

SURVEY INTERTool - PHASE I

2300171-CP-1-2006-1-DE-Grundtvig G1

Questionnaires

March 2007

www.intercultural.ro/intertool

Summary

The Questionnaire was addressed to Partners of transnational European Projects in adult education.

Approximately 250 questionnaires were sent out, 41 returned, 3 of them had an old version and were not put into the summary. The response rate is about 16%, which is within the usual norm.

Not everybody answered all questions, especially those about the tool. Some of them probably didn't understand what was meant with a tool, although a definition was given. More than 50% did not use a specific tool in practice of EU Projects based on the intercultural issue. An additional question might have been needed: Would they find it necessary?

More than 50% could not identify unsolvable problems arising from cultural differences. Tools handling with cultural differences might be used but they seem to be not very consciously. It came out that tools for intercultural issues are mostly used for evaluations (58% found an intercultural tool useful for this task or phase) and meetings (55%). 16% did not answer this question.

Generally spoken, quite a lot and valuable examples of **cultural misunderstandings** and especially **stereotypes** were given. We received more examples of intercultural problems than examples for good intercultural practice in transnational EU Projects. It might lay in the nature of human that if something is functioning good there is no need for reflection. On the other side people gave a lot of suggestions what means intercultural competence to them and what competencies might be needed in European Projects (it is an nearly endless list of suggestions)

As **critical points** in transnational EU Projects could be identified:

Team development

Time for getting to know each other, team development sequences, time for socializing, equal treatment and a diversity approach helps to get a good working platform,...

Leadership

Project leaders play a major role in handling the impact of intercultural issues in the project development, which are unavoidable. The leader is also a participant and brings his/her culture in.

Communication

In an intercultural environment it is very important to have high competences in communication practice in all its fields (verbal, nonverbal, IT-based), as well as language competences written and spoken. High self reflection skills, and self awareness are essential for a successful intercultural communication as a citation of Gudykunst stated: "The way we define ourselves affects the way we communicate" / *William B. Gudykunst (source: quote in the questionnaire)*
Because of the small amount on face-to-face meetings IT-skills are inevitable.

Cultural stereotyping

Most of the stereotyping is taking place due to nationalistic categories. People from North intend to be...whereas people from South are...etc.
The diversity approach would help to avoid generalizations. In some quotes the worse part of stereotypes appear as cultural discrimination.

Personal competences

Beside hard skills as Project Management, language, general knowledge of EU countries (History, Politics, Economy, Education,...)
there are many responses on that
Being capable to adapt to different cultural environments and practices

Intercultural challenging situations usually occur **during meetings** and mainly **at the beginning** of a project.

There is an interest on the development of an intercultural tool (20 of the respondent were poised for giving an interview)

Some of the respondents have been project partners and coordinators as well. In summary the survey represents among half of the European countries representing Northern, Eastern, Western and Southern Europe.

Except within the section of Stereotyping we quit mentioning the names of countries of the given examples. But we use the name of countries of the given examples to emphasizes the dangers of stereotyping.

A. Background information

Most of the respondents take/ or took part in Grundtvig (33), Leonardo (16), PRINCE (14), other Socrates (12), PHARE (9) other Programmes (11) from this (6) are not financed by the EU.

Most of the respondents have been coordinators and partners as well 7 (less than 20%) of them were only partners in EU-projects. To me it seemed that more respondents were men, but there was no space for gender categories.

For 50% it was not their first EU-project.

B. Working Practice in transnational European Projects

- 1.0. Could you give an example of good intercultural practice in transnational projects? (NA=No Answer provided)

Yes	No	NA
27	5	4

27 ticked off "Yes" but not all of them gave an example. (We collected some more useful examples with the interviews. People probably intent to remember more the problematic situations than those, which might function)

Examples of good intercultural practice:

1.1. General examples

"There are still very precious contacts and the projects created among the partners a deeper understanding of "the other". The project meetings/conferences lead to an intensive exchange of ideas and opinions. Sometimes we were able to find a "common project spirit". You have to spend more time for "getting to know" each other, but this time is absolutely necessary and helps to avoid later misunderstandings etc."

“To establish from the very beginning an explicit 'code of behaviour' how to proceed in case of conflict. The necessity to establish such a code has been recognized through the conflicts.”

“The inclusion of social activities to help people to get to know their other partners.”

“The management/ coordinator of the project did share the ICT tools for communication, list of achievements, obstacles, deadlines and record keeping of the expenditures. The ICT tool was transparent to all partners for comments and suggestions on activities also carried out by others.”

