



Toolkit on Intercultural Student Encounters:

Institutional strategies to welcome
cultural diversity in higher education

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Toolkit on Intercultural Student Encounters:

**Institutional strategies to welcome
cultural diversity in higher education**

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1. Introduction

During the last decades, the European Higher Education Area has witnessed a significant increase in student mobility and migration due to a growing globalisation of education. This phenomenon is not only supported by educational policies (e.g., Erasmus programmes), but results from the institution of a worldwide market of higher education (Godin & Rea, 2011), that implies a strong internationalisation of higher education. Of course, there are important consequences for higher education institutions (HEIs) as a whole, but also for administrative and academic staff who “need to adapt the teaching methods, competences and abilities to this new reality” (Sobiesiak, 2012, p. 61). This growth in diversity and difference within higher education might be particularly challenging because, as stated in the UNESCO Guidelines on intercultural education (2006, p. 10), there are “inherent tensions (...) reconciling competing world views (...) [that] reflect the diversity of values which co-exist in a multicultural world”, a process that can, nevertheless, “lend richness to the debate on education and multiculturalism”. And this growth accommodates other sources beyond culture, nationality, and ethnicity, such as age (Amaral & Magalhães, 2009; Amorim, 2018), gender (Kim, 2011; Margolis & Romero, 1998), and socioeconomic background (Bathmaker et al., 2016), to name just a few.

However, even if well intentioned, any effort to discuss the topic of intercultural relations and conflicts – the present toolkit included! – should be aware of essentialist bias that risks treating culture as a fixed and homogeneous entity (Dasli, 2019), underlying each individual’s identity, values and worldviews as if it were a single lane, one-way street. As such, we hope that the strategies presented here are read as efforts to develop bridges between cultures, that celebrate difference and diversity, but also give participants the opportunity to identify the sameness and the radical equality between fellow humans (Arendt, 1995) while at the same time formulating the necessary “transforming questioning that each and every pedagogue [, HE staff and student] has to undertake in the process of reflecting in ever new ways on the ethical problem of difference” (Dasli, 2019, p. 227).

Defining intercultural student encounters and the focus of this Toolkit

International students undergo complex adjustment processes to higher education in their host country, academically but also culturally and socially (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013). This results in different levels of stress while adapting to the new student, university, or learning culture of the host university (Ward et al., 2001). Some groups of international students experience considerable personal, emotional, and social adjustment processes, while other groups of students adjust in a more straightforward way (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013). Meeting local students, practicing the host language with them, or making friends are important objectives of international students, when they go abroad. Thus, social integrations are a key imperative to help international students have a positive experience in higher education (Tinto, 1975). Meeting like-minded peers individually or in small groups is essential for the social integration of international students (Byl et al., 2016), and the classroom is viewed as the most important space for social integration (Fergy et al., 2011). Students who are socially integrated are more likely to graduate. Fergy and colleagues (2011) explicitly mention peer support and making friends as important factors for progression in higher education. This is especially true for an academic stay abroad and the necessity for HEIs to facilitate interactions between local students and international students to foster cultural adaptation. However, this objective is not easy to fulfil.

First, it is important to know how intercultural student encounters are defined. To this end, we recall a definition proposed by a Council of Europe's publication:

“An intercultural encounter is an encounter with another person (or group of people) who is perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself. 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, people from different regional, linguistic, ethnic or religious backgrounds, or 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 individual's 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. In such situations, intercultural competence is required to achieve harmonious interaction and successful dialogue.” (Barrett et al., 2014, p. 16)

Indeed, HEIs around the world have been challenged by an increase in the participation of students from underrepresented groups in HE and especially in student mobility. The examples are very diverse: mature students, first-generation students, disabled students, women, migrants, and ethnic minorities. We hope this Toolkit will contribute to more social inclusion of all student groups.

The main question of this Toolkit is: Which examples and practices of social integration in the form of organised student encounters exist throughout European universities and how can their main strengths and weaknesses be described?

We hope that this toolkit can contribute to:

- the social integration of international students in HEI (Tinto, 1975)
- disseminating different formats of student encounters between international and local students in HEIs;
- enhancing the social responsibility of HEIs;
- promoting a diversity-oriented culture, and a “critical multiculturalism” (Stoer & Cortesão, 1999, p. 30), in HEIs;
- supporting the internationalisation of HEIs, especially regarding international student mobility.

The SOLVINC project and its outputs

SOLVINC is a project that aims at facilitating the development of intercultural and conflict management skills among international students, local students, and HEI staff, as well as to implement intercultural student meetings in HEIs. To do so, the project transferred, for the first time, Cohen-Emerique’s (2015) methodology of critical incidents to the Higher Education context. Before that, this methodology had been used in diverse multicultural settings and areas, such as social work, health care, and adult education.

This project produced four complementary intellectual outputs:

- Culture shocks in higher education. A reader for international students and faculty: how to turn critical incidents into a learning opportunity¹ – and an online tool²;
- Reader on sensitive zones³;
- Exercise toolkit for diversity and internationalisation in higher education⁴;
- And, finally, this Toolkit on intercultural student encounters⁵.

For a more contextualised overview of this Toolkit, we recommend reading the products listed above. The information provided may enrich the implementation of intercultural encounters.

1 <http://learningfromcultureshocks.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Reader-22Nov2019.pdf>

2 <http://learningfromcultureshocks.eu/>

3 <http://solvinc.eu/results/#res2>

4 <http://solvinc.eu/results/#res3>

5 <http://solvinc.eu/results/#res4>

The theoretical and analytical framework of this Toolkit

The collection of these institutional strategies was underpinned by a framework (see Figure 1) created in a previous project (Menezes, Lopes, Amorim, Neves, Pais & Soeiro, 2016), following the classic impact models of higher education proposed by Astin and Tinto, in the 1970s, and Pascarella and Weidman, in the 1980s (see Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, pp. 53-60).

This framework encompasses three main factors:

1. the first factor comprises three dimensions of “structural conditions”:
 - A) Personal background;
 - B) Educational policies;
 - C) Cultural and political dynamics;
2. the second factor, of the HE experience, contains two dimensions:
 - D) Organisational support and policies;
 - E) Students’ experiences;
3. and the third factor is related to the
 - F) Outcomes for individuals, HEIs and society as a whole.

