plan. If you focus it on the (N.N.) population, they are not used to plan, not even for a year. So when they get money they will spend it for three days in the restaurant and than all the money has gone.”

“People from N.N. when they are working within a project they never think on the future of the project. There is no perspective for sustainable development. They still think the project is a closed initiative they don't have a perspective or vision for the future. You get some money, you have some activities, you spent the money and then it's over. People don't believe that projects are to generate further sustainability. They have somehow a short-term vision. This is the big difference between Western and Eastern project perception.”

**Intermediate question:**

**Do you think there are also positive aspects of short-term vision?**

Maybe you are more focused on the present work. But it doesn't make sense. I think also what I can see in (N.N.) the people don't want to develop themselves.

**Intermediate question:**

**I would be interested if you could give me also an example about how and what could so called western EU Managers learn from eastern EU Managers?**

This is a difficult question. I wonder if western EU Mangers could learn something from Bulgarian style. Because the EU Project Management is your style it is your model. We are the one who have to learn. We didn't have a project model before. So it comes from you. When I started with EU Projects 15 years ago it was always required that we take the know how from the EU. We learned the EU model, we learned the project management, we learned everything, the framework, the reporting, the guidelines,....So I have the perception that I have to learn from you because you are more developed than other.

**Intermediate question:**

**You think so??**

Yeah, yeah that's true, definitely!

## D. Intercultural Competences

Most of the European Project Managers developed their intercultural competences through practice and not at all through formal concepts.

“I remember my 1<sup>st</sup> project where I attend as a partner. There was a partner from (N.N.)...We had meal but we completely forgot that the Easter time in (N.N.) is after our Easter time and so some of them don't eat meat during this period. We didn't realize that and we didn't ask. And they didn't tell it also. So they just refused to eat meat. They explained it to us after having meal. They didn't tell us before the meeting and we also didn't ask. What did I learn? Now I am aware of this kind of differences and I ask in advance. If somebody is vegetarian, if there are some special wishes or needs to consider. From that moment I was being aware of differences between cultures.”

“We don't mention it in the application form. We don't see it openly, yet it appears (is inherent) in all projects. We learn intercultural issues by participating in projects, without realising it. The intercultural issue is there in all projects but is not explicit.”

“People get to know each other and become open about their experiences and situations.”

“We live in a multicultural world and European projects are an excellent tool to bring together people from different cultures, working together on themes of common interest.”

“I am learning through my practice because the intercultural issue was not popular in Bulgaria before. But I find it definitely important to train on it.”

“I think I am working on my experiences more than on concepts”

“I have experiences with intercultural teams. I realized that it is important to be very receptive in the first stage, to look at the others, to see that they assume and what are their work etics, people have different ways of doing things. Observe and listen attentively to these things, than it might be easier for you to ask what you don't understand and you might discuss on it.”

## Hard Skills and Soft skills for transnational EU Project Management

One of the finding is that EU Projects have their own culture (technically and socially). Not every partner seemed to be familiar with it. Therefore transnational EU Projects need specific Hard and soft Skills.

## Hard Skills of EU Project Management might be

- Language competencies at least English (fluently written and spoken)
- Knowledge of EU Project Management practices (Survival Kit)
- General knowledge of countries history, politics, economics, special behaviours,..
- Achievement of outputs and outcomes
- Achievement of sustainability beyond the project
- Goal oriented approach more than process oriented (you have to follow the project plan)
- ...

“If the partners are experienced in EU-projects then we don’t have problems. But sometimes project leaders are not so good experienced and then we encounter problems of understanding and mostly problems of stereotyping arise especially during the meetings.”

“People who do not have any English skills, come along with a colleague who can. But the colleague is not an experienced interpreter and only translates when she feels like. On one occasion the non English speaker stopped coming to the meetings.”

“On one project I have had a co-ordinator who doesn’t know how to coordinate. He does not have a grip on where we are at, and what needs to be done, he comes along to the meetings for the social element only. The rest of the team has to pull together to make things work.”

“Some partners do not know how to facilitate meetings and don’t get the best out of them.”

## Soft Skills of EU Project Management might be

- Social Communication and interaction skills
- Self Reflection (to be conscious and aware about how I feel, think and act)
- Observational Participation (To observe action and reaction of participants during the meetings)
- Careful listening
- to be open for Synergies
- to be open to learn something new
- community/team building approach
- ...

## Communication

EU Project Managers see communication and opportunities for getting to know each other as something essential within a EU Project. “Meetings should make provisions to allow participants to work on project issues but also to socialise and exchange information about everyday life, etc.”

