

Forging Synergy between a Foreign Language and Intercultural Education

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Abstract

The expansion of the borders of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) provides members of academic communities with a challenging opportunity to participate in various exchange programmes. The phenomenon of mobility tests the proficiency level of the participants' Intercultural Communicative Competence, which enables them not only to speak a common language but also interact effectively and appropriately in the context of a hosting country.

The paper focuses on the case study of internationalisation process implemented by eight European Teacher Training institutions – Cà Foscari University (Italy), the Pedagogical University of Tirol (Austria), the University of Cyprus (Cyprus), the School of Education of Aarhus University (Denmark), the University of Nantes (France), Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest (Hungary), Jagiellonian University, Krakow (Poland), and the Institute of Foreign Languages, Vilnius University (Lithuania) – via the designed educational project carried out within the framework of an Intensive Programme in the socio-cultural context of the Republic of Lithuania. The data of the study based on the participants' reflections reveals that no matter how positive the respondents' attitudes towards mobility are, and how willing they are to participate in various exchange programmes, the level of their ICC does not always meet the desired internal and external outcomes. This proves the necessity of Intercultural education to be integrated into the content of many subjects, foreign languages, above all.

Keywords: teachers' Intercultural Communicative Competence, Intercultural education, educational project, diary, reflection

Introduction

Exchange programmes within the EHEA oblige their participants to become *interculturally competent*. It means that mobile members of the academic

communities are expected to develop their “affective capacity to relinquish ethnocentric attitudes towards and perceptions of others, cognitive ability to establish and maintain a relationship between native cultures and foreign cultures” (Zarate, 1998), and communicate in at least one foreign language. Since the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is identified as the key competence of 21st century citizens (Deardorff, 2010), its development becomes one of the prioritized areas in both secondary schools and institutions of higher education (Žydžiūnaitė et al., 2010): “now society expects schools to deal with different languages and student backgrounds effectively, to be sensitive to culture and gender issues, to promote tolerance and social cohesion” (OECD, 2005), and “teachers become the main factors of education changes and mediators of society development processes in the alteration of educational systems” (Barkauskaitė, 2005). To support the prevailing demand for ICC development at universities, the target competence has been included in the list of learning outcomes in the majority of study programmes. Despite the attention given to ICC development, there is still a feeling of uncertainty with respect to teachers’ readiness to develop younger generations’ ICC, which would enable them, first, to grasp the core of their national identity, to become open and curious about other cultures, to be able to recognize the manifestations of behaviour based on the limits of other cultures, and to discover cultural differences and commonalities, and, second, to shift their attitudes from ethnocentric points of view towards the ability to see the reality from the others’ perspectives (Deardorff, 2009).

It is quite complicated to transfer the criteria measuring a person’s ICC from theory to practice. Only a real encounter with an unfamiliar culture can reveal one’s attitudinal and behavioural dynamics, indicating a certain level of a person’s acquired ICC; therefore, mobility is considered the best educational means for developing a person’s ICC. It provides conditions for creating authentic relationships at the socio-cultural, academic and professional levels.

This paper focuses on the development of the ICC of teachers, the people who are responsible for raising their students’ awareness of the existing differences and similarities between their native culture and other cultures, which is the backbone strategy in intercultural education. Thus, the Subject of the paper – a teacher’s intercultural communicative competence.

The aim of the paper is to substantiate ICC developmental possibilities theoretically and empirically. In order to fulfil this aim, the following objectives were set:

1. to discuss the scholars’ insights into prevailing tendencies of intercultural training;
2. to highlight future EU teachers’ ICC manifestation in the socio-cultural context of Lithuania within the framework of an educational project.

Educational project: Participants

The implementation of the educational project is related to the LLP Erasmus project “EMETT – European Master for European Teacher Training”, (No. 134348-LLP-1-IT-ERASMUS-ECDSP), the output of which – the newly designed MA study programme – aims to devise teacher training that will develop knowledge, abilities, and professional awareness indispensable for teachers practicing in the European context. The study programme comprised a mobility term, the content of which was implemented via the Erasmus Intensive programme (IP) entitled “MEITT - Modernisation of Europe by Innovating Teacher Training” (No. LLP-ERA-IP-2009-LT-0261-LSS-12400-1133). The educational project provided the background for the IP. Thirty-three student teachers of various subjects representing seven European teacher training institutions – Ca’Foscari University, the Pedagogical University of Tirol, the University of Cyprus, the School of Education at Aarhus University, the University of Nantes, Eötvös Loránd University, and Jagiellonian University participated in a two-week educational project carried out at Vilnius University.