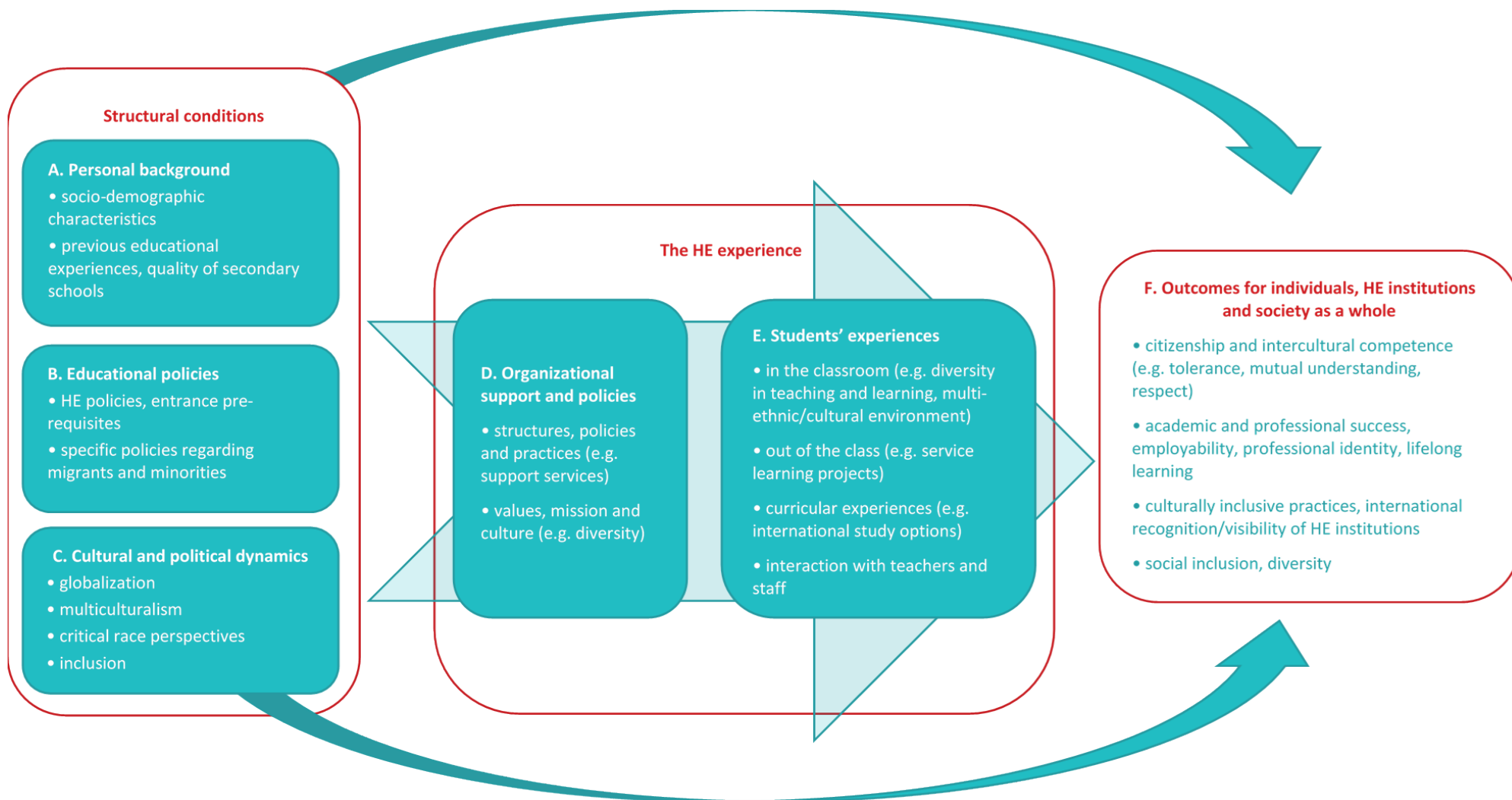


Figure 1: Theoretical and analytical framework

Source: Menezes, Lopes, Amorim, Neves, Pais & Soeiro, 2016, p. 6

This framework shows that the promotion of interculturality is done by intervening in a structural background and has consequences beyond HEIs. In this sense, it would be important to develop methodologies for assessing the impact of these actions on people, HEIs, and society in general, considering dimensions as different as citizenship, intercultural competencies, academic and professional success, employability, professional identity, lifelong learning, culturally inclusive practices, international recognition/visibility of HEIs, social inclusion, diversity (see Figure 1).

The structural conditions should be addressed in institutional strategies like the ones collected in this Toolkit, given the importance of aspects that precede entry into HE (and not just the mobility experience). Indeed, this collection does not represent everything that HEIs do in this regard, but it seems revealing the fact that only two of the examples (see Tandem Language and Peer Mentoring) refers explicitly to the moment before mobility.

In a Freirian logic of “conscientisation” (or “*conscientização*”, as Paulo Freire (1972) would say), raising awareness, and the subsequent preparation for action, on the impact (very significant, but not deterministic) of these structural conditions on the individual and collective paths of these students would have high pedagogical, democratic and emancipatory value. When talking about dialogue, and following Freire, these would be good topics to start a conversation with international and local students: (i) socio-demographic characteristics, (ii) previous educational experiences, (iii) HE policies, (iv) specific policies regarding migrants and minorities, (v) globalisation, (vi) multiculturalism, (vii) critical race perspectives, and (viii) inclusion (see Figure 1).

From our point of view, the examples collected in this Toolkit address fundamental aspects of interculturality and education (also) with international students, such as welcoming, orientation, and dialogue, different (local and international) cultures and gastronomic traditions, mentoring programs and social networks, language, and curricular strategies.

Regarding the method of data collection, desk research predominated (in ten cases), although interviews and observation (with four examples each) were also carried out.

The target group is, in all the examples, international students, although most also involve national students (n = 13), staff (n = 5), teachers (n = 4), the local community (n = 2) and other foreigners in the host country (n = 1) are also mentioned.

Based on the analytical framework presented in Figure 1, one can see that the examples described in this Toolkit focus especially on the present moment, on the experience of university students, especially regarding mobility. Overall, they seem to be primarily practices of interaction, rather than organisational structures and policies.

What to do with the difference?

This has often been the starting question. Before looking for answers to this question, however, it is important to deconstruct some myths around this idea of difference and (associated with it) of equality.

In “Animal Farm”, George Orwell (2011, p. 81) said that “All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others”. The same can be said of difference: we are all different, but some are more

different than others. Take the example of language: even when it is the same language, in its variants (e.g., European Portuguese and Brazilian Portuguese), there are communication challenges. But these challenges are much greater when the language is different, making communication even more difficult. Very often, international students do not speak the language of the host country.

Nevertheless, and as Amartya Sen (2007) says, it is wrong and dangerous to reduce the complex human identity to a single characteristic. This has been the cause of countless conflicts and acts of barbarism. The division into groups – an ingroup and an outgroup, “us and them”, in current language –, even when based on fragile and unimportant criteria (Tajfel, 1970), is associated with phenomena such as (i) the favouritism of ingroup over the outgroup, (ii) the outgroup derogation, when the outgroup is perceived as threatening (Hewstone, Rubin & Willis, 2002), (iii) the group polarisation (when the group enhances members’ pre-existing tendencies), and (iv) the outgroup homogeneity effect, as if “they” were alike (Myers, 2010).

In higher education, research with so-called “non-traditional” students shows how the combination – i.e., “intersectionality” (Crenshaw, 1989) – of two or more “non-traditional” characteristics (colour of skin, age, disabilities, sexual definition, social class, ethno-cultural features, gender, being a first-generation student, among others) contributes to the failure of these students. In other words: the more “non-traditional”, the more “unsuitable”.

In this Toolkit, and since we are talking about interculturality, it is important to underline how wrong and dangerous it is to consider as “different” everyone who comes from a country different from ours, as if we were all the same – the “communities of sameness”, by Zygmunt Bauman (2008). It is as if the difference in relation to any “foreigner” could be always justified from a cultural point of view, i.e., from the culture of a people, of a nation. As if there was no diversity and difference within each country, in a particular land, in the same family, in a group of people who come together for any reason: educational, civic and political, cultural, religious, sport, etc.

To what extent do we take as “cultural differences” aspects related to the personality of each human being, their interests, beliefs, dreams, which may have little or nothing to do with their “nationality”? The awareness of this risk must always be present when we try to work on interculturality in HE, or in other contexts, so that we can exercise an indispensable and “permanent critical vigilance” (Stoer & Cortesão, 1999, p. 28).

In this sense, Paulo Freire (2014) highlights the importance of considering not only what separates us but above all what brings us closer, not only what distinguishes us but what resembles us. He thus recalls the diverse “minorities” that are, in fact, the majority of the population. There is a common feature that can and should bring them together: the fact that they are discriminated against.

“The so-called minorities, for example, need to realize that, when all is said and done, they are the majority. The path to their self-acceptance as the majority lies in concentrating on the similarities among themselves, and not only the differences, and thus creating *unity in diversity*, apart from which I fail to see how they can improve themselves, or even build themselves a substantial, radical democracy.” (Freire, 2014, p. 143).

This “unity in diversity” must be assumed to be part of the social responsibility of HEIs, which must not only be open to this “unity in diversity” but above all to promote it, because that is the way to build an effective democracy. If not, and as Martin Trow (1973) asserted already some decades ago, HE will continue to exist for the elite, reserved for a minority (that is indeed a minority) of the population, to the detriment of the discriminated majority.

This is not an easy path, of course. Multiculturalism, as Paulo Freire rightly points out, is not spontaneously built. On the contrary, it results from a political, historical decision and collective action.

“The very quest for this oneness in difference, the struggle for it as a process, in and of itself is the beginning of a creation of multiculturalism. Let us emphasize once more: multiculturalism as a phenomenon involving the coexistence of different cultures in one and the same space is not something natural and spontaneous. It is a historical creation, involving decision, political determination, mobilization, and organization, on the part of each cultural group, in view of common purposes. Thus, it calls for a certain educational practice, one that will be consistent with these objectives. It calls for a new ethics, founded on respect for differences.” (Freire, 2014, 147)

As De Sanctis (1984) said, we cannot speak about the public in education while we are focused on individual “needs” – or, at most, on the “needs” of an elite –, disregarding the collective dimension that education must have (see also Freire, 1972), the concern for everyone (in fact) and each one. This is also stressed by the European Commission:

“Central to the social dimension of the Bologna Process is the aim that the student body should reflect the diversity of the population, and that the background of students should not have an impact on their participation in higher education.” (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018, p. 154).

So, the answer to the initial question – What to do with the difference? – does not go through an alternative conjunction (*or*) but an additive one (*and*): it is not about equality *or* difference but about equality *and* difference. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2008, p. 28) says, “people have the right to be equal whenever difference makes them inferior, but they also have the right to be different whenever equality jeopardizes their identity.”

This means that HEIs, and the people who work and study in them, should not incur a kind of „cultural colour-blindness”, taking the multi-coloured “rainbow of cultures” as one single colour... of identical interests, knowledge and needs. However, respect for diversity should not correspond “to the uncritical adoption of cultural relativism (which translates into an unconditional acceptance of diversity), coexisting with the lack of analysis of the power relations always involved in situations where different cultures coexist in the same space” (Stoer & Cortesão, 1999, p. 23). There are countless differences that enrich us, but there are some that we are not willing to accept. As in every human relationship, it is important to know our own limits and define the rules together.

The recognition of diversity cannot either mean a “folklorisation” of diversity (Mariet, 1991; van Binsbergen, 1994). Nevertheless, this recognition can sometimes be associated with some “exoticism”,

as described by Tzvetan Todorov (1993, p. 264): “the others are better than we are”. More often, however, there is an exhibition of abilities and performances that are harmless (albeit important) and sometimes exotic: dances, flavours, music...

