

# “The (Inter)Cultural Iceberg“

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## Preface

The “Eurolog“ project was conceived as a European dialogue on antique cultures, and serves as an instrument to improve the understanding of foreign past and present cultures in Europe and beyond these borders to Northern African countries and the Levant.

Methods for conveying information are developed through debates with archaeology and past cultures in order to contribute to an understanding of the past and present cultures; which emphasises intercultural competence in the respective countries.

The Eurolog project partners come from Herakleion (Greece), Alanya (Turkey), Rome (Italy) and Karlsruhe (Germany). The partner institutions had already undertaken several successful cooperative projects prior to their involvement in the current initiative. Partnership and friendly relations between the partner institutes should increase and intensify through cooperation in the Eurolog project. In particular, the symposium at the Musée National du Bardo in Tunisia at the end of April 2012, with lectures from internationally-renowned archaeologists, sociologists and museum experts, provided a platform for exchanging knowledge on the intercultural phenomena and served to form the foundations of content and methodological realisation of the project.

At the beginning of the symposium, the participants – particularly the representatives from the partner institutions – were provided with a comprehensive introduction to the topic of “Intercultural Competence”, which covered various subject areas.

Beyond the “factual intercultural competence”, the objective was to test one’s own pre-conceptions, to make conscious the everyday usage of stereotypes and to recognise and reflect on personal and factual intercultural competence using the iceberg picture in order to increase awareness.

The lecture on “The (Inter)Cultural Iceberg”, which I presented as a scientific employee of the Karlsruhe Institute for Technology (KIT), served to go beyond the acquisition of intercultural competence, towards the intercultural or even the transcultural openness of each.

## 1 **Stereotype<sup>1</sup> and Pigeonhole Thinking**

Let us imagine a nice, shiny, red draw cabinet. One that we would perhaps see in an office, a chemist or a doctor's practice; one like the example here:



The purpose of such cabinets is to store complex information material, such as payment transactions, medication or patient information, etc, so that it is sorted in a manageable way and is easy to find.

In a similar way, we can also imagine how stereotypes work: according to Thomas<sup>2</sup> a stereotype is a “reductionist ordering system” that is an acquired and internalised way we use to divide the world – at least subconsciously – fully automatically in our daily lives. This is normal and necessary! We absolutely cannot afford, or more precisely our brains absolutely cannot afford to always have to rethink and always have to reflect on how something fits in the complexity of the whole.

This means that a part of our thinking is for practical reasons “schematic thinking”. It manifests itself in “formulaic phrases”.<sup>3</sup>