Educational project: Methodology

A complex syllabus of the educational project was designed to enhance its participants’ ICC both theoretically and practically. Further to the lectures and seminars on teacher profession, a number of activities were dedicated to master student teachers’ ICC: lectures on the history and culture of the host country (Lithuania) and its capital Vilnius, the Lithuanian education system, Lithuanian culture, lessons in Lithuanian language, excursions to the country’s historical places, an observation of the festivities dedicated to the Day of the Lithuanian Statehood, a two-day trip to the Open Air Museum of Lithuania in Rumšiškės, the Curonian Spit and the Baltic sea, and national evenings organized by the project participants. In addition, the future teachers had to carry out an ethnographic survey, i.e., to explore the socio-cultural context of the host country. While applying the *ethnographic method*, there was no intention of turning project participants into ethnographers in any full sense of the term (Roberts et al., 2001). We aimed at equipping them “with the ethnographic skills and knowledge” to carry out their own research (Byram, 2001, p. 79), i.e., to develop enough ethnographic imagination to describe, interpret, explain and construct the socio-cultural reality of the country (Bitinas, 2006). The applied reflection method helped the project participants to unfold some particular objects and situations *here and now* (Zlataravičienė et al., 2008, p. 89), and also to identify the correlation between the similarities and differences between their native culture and that of the host country, to become aware of the importance of their own identity and its impact on discovering and interpreting other cultures, and to expand their own worldviews. The *diary* was chosen as a data-collection instrument to

identify the student teachers' ICC-manifestation tendencies through their reflection, for it encompasses the methods of introspection and retrospection that are of particular importance for revealing one's cultural experience (Bailey & Ochsner, 1983), which cannot be measured by any other means.

From the diary data obtained, it was possible to identify the teachers' English-language proficiency, which, consequently, revealed the range of their abilities to demonstrate the worldview and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1994) they had obtained. The latter was the background for constructing and interpreting the socio-cultural context of Lithuania. This instrument also allowed us to see the events from the student teachers' point of view and observe shifts in their attitudes.

The analysis of the data obtained by the 33 project participants was based on *qualitative content analysis*. (Žydzūnaitė et al., 2005). Cultural anthropologists F. Kluckhohn and F. Strodtbeck's Model of "Value Orientations," comprising such structural parts as 1) the human orientation to activity; 2) the relationship of humans to each other; 3) the nature of human beings; 4) the relationship of humans to the natural world; 5) the orientation of humans to time (Lustig & Koester, 2010, p. 90) was chosen as a methodological background for data interpretation.

Key Aspects of Intercultural Education

The revision of the research literature on intercultural education allows us to highlight several prevalent tendencies in this field of the EHEA. First of all, scholars admit the fact higher education institutions are responding to a worldwide demand for "interculturally competent" graduates (Paige & Goode, 2009, p. 333). To satisfy this demand, universities are widely considering the necessity to educate professionals who will "help foster cultural self-awareness and intercultural competence among their students" (Paige & Goode, 2009, p. 341), and manage the process of implementation of internationalisation. Further, R. Paige and M. Goode propose cultural mentoring during the study process that will support incoming students "when they are feeling strongly challenged by cultural differences" (2009, p. 335). Secondly, it has been admitted that institutions of higher education participating in the process of internationalisation started renewing the content of the study programmes targeting the development of students' ICC throughout the component of experience (Paige et al., 2004; O'Donovan & Mikelonis, 2005; Cushner, 2009; Ruskamp, 2009). In many cases, the period for students' exposure to a new culture is foreseen, which, naturally, guarantees the students' immersion into a new socio-cultural context and the development of their abilities to reflect upon it (Zeichner, 1996; Deardorff, 2010). Third, intercultural education is considered to be beneficial when studies abroad are student-oriented and guided by

experienced professional educators (Paige et al., 2004; Vande Berg et al., 2004; Vande Berg, 2007; Vande Berg & Paige, 2009) who are responsible for ensuring “that students would derive as much benefit as possible from time abroad” (Savicki & Selby, 2008, p. 349). K. Cushner proposes to classify study programmes “according to the degree of immersion into the host culture that the experience provides” and recommends relying on the assumption by L. Engle and J. Engle, which states that “the more integrated a student is in the host culture, the better the programme is assisting the student to develop Intercultural Competence” (2009, p. 158). This contemplation sums up the goals of any study-abroad period: to master competences both in the field of the subject studied and personal development; to cross the boundaries of a personal comfort zone; to get acquainted with the education system and the prevailing philosophy of education and teaching methods, and to expand one’s knowledge of the culture of the host country and the worldview of the local people.

