Discovering university culture through group work: how the Eurocampus

programme affects participants'

meta-cognitive perceptions and essentialist assumptions about

culture

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Abstract

Intercultural training for individuals and businesses can take many forms, one of them being the Eurocampus exchange programme for students of intercultural communication. This research looks into how the programme impacts the participants' understanding of culture in terms of their assumptions about cultural others - which western academia has often framed through the lenses of essentialism - and of their perceptions about their cultural self. Additionally, it explores possible best practices to include in future intercultural training. Semi-structured interviews with participants from the 2021 edition of the programme were conducted and then analysed by means of critical discourse analysis. It was found that the students were able to challenge their views on culture mainly thanks to group work, which prompted them to reflect on their differences with students from the same cultural backgrounds, as well as challenge their own cultural self-perception. Additionally, they reported being more aware of their essentialist assumptions about cultural others after taking part in the programme, and some even demonstrated their ability to pull on the cultural threads that connected them to their peers.

Introduction

Thanks to the class discussions that took place during a course on Intercultural Management, followed by some extensive online searches, I noticed how most of the content on intercultural training (ICT) had a way of referring back to the same, rather essentialist, approaches to culture - Hofstede and Trompenaars' models of cultural dimensions being at the basis of so many of them. Essentialism can be described as an epistemological approach that subdivides reality into separate, mutually exclusive categories. When applied to concepts like "nation" and "culture", such an understanding of the world has been said to generate "exaggerated portrayals of inter-national diversity as well as intra-national homogeneity" (Cole and Meadows, 2013, p.30). From my personal experience studying and living abroad, I often had to deal with other people's essentialised views of my culture, as well as come to terms with my own assumptions about theirs. In none of these instances did these similarly oversimplified views make our exchanges any more successful. I was puzzled as to why these approaches were being prescribed by experts as effective ways to deal with cultural interactions.

When researching the issue of cultural essentialism, I found it to be best exemplified by Adrian Holliday (2010) in his striking evaluation of essentialised nationalist objects as "seductive", "because they are convenient for theory building in the academy, and provide accountable solutions in intercultural communication training" (ibid. p. 15-16). Some researchers even argue that essentialist understandings of culture can favour positive outcomes of intercultural training modules, as they help participants make sense of complex intercultural interactions (Medin, 1989; Fischer, 2011). I became fascinated with the impact of these points of view on culture for those that undergo intercultural training: can they actually encourage intercultural dialogue by giving interactants the basics to understand one another, or are they just the legacy of lingering imperialist approaches to foreign cultures? Is the assumption of essentialist categories a sign of low cultural intelligence - as in the individual's ability to successfully function and deal with culturally diverse settings (Van Dyne and Ang, 2010) - or just the result of a western educational background, historically characterised by the essentialization of the cultural other?

In the following study, I propose to research intercultural training and its impact with regards to two variables: cultural intelligence (CQ) and cultural essentialism among participants. To do so, I look at the case of the Eurocampus study exchange programme, which I personally took part in during the fall semester of my master's degree in Intercultural Communication at Utrecht University, with the intention of answering the following three research questions:

RQ1: How are the meta-cognitive perceptions about the participant's own cultural profile and their assumptions about cultural others challenged during the exchange programme (meta-cognitive CQ)?

RQ2: How does the understanding of culture(s) change as a result of the prolonged contact with peers from different cultural backgrounds?

RQ3: How can what we learned from these two questions be translated into suggestions or best practices for other intercultural training programmes with the same goals?

The first two questions stem from the basic understanding of Eurocampus as an intercultural training programme, which will be justified through a comparative analysis of the programmes' declared learning objectives, characteristics and methods, and those presented by pre-existing literature in the field of intercultural training. The third proposes to look at which of the programme's characteristics have proven to be most helpful in the achievement of said goals, as perceived by its participants. Moreover, it goes on to investigate whether such successful features could possibly be replicated in other trainings, and in what ways. To answer these questions, this study begins by presenting a brief history of past literature on three topics: intercultural training, cultural intelligence and cultural essentialism. The next part is concerned with the methodology adopted in the study, including the critical discourse analysis conducted on the data collected through semi-structured online interviews, which will follow after the comparative analysis between Eurocampus and ICT. Finally, after presenting the findings, this thesis will be concluded with some suggestions for future researchers and trainers, regarding the use of creative nonfiction narratives as templates for exercises to be introduced in future training programmes.

Context and relevance of research

I would like for this research to bring to the fore reflections about the way in which international training programmes are currently being held, and give some ideas of new practises that could be adopted in the future. Consequently, I would suggest the inclusion of some task-based assignments to stimulate trainees to work collectively and reflect individually, with the purpose of learning how to deconstruct the language they use to talk about culture. If it is true that an essentialist framework influences the way we relate to others, based on the mutually exclusive categories we have learned to characterise them in, then these perceptions could be addressed and discussed, perhaps by means of innovative, language-based methods, such as creative nonfiction, as part of the training (Holliday, 2016, Rodgers, 2017). Here, the suggested adoption of language-based methods for the solution of research problems pertaining to culture is in line with those academic reflections that highlight the significant role played by language (and linguistic studies) in intercultural education. Once we understand language as "the medium through which cultures are created, enacted, transmitted and interpreted", then we begin to see linguistic analysis as an effective method to extract the meanings carried by language, and examine how these can ultimately articulate culture (Dervin and Liddicoat, 2013 p.9).

Furthermore, the Eurocampus programme itself presents unique characteristics which help to distinguish it from similar forms of training. An example of this can be seen in the involvement of multiple lecturers from different European universities, all experts in the field of intercultural education, with diverse teaching and grading styles. Their offer of courses that are specifically geared towards the teaching of intercultural competences and communicative skills, together with the adoption of different assessment methods, could possibly offer better grounds for the flourishing of cultural intelligence among participants. Not only do these features make it an incredibly interesting case study to analyse, but they could also represent areas in which other intercultural training programmes could potentially be improved.

With these ideas in mind, I also understand how most of the training workshops sponsored by businesses and organisations do not necessarily take into account the ethics of intercultural education in general, but simply aim at maximising the professional performances of those that are expected to work in multicultural environments. Yet, it is my hope that the results of this research will shine a light on the positive personal - as well as professional - outcomes that a constructivist approach to the study of interculturality can bring to the people that form these organisations. I hope this study will help both trainers and trainees see the value of pursuing intercultural education by taking into account the multitude of common cultural threads that intertwine between people from different backgrounds, and by exposing the risks that accompany the simplistic "Us vs. Them" view of intra-national homogeneity and international diversity.

Theoretical Framework

Intercultural training and study exchanges

Intercultural training (or ICT) is considered to be an application within the field of intercultural relations that "represents an interdisciplinary focus of cultural anthropology, cross-cultural psychology, sociolinguistics, multicultural education, intercultural communication and international business management" (Landis, Bennett and Bennett, 2004, p.1). Training theories are said to have initially developed in the 20th century, once intercultural contact became increasingly more frequent and intimate, so that more people felt the need to ensure it would be successful (ibid). As a result of globalisation, intercultural training has gained significant relevance in contemporary societies, and more and more companies are looking to hire culturally intelligent personnel that can easily adapt to different cultural situations and interactions (Engelbert, 2004).

Consequently, the topic of intercultural communication is being integrated at the university level and in adult training programmes, with the purpose of developing the skills needed to eliminate

misunderstandings and maximise the benefits of intercultural exchanges (Engelbert, 2004; Hassinen, 2015). These skills include both verbal and non-verbal communication skills, as well as the "meta-skills of cross-cultural interaction" (Landis and Bhawuk, 2020, p 15). These are defined as the expat's ability to distinguish the personal from the national, to take the lead in conversation with locals in an effort to learn more about their culture, and to learn how to "live with ambiguity": by suspending judgement and transcending the differences in attitudes and values that become evident during sojourns (id).

Many scholars have criticised the earlier competence-based efforts to theorise intercultural communication for focusing on the differences between cultures, which led to a "polarised self/other framework", sometimes presented by means of group levels (as in the cultural dimensions of Hofstede, 2001) to explain intercultural events and communication (Zhou and Pilcher, 2018). This stems from essentialist conceptions about culture and, according to Ferri (2014), leads to the adoption of functionalist approaches by most intercultural educators, that present "empirical evidence of cultural differences as cognitive conditions for 'good' intercultural communication" and therefore mainly focus on the interlocutors' ability to adapt and respect the other (Zhou and Pilcher, 2018). This approach ends up presenting IC learning as a linear process of personal development, structured with learning objectives and outcomes that ultimately form the basis for what is called the "intercultural industry" (Ferri, 2014).

Emerging critical scholarship highlights the limits of these traditional, competence-based models and instead calls for approaches that focus more so on the "inter" rather than on the "culture", by taking into account the hybridity of intercultural encounters and the intersectionality of identities (Zhou and Pilcher, 2018; Engelbert, 2004; Dervin, 2016). While some of these studies prescribe the introduction of more experiential learning and reflection-based tasks to be carried out in a multicultural workshop, others agree that just the immersion in a culturally different environment may not be enough to effectively prepare learners for intercultural encounters (Hassinen, 2015).

The most common learning objectives and outcomes of contemporary ICT programmes are presented and discussed in the analysis section of this study, as to reflect on how they compare to those of

the Eurocampus (Landis and Bhawuk, 2020a, 2020b; Bhawuk, 2009; Landis Bennett and Bennett, 2004). This theory-based comparison will be useful for arguing how the Eurocampus programme could be considered as a form of ICT training that joins traditional competence-based methods with an increased awareness of the complexities of intercultural education, thus presenting itself as a favourable ground to assess the development of participants' meta-cognitive cultural intelligence, in relation to their assumptions and perceptions about culture. To this end, the notion of cultural intelligence will first be explained, especially with regards to its meta-cognitive component and relation to cultural essentialism.