It is essential to develop a respectful and critical dialogue, that is, a “critical multiculturalism”, promoting “situations of cultural bilingualism” (Cortese & Stoer, 1999, p. 30) and even multilingualism:

“There is no genuine bilingualism, therefore, let alone multilingualism, apart from a “multiculturality,” and no multiculturalism arises spontaneously. A multiculturalism must be created, politically produced, worked on, in the sweat of one’s brow, in concrete history.” (Freire, 2014, p. 147)

To promote interculturality, communication and dialogue must be present. If not, and as Paulo Freire (1977/1992, p. 22) recalls, we will be practicing “extensionist” actions, understood as “the need [...] to go to the ‘other part of the world’, considered inferior, for, in [our] own way, ‘normalise it’. To make it more or less similar to [our] world.” These are manipulative actions, marked by “cultural invasion”, which deny the human being, the other human being, “as a being of transformation of the world” (Freire, 1977/1992, p. 22).

Nor is the repressive tolerant multiculturalism described by Slavoj Žižek (2006, p. 72) a solution: “Multiculturalism is, naturally, the ideal form of the ideology of this planetary capitalism, the attitude that, from a kind of empty global position, treats each local culture in the manner of the settler who deals with a colonised population – as ‘indigenous’ whose customs must be carefully studied and ‘respected’.”

On the contrary, the critical multiculturalism is the antithesis of a “benign multicultural education”, i.e., a “‘charitable’ and/or technocratic attempt to face cultural diversity” (Stoer & Cortese, 1999, p. 26). And it is “sweaty”, to use Freire’s words, i.e., it requires effort, a commitment of those involved. In summary, it is important to highlight the difference between the tolerance of difference – which Slavoj Žižek condemns in his “Praise of intolerance” (2006) – and the effective coexistence with difference, an effective “living with”. From this point of view, tolerance

“[...] can repulse assault only when reformed into solidarity: into the universal recognition that difference is one universality that is not open to negotiation [...]. Tolerance as ‘mere tolerance’ is moribund; it can survive only in the form of solidarity. It just would not do to rest satisfied that the other’s difference does not confine or harm my own [...]. Solidarity, unlike tolerance, its weaker version, means readiness to fight; and joining the battle for the sake of the other’s difference, not one’s own. Tolerance is ego-centred and contemplative; solidarity is socially oriented and militant.” (Bauman, 1998, p. 256)

With these introductory notes, it is important to say that this Toolkit focuses on the experience in HE – because this is when these encounters happen –, illustrating different institutional strategies to welcome cultural diversity in HE. We must bear in mind, nonetheless, that even a “good” practice/policy in one place can become a “bad” practice/policy in another, if the contextual specificities are disregarded.

Developing the Toolkit

The partners of the SOLVINC's consortium collected a set of 25 formats for intercultural student encounters. 15 of them were then selected according to their relevance (strengths and weaknesses) and diversity. As an example, the most frequent type of activity was related to food and drink. All institutions provide this type of initiative. Nevertheless, and although they have different formats – dinner, workshop, party, festival –, we present only one example, since, despite some differences, the essentials of the activity are common to all of them.

These 15 examples are described below, according to the following elements:

- Characterisation of the target group (international students and/or national students, professors, staff, others);
- Thematic focus (local culture, language, intercultural conflicts, cultural diversity, human rights/ racism, and/or other);
- Context (university and/or other);
- Short description of the student encounters: a general description of the experience, addressing
 - when and why did it start?
 - who/what entity is in charge?
 - what are the main activities/strategies implemented?
 - who is involved and how?
 - outcomes and impact (if available);
- Degree of institutionalisation, innovation, and reach throughout the university: what is the level of institutionalisation of this experience? Does it have a systematic impact on the organisation or is it relatively episodic and confined to the people involved?
- Implications for solving intercultural conflicts in universities: is this experience important for solving intercultural conflicts in universities? Does it make sense to make this a priority strategy? Why/why not?
- Major strengths and major weaknesses;
- Data collection method (e.g., desk research, observation, interviews with staff, professors, researchers, students, and/or other);
- Additional comments (e.g., age, gender, status, role at the HEI of the interviewees);
- References.

The toolkit is translated into all partner languages: French, German, Polish, and Portuguese.

2. Compendium of intercultural student encounters

2.1. Welcome, orientation & dialogue

These activities represent the initial stage of welcoming international students. There is a concern with the orientation of students who, in the first phase, may feel somewhat lost, namely with regard to aspects of an institutional and administrative nature. It could also be said that, at this stage, the dialogue begins, as an attempt at mutual knowledge.

2.1.1. Welcome Week International Office Mainz

Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU), Germany (DE)

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDENT ENCOUNTERS

The Welcome Week is organised by the International Office of Johannes Gutenberg University. It consists of different offers/events for incoming international students.

The concept includes offers for

- international exchange students,
- international degree students and
- both groups together

The Welcome Week is divided into:

- The InfoDays: offer for the international exchange students. The programme is three days long and covers administrative tasks like enrolment, getting student IDs, computer accounts, course selection and registration with representatives from the various faculties and signing rental contracts for the dorms and a campus tour. The students receive a practical guide that includes answers to many questions in a compact booklet format.
- The Orientation Days: is for international degree students.

These events are separate since the groups have different needs.

The Welcome Week also includes social networking events:

- Welcome Meet and Greet (first evening)
- Farewell reception (at the end: feedback/marketing)

Further parts of the Welcome Week are:

- InfoCafé (where many organisations and institutions outside of academic life, such as student sports groups, psychological counselling, buddy programme, university library, etc. introduce themselves to the new students in form of a small fair)
- City Tour for all

Parts of the programme are in cooperation with the Studierendenwerk (student housing department) and AStA Ausländerreferat (student organisation) and in the beginning ESG & KHG (the two university churches).

The Welcome Week is supported by student assistants and the Student Ambassadors.

CHARACTERISATION

TARGET GROUP

- international students

THEMATIC FOCUS

- local culture
- first steps/arriving at university

CONTEXT

- university

DATA COLLECTION:

- desk research
- observation
- interviews with staff/professors/researchers
- self-report

DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALISATION, INNOVATION AND REACH THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSITY

Since 1998/99, the InfoDays have been offered twice a year for international exchange students, organised by university staff. For the International Office, it is an integral part of their programme. For the university itself, they serve to facilitate new students in all areas. In this way, they also fulfil the aspect of problem prevention, which creates a better welcome climate and prevents additional work.

The Orientation Days is a similar but shorter programme for the international degree students and has been taking place for many years.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOLVING INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS IN UNIVERSITIES

We consider the Welcome Week event important because in most cases it is the first impression international students get of our university and cultural life in Mainz and Germany in general. During the InfoDays/Orientation Days they are welcomed and introduced to the University of Mainz, the International Office, their official contact persons in the departments as well as their fellow students and other international exchange/degree students. Through this offer exchange/international students have people to talk to when conflicts occur, although another goal of this event should be to introduce the new culture and help them to avoid or overcome conflicts.

MAJOR STRENGTHS

The Major strength of this event is the first direct and personal contact new incoming students will get. They can experience the local culture under guidance and will not be alone with their first culture-shocks/clash-of cultures as they will have made friends with others and thus have someone to talk to (especially in the academic context).

They will be welcomed by official staff members as well as fellow students and will be part of a group. As mentioned above, through this a good base for conflict-solving will be created which will help with avoiding major conflicts and problems.

MAJOR WEAKNESSES

- It is a rather large event, where unfortunately not everyone will be heard individually and possibly not everyone will be able to participate if they arrive late.
 - The incomings might stay among themselves and will not mix with locals (if this is really a weakness).
-

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Contact persons: Colleagues from the Gutenberg International School Services and the International Office

REFERENCES

Official Website: <https://www.international-office.uni-mainz.de/infodays/>

Program or Special Edition of the Practical Guide in digital semester 2020:
https://www.international.uni-mainz.de/files/2020/04/Practical-Guide_EN_SoSe_20.pdf

Facebook-Group „JGU Comes To You - Summer Semester 2020“
<https://www.facebook.com/jguinternationalstudents/>

2.1.2. Orientation Day

University of Social Sciences, Poland

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDENT ENCOUNTERS

Orientation day is a mandatory event for the first-semester international students. Throughout the day, international students participate in various meetings and training with representatives of different university units. They learn how to deal with administrative issues, the way that they can find help. They also listen to the interactive lecture on Polish culture (they can address questions) etc. In the evening, they can participate in a non-formal meeting with local and international students from the higher semesters.

DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALISATION, INNOVATION AND REACH THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSITY

The event is organised at the Faculty level by the Vice-Dean for International Programmes of the Faculty of Management and Security Studies with the cooperation of local and international students from higher semesters. It is organised cyclically at the beginning of the winter semester for the first-semester international students.