“The introduction of each partner/country during the kick off meeting, negotiating responsibilities in project and coordinating work packages responsibilities, project meetings organised in different partner countries, presentation of case studies emerging from local/national context.”

“...Learning some words in partners' language”

“...I appreciate my participation in all transnational projects which in all cases give me the opportunity to learn and see how the others work and live...”

“Some projects have successfully been done in terms of mutual understanding with partners from different countries and cultures local/national context”

1.2. Concrete examples

The Adventures of Hocus and Lotus, The Dinocrocs grow up
(language training for children):

“The projects in which we were coordinators were aimed at the production of materials to teach languages to small children (age from 3 to 8) in a European context, according to the results of a research conducted by the University of Rome La Sapienza. The approach uses the same process children use to learn their mother language, through telling stories and the acting out of them. It was essential to overcome intercultural differences.... Cultural stereotypes were avoided: Hocus and Lotus are addressed to all children, with no cultural stereotypes as race, colour of skin, wardrobe, religious or civil celebrations. There are no persons in the stories but extravagant animals in which children can identify themselves. Also the names, Hocus and Lotus were chosen in order not to have a national connotation....”

Face Value (Joint Actions Programme)

Edycate (Leonardo da Vinci 2003)

1.1. Did you use specific tools?

Yes	No	NA
16	22	0

1.2. If yes, could you please name and describe the tool being used?

More than 50% did not use a specific tool. It could also be that some were not aware or conscious of using a specific tool. Not all of those who ticked off "Yes" gave an example for a used tool.

Responses:

- Plan time and resources (external moderator) for the partners to undergo a process of Intercultural learning/communication about negotiating values and procedures, which are often perceived as cultural differences.
- Open Source Software - Moodle and Drupal, Mambo, Klearn, Marratech
- Dedicated " Content Management system - Knotes "
- Not free software – Basecamp
- CMS for communication and managing all related activities and documents for the project
- LMS for managing produced course materials and communication
- Compilation of curricula of the participating countries, extracting the common points, re-brushing them and developing out of that a basic for the partners for a European curriculum
- Not sure if I understand properly what you mean by 'tool' ...- perhaps that's a cultural difference in itself. I tend to Include 'ice-breakers' to demonstrate space and respect for participants' languages and get people communicating better, and a 'multicultural buffet' with contributions from all cultures present has proved v. popular. The other sort of 'tools' I use I would describe more as project management tools. I think if the project management is good ... that helps unite a project and get over intercultural differences. However, it should be said that all the projects I have participated in are to do with language learning ... therefore all participants are already 'open' and used to dealing with other cultures.
- Specific web space for sharing of experience, blog addresses
- Barnaga role-play
- Creative play, audio-visual expression (in Face Value)
- Mini-company (in Edycate)
- Just informal means, such as establishing a communication matrix that uses diverse media and means, negotiation and agreeing in order to transform partners' specific inputs into project outputs

- A PHP communication platform where the partners could upload documents, see the progress of each work package, discuss on the forum, etc.
- Model platform for the communication between partners and target group. www.modal-eu.net, Interactive Website

2.0. Could you give an example, where problems deriving from cultural differences could not be resolved in a European Project?

Yes	No	NA
15	19	4

Most of the examples state communication problems, lack of cultural awareness, critics on the leadership style and skills due to personal culture, organisational and ethnic/national culture patterns, Stereotypes and also discriminations.

Responses:

- Traditional meals are different. My English is not very good, so can't make myself understood well.
- Autocratic leadership (...) led to unbalanced partnership and resignation
- Some meetings are not managed very well. Time is wasted, there is little respect for partners, there is no meeting etiquette, and progress is not made towards achieving objectives of the project. We run out of time and things remain unresolved, which compound the problem at the next meeting.
- My problems deriving from cultural differences refer to some partners from certain EU countries. My experience shows that we manage to work in a good partnership with colleagues from (...) and quite difficult with colleagues from (...). (...) In general demonstrate unfriendliness to us as (...) and (...) are very difficult to get on with. Dutch and Belgium are more tolerant and kind in general. And this is rather common opinion and impression amongst Bulgarian project people. In my case, although the mentioned difficulties, problems are always being resolved between us.
- To install new organisational structures within a conference although we as a European group had entirely planned it in a cooperative way with the partner
- Socrates Grundtvig 2 project:
The majority of partners are from "accessing countries". Partners feel strong about own position and traditions. Also, partners from (...) often do not support active communication in the project activities.
- Lack of willingness to understand the cultural differences and focus only on project results relevant for their country
- Problems concerning different traditions in the field of education of career counsellors and in different concepts of counselling in different countries. The main problem though had nothing to do with cultural differences, but was caused by one project partners' lack of cooperation and lack of responsibility