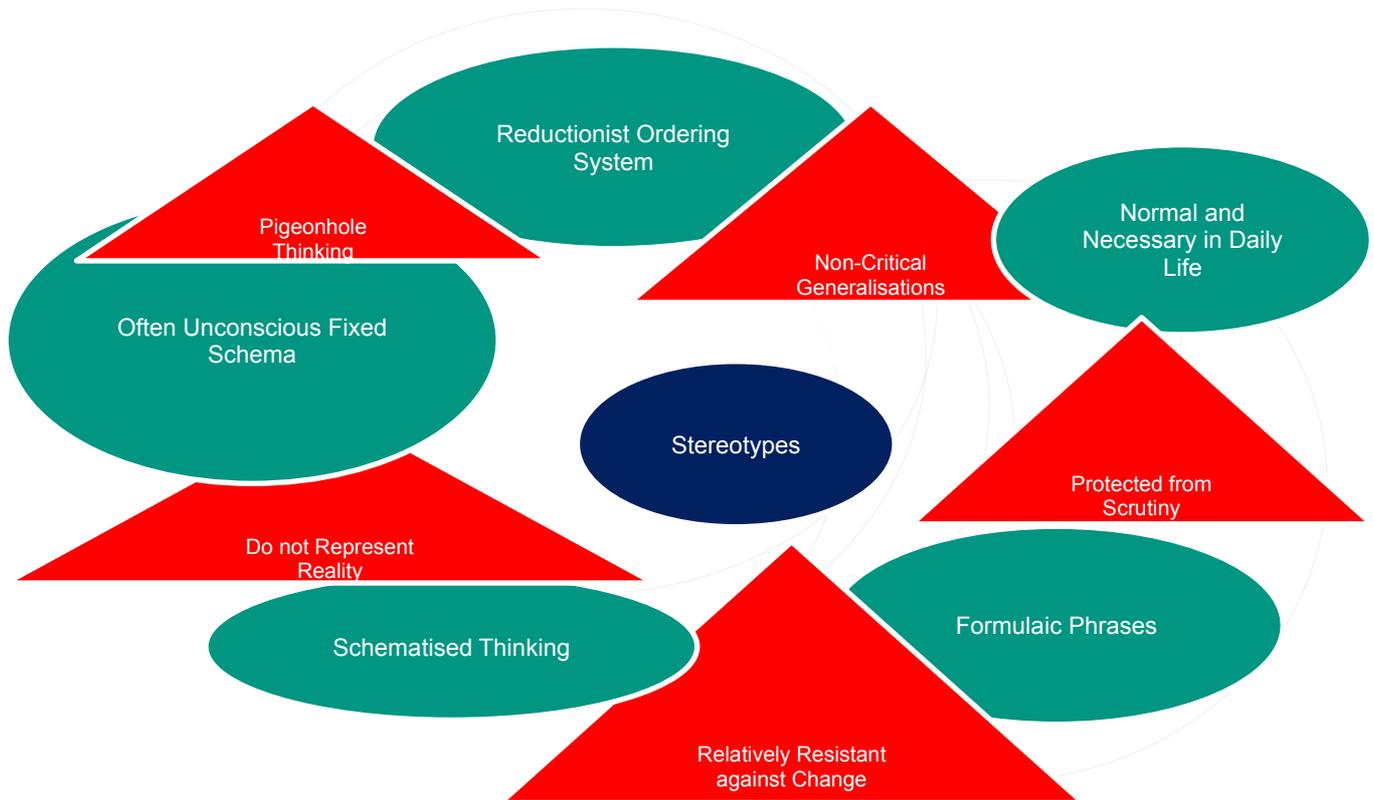
**In order for us as individuals to even attempt to grasp the diversity of this complex world and to deal with it, we need to create topics, set up folders and think in categories.**

Of course, these formulaic phrases are protected from scrutiny as this would require renewed thinking. And here comes the crux between useful stereotypes and pigeonhole thinking: as no regular comparison is made between the folder and its actual content, stereotypes are relatively resistant. This means that they represent a static schematic rather than reality. Pigeonhole thinking is based on unquestioned generalisations and unreflected stereotypes, and as a consequence offers the ideal conditions for prejudices and discrimination.

<sup>1</sup> Comparison Heringer 2010, p198-.

<sup>2</sup> Comparison Thomas 2006, p3-.

<sup>3</sup> Comparison ebd.



[Source: own diagram]

Stereotypes are often associated with the *tacit knowledge*<sup>4</sup> of an individual and a culture, which means they function without you even being aware. Stereotypical perceptions can severely limit successful intercultural activities. Stereotypes reduce the space that one has to negotiate a relationship with a counterpart due to assumptions based on the predefined, stereotypical thoughts. Those who wish to fight against the negative side of stereotypes must firstly acknowledge them and transfer to the realm of explicit, self-reflective and observed knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

“With schemes in mind, we confront not only the complete reality, but also their sections: people that are foreign to us”.<sup>6</sup>

Before we can dedicate ourselves to become conscious of manifested stereotypical, culturally-specific perceptions, we must understand the term “culture”.

<sup>4</sup> Comparison Erll and Gymnich 2010, p59-.

<sup>5</sup> Comparison ebd.

<sup>6</sup> Erll and Gymnich 2010, p73.