The target of intercultural education is a person’s Intercultural Communicative Competence, defined in this article as “complex abilities ...required to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (Fantini, 2009, p. 458). According to A. Fantini, *effective* reflects the view of one’s own performance in the target-language culture (an outsider’s or “etic” view), while *appropriate* reflects how natives perceive such performance (an insider’s or “emic” view).

The research literature presents the conceptualization of the construct of ICC as highly intertwined with the learning outcomes of the study programme and the context it manifests (Neuliep, 2006; Lustig & Koester, 2010). There is neither a common agreement on the content of ICC, nor the subject domain that should cover the development of ICC. Some scholars (Barkauskaitė, 2007; Gaižutis, 2011; Gibson, 2002; Lukšienė, 2000; Schachinger & Taylor, 2000) claim that one discipline alone is not enough to develop a person’s ICC, while others (Bandura, 2005; Byram, 1989, 2008; Fenner, 2006; Lázár, 2003; Little, 2007; Nizegorodcew, 2011; Risager, 2007; Sercu, 2005; Zarate, 1998) maintain that ICC development is a mission of foreign language teachers when language teaching integrates aspects of other sciences such as anthropology, social psychology, sociology. The third group of scientists (Bennet, 2008; Goode, 2008; Cushner, 2009; Cushner & Mahon, 2009; Paige et al., 2009; Sunnugard, 2007) believe that the process of intercultural training should encompass all the three chains of a higher education institution, including administrators, pedagogical staff and students, making them aware of the ICC concept and its importance in the process of internationalisation. The case presented in this paper supports the synergy of two fields – foreign language and anthropology.

Results & Discussion

Culture-revealing Models, both vertical and horizontal (according to G. Weaver, 2000, pp. 75–77), equipped the project participants with abilities to identify cultural aspects typical of the host country’s socio-cultural context and its people. Among the abundance of data obtained the informants’ reflections mainly focused on people’s value orientations, therefore, the *Value Orientations Model* designed by anthropologists **F. Kluckhohn and F. Strodtbeck** (see Table 1) was chosen for data interpretation.

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck’s Value Orientations. **Table 1.**

Orientation	Postulated Range of Variations		
Activity	Being	Being-in-becoming	Doing
Relationships	Linearity	Collaterality	Individualism
Human nature	Evil	Mixture of good and evil	Good
People-nature	Subjugation to nature	Harmony with nature	Mastery over nature
Time	Past	Present	Future

Source: Adapted version by M. Lustig and J. Koester, *Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication across Cultures*, Boston: Allyn& Bacon, 2010, p. 91.

The culture’s orientation to the value of activity

According to M. Lustig and J. Koester’s insights, a culture’s orientation to the importance and value of activity can range from passive acceptance of the world (a “being” orientation) to a preference for a gradual transformation of the human condition (a “being-in-becoming” orientation) and to a more direct intervention (a “doing” orientation) (Lustig& Koester, 2010, p. 90).

Having reviewed the data presented by the participants of the educational project, the first thing that draws a reader’s attention is the student teachers’ surprise at the Lithuanian people’s pace of life: “*We always have to be in a hurry and on time. It is a little bit stressful,*” indicate the informants from France. They find it difficult to adapt to such an orientation to time, while the student teachers from Italy demonstrate their impatience, stating that “*Lithuanians have lost the concept of time... there exist 24 hours per day, not 30!*”.