CHARACTERISATION

TARGET GROUP

- international students with
 - national students
 - professors
 - staff

THEMATIC FOCUS

- local culture
- language

CONTEXT

- university

DATA COLLECTION:

- observation

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOLVING INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS IN UNIVERSITIES

No particular focus is placed on solving intercultural conflicts. However, creating the opportunity to increase international students' awareness of the university policies, rules and regulations as well as the basic features of Polish culture have a positive impact both on their everyday life on the campus, their academic achievements and relations with local students.

MAJOR STRENGTHS

The major strength is that many students, both international and local, as well as professors and staff, appreciate the event atmosphere and is relatively easy to encourage them to participate actively.

MAJOR WEAKNESSES

The major weakness is that, although the event has a cyclical character, it is organised only once a semester, and only a limited number of students participate in it.

2.1.3. Campus Dialogue Sessions Program

Faculty of Engineering of the University of Porto (FEUP)

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDENT ENCOUNTERS

Campus Dialogue Sessions take place monthly during the academic year at FEUP. Dialogues are effective and well-received mechanisms for engaging different groups and can help identify advocates across campus to fulfil the objectives and move forward. The program is held to improve intercultural communication competence and avoid intercultural conflicts in both international students and local students. Each session has a different subject such as “My life as a doctoral student” (see the picture below)! Participation is free, and there is an online form for enrolment.

DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALISATION, INNOVATION AND REACH THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSITY

The program is often institutionalised by the faculty. Orientation and Integration Office staff (e.g., a psychologist and counselor), professors (the heads of departments) are invited to have conversations with international and local students. International students and local students can speak up about different issues, and subjects with professors and international service staff directly, and straightforwardly.

CHARACTERISATION

TARGET GROUP

- international students with
- national students
- staff

THEMATIC FOCUS

- local culture
- intercultural conflicts
- cultural diversity

CONTEXT

- university

DATA COLLECTION:

- desk research
- self-report

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOLVING INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS IN UNIVERSITIES

The primary goals of the Campus Dialogue sessions are to help internationalise the FEUP campus, foster a global mindset in Portuguese students and staff through meaningful interaction and shared experiences with international students, reduce the isolation of newly arrived international students, provide social support for them, provide an avenue for international students to socialise with individuals outside their cultural group and to learn from students who have experience adapting to the host country and university.

MAJOR STRENGTHS

Dialogues are important because of the essence of dialogues, and the goals can be fulfilled by exchanging information through them. Students can obtain information about the new educational system, and the local culture of the host country. Dialogues can help to avoid intercultural conflicts by increasing awareness about the host country. They feel that there are people in the academic service that listen to them and prepare information to help them. The dialogues also happen between international students and local students that can have a positive impact on increasing intercultural communication competence in the local students.

MAJOR WEAKNESSES

Since participation in the program is not mandatory, many students might not be active or encouraged. They might be unaware of the positive effects of the program on their academic and daily life.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

This information was self-reported by Laleh Esteki, a former consultant at iPoint (Intercultural Contact Point), and validated by Carlos Oliveira, the head of Image, Communication and Cooperation Services, invited assistant professor at FEUP, and responsible for iPoint activities.

REFERENCES

<http://fe.up.pt/ipoint>

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1GQFqliTcC2yRFivubDUeTvVBNmneLsDoiUpSjvbrASM/edit>



CAMPUS CONVERSATION SESSIONS

"MY LIFE AS A DOCTORAL STUDENT"

22 november 2018 - 16h00
FEUP, room I -105 (DEEC)

We are really pleased to invite you to attend our first conversation session **"My life as a doctoral student"**.

Why conversation?

Conversations are really effective and important mechanisms for engaging different groups and allowing them to share opinions and open up to the academic community.

We would like to

- . Provide an avenue for international students to socialize with individuals outside their cultural group and to learn from students who have experience adapting to the host country and university;
- . Reduce the isolation of newly arrived international students, and provides social support for them;
- . Foster a global mindset in Portuguese students and staff through meaningful interaction and share experiences with international students.

Participation is free, but enrolment is necessary. Please fill in the form below (the number of participants is limited):

goo.gl/forms/xzcfNAEszJYk09Fg1

Looking forward to seeing you!



2.2. Cultures and flavours: cities, countries & continents

In a second stage, there is an attempt to deepen mutual knowledge. Thus, the host shows different aspects of the host culture – the city, gastronomic aspects... – and the international students are also invited to introduce themselves and their cultures.

2.2.1. City Tour and Sarau Cultural

Faculty of Arts of the University of Porto (FLUP)

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDENT ENCOUNTERS

This activity happened in September 2018, in the middle of the afternoon. It begins in the faculty's facilities, for being the easiest and most well-known meeting point for the foreign students. It focuses on the most iconic and historic points of the city, explaining its existence, history, and fun facts. And it terminates with a Sarau Cultural, which is an Academic Musical Festival, with FLUP academic groups.

DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALISATION, INNOVATION AND REACH THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSITY

The activity is conducted by the FLUP's Student Association. It is agreed that it should happen at the beginning of each year, for being the time students most need some academic cultural context and for being the time of the year when they access the most to faculties activities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOLVING INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS IN UNIVERSITIES

The activity is planned carefully for students' integration. The first goal is to make sure incoming pupils know that there is a community to receive them and give them a preview of what they are going to feel and experience. They are gathered together to know each other, becoming aware that they are not alone and others are living the same. The second major goal is to introduce them to the city and the Portuguese academic culture.

MAJOR STRENGTHS

International students are informed about the faculties, the local culture, and the city where they are going to live for a while. Creating a situation to have informal conversations with other international students and make friends can avoid intercultural conflicts. They also gather information about other cultures so that it can help improve their intercultural communication competence.

MAJOR WEAKNESSES

Students might not show up if they were not motivated enough or feel uncomfortable getting out of their comfort zone.

REFERENCES

Lopes, Ana Filipa O. (2018). *The Integration Rituals of Mobility Students in Faculty of Arts and Humanities of University of Porto. Internship Report Masters in Intercultural Studies for Business*. Porto: Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto, Instituto Politécnico do Porto.

CHARACTERISATION



TARGET GROUP

- international students with
- staff



THEMATIC FOCUS

- local culture
- intercultural conflicts
- cultural diversity



CONTEXT

- university
- the city of Porto



DATA COLLECTION:

- desk research

2.2.2. Seven Colours, Seven Continents

Vistula University, Poland

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDENT ENCOUNTERS

Students from different countries organise national stands and offer traditional national dishes and souvenirs. They wear traditional clothes, perform traditional dances and songs. Simultaneously presentations on various national cultures are delivered. At the end of the event, the party is organised, and the students' music bands perform.

DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALISATION, INNOVATION AND REACH THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSITY

The event is organised at the university level with the cooperation of the Students Government. It has a cyclical character but is organised only once a year. Each year different people are responsible for the organisation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOLVING INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS IN UNIVERSITIES

No particular focus is placed on solving intercultural conflicts. However, the opportunity to increase awareness of students, professors, staff, and local community members about different national cultures, traditions, values, and norms help to create a better understanding, reduce intercultural barriers and overcome negative stereotypes.

MAJOR STRENGTHS

The major strength is that many students, professors, and staff appreciate the atmosphere of this event and is relatively easy to encourage them to actively participate.

MAJOR WEAKNESSES

The major weakness is that although the event has a cyclical character, it is organised only once a year, and only a limited number of students, professors, and staff can participate in it.

CHARACTERISATION

TARGET GROUP

- international students with
 - national students
 - professors
 - staff
 - local community members

THEMATIC FOCUS

- local culture
- cultural diversity
- national cultures of international students

CONTEXT

- university

DATA COLLECTION:

- observation

2.2.3. Cooking workshop

Cité universitaire de Paris

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDENT ENCOUNTERS

The cooking workshop is an activity promoting sharing and exchange between people of different cultural backgrounds. It was inspired by a European project, ALCE – Appetite for Learning Comes with Eating. Joined with the Cité Universitaire de Paris, élan interculturel organised cooking workshops with local and international students. The starting point was to share recipes that are important for each participant, linked to their culture, their history. Then small groups of participants were invited to create a new recipe with at least one ingredient from each recipe proposed by the group members. Each group made their own recipe and presented the final result to the other groups. Sharing ingredients and cooking tips gave an occasion to recognise each other as members of “cultures” in a multiple sense: countries, regions, families and also as individuals, and in parallel with the new recipes participants also cooked up new connections and an experience of positive collaboration.

DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALISATION, INNOVATION AND REACH THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSITY

This activity was set up at the Cité Universitaire de Paris. Within the framework of the university, it can be set up by associations (e.g. association for international students) or it can be proposed by the student residencies or in another place (on campus)

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOLVING INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS IN UNIVERSITIES

This activity creates a link between all the students (local and international). It allows international students to create social links and intercultural encounters between all students. It is an activity that also allows for intercultural exchange and sharing.