## 2 Culture, what is that actually?

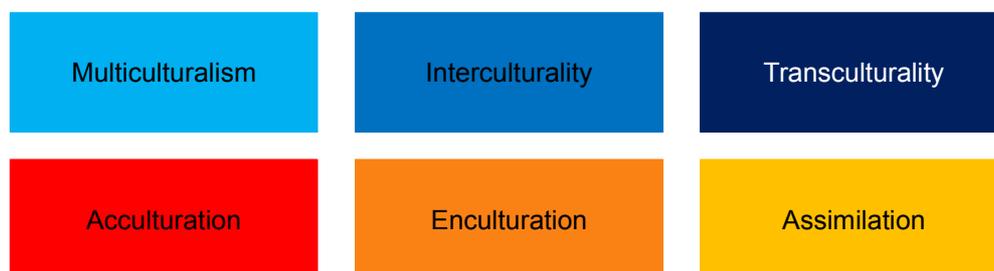
According to the dictionary definition, we understand the term “culture” to mean: “the totality of the intellectual, artistic, creative achievements in a community as an expression of human progress, for example, a people related by language and culture. [But also] all the characteristics created by a particular community in a specific area during a certain era, intellectual, artistic, creative achievements such as Western culture or the culture of the Greeks, the Renaissance in Italy.”<sup>7</sup>

“Culture consists of patterns of thinking, feeling and acting, and is transmitted through symbols that make up the distinctive achievements of specific groups of people and their embodiment in artefacts. The essence of culture consists of traditional (i.e. justified in history and selected by them), ideas and especially their corresponding values.”<sup>8</sup>

“Culture is “mental software” that is culturally “programed” in a socialisation process. During the course of this socialisation, and especially during childhood which is the primary socialisation, the individual acquires certain thought patterns, feelings and actions that are described as values and behaviours.”<sup>9</sup>

“Culture is a universal orientation system typical for a society, national organisation or group. This orientation system consists of specific symbols (e.g. language, meaningful signs and typical behaviour) that are passed down in the respective society, organisation or group. It affects the perceptions, thoughts, values and behaviours of all members, and thereby defines their affiliation with a society. The orientation system allows the members of a society to manage their entire environment, permits rapid communication, simplifies orientation in complex social fields and promotes smooth and effective interpersonal cooperation.”<sup>10</sup>

When we think of “culture”, we also delve into terms that are ubiquitously associated with “culture”:



[Source: own diagram]

<sup>7</sup> www.duden.de

<sup>8</sup> Definition by Kluckhohn

<sup>9</sup> Definition by Hofstede comparison in: Dokumentation mit Theoriebeiträgen und methodischen Übungen zu Kultur und interkulturelles Lernen des Europarates und der Europäischen Kommission, p20-.

<sup>10</sup> Definition by Thomas and Hagemann 1996, p174-.

In the following section, I will briefly explain what we commonly understand under these individual terms.<sup>11</sup> While *multiculturalism* covers the complex existence of influences from several cultures within a region, where people from several different cultures coexist in a culturally diverse community<sup>12</sup>, *interculturality* rather expresses awareness that applies especially to the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of the members of a society. With interculturality, objectives and strategies are developed to achieve respect for and acceptance of diversity<sup>13</sup>. *Acculturation* is where elements of a foreign culture are adopted by individuals or groups – this is understood as a cultural process of adaptation. *Enculturation*, however, is the growth of the individual into the culture of the society surrounding them. *Assimilation* stands for the adaption of an individual or a group to the nature of another group or other people, and is actually meant in the context of the integration of migrants. “[...] A culturally defined majority [...] that is adapted to in stages and should be aligned by individual adaptation and collective modernisation within roughly three generations.”<sup>14</sup>

In the next step, we will look at culture as an iceberg in order to bring to the point what is included under cultural understanding.

### **3 Culture as an Iceberg**

The tip of the iceberg is the much smaller, visible part of the iceberg. In our context, this is everything that an individual shows from their culture. This is everything that we immediately recognise from the other culture that belongs exactly to that culture.