The measure of cultural intelligence for intercultural training

The concept of cultural intelligence is argued to derive from Gardner's (1983) definitions of multiple types of intelligences: traits that allow some individuals to learn more effectively than others, within specific areas, such as mathematics, music, physical activity, interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. The last area is what constitutes emotional intelligence, also defined as the cognitive ability that involves the cognitive processing of emotional information (Qualter et al., 2007). Emotional intelligence has increasingly gained attention in academia, especially following the conclusions of a group of researchers who found that emotional intelligence might be an asset for the effective functioning of organisational systems (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2000). Since then, some scholars have indicated that emotional intelligence is fundamental to career success, leadership effectiveness and organisational performance, while others have criticised the construct for being insufficient to ensure effective leadership behaviours, as it does not account for the situational knowledge and rational thinking that are usually involved in interpersonal, environmental and organisational events (Locke, 2005; Elenkov and Pimentel, 2009). All in all, this debate has favoured the research of alternative interpersonal intelligence constructs that could better present themselves as possible prerequisites for managerial effectiveness, perhaps by also taking into account new or changing settings and situations (Elenkov and Pimentel, 2009). One of the most recent is

cultural intelligence, which has been found to have overlaps with emotional intelligence, as well as some distinctions.

Cultural intelligence (or CQ) is defined as the capacity of individuals to effectively adapt to contexts where assumptions, values and traditions are different from the ones that characterised their upbringing, and differently characterise those of the people they interact with (Van Dyne, Ang, 2010). As both constructs are concerned with a set of skills, rather than preferred behaviours, some of the similarities between cultural and emotional intelligence rely on the abilities involved in both (Moon, 2010). These include being able to regulate and adapt one's emotional expressions depending on the situation, for example, or the ability to expand one's ideas regarding what the appropriate behaviour is in certain situations (Salovey and Pizzarro, 2003; Earley and Peterson, 2004).

As opposed to cultural knowledge, CQ does not just depend on the cognitive cultural competences of individuals - as in how much they already know about a different culture and its values and traditions - but it also accounts for their own cultural self-perceptions and assumptions, their motivation to interact with and their adopted behaviours towards other cultures (Van Dyne, Ang, 2010). Therefore, it is subdivided into three components: meta-cognitive CQ, behavioural CQ and motivational CQ, according to Earley's model (Earley and Peterson, 2004). An effective way to visualise these components and how they are being targeted in intercultural training for the development of CQ is given by MacNab, Brislin and Worthley (2011). They suggest that meta-cognitive CQ relates to the "mind": this is the component that "stores" our cultural knowledge, as well as our assumptions about the self and the other (ibid., p 1322-1323). This is the component that most relates to and overlaps with aspects of emotional intelligence, therefore also indicated as the "emotional component" (Westby, 2007). Motivational and Behavioural CQ refer to, respectively, the component located in the "heart" and the component that manifests through "action" (MacNab, Brislin and Worthley, 2011 p 1323).

For these reasons, CQ has been frequently used to assess skills and competences of those that are training to study or work in international environments, making it a much sought after ability for those

that aim to develop their leadership at an international level. So far, much of the academic research on CQ has been carried out with more quantitative approaches. An example of this may be found in Fischer (2011) where the author proposes to quantitatively measure the values of cultural essentialism and cultural intelligence in participants, before and after their attendance at a four week university-level intercultural training course. To do so, he presents participants with a questionnaire regarding personal characteristics, such as their perceived open-mindedness (to be measured by means of a Multiple Personality Questionnaire) and their cultural essentialism tendencies (to be measured through a Likert scale, created by the author himself). Having reported the results, the author concludes that cultural essentialist beliefs measured before training are positively related to open mindedness and meta-cognitive CQ measured after training, as the participants that displayed higher, self-evaluated levels of cultural essentialism at the beginning of the experiment, had reported how they had "learned something valuable about cultures during the training session." (Fischer, 2011, p 774).

However, the sole adoption of quantitative methods represents one of the limitations of such research. On its own, this type of approach does not allow researchers to get more deeply into the participants' perceptions and reported experiences with the issues, which, given the multiplicity and intersectionality of the identities at play, cannot simply be overruled by presenting the nationality, gender and educational background of the group. Instead, by carrying out a similar study with a constructivist qualitative approach, one could present a much clearer view of the implications of such reports for intercultural training, as well as provide trainers with a better idea of how to deal with essentialism in the workshop and how to bring participants' attention to it

On the "essentialist trap" and education

Essentialism in this research is understood as the metaphysical understanding of reality that characterises most western cultural views, according to which reality can be subdivided into specific, mutually exclusive taxonomies, that create distinct categories (Martinez, 2017). Essentialist beliefs about culture

presume underlying meanings (or "essences") as defining features of a specific group of people, implying social categories to be discrete and similarly shared by all members of that group, which makes them all somewhat similar to one another and, at the same time, different than all others (Fisher, 2011, Cole and Meadows, 2013). An example of this can be found in the popular book *Orientalism,* by Edward Said (1978) where the author describes the essentialist perceptions shared by western countries of the East as a territory where people are more primitive and less rational than in the West. In turn, this fuels the self-perception of western people as superior beings, thus justifying their colonialist interventions as needed in the East. Essentialism has more recently been challenged and criticised by that same western academia as an "inappropriate way" to study cultures (Martinez, 2017). Yet, it still remains "tacitly at work" to shape what is being defined as Neo-essentialism (ibid, p 1, see also Holliday, 2016).

This construct derives from the definition of essentialism and applies to a "softer" version of it, whereby essentialist beliefs are criticised by scholars in academia, but are nonetheless being reinforced through education, more or less consciously, given essentialism's "seductive" ability to break down complex issues into binaries - which are usually easier to express, understand and analyse (Holliday, 2016, p.15). For this reason, Neo-essentialism has also been referred to as "the essentialist trap" (Cole and Meadows, 2013 p.30).

There has been an ongoing debate on the implications of essentialist beliefs for intergroup relations (Fischer, 2011). Some scholars have argued that "psychological essentialism" may nonetheless assist intergroup relations, in so far as it may help people make sense of the world around them by categorising others, providing "causal linkages from deeper properties to more superficial or surface properties" (Medin, 1989 p. 1476). As a result, once individuals begin to make essentialist assumptions about a social category, they would usually go on to attribute similar characteristics to all members of that same group whom they will encounter (Fischer, 2011). However, multiple studies have highlighted how psychological essentialism has severe consequences on social attitudes, such as the increased prejudice

directed towards stigmatised groups, caused by the inclination to essentialise those qualities perceived to be negative (Prentice & Miller. 2007).

In fact, though essentialist beliefs about social categories have been demonstrated to be the basis for prejudice (Allport, 1954, Haslam et al, 2000), even the course contents delivered by intercultural educators are still guilty of presenting essentialised notions such as "nation" and "culture" (Cole and Meadows, 2013). An effective representation of the ways in which we could improve how we research interculturality and educate future trainers can be found in Holliday's (2016) metaphor of "cultural blocks" and "cultural threads". Here, instead of portraying cultures as the separated entities that the essentialist framework describes them as (blocks), the author suggests that intercultural educators and researchers promote the image of culture as a series of intertwining threads that connect people on the basis of shared human experiences, such as being a parent, or a "cultural traveller", like the international students he writes about (ibid).

In an effort to bring about some positive changes - in the classroom much like in academia - some authors have proposed the use of linguistic tools, such as critical discourse analysis as well as the adoption of creative nonfiction narrative, to include both in the learning stages and as part of the academic research process. These methods allow teachers and learners to gain awareness of the reproduction of monolithic, essentialist views on language and culture, in hopes of avoiding falling into "the essentialist trap" (Cole, Meadows, 2013, Holliday, 2016).

Why the Eurocampus?

With the aim of connecting these theoretical links to a practical example I am familiar with and passionate about, I would now like to take into consideration the case of the Eurocampus programme. The Eurocampus is a joint venture between nine European Universities, also known as the EMICC network (European Masters in Intercultural Communication). These are Utrecht University, Università della Svizzera Italiana, Tallinn University, University of Jyväskylä, Anglia Ruskin University, Universität

Bayreuth, Universidade Aberta, Lisbon & Coimbra, University of Urbino and the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (INALCO). The network comes together to offer a four-month long intensive programme of master level studies in Intercultural Communication, taking place in a different location every year (Hassinen, 2015). In terms of its duration, the Eurocampus presents itself as a bridge between an exchange programme and an ICT programme. This is because it is not as long as many study abroad programmes (the Erasmus+ offer, for example, is usually from 5 months to one or two years) and not quite as short as many cross-cultural training modules offered by companies or universities, which usually last between 2 and 8 weeks. On this note, however, it is worth mentioning that researchers have often argued in favour of longer ICT sessions, so as to offer participants a mix of experiential and lecture-based learning (MacNab, Brisling and Worthley, 2011).

In 2021, the Eurocampus took place at the University of Jyväskylä, in Finland, where 16 master level students from 4 of the 9 different European Universities - with a total of 7 nationalities - met with a group of lecturers which was also very heterogeneous, counting professors from as many as 15 different countries. The reduced number of participants may be attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced some of the universities to forfeit participation for the 2021 edition. For this same reason, some of the lessons at the University of Jyväskylä took place online, following the regulations coming from all partner universities.

Methodology

Comparative analysis of the literature on training programmes

To answer the research questions presented in this study, a comparative analysis between the Eurocampus and other ICT programmes will first be conducted in the following section, in an effort to establish this study exchange programme as a form of intercultural training. This is achieved by means of a literature-based comparison, where recent review studies on the state of the art of ICT were studied and compared to the available literature on the Eurocampus. However, seeing as there is not much information in academia on this particular programme, most of the information on the Eurocampus was gathered from

two documents and then supplemented by the author's own personal and practical experience as a participant, as will be detailed in the first section of the Data Analysis. Having established that the Eurocampus can indeed be considered to be a form of ICT, twelve interview questions were then created to answer RQ1 and 2:

RQ1: How are the meta-cognitive perceptions about the participant's own cultural profile and their assumptions about cultural others challenged during the exchange programme (meta-cognitive CQ)?