“Nothing much happens between meetings. If you don’t communicate with people and prod them, nothing happens.”

Giving the example of a research on intercultural project management where 40 Managers of international projects were interviewed about successful intercultural project management, most of the interviewees (16) agreed that a “constant stream of communication (75% of the project work) is important due to the different needs across cultures.

(source of the study: Lamson Consulting Diversity & Intercultural Management)

### **As a reason for a constant communication stream they stated out:**

“Good communication helps people understand each other. Need continuous contact. Can check if everyone is doing the tasks and working towards the fulfilment of the project aims.”

“To understand people better. Without understanding you can’t deliver the project. Communication is the most important thing.”

“There are difficulties in communicating with people due to language difficulties. The more you talk the easier it is.”

“It is a process, diversity cannot be understood in one meeting. It is a continuous process and needs time and continuous contact. Understanding each other is a process and not a single event.”

“Many problems are caused due to lack of understanding and due to the fact that people are geographically dispersed. Even with electronic communication tools to hand, the reality is that the person you are working with is not in the office next door but many miles away, Generally work slows down between meetings unless a conscious effort is made to keep in touch and keep on top of things. Without good communication nothing happens. Good communication is the catalyst to making things happen.”

“We have to battle with language differences and cultural differences. Communication dialogue is really important. We need a mixture of different communication methods.”

“Communication is the most effective tool in the intercultural issue”

“Because if you don’t have a proper communication within a partnership the whole

project the whole work on the project can be put in danger, because people who work together should understand each other very well. Sometimes there are some misunderstandings just because people lack cultural awareness. The language is a very big issue. A native speaker should be aware all the time that English is not the native language of everybody.”

“I have not measured the percentage, it seems to be a lot. But I agree that communication is important because the project has to be developed and without communication it is not possible to work it through. There are only 3-4 meetings annually.”

“Maybe 75% is too much but communication is important because it would reduce somehow the differences.”

“Because of the common work and common objective and you cannot have this without common discussions and decisions and how the project work should proceed. Each project step should be undertaken a common decision, should be discussed and agreed by everybody.”

### **Different communication styles through mimic and gestures**

There are different behaviours to communicate and signs of expressions differ from one culture to another as the examples from Bulgaria illustrate. The difference might cause misunderstandings:

“A colleague from Sweden coming to a meeting to Bulgaria asked the taxi driver are you going to take me to the hotel and the taxi driver answered in the Bulgarian style. Then the Swedish colleague did not move because he thought the taxi-driver is busy and won't bring him to the hotel.”

“Bulgarian don't look you in the eyes if you are the boss. This might cause difficulties. Managers from other countries coming to Bulgaria think that people who don't look in to their eyes are hiding for something.”

“A colleague from England asked a Bulgarian who was a kind of self restrictive person with no facial expression something and she said just no. That might be offensive for the English person, because somebody from England answers with “No, thank you” or “yes, please!”

### **Different concept of physical delimitation of a person**

“Bulgarians intend to move very close to you that might be embarrassing for those who are not used to it, also the touching the person during a conversation. Southern people used to touch other people, which mean a friendly gesture.”

## Differences due to religious background

“How to communicate with a female teacher with Islamic religious background wearing the Tschador and teaching language?”

## Skills how to identify and solve misunderstandings

“In a project I was coordinating we had an evaluation session. We put stickers on the wall to describe our experience from the project. One thing that core people’s attention was that one of the participants from Spain put on the sticker “Nordic arrogance”. The people from the Nordic countries, meaning Norway, Denmark, Finland, Sweden said, what’s this? Why and they talked about it later in the evening. But this was the final day so we didn’t brought up again until the group met again three months later. Than it appeared when the Scandinavians wondered and scratched their head and talked about, what does this mean?? And than it appeared that what she was referring to was the efficiency with which the native speaker of English could talk with their language without paying attention to the fact that some are not so good of speaking the language. So the Nordic was actually British, coming from the North. And it created a problem for three month because the people didn’t bring up immediately, what was meant by this “Nordic arrogance”.”

## What could you do differently?

“You should have the intercultural courage to ask...and I as a coordinator should have brought up.”

Note:

Looking on an objective level on this example it shows, that the problem of stereotyping still exists, even if the content of the blaming expression could be clarified. But than still a question remains - Why the British people should be arrogant? There where no British people on the meeting – which on the first hand is unfair to blame somebody who can not defeat him/herself. Second it shows, that it seems to be easier to criticise a person if he/she is absent than to address directly when the problem arises.