Under the water level lies the much larger part of the iceberg as the invisible, not immediately recognisable part. This unknown area of culture must firstly be “researched” in order to prevent possible “dangers of collision”.

The image of the iceberg is often used in scientific discourses on the topics of “intercultural communication” or “acquisition of intercultural competence” in order to represent and illustrate potential dangers and difficulties. The image is actually borrowed from the Freudian layer model of the human psyche: where Freud refers to the conscious, this is the visible part, while the unconscious is the invisible, implicit culture. The preconscious is something distorted and blurry just below the water level, which can only be decrypted as a recognisable culture when looked at closely.

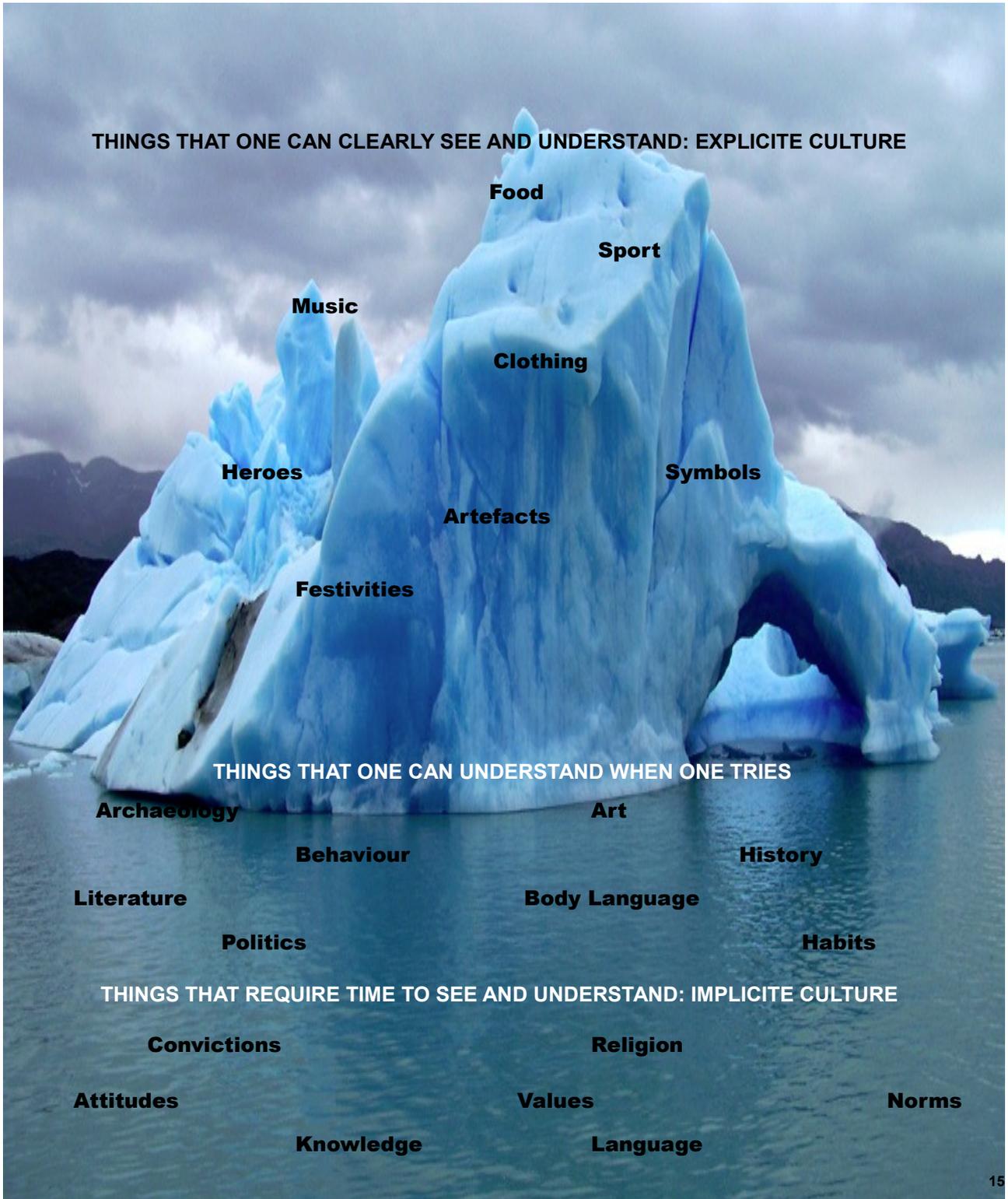
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<sup>11</sup> Comparison: [www.duden.de](http://www.duden.de)