- concerning mutual agreements.
- Racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination appear sometimes in EU projects, bringing thus problems in partnership during the project lifecycle.
 - Personal approach. The problems are not explainable from cultural difference. They play only a minor role.
 - Different ways and traditions preventing to work in a successful way on products
 - Communication problems between project partners concerning the communication tools and styles e.g. 'cultural differences' that were induced economically, through budget ceilings: for the same tasks/no of hrs/quality of work, staff costs for different countries signal that some partners are different than others, some are 1st hand EU citizens, other are not; since these calculations seem to be based on correct or manipulated, but officially reported statistics these issues cannot be solved by the project coordinator or partners and they create 'cultural difference' that has an impact on the projects
 - There was a disagreement concerning the realisation of the content due to variable systems in European vocational education systems. One partner did not fully agree with the majority, though eventually did what had been agreed but the situation did indeed affect to the atmosphere of the rest of the project. Not understanding due to language barrier.

2.1. Do you have an idea, how the problem described in No.B.2.0. Could have been or could be resolved??

Yes	No	NA
10	9	19

The Responses touches mostly fields of intercultural communication practices and trainings, improvements on communication skills, team building exercises and leadership development, which could provide intercultural challenging situations.

A selection of responses:

- Some partners agreed to insist on discussion due to different views and/or problems and try to find common agreements
- Clear objectives for the meeting. Better time management. Provision for listing issues raised and making time available at the end to resolve them.
- ...Once the others learn about me – my skills and attitude to people, colleagues, work and life – things start to run smoother.
- Exposing all partners to intercultural (and perhaps playful) exercises in physical meetings can take away some of the "pompousness".
- More communication!!! More interactive methods for team building, etc.

- Personal meetings, knowing each other....and better knowledge of language
- It might have been resolved only during the initial planning of the project proposal by discussing with all partners in great detail, and if necessary, by finding another partner...

3.0. Have you encountered the stereotyping of cultures? (Please give an example)

Yes	No	NA
19	15	4

Quote:

“People often have a prejudice concerning other people or cultures they do not really know.”

There was a long list of examples on stereotyping as listed below. The majority of them are a kind of national stereotyping mentioning negative or challenging aspects due to nationality. Some examples show that stereotypes are dealing with general classifications, which cause unfair preconceptions and solutions.

Some responses:

- Italian national agency gave a delayed decision, this was perceived as 'typical' Italian Inefficiency and time management (which was not the case - delay was due to freezing by the Commission)
- Self-stereotyping in the case of Italian and Estonian colleagues that interactive and more affective oriented methods are not part of their learning culture (due to partial perception)
- Romanian partners for economic reasons
- Turkish partners for different religion.
- Turkish partners in one meeting have appeared to be autocratic and other partners have tended to stereotype all Turkish people in the same way.
- Prejudices to personal attitudes of different nationalities.
- We had the Image, that the Germans are cold. We corrected this bias.
- Time management: Germans are always on time, Mediterranean partners have often a different understanding of exactingness
Discussions: partners from eastern countries are more reserved
- Italians are talkative
- People living in Scandinavia are self-contained, cold
- Spanish people are passionate
- Part of this is already mentioned above. Additionally, Polish and Turkish colleagues are also difficult to work with, because they very often do not comply with agreed deadlines and commitments. My experience shows that Turkish people do not know what a deadline means actually, they demonstrate

bad quality of work and bad reporting. Turkish do not trust the other nations, it is almost impossible to find a partner from Turkey via Internet if no connections exist before that. They never respond to an inquiry or request, extremely non-European behaviour and attitude. Polish behave also somehow strange as project partners. They pretend to be important and knowledgeable but many colleagues complain of their bad experience with Polish who perform badly in their project work, meaning quality of products, reporting, responsibilities, attitude to partners, etc.

- E.g the Mediterranean partners are afraid of new elements of methodology having developed by the western part: Implementing workshops in conferences – it seems to be better to have all the lecturer speaking one after the other. And no contribution from the speaking one after the other.

It was interesting: Nobody gave positive Stereotypes e.g Italians are good cooks, or Finns are good teachers, German are good Technicians etc., which might not be true for everyone. Men are good drivers. It sounds positive but it is a stereotype too.