## The most used virtual tools for intercultural communication are

- **E-mail** followed by
- **Skype** or **Video Conferences** (success of this depends on the knowledge and technical ability of the partners). It can take one year for partners to feel comfortable using this technology.
- **Telephone** (for urgent reasons)
- **internet chat** (pressure to write something down fast)
- **website – wiki or blogs**
- **Post** (for original documents for applications)
- Some use MSN and one uses Open source learning platforms (Moodle and Drupal)

The frequency of communicating with partners depends on the stage of the project.

“It depends on the phase of the project in some phases you need very intensive contact and during some phases you better leave people alone and let them better do their work because otherwise they feel pressure. I restrict that contacts being functional at that moment. You should know when it is an important moment to get in contact. You should be flexible on that. But that means that you are closely following developments.”

Not everybody seems to practise regular communication with project partners  
One stated that

“In European projects we intend to communicate not too much. We have communications before meetings and one two weeks after meetings. Normally by Email, Messenger, sms, sometimes Skype, face-to-face meetings. But the level of communication is very low.”

Virtual tools are necessary because of the usually small number of face-to-face meetings during the project but they are limited in their possibilities to communicate. Emails can cause misunderstandings – So you have to be aware on that

“Nothing compares to direct communication, you see sometimes that project coordinator are addressing the whole group with messages that affect only a few of them (e.g. reminder that the report being late or something like that) The risk is that those who are not late will feel uncomfortable. It's better to have this through direct contact and you may speak with the person more private than with the whole group. It's time consuming of course but it avoids misunderstandings, which are time consuming as well.”

Virtual tools are not found easy for everybody and cause resistance

“We had a virtual office in a Grundtvig project were we used several communication tools we used a chat-room, forum, we left messengers for each other, we could load or post documents, etc. It was a way to expand communication and communication tools but we are facing some resistance most of the partners in using the tool.”

What was the difficult to use the tool successful?

“First of all we didn't know the tool. We received a kind of guide we explored the tool, with communication tool inside but it was not easy, it was not friendly user. We had some difficulties in the beginning almost every partner showed some resistance in using it. It costs a lot of time to get familiar with it. If it would be used for every European project than it would be ok. But if you have to use always a different tool for each project than it would be difficult and it would need a lot of time.”

Some partners don't respond Emails

"I like to have fast answers and like using e-mails. I try to answer e-mails the same day or the next day. If I can't then I always send an e-mail saying I will respond when I can. However, some partners are very bad at this and don't respond and you never know whether they have received your e-mail."

But as one of the interviewees stated, "for every project there are usually new tools, it is a learning process." It depends on how partners are willing in to that process and how much time they have to concentrate on it and that makes a difference, which might be challenging too.

## **Suggestions of good practice in intercultural project management**

### **Teambuilding**

Give time to talk through difficult situations:

"In one project we had 10 minutes slot where we asked everyone if he/she feels comfortable and we gave people time to address issues. Issues only become visible if we talk about them."

"Give the participants the possibility to get to know each other, to be able to interact with each other, many of these stereotypes disappear, when people get the possibility to know each other."

"Informal times of the meetings are an important element of the project for interaction and understanding each other and provides the intercultural approach necessary for European projects."

"Communication and getting to know the country and organisations of the partners – informal community building"

"The integration of different cultures was considered an enrichment to the whole partnership as the project gave everybody the opportunity of learning something more about the culture of the participating countries. It also helped participants to analyse similarities and differences. To discover that there were more similarities than differences make everybody to feel closer."

## Leadership

“Make Checklist of questions to ask delegates eg medical conditions, dietary requirements etc. Ask people about their needs, and make allowances. “

“Some way of letting new people to European projects know about things to expect. Working on European projects is very different to national projects and if you are not prepared for different ways of working it comes as a bit of a shock. Preparing people for this can save valuable project time. We can't solve everything but we can prepare people to expect differences, be more tolerant and give them skills to manage people and situations.”

“It is very important that project leaders are good leaders and be aware of these critical steps. They have to handle different issues with diplomacy and should be able to manage conflicts or to avoid them. So it would be very important for your project to train the leaders of EU Projects.”

“In some projects project leaders handle cultural differences with funny introductions at the kick of meeting, e.g. present something funny about your culture.”

“The Project leader might also care for that every partner feels valuable and invites every participant to express the own objectives.”

“Have multicultural brunches, you can speak about similarities and differences by tasting national food or drinks.”