MAJOR STRENGTHS

- Intercultural Encounter: activity for local and international students that allows for an intercultural encounter.
- Create a link between all the students (important for those who have just arrived).
- Cultural exchange; allows the exchange around each other’s culture and the sharing of one’s own culture history with an original Innovative approach

MAJOR WEAKNESSES

- Difficulty attracting participants; especially local students who may not be looking to meet new students, they do not need to fit in. Also, not everyone is interested in cooking.
- If there are not enough participants, this can be a problem for the smooth/successful running of the workshop. If there is only international student, there is no intercultural meeting.
- It requires equipment (a kitchen big enough to accommodate everyone).

REFERENCES

<https://cesie.org/en/project/alce/>

<https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/resource-centre/content/alce-appetite-learning-comes-eating>

CHARACTERISATION

TARGET GROUP

- international students with
- staff

THEMATIC FOCUS

- local culture
- cultural diversity

CONTEXT

- university

DATA COLLECTION:

- interview with the organiser of the workshops

2.3. Social networks & mentoring

The third type of activities aims to deepen the relationship of international students with their peers (tutors and mentors), with more experience at the host university, so that the support provided can be more effective, closer, and more extended over time.

2.3.1. Buddy program

Universidad Carlos III de Madrid

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDENT ENCOUNTERS

The Buddy program consists of a local student tutoring an international student during their stay. The local student contacts the international student before the stay. This program is put in place by the host university. The aim is to help the international student regarding practical issues, introduce the university and campus, question about the life in the host city, take part in activities on and off campus, meet local people, and practice language.

DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALISATION, INNOVATION AND REACH THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSITY

This program is put in place by the university, but It's not limited to the life on campus and last the time of the international mobility. The Buddy program can be a way to know a city from the point of view of a local student, to meet local people and participate in activities off campus. Students have the choice to sign in or not.

CHARACTERISATION

TARGET GROUP

- international students with
- national students

THEMATIC FOCUS

- local culture
- language

CONTEXT

- university

DATA COLLECTION:

- desk research

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOLVING INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS IN UNIVERSITIES

This program allows international students to have easy access to information about life on campus (courses, administration) but also about the local culture and to have someone who can explain to them some situations that they find difficult to understand (cultural shock). It would be interesting to make this a priority strategy as it is involved both at the university level and outside (meeting with locals, doing activities outside the university) and not only among international students. The international student has someone s/he can rely on if needed and not only for university matters.

MAJOR STRENGTHS

Being able to be helped by someone familiar with university life (administrative problems, how the university operates, course registration) but also with the local culture/ way of life. In addition, it is a way to improve their language skill.

MAJOR WEAKNESSES

- Not knowing the person can be a problem if the two students are not compatible.
- The problem of commitment from the local Buddy, if this person is not involved enough and limits his role to the presentation of the host university. If your buddy does not introduce you to other local people

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

[Evaluation: Nothing that we know of. The university is looking for people that are motivated and can be committed, same for the international student that ask to participate in this program. They are expected to participate in activities with their buddy.]

REFERENCES

<https://www.uc3m.es/ss/Satellite/UC3MInstitucional/en/TextoMixta/1371220461929/>

2.3.2. ESN – Buddy Program

University of Vienna, TU Vienna, Salzburg, Innsbruck, FH BFI Wien etc.

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDENT ENCOUNTERS

The Buddy System links Erasmus students and local students and is based on the principles of volunteer work and intercultural exchange. The programme aims to help incoming students to settle in on the one hand, especially in the first weeks, when facing a different country, language, and new habits (cultural adaptation processes). On the other hand, the buddy system intends to make friends in the local student community and to expand the Erasmus experience during a study abroad.

Buddies are local students who want to welcome Erasmus students and help them get settled in their new environment. This can be for example by answering questions before their arrival, helping to find the way around the city, or simply by hanging out and helping them to get an inside into student life. The ESN Buddy Network offers various and different activities: a welcome week and kick-off event (e.g. university tour, welcome dinner, speed friending, pub quizzes, welcome party, phototour challenge, city tour), events (international karaoke, museum day, ballroom dancing courses, wine tasting, etc.) and trips (trips around the area and to neighbour countries).

CHARACTERISATION

TARGET GROUP

- international students with
- national students

THEMATIC FOCUS

- cultural diversity

CONTEXT

- university

DATA COLLECTION:

- desk research
- telephone interview

DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALISATION, INNOVATION AND REACH THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSITY

The ESN Network Buddy program in Austria is organised as an independent student association with a board, however, the network works internationally. Most universities in Austria have a branch office of the ESN Network in their universities. The student association is connected to the International Offices in the framework of international student mobility or incoming student work. Local students act as buddies on a voluntary basis. The program takes place regularly for all Erasmus incoming students, but also for other international students. Most welcoming activities take place at the beginning of the semester.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOLVING INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS IN UNIVERSITIES

A lot of students like the events and think that they are well organised, and people are friendly, so that there is a good atmosphere. Nevertheless, there seems to be no special focus on intercultural conflicts – buddies might not be trained for that in an extensive way for that. However, buddies are institutionally linked to the International Office and can ask for counselling there in case of conflict. Lots of cultural exchange is based on activities and common experiences, but there is no special supervisor. Speaking about cultural conflicts might be more implicit than explicit and might not always be reflected by the buddies.

MAJOR STRENGTHS

The ESN Buddy Program is a typical and classical example for organised student encounters between local and international students in Austria, offered at different universities in Vienna, Salzburg, Innsbruck, etc. For international students, the ESN buddy network is a good strategy to settle in and to be prepared for organisational and administrative matters, but also from a psychological perspective to get to know a lot of other international and local students. International students can receive access to different kinds of resources – emotional, psychological, administrative, and local knowledge. Local students can support them in their student and private life while studying abroad.

Members of the board of the ESN Network introduced themselves in class in all faculties and advertise memberships for the semester. For example, at the University of Applied Sciences BFI Vienna, the network contains more local students than international students at the moment because local students are very interested in joining the lively network. As an example for the spiritedness of the network at the University of Applied Sciences BFI Vienna, students recently interviewed international students after coming back from their stay abroad about their experiences. They provided the information of the interviews in a structured and creative way in an online podcast, which other students can now watch.

MAJOR WEAKNESSES

There is some research about the ESN Buddy Program from other universities (e.g. Nilsson, 2019). In some universities, the members of the board change more often than in others. When this happens, there is a great risk of losing relevant information and social capital. New student board members usually need one semester to take full ownership of the activities. The results of evaluation research indicate a variability across different dimensions of social integration for international students: There might be more success in the integration of international students in social activities within the program, while finding enough local students seems to be more difficult for some universities.

REFERENCES

Webpages:

<https://www.tuwien.at/en/studies/international/incoming-exchange-students/studies/esn-buddynetwork-tu-wien/>

<https://boku.ac.at/en/international/themen/international-students-coming-to-boku/auftakt-an-der-boku-willkommenstage-und-andere-veranstaltungen>

Published articles:

Nilsson, P. A. (2019). The Buddy Programme – Integration and social support for international students. *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education*, 11(Winter), 36-43.

2.3.3. Fremde werden Freunde (Foreigners become Friends) / FWF

Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU), Hochschule Mainz (HS Mainz)

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDENT ENCOUNTERS

The goal of Foreigners become Friends is to create contact between international students and people of the region.

To be able to witness the everyday life of German citizens, contact with German students often is not enough because the students' lives often vary greatly from the everyday life of „regular“ citizens.


“FWF” offers international students the opportunity to get to know the “real life” in the country they are studying in. As is generally known, this works best through direct contact with people who live there.

DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALISATION, INNOVATION AND REACH THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSITY

This programme is not offered by Mainz University itself but by Studierendenwerk and is open to students of JGU Mainz, HS Mainz, and TH Bingen and local citizens from Mainz, Bingen, and the region.

CHARACTERISATION

TARGET GROUP

-  international students with
 - national students
 - locals / citizens

THEMATIC FOCUS

- local culture

CONTEXT

- every-day-life

DATA COLLECTION:

- desk research
- interviews with students
- colleagues being part of that programme

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOLVING INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS IN UNIVERSITIES

This offer where international and local students /locals get in touch with each other is an important priority to be able to learn about local and other cultures in a small setting. A good possibility to talk about critical incidents and sensitive zones.

MAJOR STRENGTHS

The contact to locals, non-students

MAJOR WEAKNESSES

The coordination of the encounters and finding suitable people is more time consuming than a large event which reaches many people at the same time.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Contact persons: Staff of the Student Housing/Student Union.

REFERENCES

<https://www.studierendenwerk-mainz.de/fwf>

Facebook group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/722984724743047/>

2.3.4. Peer Mentoring Transversal Program of the U.Porto

University of Porto

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDENT ENCOUNTERS

The Peer Mentoring Program of the University of Porto aims at supporting, in this new phase of their academic path, both national and international students who enter for the first time at this Higher Education institution (mentees). Mentors, in turn, are national or international students who have been attending U.Porto's different study cycles for at least one year and who, voluntarily and without any remuneration, decide to participate in the U.Porto Peer Mentoring Program, in the respective Organic Unit (i.e., faculty or institute). Generally, all mentees are accompanied on their journey by the mentor assigned to each one of them, although changes may occur, when justified, with the approval of the responsible coordinator team (composed of teachers).