RQ2: How does the understanding of culture(s) change as a result of the prolonged contact with peers from different cultural backgrounds?

Semi-structured interviews with Eurocampus participants

Following the comparative report of the Eurocampus and ICT programs, the study was then carried out using a constructivist qualitative approach, by means of semi-structured online interviews with Eurocampus participants. The overarching research framework adopted for this study can be located in the realist paradigm, considered to be a bridge between the critical humanist and the critical structuralist approaches, as it presents the participants' subjective experiences of reality by contextualising it within the objectivity of the structures that influence them. The realist approach allows one to take into account various testimonies and points of view on culture and on intercultural learning, and yet still recognises how these are influenced by the overarching ideologies on language and culture - also reflected, to some extent, in modern intercultural education and training.

Initially, this study proposed to feature online semi-structured video interviews with two groups of 3-4 participants each, one being a group of Eurocampus students from the 2021 edition in Finland and one of past Eurocampus students from earlier editions. The rationale for the selection of these groups is as follows: a) recent Eurocampus students can give a fresh recollection of their experience with the programme and are equipped to discuss issues pertaining to intercultural education and encounters, such

as cultural essentialism and cultural intelligence, and b) past Eurocampus students have had more professional experience with these concepts, and may be able to discuss personal experiences with other forms of intercultural training, as they have been possibly already working for companies that value the proposed outcomes of such programmes - the improvement of intercultural communication skills and intercultural competences in decision-making and responsibility being only some of them (Engelbert, 2010). The initial attempts to reach out to the group of past Eurocampus participants included following a "snowballing" method, first by getting in contact with the overall coordinators of the programme and then by contacting students directly on LinkedIn. Unfortunately, in the end it proved to be quite difficult to get in touch with participants of prior editions within the limited timeframe of this thesis, and only the interviews with four participants of the most recent Eurocampus were included in this study.

Conducting online one-on-one semi-structured interviews with participants facilitated the collection of a significant amount of data, which could easily be analysed multiple times after the calls - as the online platform *Microsoft Teams* also allows to record them. Of course, this was done by first having secured the consent of each participant beforehand. As well as that, going back to the blocks and threads analogy, Holliday (2016) highlights how interviewing allows for a better interpretation of cultural threads, as both the researcher and the interviewee co-construct what is being said, thus making the former a participant in the subjective power-relations at play (Block, 2000; Miller, 2011). An interview guide was created for this purpose, with some ideas for follow up and probing questions concerning four macro topics: general background info, experience with the Eurocampus programme, cultural self, and cultural others. In accordance with the semi-structured nature of the interview, these questions were prepared to allow for the interviewee to elaborate on interesting emerging issues in an exploratory manner (Dörnyei, 2007).

The four online video interviews each lasted roughly an hour, and were conducted in the space of a week in mid-April 2022, as soon as this study had obtained the approval of the Ethics Board of the Faculty of Humanities at Utrecht University. While listening back to the interviews, those instances when

participants (hereby referred to as student A, B, C and D to help maintain their anonymity) had made references to culture and intercultural interactions were noted down - in terms of their content and the minutes when they happened. These included: recollections about their encounters with cultural others, reflections on how they see their cultural selves, their experience with culture at the Eurocampus. The video recordings were then turned into transcripts through the use of the online software *Otter.ai*, to facilitate the process. Having obtained the transcripts, these were slightly cut down according to the initial selection of instances, so that the analysis of the collected data could focus solely on those parts of speech that could help in answering the research questions. Additionally, this allowed for the identification of a few categories of semiotic processes that were common between all interviews, on the basis of which it was possible to conduct a critical discourse analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis

The collected data was analysed by means of a critical discourse analysis, seeing as the linguistic analysis of the meanings carried by language has been proven to be a successful tool to solve research problems pertaining to culture (Dervin and Liddicoat, 2013). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) has been described as being about the disruption of "the common sense that is realised by means of discourse" (Cole and Meadows, 2013 p 34). It has been suggested as an analytic tool to implement in the language classroom, to sensitise learners to the ongoing processes that characterise discourse on language and culture, and encourage students to subvert them (ibid). Linguistic tools such as critical discourse analysis and conversation analysis have been previously incorporated into the language classroom and used by both students and teachers to understand how linguistic practises stem from common discursive processes, in an effort to make "visible what might initially seem hidden or invisible" (Wang & Rendle-Short, 2013, p.131; Cole and Meadows, 2013). They have also been used to promote among learners the imagination and enactment of alternatives to nationalist essentialising, which could ultimately lead to a more ethical form of intercultural education (Cole and Meadows, 2013).

In line with other critical discourse analytic studies, this research proposed to uncover the universal semiotic processes that humans use to construct essentialised boundaries between groups of people, often subdivided into "us" and "them" (Cole and Meadows, 2013). To this end, it draws from the conclusions of previous research in the field of linguistic anthropology, which establishes the relationship between language practice and language ideology through the analysis of semiotic processes, also referred to as "semiotic acts of identification" (Bucholtz et Hall, 2004, p.370). Linguistic anthropologists describe these overlapping processes as being carried out by humans through their use of language (ibid). Thanks to the dual ability of language to convey meaning both at the pragmatic and at the referential level, in fact, language can act as a resource for invoking social identity, often with the purpose of establishing social relations among individuals (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004). One example presented by Bucholtz and Hall (2004) refers to the use of the word "props", which usually signifies respect on the pragmatic level, though on a referential and sociocultural level, it is also associated to hip hop culture; by using this word, the speaker will indirectly invoke his identity as part of that cultural group (ibid).

The social relations which get established by means of semiotic processes are, for example, those of sameness and difference between individuals or groups, which Bucholtz and Hall (2004) refer to as a pair of "tactics of intersubjectivity" with the name of *adequation* and *distinction* (ibid, 382). This pair of tactics is described as mirroring mechanisms, whereby when some similarities between components of a group are highlighted in order to socially recognise sameness and invoke a sense of community, salient difference also gets produced between them and all outsiders of the group, thus ultimately leading to an "Us vs Them" dichotomy. (ibid).

This framework was used to analyse the language used by Eurocampus participants during the interviews, as to illustrate how they tend to talk about intercultural relations and cultural identities. Additionally, a similar approach can also be used to observe if and how essentialism - as a concept which, according to Bucholtz and Hall, is "central to identity" - is portrayed by their choice of words (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004, p.383). For this reason, the participants were only debriefed regarding the linguistic focus

of the research shortly before the conclusion of each interview, and not in the information letter (following the suggestions from the Ethics Board of the Faculty of Humanities at Utrecht University).

Data Analysis

Results of the comparative analysis between the Eurocampus and other ICT programmes

1. Sources

Most of the academic sources selected for this comparison are extracted from review articles, written by scholars and trainers in academia to keep track of the evolution of the study and practice of ICT through the years (Landis, Bennet and Bennet, 2004; Landis and Bhawuk, 2020a). In fact, the literature on ICT is quite rich and gets routinely updated with new research, theories and methods, which prompts scholars to write review studies. An example of these can be found in the chapters by Mendenhall et al. (2004) and Kallshmidt et al (2020), written for two different editions of the *Handbook of Intercultural Training*. Both reviews discuss the state of the art for studies concerning the evaluation of ICT programmes and uncover the difficulties academia has been facing in finding the best tools to assess the effectiveness of IC training (Menhdenhall et al, 2004 in Landis, Bennet and Bennet, 2004; Kallshmidt et al, 2020 in Landis and Bhawuk, 2020a).

In contrast, the academic literature about the Eurocampus programme is quite scarce. For this reason, the two main documents referenced in this analysis are the Programme Manual from the 2021 edition of the programme, created by the Department of Language and Communication Studies at the University of Jyväskylä, and a study by Hassinen (2015), a researcher from the same Finnish university. As part of her PhD dissertation, she presents the case of Eurocampus 2012 to examine the development of intercultural competence in participating students (Hassinen, 2015). Her research was presented as part of the Proceedings of the Cross-Cultural Business Conference of 2015 and served as a model for the present thesis.

*2. **Some key differences between Eurocampus and other ICT programmes: participants and their assessment***

Table 1 presents the main characteristics of ICT programmes and of the Eurocampus, as detailed in recent literature in the field of intercultural training and by the Programme Manual, and then supplemented by the author's personal experience with the Eurocampus.

Table 1 - Characteristics of Eurocampus and of ICT programmes

	ICT	Eurocampus
Participants	Company employees (expats)	Master-level students of Intercultural comunication
Duration	2-8 weeks	4 months
Staff composition	1-2 trainers, optionally a member of the involved culture/group should be present	18 lecturers from all EMICC universities, various disciplines of expertise within intercultural communication
Contents	Culture-general and culture specific, based on theories of culture and cultural change	Intercultural communication theories from various academic disciplines
Assessment of participants	Various methods, depending on training	With credit scores: participants pass the programme if they acquire 30 ECTS
Programme effectiveness	Most effective for knowledge and satisfaction, less for behavioural and attitudinal changes	Not always effective in improving intercultural competence (see Hassinen, 2015)
Aims and outcomes	To improve participants': - Knowledge (culture-specific and culture-general) - Attitudes - Behaviours - Adjustment - Job performance - Satisfaction	To improve participants': - Academic knowledge - Intercultural communication skills - Intercultural competence - Intercultural citizenship - Understanding of global contexts
Methods	Mix of experiential and didactic, culture-general and	Experiential and didactic, including lectures, group work,

	culture-specific.	e-learning, simulations.