Since the participants spent most of the time within the academic context, the majority of the informants' observations reflect the academic community's orientation towards the value of activity. They point out Lithuanians' keenness on intensive work and punctuality, misinterpretation of one's leisure time and love of organizing everything. The informants from Hungary and France indicate that Lithuanians: "*plan everything and try to be prepared for any case in life, though it is impossible!*"; "*you organise every step and explain how to carry it out*". The last comment was related to the tradition of organizing guided excursions to introduce the country or the city. However, this way of getting acquainted with a new country/city was not acceptable for the student teachers from Denmark and Italy: "*Your society members neglect a person's right to privacy: you foresee the strategies of how to discover your country beforehand: book excursions or appoint students to guide us. But we are mature enough to discover your country on our own. In Denmark we let foreigners discover our country themselves*". Lithuanians' penchant for carrying out activities in an intensive way was stressed in many cases and evaluated differently by the informants. Table 2 sums up the education-project participants' attitudes towards the intensity of activities in the Lithuanian academic context:

Informants' positive attitudes towards the intensity of activities. **Table 2a.**

Informants from Austria: <i>"Everything is organised very intensively", "agenda for the whole day".</i>
Informants from Cyprus: <i>"The programme is very intensive, even for the weekend!"</i>
Informants from Poland: <i>"The programme is very intensive. Due to its intensity we can see and discover many valuable things, national evenings among them".</i> <i>"Although the programme was very intensive and I had to get up early, I really like it and enjoy its every moment".</i>
Informants from Hungary: <i>"The programme was compact and well organised",</i> <i>"really good according to the lecture – leisure time ratio: lectures-seminars-national evening",</i> <i>"although I was tired of the variety of lectures and seminars, and sleepless nights, I would not change anything in the syllabus of the programme. I was happy while participating in it, and my university colleagues were happy too".</i>

Informants' negative attitudes toward the intensity of activities. **Table 2b.**

Informants from Italy:

"Excellent range of activities: diversity of lectures, keeping the schedules, punctuality. What should I say? A good school for army officers",

"The requirements for the programme participants are too high: preparatory work before coming, extra tasks, including diary writing, during the programme. When shall I do all of them?"

"I got tired because of the intensive programme. I keep asking myself all the time I am I on holiday or at work?"

"Lithuanians have lost the concept of time: you should study a little of Latin culture, 'carpe diem'".

"I have never done so much within such a short period of time as in Lithuania."

Informants from Denmark:

"You want to grasp everything within such a short period of time",

"This programme is too ambitious. From my point of view it is unfair to leave students without leisure and sleep. First, we are surrounded by unfamiliar people, second, the course is run in a foreign language, third, we find ourselves in a strange city, we need leisure to recover from all these things!"

"Why nobody told me that I would have to work? If I had known that I would not have joined the programme".

Having decided to participate in the intensive programme and become familiar with its syllabus, some of its participants forget about the very nature of the programme and tried to establish the rules of their own cultures in the context of the host country. On the other hand, their reflections helped us to reveal a definite fact that our society members' orientation to activity is the "doing" type, where "work comes before play" (Lustig & Koester, 2010, p. 94) and makes people forget about themselves as personalities.

The culture's orientation to the value of human relationships

"A culture's solution to how it should organize itself to deal with interpersonal relationships can vary along a continuum from hierarchical social organization ('linearity') to group identification ('collaterality' or 'collectivism') or individual autonomy ('individualism')" (Lustig & Koester, 2010, p. 91). To put it another way, the social-relations orientation describes how the people in a culture organize themselves and relate to one another. Student teachers' reflections on this issue allowed us to identify four areas of human relationships existing in the country: Lithuanians' relationship with the country residents of different nationalities; the residents' inner relationship; student-teacher relationships in the academic context;

and the country residents' relationship with foreigners. Lithuanians' relationship with ethnic minorities residing in the country was illustrated by the reflection found in an informant from Austria's diary: *"Lithuanians are very tolerant of the people from minorities living in Lithuania (Karaites case in Trakai)."* This opinion is supported by an informant from Hungary's insight: *"Lithuanian people open up in the run of time, they are used to live together with Jews, Polish, Russian."* The informant's reflection sidetracks to the conclusion that generalizes the origins of good relationships demonstrated by the leaders of the country: *"The President's participation in the ceremonies on the Day of Statehood (6 July) demonstrates great respect to common people."*

The tendency of good innerrelationships among the citizens of Lithuania was noted by the informants from Hungary, Denmark and France:

"Friendly, make easy connections, smiling...; there are many old(er) people on the streets. In general, people are happy, helpful and kind, the same as in my country (Hungary) – they are warm-hearted. It is good that even when the financial situation of the country is difficult people are able to smile."