In each Organic Unit, several frequent activities are carried out during each academic year, namely:

- Training seminar(s) for mentors on Mentoring and Being Mentor, and on the different services and resources of each Organic Unit and the University of Porto;
- Welcome of new students, assisting them in the integration in the respective study cycles, faculty, and the U.Porto, promoting their registration as mentees, and accompanying them during the first year of their studies in U.Porto (at least);
- The organisation of mentor/mentee interrelationships, taking into account the number of students enrolled in the Program and the functioning of each Organic Unit, emphasising the development of the most appropriate conditions for the establishment of solidary and mutual respecting peer relationships;
- Promotion of meetings/socialising moments and various activities, throughout the academic year, addressing the needs and interests of mentors and mentees of each Organic Unit and their involvement in the organisation of these events;
- Participation and planning of activities transversal to the Peer Mentoring program of the University of Porto. (See *Despacho nº GR.09/09/2020*, pp. 6-7)

In addition to mentor training (see as an example the webinar available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=67YQjIMcQoU>), the Program also includes teacher training for the various faculties' professors and workshops for sharing experiences by those who participate in Mentoring.

From a conceptual point of view, there are three transversal and structuring axes of this Mentoring Program. The first highlights its institutional nature, that is, the recognition, by the University, of its "institutional responsibility [...] for the processes of welcoming, integration and social and academic experience of all (national and international) students who attend it." (Torres et al., 2020, p. 340).

The second axis points to "Voluntary student involvement and peer cooperation", aiming to support and include new students, stimulate "healthy and democratic practices in higher education", and build "networks and solidary relationships." (Torres et al., 2020, p. 340).

The third axis is related to the "Pedagogical and Formative Dimension" of this program, which is coordinated by teachers, who accompany the whole activity of mentoring, fostering the initiative and autonomy of mentors and mentees, the creation of democratic networks of peer relations and solidary ways of living the U.Porto. The development of different knowledge and transversal skills, associated with the role of "being a mentor", is very significant, reinforcing the importance of the pedagogical dimension of Mentoring and the role of teachers.

In terms of size, and in the current academic year (2020/2021), the Program involves the participation of near 2000 mentors, a higher number (and growing, since there are still new students arriving) of mentees, and more than 100 teachers.

CHARACTERISATION

TARGET GROUP

- international students with
- national students
- professors

THEMATIC FOCUS

- local culture
- cultural diversity

CONTEXT

- university

DATA COLLECTION:

- desk research
- interviews with staff/professors/researchers

- 6 An example is also the 1st Meeting of the U.Porto Peer Mentoring Program, held in February 2019, which included interventions by mentors from all faculties and student residences. About 500 participants attended this meeting (<https://up.pt/mentoriaup/2020/02/12/o-i-encontro-do-programa-mentoria-interpares-da-u-porto-em-imagens/>). It should be stressed, however, that the most important aspect about mentor training is not the 3-hour course (although it is important). It is rather a process of continuous education, throughout the year, marked by meetings, experiences, relationships...

DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALISATION, INNOVATION AND REACH THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSITY

The Mentoring Program started in 2011, at the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Porto (FPCEUP). Later, the Civil Engineering course, from the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Porto (FEUP), asked for the support of FPCEUP to launch a mentoring program. In 2019, the Vice-Rector for Training, Academic Organisation, and Cooperation, knowing the program underway at FPCEUP and FEUP, asked for a proposal to extend it to the entire U.Porto. Approved by the Rector in June 2019 (and this acknowledgment by the Rector is very important, as it shows that the Program is not just the outcome of the goodwill of a group of teachers), the Program currently covers 12 of the 14 Organic Units of the U.Porto and also the university residences.

As already stated, the U.Porto Peer Mentoring Program is based on the institutional responsibility of the University of Porto and its Organic Units for the processes of welcoming and personal, social, and academic integration of all new students, national or international. This is to assume that the university cannot resign itself from the responsibility of properly integrating new students.

In the operationalisation of the Mentoring Program, the University of Porto and the Organic Units operate with different roles and responsibilities through their management bodies, in particular the pedagogical councils, the study cycle directions, teachers, and students participating in the program. And this aspect is very important, since, being transversal, the Program has to adapt to the specificities of each faculty (which vary a lot, for example, in terms of the number of departments, teachers and students, courses provided). The Program cannot be transferred from one context to another without considering its suitability for each specific reality.

For the institutional and transversal coordination of the U.Porto Mentoring Program, the following structure was created by the Rectory, "which aims at the valorisation, monitoring and regular evaluation of the Program, with a functioning as flexible as possible:

- Transversal General Coordination: Vice-Rector for Training, Academic Organisation, and Cooperation;
- Scientific-Pedagogical Commission: Teachers promoting the original Program at FPCEUP and FEUP;
- Transversal Coordinating Committee: one or two representatives from each Faculty, appointed by the respective Pedagogical Council or Director, from among the teachers involved in promoting the Peer Mentoring Program;
- Support Secretariat: Technician specially hired for the purpose⁷;
- Faculty Commissions: composition to be indicated by the respective Direction or Pedagogical Council, with the necessary inclusion of the teacher(s) who are part of the Transversal Coordinating Commission." (*Despacho nº GR.09/09/2020*, pp. 3-4)

All stakeholders are committed to disseminating the U.Porto Peer Mentoring Program, to respect and implement their goals and guiding principles to carry out actions to welcome and integrate students and diversified activities throughout the academic year. The implementation of the Program implies the dynamisation of spaces for training and accompaniment of the different teams in each faculty and the definition of monitoring and evaluation strategies. Moments of cultural exchange and training actions extended to all local centres should be encouraged to share and disseminate different practices and create a U.Porto Mentoring Community.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOLVING INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS IN UNIVERSITIES

The Program promotes diverse transversal personal skills, such as attention to the other, understanding and respect for the difference and dignity of each one, the ability to help and share knowledge and skills, as well as the identification of possibilities for personal and collective development, both at the technical, cultural and social levels. It promotes also values as important as solidarity, reciprocity, cooperation...

Concerning interculturality, several mentors are international students, especially Brazilians. Sometimes contact between mentor and mentee begins before international students arrive at the university. This relationship can be based on several languages: Portuguese, Spanish, English, among others.

As the integration process is not always easy, the Mentoring helps to oppose these difficulties. Some national students tend not to facilitate the integration of international students, either for fear that this may penalise them in the evaluation or due to prejudice. In turn, international students have their own spaces for socialising and meeting. They often live together, which ends up making them interact mainly with each other and not with national students. In addition, some are very young, they are far from their families, which implies special attention. Besides, the pandemic has increased all these difficulties, as a result of the decrease in face-to-face academic activities.

The attention to the other that mentors learn to develop is a fundamental impact of the Program. In fact, it contributes to solving problems of a different order: academic doubts, existential anxieties, economic problems, among many others.

7 This technician is a former international student, who did a research, within the Master of Education Science, on the FPCEUP's mentoring program.

MAJOR STRENGTHS

The Pedagogical and Formative Dimension, as already stated, is one of the major strengths, as it underlines the formative character of this Program. It is not only an integration dynamic but also a complex and transversal learning project. This pedagogical and formative dimension, thus, is “ensured through a) the voluntary involvement of teachers responsible for accompanying and monitoring the instituted practices; b) the promotion of collaborative and supportive training processes; c) the stimulation of students’ autonomy and their capacity for analysis and critical reflection; d) the construction of ethically equitable and solidary support relationships and the commitment to the construction of an inclusive collective identity; e) the promotion of the development of transversal and social skills.” (Torres et al., 2020, pp. 340-341)

In a questionnaire answered by 460 mentors and 544 mentees, 79% of the mentors and 81% of the mentees refer they are satisfied or very satisfied with the Program. And, above all, they value the following four dimensions: (i) academic support (e.g., availability of learning materials, the indication of strategies/methods more suitable for success, “how will the exam be?”), (ii) emotional support (e.g., talking, listening to someone’s self-disclosure, giving advice), (iii) social integration (e.g., an invitation to mentoring, leisure activities, social gatherings, group integration), and (iv) support with faculty and university services (see Medina et al., 2020).

Satisfaction with the Program is, in fact, a very positive aspect. Students often sign up as mentors because they want to give back something that was very important to them as mentees. Also very often, the mentoring relationship continues throughout the course, although, formally, it only applies to the first year.

MAJOR WEAKNESSES

This Program requires a very significant effort from the volunteers and teachers who coordinate it. And if for students it is recognised in the form of a diploma supplement (it is curious that most students do not even request it, which shows that their dedication to the Program is not instrumental), for teachers, and concerning their career, it can be perceived by others – not by those involved – as a “waste of time”, as it is not properly acknowledged for example in the process of teacher evaluation process (when compared to the publication of papers or the participation in funded scientific projects, for example).