Sources: Bhawuk, 2009; Landis, Bennet and Bennet, 2003; Landis and Bhawuk, 2020a, 2020b; Stephan and Stephan, 2013, Yoshida, 2020; Kallschmidt et al, 2020; Mendenhall et al., 2004, Hassinen, 2015; University of Jyväskylä, 2021.

The main distinction between the Eurocampus and other types of ICT is that the participants of each programme are different, which in turn leads to differences in content, duration and staff composition. This also means that the trainers assess the participants' progress throughout the programme in different ways and, consequently, the programmes themselves get differently evaluated by scholars in the field of ICT. The participants of the Eurocampus are all students of disciplines within the field of intercultural communication, attending one of the nine universities of the EMICC network: the European Masters in Intercultural Communication (Hassinen, 2015). Consequently, progress in the Eurocampus is evaluated in terms of ECTS (European Credit Transfer System, used to uniformly evaluate courses across multiple European universities), with students having to obtain at least 30 ECTS in total to successfully pass the programme (University of Jyväskylä, 2021). These refer to the amount of individual and in-class study hours that the participants have to employ to pass their exams and obtain their diplomas, and 1 ECTS is equivalent to 28 hours, so that the Eurocampus amounts to roughly 840 hours of training (ibid). Therefore, it makes sense for the programme to involve students for a set period of time and feature lecturers from their own university, as well as the others, because it needs to act as a part of their study curricula.

The attendees of ICT programs, on the other hand, are usually employees of a company who are required to travel for work and establish contact with colleagues from a different nationality or culture, and are therefore also referred to in the literature as "expats". Their employers invest in their intercultural education and hire trainers with knowledge of the culture relative to the expats' destination, to ensure a more successful interaction and ultimately improve their performances on the job (Kallschmidt et al, 2020). As there are multiple counselling companies that offer similar training services all around the

globe, it is quite difficult to find sources that establish how the trainers of each programme propose to assess the participants. However, there are plenty of academic sources that show how scholars in the field of ICT have historically assessed the progress of the participants, in an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of these types of training (Menhdenhall et al, 2004 in Landis, Bennet and Bennet, 2004; Kallshmidt et al, 2020 in Landis and Bhawuk, 2020a).

2.1. *Contrasting studies on the effectiveness of ICT programmes*

The review studies by Mendenhall (2004) and Kallshmidt (2020) show how scholars have researched and evaluated expats' progress during ICT so far mainly using six dependent variables: knowledge, behaviour, attitude, adjustment, satisfaction and performance. The first variable, knowledge, pertains to the effectiveness of ICT in enhancing the knowledge of trainees and, together with the variable of trainee satisfaction, it is one of the two categories which studies have shown these programmes can most effectively target (ibid). With regards to the other variables, the reviews show how ICT is much less effective in influencing attitudes and changing behaviour, as well as in improving the adjustment and performance of trainees, though this appears to be in contrast to some earlier findings (Kallschmidt et al, 2020; Mendenhall et al., 2004).

In fact, earlier studies on the outcomes of intercultural trainings concluded that the programmes resulted in participants manifesting positive feelings about the training, witnessing improvements in interpersonal relationships and performance on the job, as well as changes in their perceptions of host nationals and a reduction in culture shock (Black and Mendenhall, 1990). This was also later confirmed by Deshpande and Viswesvaran (1992), who summed up the effects of intercultural training on five variables of interest, this time from the point of view of the expats: self-development of trainees, perceptions of trainees, adjustment during sojourn, relationship with host nationals and performance on the job. Both of their conclusions have later been criticised by some academics as being too favourable of

the effectiveness of training, seeing as many other studies point out the "relatively moderate amounts of variance accounted by the training" (Mendenhall et al, 2004; Landis and Bhawuk, 2020b p. 4).

Over the years, the contrasting conclusions on the effectiveness of intercultural training have caused a number of criticisms of ICT and of the way it has so far been evaluated, which have resulted in many multinational companies failing to see the value in this type of preparation (Kallschmidt et al, 2020). Overall, literature on the subject concludes that intercultural training is a product which is undoubtedly needed in society, but whose efficacy still has to be proven, and that more research is still required in order to be able to address the controversies regarding the goals, content and effectiveness of the training processes (Kealey and Protheroe, 1996; Kallschmidt et al, 2020).

3. *Main similarities: learning aims and expected outcomes*

Table 2 presents the similarities between the outcomes of the Eurocampus and those of ICT programmes, as detailed in the literature; in the case of the Eurocampus, the main sources remain the 2021 Programme Manual from the University of Jyväskylä and the author's personal experience as a participant of the programme, whereas for ICT the literary sources are detailed in the last column.

Table 2 - Summed up similarities between ICT and Eurocampus from literary sources

Outcomes	Mentioned in ICT literature	Mentioned in Eurocampus literature	ICT literary sources
Promote knowledge acquisition	X	X	(Pedersen,1988; Sue & Sue, 1990 in Yoshida, 2020; Bhawuk, 2009)
Raise awareness on cultural differences	X		(Pedersen,1988; Sue & Sue, 1990 in Yoshida, 2020)
Promote changes in attitude, perceptions and relationship with others	X	X	(Paige, 1993 in Yoshida, 2020; Black and Mendenhall, 1990 in Landis, Bhawuk, 2020b; Stephan & Stephan, 2013)
Foster intercultural communication	X	X	(Landis and Bhawuk, 2020a)

competence			
Teach intercultural communication skills	X	X	(Pedersen,1988; Sue & Sue, 1990 in Yoshida, 2020; Stephan & Stephan, 2013)
Promote of self-development of trainees	X	X	(Deshpande & Viswesvaran, 1992 in Landis and Bhawuk, 2020b)
Address emotional aspects of intercultural experience	X	X	(Brislin & Yoshida, 1994 in Yoshida, 2020)
Improve job performance	X		(Deshpande & Viswesvaran, 1992 in Landis and Bhawuk, 2020b; Yoshida, 2020)
Improve participants' behaviour in the modern world	X	X	(Stephan & Stephan, 2013)

This comparison found the Eurocampus to be very similar to other forms of ICT training in terms of their intended aims and expected outcomes, as detailed in literature. It is important to mention that there are some recognised differences between the concepts of learning objectives, learning aims, and the derived outcomes (see Imperial College London, n.d.). Nevertheless, in order to collect a larger corpus of elements of theory, this report presents what the 2021 Eurocampus Programme Manual refers to as "aims", together with what is indicated in ICT literature as "outcomes" or "objectives", simply as outcomes (see table 1 and 2).

As a study exchange programme, the Eurocampus promises to promote students' academic knowledge by teaching them to critically conduct and analyse research in the field of intercultural communication (University of Jyväskylä, 2021). Similarly, the literature on the objectives of ICT also shows intent to promote knowledge acquisition in participants, but emphasises a distinction in the content of the teaching between "culture-general" and "culture-specific" knowledge (Pedersen, 1988; Sue & Sue, 1990 in Yoshida, 2020; Bhawuk, 2009). Bhawuk (2009) suggests that the core elements of the theoretical framework of ICT are the "culture-general" ones, which should be considered as foundational knowledge

and applied to all intercultural training programmes (ibid). They should also be taught ahead of the "culture-specific" elements, as these are usually learned while living abroad (Landis and Bhawuk, 2020b). Consequently, the methods presented by ICT programmes should be adapted depending on whether the target knowledge to be acquired by trainees is culture-specific or culture-general (ibid). To this end, ICT literature suggests the adoption of a mix of experiential and didactic teaching methods - lectures and readings together with simulations and role plays - all of which are also included in the Eurocampus Programme Manual, as to "optimally meet students' learning needs and introduce [them] to the rich variety of contemporary academic didactic practices" (Yoshida, 2020; University of Jyväskylä, 2021, p.3)

3.1. Implications for this study

As table 2 shows, in the literature regarding the intended outcomes of the different programmes, the main differences between ICT and the Eurocampus concern two aspects: improving job performance and raising awareness of cultural differences (Deshpande & Viswesvaran, 1992 in Landis and Bhawuk, 2020b; Yoshida, 2020). With regards to the former, it makes sense for the Eurocampus not to target job performance, as most of the participants do not yet have a job. The latter is similarly not promoted by Eurocampus as it is in contrast to many of the declared aims of the programme, which actually promote the understanding of the interconnectedness of the various contexts in the world through the application of intercultural communication theories, skills and competences (University of Jyväskylä, 2021). This could also be the reason as to why there is no mention of a distinction between culture-general and culture-specific knowledge and methods in the literature on Eurocampus.

Additionally, even though both ICT and Eurocampus literature present the development of intercultural competence as an expected outcome, it should be noted how Hassinen's (2015) study concludes that the Eurocampus programme is not always effective in achieving this aim. She suggests that this could be due to students' unawareness of their own culture, which causes them to be incapable of "assessing the cultural positions of others" (Hassinen, 2015, p.10). This could potentially be improved

upon by supporting the intercultural training of the Eurocampus with "targeted cultural reflection using in-depth critical incidents' analysis where students' own cultural assumptions, values, and practices meet the assumptions, values, and practices of host country nationals and other international students" (id).

The conclusions of this comparative report justify all three research questions raised in this study. They justify the first two, since these concern how the Eurocampus training impacts the students' ability to recognise and understand different cultural contexts and their interconnections, as this is one of the declared outcomes of the programme:

RQ1: How are the meta-cognitive perceptions about the participant's own cultural profile and their assumptions about cultural others challenged during the exchange programme (meta-cognitive CQ)?

RQ2: How does the understanding of culture(s) change as a result of the prolonged contact with peers from different cultural backgrounds?

The conclusions also justify the third one, since they support the initial understanding of the Eurocampus as a type of Intercultural Training Programme that shares similar content and aims to those presented in the most recent literature on ICT. Consequently, the third research question proposes to answer the need for ICT to include more of what Hassinen (2015) calls "targeted cultural reflections" meant to foster the cultural self-awareness and intercultural competences of participants:

RQ3: How can what we learned from these two questions be translated into suggestions or best practices for other intercultural training programmes with the same goals?