<sup>12</sup> Comparison. Erll and Gymnich 2010, p32-.

<sup>13</sup> Comparison. ebd., p34-.

<sup>14</sup> Ebd., 33; p67-.



Now if we would like to consciously avoid collisions with cultural icebergs, we must be interculturally competent.

<sup>15</sup> Comparison Erll and Gymnich 2010, p22-.

## 4 Intercultural Competence

Our words, our gestures and our actions can be interpreted completely differently by someone from another culture. Just as we do, everyone sees the environment, others and themselves through the lens of their cultural socialisation. How intercultural interaction is achieved, depends on intercultural understanding and the intercultural competence of those involved.

“Intercultural competence is reflected in the ability to capture, respect, appreciate and productively use cultural factors in perceptions, judgments, feelings and actions in oneself and others to promote mutual adaptation; tolerance compared to incompatibilities and a development towards synergy-rich forms of cooperation, coexistence and action-orientation patterns in relation to interpretation of the world and its organisation.”<sup>16</sup>

Intercultural competence consists of three components:

1. Intercultural knowledge
2. Intercultural sensitivity
3. Intercultural competence in action

### 4.1 Intercultural Knowledge (Cognitive)

The first component, the acquisition of intercultural knowledge, describes the cognition, which in turn describes cultural education and culture-specific understanding. Cultural awareness is an important component of general cultural understanding; in other words, the understanding of the cultural dependence of thought, action and behaviour in oneself and others. Knowledge of a foreign culture, its values, norms and conventions, as well as their rules of communication and interaction is important for cultural-specific understanding. The knowledge described above is the basis for the acquisition of intercultural competence.<sup>17</sup>

When we talk about "intercultural learning", this involves learning and experience with concrete knowledge of language, country-specific knowledge, cultural dimensions, standards and processes, ethnocentrism, knowledge of migration and integration processes, culturally-specific knowledge and cultural concepts.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas 2003, p143

<sup>17</sup> Comparison Stellamanns 2007, p23

<sup>18</sup> Comparison <http://www.ikud-seminare.de/interkulturelle-kompetenz.html>

## 4.2 Intercultural Sensitivity (Affective)

"The second component, affinity, signals a positive attitude towards a foreign culture, the tolerance of ambiguity, the ability to reduce stress and anxiety with an intercultural contact and respect the traditions and customs of another culture."<sup>19</sup>

The specific intercultural skills require, but are also limited by, knowledge and skills. The following are all required: reflective skills such as observation, perception, recognition and appreciation, appropriateness, self-reflection, reflection on others, the ability to change perspective, the ability to sympathise, flexibility and openness as well as tolerance and sensitivity.<sup>20</sup>

## 4.3 Intercultural Competence in Action

"The last component, the behavioural component, expresses the motivation and interest to come into contact with people of a foreign culture. Specific factors include friendliness and courtesy to name a few, as well as empathy towards another culture, whereby the ability to develop appropriate strategies of intercultural interaction is probably the most important."<sup>21</sup>

The specific skills required for intercultural competence include: stress management, conflict resolution, communication skills, the ability to integrate, reflected and solution-oriented handling of critical events, non-violent communication and strategies for coping with culture shock(s).<sup>22</sup>

**Intercultural competence can be learned! The basis is the willingness and motivation of the learner to deal with foreign cultures...**

## 5 (Inter)cultural Learning = (Inter)cultural Openness

Although not all human skills and abilities are innate, they can be learned. In the same way intercultural competence can also be learned through the process of intercultural learning. As a basis, this requires the willingness and motivation of the learner to deal with foreign cultures.<sup>23</sup>

"Intercultural learning takes place when a person is willing to understand the specific orientation systems of perceptions, thoughts, values and behaviours of people from other cultures, to integrate these into the own cultural orientation system and to apply them in

<sup>19</sup> Comparison Stellamanns 2007, p24-.