Another aspect to improve is the monitoring of the mentor-mentee relationship, to understand if it is working. If there were more extensive technical support, it would be possible to do so. Otherwise, it is really difficult.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The interview was done with Professor Teresa Medina, assistant Professor at FPCEUP and researcher at the Educational Research and Intervention Centre (CIE). Vice-president of the Pedagogical Council of FPCEUP. Chair of the Scientific Pedagogical Committee of the Peer Mentoring Transversal Program at the University of Porto, Coordinator of FPCEUP Mentoring, member of the Coordination of the Portuguese Peer Mentoring/Tutoring Network in Higher Education, and member of the *Junta Diretiva da Rede Iberoamericana de Mentoria* (RIME) [Board of the Iberoamerican Mentoring Network]. Main areas of research/intervention - Mentoring in higher education, education/training of young people and adults, education and work, education and social movements.

REFERENCES

<https://up.pt/mentoriaup/>

https://sigarra.up.pt/fpceup/pt/web_base.gera_pagina?p_pagina=MENTORIA_APRESENTACAO

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2.4. Language

These activities focus on a crucial cultural aspect: language. As said before, this is often a communication challenge, especially when the hosts and the international students do not master the same language.

2.4.1. The language café

Université d'Orléans

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDENT ENCOUNTERS

Local and international students are invited to meet in a bar in the city centre to exchange and discuss over a drink. The aim is to meet new people, create an intercultural encounter and especially to practice a foreign language.

DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALISATION, INNOVATION AND REACH THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSITY

The language café is organised by a university organisation but does not take place within the university environment. Foreign people, not necessarily students, can also participate in the language café to practice their French or to learn another language. It takes place every two weeks from 18 to 21.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOLVING INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS IN UNIVERSITIES

International students have the opportunity to meet locals, speak the language of the host country, or another language, and ask questions about the culture and life of the locals. This is a very good practice to encourage intercultural exchanges and encounters.

MAJOR STRENGTHS

The fact that the meetings are not held in the university environment can encourage less formal exchanges.

The Language café is also an advantage for local students as it allows them to improve their language skills and therefore encourages them to come exchange and meet new people which is not always the case since they don't necessarily seek to meet new people.

Intercultural meetings: International students have the opportunity to talk to local students about any subject they wish for several hours. The exchange is a two-way street, everyone can learn about a different culture and improve their language skills. It is a good way to exchange experiences.

MAJOR WEAKNESSES

Meetings only take place every two weeks; There's no guarantee that you'll see the same people again, so it can be difficult to create real connections.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Contact person: French student, 23 years old

CHARACTERISATION

TARGET GROUP

- international students with
- national students
- other foreigners in the host country

THEMATIC FOCUS

- local culture
- language
- cultural diversity

CONTEXT

- That doesn't necessarily happen on campus (Bar).

DATA COLLECTION:

- interview with a student

2.4.2. Tandem Learning / Language Tandem

University of Vienna, Technical University Vienna, Vienna University of Economics and Business, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Vienna, but also others

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDENT ENCOUNTERS

Tandem Learning is a reciprocal language learning project – language learners are paired with a native speaker of the targeted language (here: German), so that they can learn together. This means that students with different language backgrounds teach each other. There is no financial cost involved and both parties can benefit regardless of their language level. They can meet to study together, practice speaking, discuss problems with the languages and find out more about their partner’s culture, but can also support each other. Online tools like mobile emailing, Skype or mobile phones can support Tandem Learning.

How can partners learn? There are no constraints for learning. Tandem partners can use textbooks and exercise books and can work through them. They can also use media and work through them (e.g. newspaper, radio shows, videos, podcasts, books, etc.). Mostly the learning practice is structured in dialogues on certain themes and conversations with each other. Which method is used depends on the background and context of the partners, their interests and opportunities, and of course depends on the learning objectives of the tandem learning and the prior language knowledge of the partners.

CHARACTERISATION

-  **TARGET GROUP**
 - international students with
 - national students
-  **THEMATIC FOCUS**
 - language
-  **CONTEXT**
 - university
-  **DATA COLLECTION:**
 - desk research

DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALISATION, INNOVATION AND REACH THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSITY

The program is often institutionalised at the specific universities, their language centres or the student unions. Native speaking partners are volunteers. The aim is that both partners benefit from the other and extend their language skills. In this sense, the length and duration of a language tandem partnership depend on the partners and their motivation for participation or the duration of the stay abroad.

Often, the university just provides the Online-platform, where students interested in a partnership can register, but also search and find a partner. Then the partnership is self-organised and university is not involved in the further process and does not take responsibility for them. In other cases, the Tandem Learning is institutionalised in a whole program. Then the registration process is monitored by the university and offers meetings with some hints for Tandem Learning and the opportunity to meet other participants of the program, so that an intercultural exchange with more people can take place. This program also involves the learners to explicit goals for the learning process, writing a diary as a documentation of the learning process and doing reflection tasks e.g. after videoing their meetings. For some studies, the participation in Tandem Learning is also recognised with credit points.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOLVING INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS IN UNIVERSITIES

Tandem Learning mostly focuses on the improvement of language skills – the development of diversity competence or intercultural competence is more a side effect. Didactical approaches focusing on Tandem Learning seem to be highly developed and professional. Nevertheless, intercultural conflicts might not be an explicit discussed content – and might also depend on the design of the specific Tandem Learning program and the focus of language teachers.

MAJOR STRENGTHS

Students, teachers, and researchers who are planning a stay abroad can make contact with someone in their future host country before their stay has begun (pre-departure). This helps them to improve their language skills and gain an insight into the culture, mentality, and social environment of the country. Tandem Learning is also a convenient way to keep up your previously-acquired language skills and to make contact with native speakers. Language Tandem Learning is cost-free, and flexible according to time and place (also online possible), as it is based on voluntary partnerships between language learners.

MAJOR WEAKNESSES

The participation in language Tandem Learning affords a lot of motivation because it is self-organised. In this sense, the support of partnerships by a professional teacher and supervised meetings are a good option to build sustainable partnerships between learners, but also to solve possible occurring intercultural conflicts.

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Webpages:

<https://sprachzentrum.univie.ac.at/en/language-swap/>

<https://boku.ac.at/en/international/themen/sprachkurse/tandem><https://www.tuwien.at/en/studies/international/incoming-exchange-students/studies/tandem/>

<https://www.wu.ac.at/lrc/tandem-learning>

<https://www.hmdw.ac.at/index.php/de/auslaenderinnen/sprach-u-kulturtandem>

<https://www.oeh.univie.ac.at/vertretung/referate/oeh-office-antiracism-work-referat-fuer-antirassistische-arbeit#field-collection-item-field-textblock-295>

2.4.3. Gutenberg International School (GIS) – Courses for Exchange Students

Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU), Germany (DE)

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDENT ENCOUNTERS

The Gutenberg International School Services (GIS Services) is a unit of the International Office that has been the main contact for the study abroad students (incomings) at JGU (Mainz campus) since 2017. The Gutenberg International School Services (GIS), established in the same year, sets up course programme for students whose primary goal is to improve their German language skills or who can study only in English and may have problems to earn enough credits in their respective subjects if the offer of courses in English is insufficient. The GIS courses in English are supposed to be supplemental for students but can also be taken as a whole semester programme if desired, since almost all courses are open to exchange students from all disciplines. A further goal is to increase the number of courses with international classrooms to bring in more diverse perspectives and opinions and to foster intercultural exchange.

DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALISATION, INNOVATION AND REACH THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSITY

- Considered part of the university and an important point of contact for international students
- Programme: courses for learning German (language courses, reading classes, conversation classes, German history classes)
- Programme courses in English: focus on history and culture & social sciences & society
- Courses so far have been attended by probably a thousand students within the 4 years of the GIS's existence (regular JGU students & exchange students)
- Sustainability given since most courses have been tested and been well-received by the student community (good evaluations)
- Further impact: good recruiting and marketing tool – led to new cooperations with an international partner and raised more interest by potential exchange students (in combination with the more efficient and personal support through the GIS Services)

CHARACTERISATION

TARGET GROUP

- international students with
 - national students
 - professors
 - staff

THEMATIC FOCUS

- local culture
- language
- intercultural conflicts
- cultural diversity
- human rights/racism

CONTEXT

- university

DATA COLLECTION:

- desk research

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOLVING INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS IN UNIVERSITIES

International classrooms, more insight into other perspectives and opinions, learning to be more reflective.

MAJOR STRENGTHS

Through this offer, the University presents a special programme for students who do not have strong German skills but still can come to Mainz. Students from many different countries can learn with each other and from each other: a perfect setting for intercultural student encounters.

MAJOR WEAKNESSES

Also dependant on funding and recruitment of teachers by the subjects which can be very difficult since there is hardly any capacity to include parts of the programme in the regular curricula.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Contact persons: Colleagues from the Gutenberg International School Services and the International Office

REFERENCES

<https://www.international-office.uni-mainz.de/exchange/gis/>

2.5. Student encounters in the curriculum

There are also curricular strategies to promote student encounters, such as credit awarding seminars or courses with an intercultural component.