Results of the interviews with Eurocampus alumni

The following sections illustrate some of the instances when students A, B, C and D came up with reflections and recollections regarding their experience at the Eurocampus. These can be used to represent examples of processes - like blocking and threading and adequation and distinction - that showcase their understanding of culture and cultural differences, as influenced during the time spent as part of the

programme. As multiple semiotic processes can often happen at the same time, it was quite difficult to highlight, for example, when an expression would denote distinction instead of blocking. As a result, only extracts that more clearly represent an example of a single category were included below, with the exception of number 5, adequation and distinction, as both processes happening at the same time lead to the single categorisation "us vs them". All extracts from each numbered interview are compiled in the Appendix to this thesis.

Additionally, in order to avoid leading participants towards a monolithic interpretation of the word "culture", none of the interview questions mentioned nationality and instead asked about peers and lecturers from "different universities", as to allow students to interpret the questions autonomously. When mentioned in the answers, the nationality of the participants was then removed from the transcripts, not only to help protect the anonymity of participants, but also to facilitate the creation of nonfiction narratives on the basis of the selected extras in the future. Below, I present all of the relevant examples from the data, which I will then analyse in the following discussion section.

1. *Blocking*

Interview 1. Extract 1.10, lines 10-14: "And so my evaluation of her was, okay, she's - without any negative connotation - [...] she's like a more traditional person, churchgoer, stuff like that, which is completely fine with me, you know. I don't have any problems at all with that, as long as you don't let it bother you or let it bother me. Like, if you… practise your religion all you want, like do it, but don't let it come between me and [...] yourself [...]."

Interview 3. Extract 3.1, lines 2-8 "And when you're in Spain, when you're 16, you can go to clubs, like they're like, it's a thing, you can enter clubs at 16 years old. But, like, most of the Spanish people [there] were 15, and they almost all had fake IDs, which… First of all, for me, [it] seemed really crazy. Because I had never had anyone in my environment that had a fake ID, especially when you're 15.

Like, if it's like a fake ID when you're 17 to get alcohol, [...] I was like, Okay, maybe for that. But this was to get into clubs".

a. Being aware of essentialising / blocking

Interview 1. Extract 1.11, lines 1-8: "And that was immediately what happened, because we needed to [...] do this group project and for - I think it's Catholics or for some Christian religious group, Sunday is a resting day. Like, on Sunday, you're not allowed to do anything for some strict religious groups [...]. We wanted to meet up with the group uh, to make, like, a planning. And that was on a Sunday, and she just refused to come. Even though it was, like, a meeting [of] 20 minutes. And it might be [...] close minded [of] me, but then I'm starting to get annoyed. Then I'm starting to get the feeling that you are using religion as an excuse not to have to do anything, which is not at all the case. But that's my immediate first reaction."

Interview 4. Extract 4.2, lines 5-11: "Yeah, I feel like we talked a lot about essentialism. And I would say I'm more aware of that now. Which is also connected to my first point, you know, to always, also reflect on my own essentialism, in my own thinking or doing. I guess."

"7:07 - Interviewer: Do you find yourself doing that a lot?"

"7:10 - D: Not a lot, but sometimes, yeah. But I think that's normal, [it] just happens. And then…That's why we do intercultural studying, to be aware of it."

2. Threading

Interview 3. Extract 3.5, lines 1-8: "I think sometimes it was tough, because we had very different expectations [...] when it came to, like, group work. And so, you know, [...] some people had very specific ideas of [...] the way they wanted things to be. And then, like, another person [was] going to completely clash with another person's perspective on the same thing. But at the same time, I also think it was very interesting, because we could, like, really see the different ways of working. And I remember, like, talking with some of the Italian girls and being like, Oh, [they] kind of have the same way of working with the

French people. But like, then, I don't know, like, the German girls had [...] a completely different way of working. So it was really interesting to see that."

Interview 4. Extract 4.5, lines 5-9: "Yeah, I think that's the main reason, because it's totally fine that people have different experiences and different ideas about the way things work and the way that, you know, you think academic work should function. And everyone, like each of us, had these ideas. So we should have talked about this, and we didn't. I don't think it's, you know, a lack of …I don't know [...] I don't think it's because they were from China."

3. *Distinction*

Interview 1. Extract 1.9, lines 5-10: "And it is true, the average person from [...] Northern {country of provenance} is like a really different person from the average person [...] from where I'm from. Like, there are actual differences in the average person. And I think we both noticed that quite quickly, like me being like, this city person, not a big city, but like a city person who is somewhat outgoing, likes to talk a lot. And in her case, I just automatically evaluated her as somebody who takes everything too seriously and who has, like, a whole different outlook on life. [...]"

Interview 4, Extract 4.3, lines 3-7: "Um, I would say that there were groups from the beginning. And I felt that they were based on where people studied. So I feel, like, that each group goes together, right from the beginning, the Italian group. And {university of provenance} also, we did it too, and Passau as well. Yeah, I just feel like we kind of grouped together based on where we came from, university wise. And we never, at least for me, I didn't feel that we were like, you know, like as a group overall."

4. *Adequation and Distinction / Us Vs Them*

Interview 1. extract 1.4, lines 6-12: "For example, we had this thing that we literally refer to sometimes as the "Italian front", like, the Italian border, and they're just [...] a couple of Italian girls. They

were really nice, in my opinion. But you notice that they did not really come here to make new friends, they did not really come here to be interculturally active, they always sat with the three of them next to each other, and they all always did the projects together. While on the other hand, people like you and me, we were, like, actively trying to be liked by everyone, or, or at least have some kind of rapport with everybody. [...] And you noticed that difference."

Interview 2. Extract 2.2, lines 5-11: "We were in the capital, so they told us we would be able to just communicate in English. And going there… actually being there, also being in a university setting, we still realised that not a lot of people actually spoke English. And that also, for example - now I'm getting specific - when it comes to communication, hierarchy was something that I wasn't really used to. So there were a couple of shocks and even, like, faux pas. Like, things I did wrong when I was communicating with a professor. And then if you use the wrong name, or if there was a problem, and then we talked to somebody who was a higher on a higher level, the person [...] got offended."

5. *Perceptions of the cultural self*

Interview 1. Extract 1.8, lines 8-14: "The stereotype of {nationality} people [is that they] are loud, direct people. And [...] when it comes to me, that stereotype fits more or less. Like, I'm not necessarily… I wouldn't say, necessarily loud, but I am quite a direct, maybe harsh person. And I don't, as I said, I [have not] investigated. I don't have proof, but I feel like there were some people in our Eurocampus programme who stayed away from me a bit at the beginning. Because I came across as, like, this… this loud, "screams-what-he-wants-to-scream" person. Even though that's just me, that's just my, as you said, my cultural self."

Interview 2. Extract 2.5, lines 2-8: "So I am {nationality}, but I don't have a strong connection to the {nationality} culture. To me language and culture are obviously connected. But seeing people from China and also from Egypt, speak in {her mother tongue} and feeling very confident in speaking {her mother tongue} rather than English was really interesting. And I do think it was amazing to see how that

can connect people. And, for example, like, I don't know any Arabic, I don't really know any Mandarin either. I can say "hello", and "goodbye" and "how are you". But still, it was… that was really nice at the same time."

6. *Assumptions about cultural others*

Interview 1. Extract 1.11, lines 1-8: "We needed to [...] do this group project and for - I think it's Catholics or… for some Christian religious group, Sunday is a resting day. Like, on Sunday, you're not allowed to do anything for some strict religious groups in {country of provenance}. We wanted to meet up with the group uh, to make, like, a planning. And that was on a Sunday, and she just refused to come. Even though it was, like, a meeting [of] 20 minutes. And it might be [...] close minded [of] me, but then I'm starting to get annoyed. Then I'm starting to get the feeling that you are using religion as an excuse not to have to do anything, which is not at all the case. But that's my immediate first reaction. And the… uh, the growing apart thing starts [when] she makes this decision. So [...] most evaluations were somewhat based [on] assumptions. And I think it was the same for her with me. So yeah, we just…uh, we were quite far apart from each other. But we grew even further apart from each other by how we acted."

Interview 2. Extract 2.4, lines 10-16: "usually we had a deadline to hand in our work. And then [the professors] also had a deadline to give us feedback. And when that deadline was missed, basically for either or, I don't know, I think one professor took more than a month longer. That was a huge issue, because at the beginning, we thought it might just be his national culture that led him to think if he says, "Oh, I'm going to reply tomorrow, I'm going to be give you the feedback tomorrow" and it might take in a couple more days, we wouldn't be surprised. But in the end, we learned that it was just a personal thing. And actually, it had nothing to do with this national culture, it was just a personal issue."

Discussion

As the extracts from the interviews show, the interviewed Eurocampus participants were still somewhat *blocking* and overall essentialising of cultural others during their conversations. However, some of them appeared to be clearly aware of this practice, and at times even tried to avoid it. In fact, there are multiple instances when - even before the interviewer's disclosure regarding the linguistic focus of the research - they recognised they might be perceived as "close minded" by the researcher for portraying cultural others with an essentialistic approach (extract 1.11, line 5). Student D also clearly mentioned she was wary of her own tendency to essentialise others, and that ever since the Eurocampus she has taken care not to do it too much, but in the end concludes that essentialising is "normal" (extract 4.2, line 10). She adds that intercultural experiences are important to this extent, as they allow people to become more aware of their essentialist beliefs. In the case of Eurocampus, this research has found two aspects of the programme that, according to participants, made them more aware of and helped in challenging their essentialist beliefs: the promotion of group work between participants with the same and with different cultural backgrounds, and the inclusion of participants and trainees from different academic or "university" cultures.