“Give some geographical and cultural instructions before the meeting”

“Good moderation – everybody felt respected and everybody gained an insight into the differences in thinking about the intercultural issue”

“Set up communicative/interactive methods”

## Working practice

“To give space within the meetings to realize that there are differences between the countries in working styles, to bring local elements in”

“To involve the partners in the planning phase to bring the different aspects of a specific issue in”

“Give space to different working practices”

“Give enough space for everybody to introduce personally and the organization”

“Give space for flexibility beside the structure. I remember a meeting in Sweden, that

one of my project partner talked about an liberal adult education school in Sweden and the eyes of the other participants showed that they did not really understand what he was saying. So he said, can we provide a bus, so we can go there. Instead of trying to find words to explain what he was talking about it, he said, you have to see it. And we went there with the bus.”

“Common framework of the project”

“Glossar with key words of transnational European project management would be really helpful. It was difficult for me to understand the project language.”

“There is also a matter on developing intercultural encourage, daring to ask questions to source out misunderstanding.”

“Handbook or guide which gives some examples of some cultural differences within the cycle of the project developments could help to avoid of course not all but several problems arising from cultural differences. It may help to be aware of different cultural backgrounds and we could react better and faster I think.

Content could be about the way of work, the way, how to produce materials, the way of presenting work could differ from one culture to the other.”

“A collection of case studies”

“Another collection could be done virtually inform of cartoons that would point out some differences and help us this situation could happen in a kick off meeting etc.”

“Normally in the Eastern countries they have the idea that we are right or we have the right culture and they are wrong. A Handbook, guide or even cartoons should be presented without valuing it should be presented balanced just how situations could happen.”

“Conference should be planned together ”

“Value the time of the partners and do not waste time”

“Choose no locations which are far away from airports (for a stay for only 2 days)  
Come clear at the beginning with the dates (cheap tickets) and do not change the dates”

“Project works well if all the partners enter into the idea of the project from the kick off meeting. After that it is a matter of keeping up with the tasks and communicating regularly using the ICT tools. The co-ordinator has to stress this from the beginning, after that the project is nice and simple. It depends on good co-ordination.”

## Communication

“Using good ICT tools to communicate and manage projects is essential, for example Marratech and Basecamp.”

“Involving people in exercises, where participants getting aware of their own cultural context. One of our challenges is making people aware of the peculiarities of their own culture. If you manage to see your own culture from the outside you have come quite far....One of the exercises that I have used is called non verbal communication with a non verbal interview: How much do you find out about a person with not using words? You realize that there are non verbal signals and they are not necessarily the same in all cultures.”

“During the meetings give a lot of space for communication – for example in the beginning presentations. Mix the groups, so that everybody gets in contact with each other.”

In one Project we spent the whole of the first meeting establishing common ground. We organised the work, how we will communicate, agreed a common working platform for communication. This made the project easy going. Still had problems with one partner, as she didn't understand many things. At the beginning it was important to find out that everyone understood the project, found common ways of progressing with the project, had to get behind what the project really is about. Because everyone signs up to a project we think that they understand what the project is about and that they are all as committed, but that is not always the case.

## Others

“European projects have sometimes a problem to start in the way they should because of misunderstanding and cultural differences. It would be an idea to install a task force group of experienced people who could help to start EU-projects and to guide them if necessary.”

“The design of the project made provisions to integrate all cultural backgrounds from project partners. In this way everybody understood that their own cultural background was part of a bigger picture.”

“Related to the question: what does ‘intercultural’ mean to us – there were interesting discussion processes. Partners gave examples of their understanding of intercultural practice. For example differences in experience.”

“Giving equal talking space to men and women”

“An underlying principle should be the answer to questions like what can we learn from others? How can we contribute to a better dissemination of our cultural features? How can we contribute to the building of a European citizenship?”

“Need to make more time available to discuss things, to get to know each other, to

understand how different people work. It is important to visit each partner in their own environment to help understand them better.”

### **Some suggested Exercises**

- Getting to know each other:  
Ball of wool throwing from one to another by introducing myself and giving some additional information as objectives or greeting in the national language (language awareness)”
- Examples of what can go wrong as case studies or videos
- Kick off meeting: creative introduction of everybody (buy logos, symbols,...)
- You tell a story in a very neutral way and then you ask people to create a moral behaviour of the people involved within the story. Who was the bad, who was the best,...? You get very interesting discussions out.

### **Some Links**

<http://www.statvoks.no/ictal/>  
<http://www.statvoks.no/euromigranet/>  
(EU Project that touched upon the intercultural issue)

### **Note from one interview**

It was an interview with Peter Jarvis who is one of the best known adult educators in Europe. He had the idea about a check list which could be made beside the Tool kit, very simple and convenient. Such like “first steps to a good cooperation” or do’s and don’ts in EU-projects.