- After several big EU projects with 15+ members, I'd say there's no question that (with danger of generalising ...) partners from below 'the wine belt' (a phrase from one of our Bulgarian colleagues ;-) ... tend to have a different attitude to:
 - time (more flexible);
 - reporting (later, but more relaxed about it);
 - coffee (more necessary & must be stronger);
 - discussion (overlapping discourse more common and acceptable);
 - finances (more relaxed - rounding up or down to nearest Euro - not reporting 'cents');
 - food (more important & discussions over it also important part of the proceedings)
 - protocol (with e.g. senior members of their institutions) often more formal and necessary
 - smoking
- A lot of cultural stereotypes, some turned into funny jokes (esp. northern cultures), some in negative feeling (against gypsies or Eastern European cultures)
- We had the Image, that the Germans are cold. We corrected this bias.
- German "Ordnung" as style of working
- The Finns are poor in small talking – they stick to the working issues.
- The Swedish partners can't make decisions after they have talk for ages about the matter.

The given responses proved that in the INTERTool Project we have to spend a specific issue on stereotyping which seems to cause many misunderstandings and somehow, if not resolved, frustrating working atmosphere in EU Projects. On the other side EU Projects are a big effort to diminish national stereotyping, because of interaction experience with each other.

C. Competences

1.0. What do you think are the main intercultural competencies needed in European Projects?

There are hard skill competences, as knowledge of language, history of EU countries, religions, IT-skills,... but most of the competences seen as a need in European Projects are soft skill competences (open minded, interested, aware on personal attitudes, adaptability, respect and acceptance of the other,...)

Responses:

- In my opinion, you have to be tolerant, curious and open. You have to be ready to “prove” yourself, to accept others/other cultures. It is sometimes useful when you can laugh about yourself or your own country
- Negotiating skills
- Awareness of the ethnocentricity of own knowledge, Interpretation, definition etc. (Amartja Sen)
- On a personal level - Adaptability, Plurality, Tolerance
Otherwise - communication skills, IT skills and the ability to understand accented speech.
- Speaking English
- Interest in other countries (traditions, way of living so.)
- Foreign languages skills
- History knowledge
- Knowledge of other Religions
- Respect to the others, openness to other cultures and mentality, preparedness to judge upon personal skills rather than on national belonging, equal treatment of all EU nations by the European Commission also.
- the ability to listen (take in information) in a non-judgemental way (non-ethnocentric)

- the ability to see your own culture as something particular (not a standard)
- Confidence in your own values, which makes it easier to accept other people's values
- The project manager should not take anything for granted; every detail and term has to be discussed as there can be different kinds of national interpretations for the terms used. Understanding cultural differences related to e.g. e-mail messages. What is a normal approach in Finland, seems to be quite rude in British way of thinking.
- a good sense of humour....

D. Tools for European Projects in Adult Education

Definition: As tools we consider facilities utilized for project management, like planning tools, communication tools, tools for team-cooperation, documentation, etc. The term INTERTool emphasizes the intercultural aspect of a tool.

Do/ did you use any intercultural project tool which you find/ found really useful in the following project tasks?

Responses:

“Internet in general is a tool meant to be transparent to all cultures. Therefore I like to include e.mail, e.groups, functions of web 2.0, Open software (LMS and CMS)”

“In particular , we prefer Basecamp”

All the tools listed below. I would consider general project management tools, rather than specific 'intercultural' tools. I suppose this comes back to my feeling that good project management makes for good intercultural communication.

» Project Planning (structuring, defining, working plan, schedule, budgeting,...)

Yes	No	NA
19	14	5

Listed tools:

Involving partners in the planning process

Basecamp

Spreadsheets

E- Mail

wiki

For large projects I tend to produce a partners 'Handbook' with all the relevant project information, reporting procedures, contact details etc. in user friendly format (i.e. not the whole proposal with all the repetition etc.)

We also develop a 'project workspace' with archive of project e-mails, photos, documents etc. in it.

Definition of different work packages leaders and responsibilities

Gantt sheet, info letters sent periodically to partners reminding the deadlines and tasks

» Project Organisation (leadership, management, coordination,...)