Group work

These extracts from the data show how group work at the Eurocampus represented the main instance when students got to challenge and put to the test their assumptions about cultural others, as well as their perceptions about their cultural selves. Although working with students from other universities and nationalities often proved to be difficult - mostly due to their different ways of approaching academic work - it was the times that the participants got to work with peers with their own cultural background that were the most challenging, as A., B., and D. all report (extracts 1.8, 1.9, 1.10, 1.11, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 4.3, 4.4). In instances where this proved to be too difficult, as in the case of Interview 1, the participants reported feeling like they were "growing apart" (extract 1.11, line 8) and therefore refused to interact with

them again, which could be interpreted as the student's inability to assess the other's cultural position, also referred to by Hassinen (2015). It is also important to note that, although there was no other student with the same national and cultural background as C in the Eurocampus, she still managed to use group work with cultural others to reflect on her own cultural background and how it impacted the way she approached academic work (extract 3.6, lines 10-11).

University culture

The experiencing of different academic cultures during group work, or what B. calls "university cultures" (extract 2.4, line 5), also allowed participants to test the practice of *threading* as they were able to challenge their own essentialised assumptions, and see culture beyond national borders. This was also the case when working with professors from different national and academic cultures (extracts 2.4 and 3.5). With academic culture or "university culture", the students referred to the different ways of approaching academic work in the various universities attending the Eurocampus, and that differed among lecturers and participants. An example of this can also be seen in the misunderstanding of the conversation with Student D. in interview 4. When asked about if she had experienced difficulties in working with anyone from her same cultural background, she questioned whether the interviewer meant people from her country, because that is what her mind jumped to, or more so with a different academic culture (extracts 4.4, 4.6). Though she never had any issues with someone from the same academic culture, she did have some problems working with people with her same national background, but from a different university.

These findings seem to suggest that prolonged cooperation between peers of different cultural and educational backgrounds, paired with a need to mediate and adapt between the different university cultures of lecturers and students, prompted participants to critically reflect on their own cultural positions and on their understanding of culture. In many cases, students were able to challenge their assumptions about cultural others and perception of the cultural self as a result of group work. Yet, when they reported having difficulties in doing so, they recognised this was not simply a result of clashes between different

national cultures, but more so due to different approaches to academic work (extract 4.5, line 9). Therefore, participants were effectively able to understand culture by pulling on the threads between themselves and others, based on their common life experiences as intercultural students, such as having to adapt to ways of approaching academic work different to those they were educated in.

Conclusion

This research proposed to look at the ways in which measures such as cultural essentialism and meta-cognitive CQ could be affected as a result of the intercultural training offered at the Eurocampus programme. To achieve this aim, the present thesis has demonstrated that the Eurocampus is indeed a form of ICT, given their similarities in terms of contents, objectives and methods, as confirmed by the results of the comparative analysis. Having established this correlation, with regards to investigating how meta-cognitive perceptions about the cultural self and assumptions about cultural others may be challenged during the programme (RQ1), through semi-structured online interviews with recent Eurocampus participants, it was found that group work between peers from different academic, cultural and national backgrounds was the main source for critical incidents. In these instances, students were caused to reflect on or reconsider their cultural positions, and become more aware of those of their fellow participants, in an effort to understand and mediate between their different approaches to academic work.

As a result of these incidents, participants' understanding of culture seems to also have changed, seeing as in multiple instances during the interviews they went on to present "culture" also as the different ways in which others liked to work - which did not necessarily have to do with their nationality or national cultural background (RQ2). In some of these cases, participants reported how it was more specifically group work with peers from the same national culture but with different "university culture", that led them to experience more difficulties. Though it did stimulate reflections on how they assessed their own cultural positions, there were some instances where group work with peers of the same

nationality but different cultural background were not successful. In fact, although the interviewed students showed an ability to pull on the threads of their life experience as students to relate to one another, there were nonetheless instances of blocking, both when recalling intercultural experiences prior to the Eurocampus, and when talking about their time as participants to the programme.

Limitations and future research

Ideally, this research would have presented data collected through interviews with more participants of the Eurocampus, including editions prior to the one in 2021. As this has not been possible due to the unavailability of past Eurocampus students, it would be interesting for future research to also examine their views, as to see whether their professional experiences have had an impact on the way they talk about culture, and if this differs from the results revealed in this study. In fact, the scope of this study remains quite limited, not only due to the reduced number of interviewed participants, but also because it was designed to be evaluated for a Master Thesis and therefore had to respect time restrictions and word limitations, so that only a few extracts of transcripts could be taken into consideration at the current time.

For future research that would like to expand the scope of this thesis, following Holliday's (2016) example, this study suggests the use of creative nonfiction narratives to present the findings emergent from the interviews. One reason for this choice is that, through the creation of the narratives, scholars can effectively learn to pull on the "threads" that compose the reality between participants, rather than characterise their interventions as solely based on their cultural identities: nationality, age, gender, social status (ibid). This can be easily avoided through the use of creative nonfictional narratives, as they allow for the analysis of data to be presented not as directly emergent from and representative of the sample, but rather as co-constructed with participants and re-elaborated by the researcher.

As an example, for studies structured like the present thesis, the narratives should be written as creative compilations of multiple stories derived from a re-elaboration of the interview transcripts, to be presented after the data analysis and discussion, as to favour reflections centered on some or all of the

findings. Additionally, this research also proposes narratives as a tool for future ICT trainers, to help them foster cultural intelligence among participants. In fact, narratives created on the basis of this and future research can be adopted as templates for exercises meant to prompt the production of "targeted cultural reflections" among ICT participants, as to facilitate the development of their intercultural competences (Hassinen, 2015, p.10). This would be achieved by presenting in-depth critical incidents in a form which is easy to read and accessible, even to those outside of academia, in an effort to favour the achievement of ICT learning goals, such as the improvement of participants' intercultural competences. This type of exercises, together with best practices from the Eurocampus, such as the promotion of group work and of interaction between peers with different "university cultures" (academic and educational backgrounds) could be considered as suggestions for other ICT programmes with similar goals to those of Eurocampus (RQ3).

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Appendices

Interview Guide

<u>Session 1 – Recent Eurocampus students</u>

I. Opening

A. *Establish rapport:* My name is Maria Anna Saija, I am a student of Intercultural Communication at Utrecht University. I am currently working on my master thesis regarding the Eurocampus programme, so I thought it could be interesting to interview you as you have taken part in the programme as of recent. Thank you very much for accepting to be part of my research!

B. *Purpose:* I would like to ask you some questions about your background, your experiences and in particular with regards to the Eurocampus programme.

C. *Motivation:* I hope this information will help me understand how the programme affects its participants and their experiencing of cultures.

D. *Timeline:* The interview will last roughly one hour. Would it be okay if I start recording our call now?

II. Body

A. First topic: General info / background (ice break)

- Question 1 – What is your study background?
- Question 2 – What motivates you to study in this field?
- Question 3 – Did you have any prior intercultural experiences prior to the Eurocampus or was this your first time? / How would you describe them?

B. Second topic: Experience with Eurocampus

- Question 4 – How would you describe your overall experience as part of the Eurocampus?

- Question 5 – What are three things you feel you have learned thanks to the programme?

- Question 6 – What do you feel were the main challenges you faced during the programme? / What do you think could be some of the reasons?

C. Third topic: Cultural others

- Question 7 – How would you describe the group dynamics within Eurocampus? / Was it easy or difficult for you to make friends in class?

- Question 8 – What would you say were the main ups and downs in working with students from different Universities?

- Question 9 – What would you say were the main ups and downs in working with lecturers from different Universities?

D. Fourth topic: Cultural self

- Question 10 – Could you tell me about a time when you found it difficult to work with someone with a different cultural background than you? / What were the reasons?

- Question 11 – Could you tell me about a time when you found it difficult to work with someone with your same cultural background? / What were the reasons?

- Question 12 – What are some ways in which you feel the Eurocampus could potentially affect your professional life?

III. Closing

A. *Summarise: sum up some of what was said*

B. *Debrief*: Take some time to explain what the actual goals of the research are, and how it will indeed take into exam their language use. They will then be explicitly reminded they have the option of withdrawing their consent to appear in the research, if they wish to do so.

C. *Maintain rapport:* I appreciate the time you took for this interview. Is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know and that I perhaps forgot to ask you?

D. *Action to be taken:* I should have all the information I need. Would it be alright to send you an email in case I have any more questions? Thanks again.

Session 2 – Past Eurocampus students

I.   **Opening**

A. *Establish rapport:* My name is Maria Anna Saija, I am a student of Intercultural Communication at Utrecht University. I am currently working on my master thesis regarding the Eurocampus programme, so I thought it could be interesting to interview you as you have taken part in the programme in recent years. Thank you very much for accepting to be part of my research!

B. *Purpose:* I would like to ask you some questions about your background, your experiences and in particular with regards to the Eurocampus programme.

C. *Motivation:* I hope this information will help me understand how the programme affects its participants and their experiencing of cultures.

D. *Timeline:* The interview will last roughly one hour. Would it be okay if I start recording our call now?

II.   **Body**

A.   First topic: General info / background

- Question 1 – Where do you work currently and what type of job do you do there?

- Question 2 – What motivated you to work in this field?

- Question 3 – Have you had other intercultural experiences besides Eurocampus? / How would you describe them?

B. Second topic: Experience with Eurocampus

- Question 4 – How was your overall experience?

- Question 5 – What are three things you would say you learned thanks to the programme?

- Question 6 – What were the main challenges you faced? / What do you think could have been reasons for these challenges?

C. Third topic: Cultural others

- Question 7 – How would you describe the group dynamics within Eurocampus? / Was it easy or difficult for you to make friends in class?

- Question 8 – What would you say were the main ups and downs in working with students from different Universities?

- Question 9 - What would you say were the main ups and downs in working with lecturers from different Universities?

D. Fourth topic: Cultural self

- Question 10 – Could you tell me about a time when you found it difficult to work with someone with a different cultural background than you? / What were the reasons?