According to Lithuanian psychologist V. Legkauskas, the interpretation of people's social relationship is always subjective and biased, and depends either on the nature of our interest (2008, p. 149) or adopted attitudes. Danish student teachers admit that *"people seem to be supportive to each other and have a strong sense of family"*, *"people trust each other"*. Italian student teachers point out a *"good atmosphere on the buses and trolley-buses. People here are very supportive,"* while informants from France feel a good atmosphere *"even on the beach. The relations here are good."*

However, the atmosphere in the academic context of the host country dissatisfies the student teachers. They describe it as less friendly than that of their own universities, e.g. the student teachers from Austria and Denmark state that a *"hierarchy is evident between teachers and students. In Austria it is not so strong; the position of a person is more important in our (Austrian) countryside areas."* *"The teachers do not have much respect to the students, in my country (Denmark) professors try to listen what their students tell them."*

It does not take the participants of the educational project long to note that the residents of Lithuania have a special attitude towards foreigners. Some of them were surprised at the level of Lithuanians' openness and helpfulness toward foreigners (9 cases):

"You are open-minded and very positive towards foreigners. You are interested in our culture! In Austria we are also open-minded, however, the Austrian people's

level of tolerance towards foreigners depends on the name of the country they come from. And Austrians are more distant from foreigners."

The respondent from Austria's reflection is supported by a student teacher from Poland: *"People are positive in general, very hospitable and friendly"*. However, some criticism is voiced at the customer-service mentality: *"Sometimes waiters and waitresses appear to be mean. It is a pity that the service staff of the restaurants do not respect foreign guests"*. The informants keep comparing and contrasting their native people's attitude toward foreigners: *"Your people are friendlier to foreigners than we, Hungarians, are. You smile at foreigners and help them. Especially you're happy when foreigners say something in Lithuanian. Further to it, you are interested in who we are, ask about our culture and traditions. We, Hungarians, try to be friendly to foreigners too, we understand that tourism is important, but we aren't as polite to foreigners as Lithuanians are"*; or *"Your people are much friendlier to foreigners than the French people are: we keep distance from them. We also find that your people are very curious about foreigners"*.

Describing human relationships in an unfamiliar context is one of the most complicated tasks. It requires specific culture knowledge about the host country, time to feel the new culture and experience to interpret it. Although the informants' skills in evaluating and interpreting the host-country residents' orientation to human relationships appear to be rather limited, and there is some evidence that reflections are linked to the people they met or situations they were involved in, the data obtained lead us to the assumption that the Lithuanian culture is oriented to collaterality with sparse manifestations of individualism.

The nature of human beings

Considering the nature of the host country people, the informants identified 48 character features of the people of Lithuania. ***Friendliness*** was pointed out as the most typical feature of the residents of the host country (20 cases): *"Lithuanians are nice and friendly, happy and smiling", "friendly and supportive"*.

60 % of the informants said Lithuanians are ***kind and nice***: *"Your people are very nice: on the bus a girl came up to us to offer her help. We did not invite her; she did it voluntarily. The other one helped us on the street. In Italy people do not offer their help if they are not asked."* The informant from Austria doubts if this character feature is typical of her compatriots: *"Lithuanian students are so kind to us. We have been wondering whether the Austrian students would be as kind as the Lithuanians are to foreigners?"*

The third feature on a hierarchical scale happens to be Lithuanians' **helpfulness** (18 cases): "very supportive, willing to help", "any time when help was in need we were given a hand".

Lithuanians' well-known feature of **hospitality** was remarked upon by nine informants: "very hospitable", "they know the way how to treat foreigners". In an investigation into the origin of the Lithuanian **hospitality**, Lithuanian scholar M. Lukšienė compares it to the feature of **servilism** described in M. Shennan's European Identity theory, which states that Lithuanians might have inherited this feature during the cultural encounter with the Byzantine empire (2000, p. 37). The Greek Cypriots support the researcher's idea, stating that our (Lithuanian) and their (Greek) "attitudes toward foreigners match". The Polish informants are of the same opinion of their compatriots: "Poles try to be as hospitable as possible." However, the rest of the informants doubt whether they can attribute these characteristics to people in their home countries: "In France younger generation are very open-minded, however, people in general are not so welcoming"; "We (Italians) are not as hospitable as you are." French and Austrians admit that their people "keep away from foreigners".