Yes	No	NA
17	15	6

reciprocal observing and visiting of project activities to see how activities are implemented by others (need to understand the language of the other)

Skype, e-groups, Moodle , Basecamp and kdpgroup www.kdpgroup.org

Blogs, wiki, CMS drupal, skype and virtual classrooms for online conferences

Using intercultural learning methods

Eat together! Have Icebreakers and warm up exercises , involve everyone

Communication games, roleplays

Communication always to all partners involved; group works; Communication of aims

Introduction of partners/organisations in kick off meeting, negotiation of work packages and responsibilities, social programme in meetings

Social activities, have the partners work in team, 2 by 2 for example

No specific tools here. We discussed about the working culture in the first project meeting and made some additions before the second meeting. There was an excellent start for team spirit building in the first project meeting: the meeting began with presenting starters for dinner brought from each country, and continued later by social get together with songs or plays presented or

hosted by each partner country.

Team Building Seminar at the beginning of the project to know each other, above all in the case of projects with a very high number of partners.

» Meetings (aims, planning, structuring, organizing, conducting,...)

Yes	No	NA
21	10	7

exemplary experimentation of key activities or tools developed in the project (by other partners) during partner meetings

Skype, e-groups, Marratech, Datumprikker (<http://www.datumprikker.nl>)

Meetomatic.com for organising meetings. Wiki. Checklists.

Telephone, email, personal visits, wiki

Meeting in each of the partner countries

Usual good practice of meeting organisation and documentation

Meetings with local stakeholders, making events out of transnational meetings

Social programs, present to all partners the agenda as a draft version in order

to all have the possibility to had some relevant points on their point of view;

Introduction of partners/organisations in kick off meeting, negotiation of work packages and responsibilities, social programme in meetings, Moodle – platform

In addition to the detailed minutes of the meetings the project manager provided us with a sheet of what should be done next in the project and the time tables agreed.

Taking into account the different cultures represented in the transnational meeting while preparing and managing it.

» Evaluation (objectives, methods, instruments, agreements, agenda,...)

Yes	No	NA
22	11	5

If you see it as a tool: questionnaires, other methods to have opinions in a plenary session, open debates, common develop evaluation framework with online forms in CMS drupal

Online survey (Surveymonkey.com)

Ask partners their opinions and act on them

Activity proofs

Our process evaluation also includes intercultural questions

No specific intercultural tool

Communication of aims and instruments

INKA –evaluation system

If you see it as a tool: questionnaires, other methods to have opinions in a plenary session, open debates

An evaluation form was fulfilled at the end of each meeting to give feedback.

Take into account the intercultural aspects into the evaluation of results' achievement of the project.

» Contracts and financial management (agreements, financing, reporting system,...)

Yes	No	NA
12	18	8

financial issue is sensitive but not 'culture specific – has to be discussed in the planning phase

PhP project, CMS drupal

Try and be as efficient and transparent as possible

Unique system for reporting (tables)

» other sectors regarding to transnational projects, like (distance) communication, book-keeping, reporting, working styles, decision making,

Yes	No	NA
11	22	5

develop forms and report sheets for everybody

CMS drupal includes votings and polls, skype, virtual rooms

Discussion groups, Joomla

Please see above re. workspace

Communications via Messenger or ICQ.

E. Comments

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?

Yes	No	NA
5	-	33

Intercultural project are very exciting and an incredible / unforgettable experience. I did not use any “tools” – and I lost very much time for organizational matters which would be easier if you use helpful “tools”/instruments. The commission should support seriously ideas/projects/preparations for the development of “tools” which make “daily project work” much easier.

In general the working conditions have become worse - I.e. time pressure on individual partners, less resources, multitasking, larger competition for financial resources, number of required partners in officially larger than official number requested, lack of time because of tight budget, exploitation

I would appreciate in my management work to have a kind of time alarming tool to make some project partners be more committed to agreed deadlines. Just to clarify, the tools checked above, are implemented by me as popular and logical management tools, which are well-known amongst European project managers – work plan, distribution of task, WGroups creation, project leadership, evaluation indicators, internal report sheets, etc. We have not developed something special.

Most of the tools we implement are included in the Socrates Survival kit and other manuals alike. The main aim of this sort of tool must be: To make people aware of the fact that our brains tend to categorise things in an over-simplifying manner. We tend to share categories with our immediate surroundings. There is absolutely nothing wrong in this but it can create misunderstanding. We should also be made aware that the intercultural challenge might as big within a country as between countries.

The more technical aspects touched upon in the questionnaire can help many project coordinators avoid statements like: But surely you have a tax registration number. Everybody has." "Your account number has 11 digits only. It should have 14."

Training, vision of totality, all the above are essential, looking forward for the project results :-)