- Question 11 – Could you tell me about a time when you found it difficult to work with someone with your same cultural background? / What were the reasons?

- Question 12 – How would you say the Eurocampus programme has impacted or not impacted your work life?

III.   Closing

A. *Summarise:* sum up some of what was said.

B. *Debrief*: Take some time to explain what the actual goals of the research are, and how it will indeed take into exam their language use. They will then be explicitly reminded they have the option of withdrawing their consent to appear in the research, if they wish to do so.

C. *Maintain rapport:* I appreciate the time you took for this interview. Is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know and that I perhaps forgot to ask you?

D. *Action to be taken:* I should have all the information I need. Would it be alright to send you an email in case I have any more questions? Thanks again.

Information Letter

Information about participation in: <MA Thesis research on the effects of intercultural training programmes for the discourse on culture: the case of Eurocampus>

　　1.　　　Introduction

　　　In this scientific study you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview regarding your experience with the Eurocampus programme. The interviews will take place online via Microsoft TEAMS. The audio and video of the interview will be recorded and stored for data collection and analysis purposes, which makes this online scientific study non-anonymous. This study has been reviewed by the Faculty Ethics Assessment Committee of the Faculty of Humanities (FEtC-H) at Utrecht University.

　　2.　　　What is the background and purpose of the study?

Past research has shown how the development of intercultural competences has increasingly gained importance in the corporate world, and yet little is still known on the effects of intercultural training programmes, such as the Eurocampus, on the ongoing discourse regarding culture. This research expands on the existing literature on Intercultural training (ICT) to help researchers understand how the programme affects its participants and their experiencing of cultures, as to ultimately see if there are any aspects of the Eurocampus that could be implemented as best practices for other programmes with similar goals. The study has not been funded.

3.   Who will be carrying out the study?

The study will be carried out by master student of Intercultural Communication Maria Anna Saija (m.a.saija@students.uu.nl) and supervised by Deborah L. Cole (PhD) (d.l.cole@uu.nl), who will also be data controller of the research.

4.   How will the study be carried out?

If you decide to be in this study and participate to the online semi-structured interviews, you will be asked to answer a set of 12 open-ended questions, which will take roughly 1 hour of your time on a set date, to be agreed upon together with the researcher, depending on your availability. The study will involve 6 to 8 interviewees in total. Your participation will unfortunately not be compensated, but highly appreciated!

5.   What will we do with your data?

If you decide to be in this study, the study researchers will get information that identifies you, in the form of video recordings. This may include information such as your name, and other information you will decide to disclose when answering the open questions of the interview. This information will be kept for the length of the study and a fixed period afterwards (1 year). After that time, it will be destroyed. The data which will be collected and kept, such as your thoughts and experiences, will be transcribed only through the creation of sample narratives: a sort of story, where your name will be substituted by a pseudonym and any personal information such as your age and nationality will not be disclosed. The

sample narratives created through the use of your pseudonymised data may be used for the purpose of providing intercultural trainers with a template that can be potentially presented to trainees to stimulate discussions on culture. By consenting to participate in this study, you consent to the extended use of this pseudonymised data in the form of narratives for further research, by the researching team or potential future research partners, in case the research were to be published.

6.   What are your rights?

Participation is voluntary. We are only allowed to collect your data for our study if you consent to this. . If you decide not to participate, you do not have to take any further action. You do not need to sign anything. Nor are you required to explain why you do not want to participate. If you decide to participate, you can always change your mind and stop participating at any time, including during the study. You will even be able to withdraw your consent after you have participated. However, if you choose to do so, we will not be required to undo the processing of your data that has taken place up until that time. The research data we have obtained from you up until the time when you withdraw your consent will be erased (see articles 15-16-17-18 of the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679).

7.   Approval of this study

This study has been approved by the Faculty Ethics Assessment Committee of the Faculty of Humanities (FETC-H). If you have a complaint about the way this study is carried out, please send an email to the secretary of this Committee: fetc-gw@uu.nl . If you have any complaints or questions about the processing of personal data, please send an email to the Data Protection Officer of Utrecht University: privacy@uu.nl). The Data Protection Officer will also be able to assist you in exercising the rights you have under the GDPR. Please also be advised that you have the right to submit a complaint with the Dutch Data Protection Authority (https://www.autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl/en).

8.   More information about this study?

If you wish to ask any questions or obtain additional information before, during and after the study, feel free to contact Deborah L. Cole: d.l.cole@uu.nl. Additionally, you can also contact Maria Anna Saija m.a.saija@students.uu.nl.

9. Appendix:

•   Declaration of Consent

Transcripts

Interview 1 with Student A

Extract 1.1

1   5:52 - Interviewer: And how would you describe these vacations as intercultural encounters? Like, how would you describe them in general? Were they good, did you enjoy them? Did you not like them? Were there things you didn't like?
6:03 - A: Well, that also really depends on which country, I can give some examples. For example, in

5   Israel. When I went to Israel, I did not really like the intercultural encounters, because I thought they were quite intense. Like you walking around and there being like, rows of people on the side of the road, and just looking at you like "Mmh he's a tourist" and, yeah, that was kind of impressive [...]. But, like, me and my family, we almost always went to France, [on] holiday. So I got to know a lot about French culture. I like to believe I got a lot of ideas about French culture. Because we… not only [did]

10 we really try to hang out with locals, we also really, really intensely, really actively sought out the history of the country and the arts, as I just said. So it's…my evaluation of it is more or less dependent on which country we're talking about.

Extract 1.2

1   10:12 - A: I also learned that [...] it's actually really helpful to try to work together on some projects [...] to have, like, a close group within your lecture group or within your studies with whom you can discuss all kinds of parts of the education. Because… I used to think of myself - and I still think of myself - as like this person who likes to work alone, who likes to do their own thing. But I noticed that in Finland

5   [...] at the Eurocampus, I really valued hearing what other people had to say about a certain assignment, or getting feedback from one of my group mates, maybe, even though I would have never done that in {country of provenance}. So I think [I became] more dependent on other people. Maybe dependence is not a good…not the right word. Maybe more rely[ant] on a lot of people. I don't know.

Extract 1.3

1 12:41 - Interviewer: Could you elaborate on what you said that you would have never done that in {country of provenance}? Why is that?
12:47 - A: Yeah and that's because of the fact that in {country of provenance} I've always had this… like this mindset of me wanting to work alone. So in that case, I would never ask anyone for help on an

5 assignment. For multiple reasons: I might feel like I bothered them. It might also have to do with a bit of arrogance like that. I feel like my thing is better than theirs.
14:47 - A: Yeah. And that's…uh, I felt more inclined to uh, get help from others in Finland. [...] in {country of provenance} I would be more hesitant or would not be interested at all to hear what other people have to say about my assignment or my paper. Well, I think in Eurocampus, there was this, this

10 shared mentality of we're all in this together. And if I struggle, you help me. If you struggle, I help you. That's a big mentality I noticed during Eurocampus - in subgroups maybe.

Extract 1.4

1 19:37 - Interviewer: So you were talking about these different groups and different closed groups, or open groups inside the Eurocampus group of people, the students, and the fact that they had different struggles. How would you describe in general the group dynamics, like making friends..was it hard, was it [easy]?

5 20:01 - A: I think I'm quite a social person. So for me, [...] personally, it was not hard to make friends or to, like, create social life when it comes to Eurocampus only. I feel like [...] a lot of that has to do with mindset. And I think the mindset differed a bit among students. For example, we had this thing that we literally refer to sometimes as the "Italian front", like, the Italian border, and they're just [...] a couple of Italian girls. They were really nice, in my opinion. But you notice that they did not really come here to

10 make new friends, they did not really come here to be interculturally active, they always sat with the three of them next to each other, and they all always did the projects together. While on the other hand, people like you and me, we were like actively trying to be liked by everyone, or, or at least have some kind of rapport with everybody. [...] And you noticed that difference.

Extract 1.5

1 21:11 - Interviewer: And what do you think could be the reason for this difference? Like, why would they decide to not integrate?
21:18 - A: Well, we're specifically talking about the Italian front, if I can still call it that. It was partially due to COVID. I think.... I heard. Like, they still [had] the mentality of being afraid of other people

5 because they can, they might make you sick. Maybe it can also be attributed to a different mindset, or a different goal of Eurocampus. Like, for me, the …actually completing Eurocampus, actually getting high grades, was relatively secondaire, to actually experiencing an exchange [...]. And I think some people in the group were there to get the paper, rather than experience an exchange to the fullest. Experiencing, like, local culture. Experiencing Jyväskylä, in our case, in every sort of way. It might be

10 that I'm making assumptions, because maybe the Italians that we're talking about, [they did] those things also, but within other instances. But, for example, I didn't… I never saw them at, like, Sit Sits or something […] That's my personal way of getting to know, or finding my way inside the society.

Extract 1.6

1 26:25 - Interviewer: So uhm, just to summarise, what would you say were the main ups and downs of working with students from different universities?
26:40 - A: [...] Another big up[side] of working with such a group was that you have all these people who all know a lot about something [...]. For example, maybe {other student} knew a lot about Brazil

5 or, and {other student} knew things about the USA or I don't know, just because she has lived there. The main [upside] of all is that you're collectively a group [...] and within that group, there are all these individuals who know specific stuff and want to share with the other people. So you, you become this interconnected group of people who have lived completely different lives [and] everybody is interested in each other.