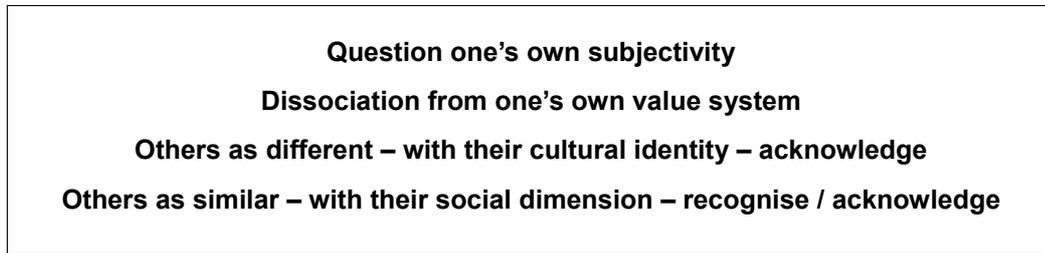
<sup>20</sup> Comparison <http://www.ikud-seminare.de/interkulturelle-kompetenz.html>

<sup>21</sup> Comparison Stellamanns 2007, p24-.

<sup>22</sup> Comparison <http://www.ikud-seminare.de/interkulturelle-kompetenz.html>

<sup>23</sup> Comparison Podsiadlowski 2004, p50

their own thinking and action when dealing with people from another culture. In addition to the understanding of foreign cultural orientation systems, intercultural learning requires a reflection of one's own cultural orientation system (norms, attitudes, beliefs and values)."<sup>24</sup>



## 6 Cultural Openness through Transcultural Sensitivity: Away from Minorities towards Diverse Societies



[Source: own diagram]

When we follow the term transculturality according to Welsch, we need to ask the question what competencies are required in order to think in a “transculturally sensitivity” manner?

One acquires transcultural sensitivity, for example, during a longer period abroad.

“Adaptability to the foreign lifestyle, work culture and consequently the acculturation” is required in the guest country.<sup>25</sup>

Two different cultures collide together in a culture shock: one's own culture and that of the guest country. An adaption and accommodation process begins that brings unavoidable changes with it: we behave according to the new situation. We cannot *not behave*. We also cannot continue to behave in the way we did before we recognised the other culture.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas 1993, p383

<sup>25</sup> Comparison Thomas 2003, p442 on <http://www.transkulturelles-portal.com/index.php/6>

The reverse is also true, as there are typical reaction patterns to observe in the society of a guest country in which many foreign people live.

If both parties (the local and the foreigner) can be curious and open from the start, an ethnocentric situation can develop whereby the norms of the guest country are used as the standard to measure the person from the other culture. This often results in the foreigner being judged as inferior to the local.

Regardless of the cultural background in which people make their socialisation experience, many are convinced that their own behaviour and point of view are the only correct ones. The opposite reaction is xenophilia, which means that one believes the culture of foreign people is always better".<sup>26</sup>

A high level of cultural sensitivity is required before people from different cultural backgrounds can meet each other happily, aside from the usual codes of behaviour that are influential within a cultural. "Deficits in intercultural information, dominance and feelings of superiority, fear of threat, prejudices, counterproductive national and cultural stereotypes, xenophobia and fear of foreign cultures can all be removed through intercultural learning and actions."<sup>27</sup>