The other characteristic features of the Lithuanian people discovered by the participants of the education project can be arranged in the following order:

open (seven cases): "you're open to the world, and proud of your origin".

The Lithuanian scholar R. Grigas discusses the importance of openness in the process of education, maintaining that the evolution of the nation can only occur only when it is open to the constantly changing world, and, on the other hand, receptive. However, openness should be selective (2005, p. 18).

sociable (five cases): "making easy connections, smiling", "not greedy for advice".

polite (five cases): "too polite to very demanding people".

honest (five cases): Lithuanians were discovered as respecting the "family institution" and proud of "the history of their country", "customs and traditions", "their culture", "their nation" and "their national identity".

Although the majority of informants pointed out positive features of the people in the host country, there were some cases that highlighted the negative features typical of the Lithuanian people:

avoiding uncertainty (four cases): "you are not very keen on confrontations with foreigners", "your people tend to avoid constructive talks". This feature of the country's residents is considered negative in the reflections of Danish and Hungarian student teachers.

dishonest (six cases): service people, mainly taxi drivers who have a habit of cheating foreign visitors, were described as dishonest.

rude(sixcases): Lithuanian society members also cannot escape the phenomenon of being black sheep in a herd of white. This philosophical insight, revealed by the Cypriot student teachers, was meant to describe the rude service personnel who, further to the lack of foreign language knowledge, hide themselves under a skin of impoliteness, and thus tarnish the image of the residents.

Despite some negative features that, according to Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, stand for the ingredients of evil, the abundance of data presented by the informants reveal the dominant nature of the host-country people to be good.

The relationship of humans to the natural world

In F. Kluckhohn and F. Strodtbeck's *Value Orientations Model*, a culture's response to the preferred relationship of humans to the natural world can range from a belief that "people are subjugated by nature" to "people live in harmony with nature" to "people master nature" (Lustig & Koester, 2010, p. 91).

Environmental psychologist Richard Knopf maintains that "the natural environment is valued differently by different people. A culture's relationship with nature is culture bound". According to Knopf, culture influences the degree to which people value nature and the symbols they use to communicate about it. People perceive and create symbols of their environment based on their cultural experiences with it. (Knopf, cit. by Neuliep, 2012, p. 135).

J. Lang emphasises the importance of the built environment of any culture, which demonstrates people's adaptations to the terrestrial environment. "The built environment artificially changes natural patterns of behaviour, heat, light, sound, odour, and human communication" (cit. by Neuliep, 2012, p. 139).

The abundance of data obtained on the "*the incredibly beautiful country with amazingly fantastic views, many rivers, lakes, forests, green landscapes*" proved that environment is important to Lithuanian society and allowed us to classify the reflection cases into groups describing:

The landscape of the city of Vilnius:

"While landing I saw the green landscape of Vilnius. It is very impressive". Student teachers from Austria, Denmark, Italy, Hungary remarked on the greenness of the city, expressing regret that the cities they come from "*do not possess as much greenness as Vilnius does*". Vilnius citizens' relationship with the landscape was noticed too. It was measured by the level of cleanliness in the streets: "*Vilnius is so green and very clean. I am sorry to say that Copenhagen is far more dirty*" and how the citizens take care of the public places in the city: "*Vilnius is very*

green, we do not have so many nice squares in our capital (Budapest)". Recently the topic of the *Built Environment* has often been included in the syllabus of Intercultural studies. Lang emphasises the fact that "built environment is not random; it is intentionally designed to facilitate or restrict human interaction" and that it demonstrates relationships between objects and objects, objects and people, people and people (Neuliep, 2012, p. 139).

The landscape of Lithuania:

C. Sauer, an American geographer, advocated "a strictly geographical way of thinking of culture, namely, as the impress of the works of man upon the area" (Sauer, 1967, p. 326). S. Šalkauskis, a Lithuanian philosopher and teacher trainer, was also of the same opinion and acknowledged the fact that "a culture's relationship with nature is demonstrated by the state of nature as a result of human activities" (1990, p. 19). According to Neuliep's insights, "a culture's orientation toward nature affects how people within that culture communicate about nature and organize their daily activities. Knowing and understanding a particular culture's orientation toward nature is a helpful step in becoming competent intercultural communicator" (2012, p. 136).