2.5.1. Vienna Innovation Program ^{WU}

Vienna University of Economics and Businesses (WU)

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDENT ENCOUNTERS

The „Vienna Innovation Program WU” uses the diversity of students from different backgrounds as an integral part of the university course design and prepares students to solve complex, poorly structured problems in international teams by using new innovation methods. The centrepiece is a two-week intensive course at the Vienna University of Economics and Businesses (WU), which includes a set of interlocking methods that ensure that students acquire knowledge about modern innovation concepts and can use them in the sense of problem- and project-oriented learning. Together, WU (Vienna University of Economics and Businesses) and international students apply the developed concepts to real problems of international partner companies. The realistic, intercultural experience should prepare the participants of the „Vienna Innovation Program WU” for future work situations in innovation management in an international context. Numerous research findings show that high diversity in groups is of central importance for creative idea generation and innovative problem solving. Different cultural characteristics and diverse backgrounds should allow the introduction of different perspectives, which through their synthesis produce unprecedented ideas, creative processes, and innovative organisational approaches.

The „Vienna Innovation Program WU” uses the different backgrounds of 15 local students and 30 international students from partner universities as an integral part of the course design. The students work in highly diverse teams on problem and project-oriented tasks in the field of innovation. Through the mix of students from different countries and working on projects in international teams, the course offers students a new, practical, and sustainable experience of intercultural learning in an innovative context. By using the different backgrounds of the local and international students as a central component of the course design, the „Vienna Innovation Program WU” represents a course design that allows local students to contribute to internationalisation at their home university and to make the university more attractive for international students.

The following learning objectives are defined in order to increase the technical and methodological competence in the area of innovation management. Participating, students should:

- understand the principles of innovation management
- know the latest trends in the field
- validate their possible uses
- use the knowledge acquired to solve a real problem
- reflect critically and expand independently.

CHARACTERISATION

TARGET GROUP

- international students with
- national students

THEMATIC FOCUS

- cultural diversity
- innovation

CONTEXT

- university

DATA COLLECTION:

- desk research

DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALISATION, INNOVATION AND REACH THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSITY

The Vienna Innovation Program WU is institutionalised at the university and embedded in some of the curricula offered. It takes place annually, but is confined to a specific amount of students (45 students in total). The Vienna Innovation Program WU is placed internally at the Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU) and focuses on advanced students (3rd semester) of the English-speaking and internationally oriented Master's Program „Strategy, Innovation and Management Control“ (SIMC) and „Supply Chain Management“ but also on international students on Graduate / Master level (esp. MBA and MSc in Business and Economics) from other universities. The international students come from universities in the Anglo-American region (e.g. University of Chicago, Queen's University, Melbourne Business School or Lancaster Business School). The „Vienna Innovation Program WU“ comprises 40 contact hours with the local faculty. For the SIMC students, the „Vienna Innovation Program WU“ is a course in the elective module „Advanced Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management“. All other students have the option to credit course achievements in the amount of seven credit points.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOLVING INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS IN UNIVERSITIES

The learning objectives for expanding intercultural and personal skills (see Erpenbeck, 2007) include that students:

- can work effectively in highly diverse groups,
- solve emerging communication problems and be able to use conflicts as learning and innovation potential,
- be able to disassemble complex problems and structure solutions,
- get to know time limits as an opportunity for targeted focusing on project-critical aspects,
- can use different ways to come to joint decisions,
- assess the impact of measures developed for different stakeholders and prepare project results for the respective groups.

In this sense solving intercultural conflicts might be included in the content of the program and be an important part of it and could offer variable opportunities to work in an extended way with them.

MAJOR STRENGTHS

The program offers a compact and structured learning experience with support from university teachers. Students have the opportunity to connect with local students but also with other international students from around the world and stay in contact with them, which might be also interesting for later job possibilities. As the program works with real business companies it also promotes students' employability.

MAJOR WEAKNESSES

The participation of the program is restricted to a small number of students in reason of the intensive collaboration between students but also teachers and students. It is also restricted to students from specific Master Programs. It has a clear focus on business-related contents. The target group seems to be mostly reduced to international students with Anglo-American background (US, Australia, Canada, Great Britain, South-America) and might not include international students e.g. from Asia or Eastern-European countries, which is not understandable. It is also not clear if students from a lower financial background have the same opportunities and are included or not.

REFERENCES

<https://www.wu.ac.at/studium/incoming-students/vienna-innovation-program-wu>

2.5.2. International Business Bilingual Course

University of Social Sciences, Poland

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDENT ENCOUNTERS

The bilingual course in International Business is delivered for master students of Management from two programmes (with two different languages of instruction – Polish and English). Local and international students work together in multicultural teams on the business-oriented projects. It started from the initiative of Vice-Dean for International Programmes.

DEGREE OF INSTITUTIONALISATION, INNOVATION AND REACH THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSITY

The course is organised at the Faculty level by the Vice-Dean for International Programmes of the Faculty of Management and Security Studies. It is institutionalised in MA in Management studies curricula and credit-based. In this sense, the course is regularly offered and is delivered throughout the entire semester.

CHARACTERISATION

TARGET GROUP

- international students with
- national students

THEMATIC FOCUS

- language
- intercultural conflicts
- cultural diversity

CONTEXT

- university

DATA COLLECTION:

- observation

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOLVING INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS IN UNIVERSITIES

There are three introductory lectures in this course, intercultural communication, multicultural teams dynamic, and solving intercultural conflicts between students. In order to pass the course and get the credits, students work together in multicultural teams on business-oriented projects, prepare reports and presentations. Through the entire course, the academic teacher serves as the intercultural mediator or facilitator if needed.

MAJOR STRENGTHS

The first major strength of the course is that it promotes problem and experience-based learning and relates to the specific business problem.

The other primary strength is that students who participate in the course appreciate the possibility to practice their intercultural communication and problem-solving skills in a multicultural environment.

MAJOR WEAKNESSES

The first major weakness is that the course is offered only to a limited number of students.

The second primary weakness is that this course is a challenge for the academic teachers who at the same time need to be bilingual, have particular course-related knowledge as well as knowledge on intercultural communication, multicultural teams organisation and dynamics, and solving intercultural conflicts between students.

3. Concluding remarks

As stated before, we hope that these institutional strategies can support HEIs to design their own encounters, considering the context in which they are inserted, the mission they pursue and the different people who constitute and attend them.

There are certainly many other interesting practices of interculturality, in these and other HEIs. Even so, it is important to recognise that the road to travel is long and it seems that we have only just begun the journey. There is a lot to do, in fact.

A critical analysis of the main strengths of these encounters shows how important these initiatives can be to promote contact with the host country, its culture and language, the HEIs and their hosts (staff, teachers, other students...). Because they occur in an atmosphere marked by informality, they tend to favour exchanges and the well-being of the people who participate in them. It is also interesting to note, and although the exchanges are multidimensional – and include local culture, lifestyle, emotional aspects –, that these encounters are often informative (most often providing information related to administrative issues and the functioning of HEIs). Help, support, and collaborative strategies are also present.

But these strategies also reveal weaknesses. And there are two that stand out. First, the difficulty of involving students. The reasons are several: some are organised before all international students have arrived; others fail to mobilise local students, which contributes to bringing together only international students... The second weakness has to do with the sparse organisation of this type of initiative: they often happen once a year, or per semester, which allows the participation of only a small number of students, and makes continuity of action more difficult.

Hence, it would be interesting to see the extent to which these practices are really framed in the values and mission of HEIs (see Figure 1). Otherwise, they run the risk of turning into loose and less mobilising initiatives. Or else, to be reduced to informative sessions related to administrative aspects – which are important, of course, but do not exhaust the wealth of experience and exchange that can occur between and with international students.

In addition, and with a view to enhancing the transformative effects of this kind of activities, HEIs might want to extend the welcoming to migrant students over time, trying to ensure that it applies to the entire stay of students and is not restricted to the first week or one celebration day, however important – and this has to be highlighted – this first contact is as well.

Another fundamental aspect has to do with the fact that, since it is about dialogue, migrant students cannot be left speaking alone. In other words, the activities that they do should not contribute to further isolating them in their “difference”. Therefore, they must involve local students, also because many or some “needs” and “potentialities” of migrant students are shared by local students (e.g., displaced students, who study in a different city). Indeed, dialogue represents an advantage for everyone who participates in it. For this to be true, dialogue must be facilitated by well-trained teachers and staff who have experience with intercultural training, workshop facilitation, and mentoring in conflict situations.

To conclude, and because we are referring to dialogue, encounters, and students, the priority must be to listen to international and local students about their own experiences in these meetings, their wishes, needs, and potential, as well as their proposals for these or new welcoming and intercultural encounters policies and practices. We need to further this work, valuing continuity, proximity, and reflexivity, and we hope this toolkit can support us in imagining ways to do it.

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