How does transcultural sensitivity differ from intercultural sensitivity? If we wish to act in a transculturally sensitive manner, we need to consciously reflect on certain thoughts and actions in our own cultural background. We all carry our own individual cultural socialisation with us. Our behaviour and our perception, alongside other characteristics, possibly mutually limit and / or influence the way we categorise aspects such as ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, religious conviction, social background and health status; in addition to the personal cultural characteristics. High transcultural sensitivity lives and thinks inter- and intracultural diversity and is actively undertaken "to understand the specific orientation systems of perception, thoughts, values and actions, to integrate these into the own cultural orientation system and to apply these thoughts and actions when dealing with foreign cultures."<sup>28</sup>

Transcultural sensitivity therefore does not mean assimilation or xenophilia, but rather the conscious, reflected dealing with the own and the foreign; which is dynamic and constantly changing, and therefore needs to be continually checked.

In conclusion, it is clear that it is not enough to use the term transculturality exclusively for ethnicity, as people are a complex mixture of all possible variations of diversity. We people

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<sup>26</sup> Comparison Hofstede 2006, p448 on <http://www.transkulturelles-portal.com/index.php/6>

<sup>27</sup> Comparison Thomas 2003, p434 on <http://www.transkulturelles-portal.com/index.php/6>

<sup>28</sup> Comparison Thomas 2003, p438 on <http://www.transkulturelles-portal.com/index.php/6>

are equally diverse in terms of gender, age, sexual orientation, religious conviction, social background and health status. These aspects can connect us when dealing with other people or differentiates us in a scale from “relatively familiar” to “completely foreign”. One must be interculturally conscious and reflect on oneself and the other person in a dynamic process for getting closer and reducing fear. Daily life offers unlimited opportunities for practising this in reality. It may sound a little sarcastic; however, ultimately one could say that the knowledge up until now is already well known.

The peace and violence researcher Johan Galtung stated in the 1970’s that “The larger the gap between one’s self and the other, the more difficult the starting position is; the smaller the gap, the better the starting position” for a friendly encounter.<sup>29</sup>

In the end, it is clear that we need to deal with this gap constantly and continuously. Our decision dictates how we arrange our “starting position”. Somehow we all know this without having to think a long time. However, one becomes more conscious of a deeper meaning when the starting position remains relatively poor.

Up until now we have covered the individual and their efforts to come in contact with another individual person. And we can remember this from a scene from “The Little Prince” by Saint-Exupéry: The Little Prince meets a fox and would like to get to know him. The fox describes how they both overcome their uncertainty step-by-step by “making yourself familiar”.

If we now know what to do when we do not want to be alone, what efforts are required in order to make contact with another person, which gaps need to be continually overcome – the foreign chasms that manifest themselves in characteristics, other behaviours and different ideologies – then prepare yourself already particularly for the gaps that hinder intra and intercultural markers. One thing that we need to recognise: the effort that we need to perform is continuous and enormous. The ultimate goal is also: to move away from minorities towards a diverse society.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the *Eurolog* Project: in the discussion following this lecture and in later discussions during this symposium, participants will reflect on their own “private” transcultural openness and it will often become clear that aside from “professional intercultural competence” that is unaffected, cultural specific sensitivities are not always considered. And even though many terms used on the topic of “intercultural competence” are commonplace, the awareness is recognised as catharsis, which is conducive to further work in the most positive sense.

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<sup>29</sup> Comparison Galtung 1995.

People who dedicate a part of their work to better intercultural cooperation probably also need to pause and adjust their direction and to check their perceptions and emotions for their intercultural challenges. Exactly that leads to intercultural openness! I would like to thank everyone from the Euro/log project for their openness and their engagement, and would like to conclude with a quote from Erich Fromm:

“Neither a good or a bad result happens automatically or in a predetermined manner. The decision rests with people themselves. The result depends upon whether he or she has the skills to take their life and happiness seriously; if he or she is willing to deal with their own ethical problems and those of their society. It depends on their courage, themselves and their self-will.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Fromm 1980, p157