J. Neuliep notes that all cultures exist within specific terrestrial contexts; however, some aspects of the terrestrial environment exist in every culture, while others do not. <...> oceans, lakes, streams, mountain ranges, deserts, valleys, trees, and forms of vegetation vary considerably across cultures. According to Lang, the natural environment of any culture influences life in that culture. Physical and climatic aspects of the environment can restrict the kinds of activities that occur (Neuliep, 2012: 136).

Although the project participants' acquaintance with Lithuania and its landscape was based just on a two-day trip on the arranged Vilnius–Rumšiškės–Klaipėda, Klaipėda–Curonian Spit–Vilnius itinerary and a trip to Trakai, their reflections are full of landscape details. Student teachers not only demonstrate the skills of observation and evaluation, they also relate the landscape of the host country to their native countries. The most impressive landscape pictures of Lithuania and the informants' native countries are presented in Table 3.

Landscape comparison. **Table 3.**

Landscape of Lithuania	Landscape of My Country
<p>From the informants from Austria: <i>“Lithuania is a country of plains, dunes, the sea and greenness reigning everywhere”.</i></p>	<p><i>“In Austria the landscape is very mountainous, there is no sea. We do not have the seaside, though our lakes and mountains are very beautiful.”</i></p>
<p>From the informants from Cyprus: <i>“Beautiful country with amazingly fantastic views, many rivers, lakes, forests, green landscapes; it is so incredible!”</i></p>	<p><i>“We do not have such green landscapes, lakes and forests, neither the rivers to walk along.”</i></p>
<p>From the informants from Denmark: <i>“Lithuanian nature is lovely, not too much garbage.”</i> <i>“The trip to the Baltic Sea showed Lithuania’s beautiful forest areas and wonderful beaches.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Denmark also has some spots of green nature.”</i></p>
<p>From the informants from France: <i>“You are very rich: you have many rivers and forests, your country is green”.</i></p>	<p><i>“There are not so many forests in France, there are not so many lakes, either”.</i></p>
<p>From the informants from Hungary: <i>“The nature of your country is unique: 2824 lakes; ~ 800 rivers, churches, castles, beautiful seaside, sand dunes—all of them contribute to the uniqueness of the country”.</i></p>	<p><i>“Our landscape does not vary as much as yours”.</i></p>
<p>From the informants from Italy: <i>“The landscape is nice, pristine and very green”.</i></p>	<p><i>“In Italy we have less green areas”.</i></p>
<p>From the informants from Poland: <i>“Breathtaking! We find the nature of your country wilder and more intense”.</i></p>	<p><i>“In Poland we have a very similar coastline and seaside. We also have forests and dunes so we feel like we’re at home. We do not have as many lakes as you do.”</i></p>

The data obtained prove the informants' skills not only in comparing/contrasting the landscapes of the countries, but also in describing natural objects in detail, e.g. water deposits of the country, the Curonian Spit and "*the fairy-tale like greenery reigning everywhere*". With respect to English-language proficiency, the diary appeared to be the right tool to observe linguistic progress: If there were just a few lines written on the first days of the stay, subsequently, the ideas presented were much more elaborate, like the following one: "*The Baltic sea and its dunes are so impressive! The Curonian Spit makes you feel like you were in a dream standing at the crossroads of northern Africa, southern Europe and Scandinavia*".

Detailed pictures of green forest areas and wild foods were found in the reflections of the informants from Cyprus, France, Italy, Hungary and Poland. Some of them are very interesting, e.g. the Italian student teacher notices Lithuanians' relationship with bees: "*I've noticed that there are many hives in the homesteads*" and regrets that "*in Italy it is a very rare case when people keep bees: the level of pollution is much higher*". The informant from France succeeds in discovering several layers of the soil, Cypriots identify nature's influence on the people's character and point out the existing nature-mythology-history synthesis; however, this already leads to the other value orientations related to time. The data collected make us infer that nature is a source of spiritual inspiration for the Lithuanian people, thus they strive to live in harmony with the natural world.

The orientation of humans to time

This orientation concerns how people conceptualize time, whether the culture's preferred time orientation emphasizes events and experiences from the past, the present, or the future. The reflections of student teachers from Hungary and Austria reveal people's evident respect for their customs and traditions. The data obtained on the country residents' orientation to time fall into the following groups:

- 1) preservation of the ethnic culture via embodying its elements in the world of nature;
- 2) nurture of mother tongue, customs and traditions;
- 3) commemoration of historic events and famous persons.

The past is very important to Lithuanians. This opinion was predominant in many of the informants' diaries. According to their insights, "*Lithuanians still live in the ancient traditions, legends, fairy-tales and myths*", "*and they care of the past which, to my mind, is their greatest value*". Having gone sightseeing on the Hill of Witches, one of the most beautiful dunes in the region of Juodkrantė that is overgrown with old pine trees sheltering the outdoor exposition of wooden sculptures, the informants reveal Lithuanians' love of nature, forests and trees. The local people's decision to

revive fairy-tale characters in carvings seemed to astonish them, which can be interpreted as a compliment: *“the best example for the nation to preserve its past”*; or a sneer at *“the people’s total regress revealing how conservative they are”*. After the visit to the Rumšiškės open-air ethnographic museum, which displays the rural way of life in Lithuania’s four regions, the majority of the project participants praised the residents of the country for preserving the reality of the past in connection with the present. The informants from Cyprus, Poland and France found such a museum to be a good didactic example for the younger generations to discover the history of the country, otherwise *“urban children won’t know where milk comes from, as it often happens to children in Paris”*. Student teachers from Denmark and Italy find it boring to explore the past of the host country. They claim that young people do not like talking about the past or history of any country. This will be discussed when describing the place of history in the people’s lives.

All the participants of the project had an opportunity to be exposed to some folklore elements during nearly every cultural evening. At the Lithuanian cultural event, they were taught folk dances and folk songs, how to weave Easter palms and how to paint eggs. These activities were abundantly reflected upon by the informants. Their opinions differ: Some enjoyed *“every minute of dancing and singing”* while the others wondered what kind of Lithuanian identity the organisers of the project were creating: *“I saw parts of the Lithuanian traditions (egg painting, Easter palm making, dancing and singing) but I do not really know whether, e.g., traditional dances are part of young people’s everyday lives or whether the dances are mostly used to show tourists?”*. A third group managed to suspend criticism and remain discrete, saying that *“It is great when people care about the preservation of their language, folk songs and dances, national foods and commemoration of historic events. My people (Hungarians) do not have so many traditions and we do not live by traditions, we care about the present”*, thus demonstrating that their culture’s orientation to time is different from ours.

The informants’ reflection on the Lithuanian people’s relationship with history is based on the Day of the Statehood events held in Vilnius. Student teachers from seven EU universities had an opportunity to observe the flag-hoisting ceremony at the Presidential Palace and the re-enactment of the Grünwald battle at the Cathedral’s Square, visit a number of monuments dedicated to famous Lithuanians or historic events, and interview local people at the monument and inquire as to who/what it is meant for. This interactive way of familiarizing themselves with the history of the host country appealed to the informants’ feelings, prompting them to review their own identities. They came to the conclusion that *“everybody sees that you do care about your history, probably you’re in love with your history.”* However, sightseeing the monuments and interviewing local residents made the informants change their minds

and draw a gap between Lithuanians' different orientation to time and the value of history to younger and older generations: *"are you aware of the fact that your younger generation do not like the monuments of the city? They feel being Europeans now free to go wherever they want"*. This could be an indication that in time, people's orientation to time might change. Currently, it can be stated that Lithuanians live in the past, present and future: They value their traditions and find ways to revive them. They cherish their history and traditions and they want the younger generation to know and observe them. Thus the people's orientation to activity expands the range of orientation from the past to the present and adds the component of the future.

To sum up, student teachers' ICC skills allowed them to discover Lithuania as a country whose people's orientation to activity is of "doing", whose socio-relationship varies from collaterality to individualism, where the nature of people is good, where residents live in harmony with nature, and where people value the past, the present and the future.

It must be affirmed that diary is a rewarding tool, not only for checking students' linguistic abilities, but also for tracing out the manifestation of their ICC components. Due to the culture-general (culture-revealing models) and culture-specific (information about the host country) knowledge, their skills of interpretation and evaluation are relevant to the socio-cultural makeup of the host country. The cases of manifestation of ethnocentric views, first, made them consider their own cultural identity, and second, made them judge every aspect of the new culture that was not in compliance with their native culture. The education project showed that well-planned activities and appropriate didactic tools can contribute much to the development of a person's intercultural communicative competence.

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