Extract 1.7

1 36:34 - Interviewer: [...] So can you tell me about a time when you found it difficult to work with somebody from a different cultural background? And what were the reasons for the way you were feeling?
36:49 - A: [...] I have this example, which played off at my gym, like it has nothing to do with

5 education. Just to share. [...] I worked at a gym, I quit recently. But we have this like, [...] this boat next to, like, at the end of my street, which is a free place of stay for migrants, for refugees. And what I experienced a couple times in the gym, is that people who came from the boat came into my gym, not talking {A's mother tongue} not talking English, like not even being able to talk in English, which is completely understandable. But it makes working with them really hard. Because they also came in,

10 they made it clear [to] me that they had the intention of working out in my gym. You need to pay to work out at my gym. [...] I'm so sorry, I don't… Like, I care about your story. I care about what you've been through, and you're very welcome here. I'm not going to let you work out for free, that's just not going to happen. And on those occasions, to make that clear to somebody [...] and be as respectful as possible…that's, those are moments that I find that are really hard. And those are the moments where

15 you really notice you or them being from another cultural background.

Extract 1.8

1 38:51 - Interviewer: And how about Eurocampus? Like, do you ever have similar experiences (or different) in Eurocampus where you found it difficult to work with somebody that wasn't from the same cultural background [as you]?
39:03 - A: I don't necessarily. I don't really necessarily have that. [...] I think people more or less had

5 that with me. I did not.
  39:17 - Interviewer: Okay, why is that so?
  39:18 - A: Like… one hundred percent, I don't have proof for this, but it's…uh, from the beginning of Eurocampus [...] Let me rephrase, the stereotype of {nationality} people [is that they] are loud, direct people. And [...] when it comes to me, that stereotype fits more or less. Like, I'm not necessarily I

10 wouldn't say necessarily loud, but I am quite a direct, maybe harsh person. And I don't, as I said, I [have not] investigated. I don't have proof, but I feel like there were some people in our Eurocampus programme who stayed away from me a bit at the beginning. Because I came across as, like, this… this loud, "screams-what-he-wants-to-scream" person. Even though that's just me, that's just my, as you said, my cultural self.

15 40:25 - A: [...] To actually answer your question I, I don't know, I don't really have that with… the person who I had that the most with, was the other {nationality} person.
  40:42 - Interviewer: Okay, okay, interesting.
  40:46 - A: I don't know why, but it felt like… she's from the most northern part of {country of provenance}. And I'm from, like, the middle, like the centre of {country of provenance}. And there are,

20 like, certain stereotypes and some different evaluations of each other, that are just there. But I felt like, even though we could literally talk the same language to each other, the barrier between us was a lot bigger than, for example, with Italian people or with like, people from [...] basically the other side of Europe. And I felt like [...] those people stood closer to me than the person from the north and or from, like, 100 kilometres away.

Extract 1.9

1 41:32 - Interviewer: And why would you think that this is? Like, do you think that this is strictly due to the stereotypes? And the fact that they were, as you said, they were true for you, they fit you? Or what could be the reason?
  41:45 - A: The stereotypes in this case, are based on something. I wouldn't call them true, but they are

5 based on something. And it is true, the average person from [...] Northern {country of provenance} is like a really different person from the average person [...] from where I'm from. Like, there are actual differences in the average person. And I think we both noticed that quite quickly, like me being like, this city person, not not the big city, but like a city person who is somewhat outgoing, likes to talk a lot. And in her case, I just automatically evaluated her as somebody who takes everything too seriously and who.

10 has, like, a whole different outlook on life. [...] And if, if you start to notice that right away, quite quickly, to a certain extent, and I think it will automatically [...] give up [...] Like me, some people, we didn't even need to try to become close, like, we already were close [from] the day we [first] saw each other. With other people, you need to work towards each other a bit. And I think we both felt… me and her, we both felt no motivation at all to come together. So I felt like the wall between us was bigger than

15 with most people from other countries

Extract 1.10

1   43:32 - Interviewer: Okay.[...] And would you say that this made it hard to work for [you]? Or to work with her? Or did you still find a way to still work together? In terms of like, within the Eurocampus actual group work?

43:53 - A: Yeah, we actually worked together a few times. And for me, when I work with you, it's quite

5   simple. If we make, like, a division of workload, and you do your part without whining, then I [...] value you as a group partner. But here, the initial stereotypes that I had immediately already kicked in. An evaluation of us from Central {country of provenance}, [...] about Northern {nationality} people, is that they're strictly, heavily religious. Which, the rest of {country of provenance}, maybe the South [...] is not anymore. Like we have a lot of Muslim[s]. But {country of provenance} used to be like this

10   Catholic country; we just aren't anymore. That's just the truth, on average. And so my evaluation of her was, okay, she's - without any negative connotation - [...] she's like a more traditional person, churchgoer, stuff like that, which is completely fine with me, you know. I don't have any problems at all with that, as long as you don't let it bother you or let it bother me. Like, if you… practise your religion all you want, like do it, but don't let it come between me and [...] yourself and [affect] functioning.

Extract 1.11

1   45:32 - A: And that was immediately what happened, because we needed to [...] do this group project and for - I think it's Catholics or for some Christian religious group, Sunday is a resting day. Like, on Sunday, you're not allowed to do anything for some strict religious groups in {country of provenance}. We wanted to meet up with the group uh, to make, like, a planning. And that was on a Sunday, and she

5   just refused to come. Even though it was, like, a meeting [of] 20 minutes. And it might be [...] close minded [of] me, but then I'm starting to get annoyed. Then I'm starting to get the feeling that you are using religion as an excuse not to have to do anything, which is not at all the case. But that's my immediate first reaction. And the… uh, the growing apart thing starts [when] she makes this decision. [...]. So [...] most evaluations were somewhat based [on] assumptions. And I think it was the same for

10   her with me. So yeah, we just…uh, we were quite far apart from each other. But we grew even further apart from each other by how we acted.

Interview 2 with Student B

Extract 2.1

1   4:44 - Interviewer: And could you give me some examples of the culture shock you experienced in Russia?

4:50 - B: Yes. So, uhm, there were a couple of things that I want to point out to kind of give you the full picture of why I think those clashes occurred. So I was there with three other girls, we were…uhm

5   We were all not British. So it was a Hungarian girl, a Swedish girl and I, a {nationality} girl, and [a] German girl. She actually left because of the culture shock. And we did not know any Russian going there, we were able to read and write and use basic phrases. But we went there and then had, like, a crash course. And the main culture shocks were related to first of all, not being able to speak the language or understand the language. So in daily situations at, let's say, in shops, or when taking the

10   bus when people didn't understand us, or we didn't understand them, sometimes we had some clashes of people shouting at us. And we didn't know whether…what they were saying.

Extract 2.2

1   5:49 - B: And, uhm, the other thing is that culture stock in this case was very much, uhm.... How can I describe this? We… Before going, we had an idea of what we would expect, because we had a person who told us the climate is very harsh. The language is difficult, but it is Moscow's, we were in Moscow, we weren't in any small city,

5   We were in the capital, so they told us we would be able to just communicate in English. And going there… actually being then also being in a university setting, we still realised that not a lot of people actually spoke English. And that also, for example - now I'm getting specific - when it comes to communication, hierarchy was something that I wasn't really used to. So there were a couple of shocks and even, like, faux pas. Like, things I did wrong when I was communicating with a professor. And

10   then if you use the wrong name, or if there was a problem, and then we talked to somebody who was a higher on a higher level, the person [...] got offended, because they said, "Oh, [...] you should talk to me first before going to my boss". Yeah, these kinds of things. So connected to the language, but also connected to hierarchy, and then also kind of hierarchy within the language. So how do you express problems? [...] We then learned that it's best to not be that direct, and you should rather be

15   indirect to help other people keep face and not lose face.

Extract 2.3

1   8:56 - B: First of all, I think I've learned to, in general, look at topics or problems, not as separate units, but because we had that much different content and very different kinds of, yeah, areas of research within your intercultural communication that I learned to see the connections between them. And after having a couple of courses, it was really interesting to then realise, oh, this theory that I've read in another

5   course actually applies to this topic as well. And I can connect it. So that's something that I would say I learned. So kind of, yeah, this, this outlook, and also ability to to draw the like connections. The topics, then something that's mostly connected to how we worked because we were actually using a lot of group work. And in my studies [...] I've been used to doing, for example, presentations as well but writing essays together with In a group, I was not used to [...]

10   now that I'm thinking about it, I think I've not either not done it at all or not that much. So that was something that was both challenging, but also very interesting, because obviously, as I said, the students came from first of all different universities, their different writing styles, different cultural, and also linguistic backgrounds.

Extract 2.4

1   22:27 - A: So again, just having the different backgrounds was, first of all, extremely interesting, because those were the professors that had a background in completely opposite areas, such as law, for example. And… I think that they did a great job in kind of breaking it down and making their areas of work kind of accessible to us, the best they could. At the same time, obviously, it showed that every

5   university has their own… I'm going to call it culture, just the culture of dealing with things. So there were some instances where we felt like some assignments might have been way too much in comparison to others. So in terms of length, for example, so when they were asking for essays that were longer, or the structure was different, we did have a variety of different tasks. But the main issue that arose one time was the timing, I mean, timing, like time management, or maybe time. Yeah, when

10   they gave us the marks back, [...] usually we had a deadline to hand in our work. And then they also had a deadline to give us feedback. And when that deadline was missed, basically for either or, I don't know, I think one professor took more than a month longer. That was a huge issue, because at the beginning, we thought it might just be his national culture that led him to think if he says, "Oh, I'm going to reply tomorrow, I'm going to be give you the feedback tomorrow" and it might take in a

15   couple more days, we wouldn't be surprised. But in the end, we learned that it was just a personal thing. And actually, it had nothing to do with this national culture, it was just a personal issue.

Extract 2.5

1   30:08 - B: Um, I think it was actually the first case that I experienced the use of, like, {her mother tongue} as a lingua franca, because I, I'm obviously biassed. So I am {nationality}, but I don't have a strong connection to the {nationality} culture. To me language and culture are obviously connected. But seeing people from China and also from Egypt, speak in {her mother tongue} and feeling very confident in speaking {her mother tongue} rather

5   than English was really interesting. And I do think it was amazing to see how that can connect people. And, for example, like, I don't know any Arabic, I don't really know any Mandarin either. I can say hello, and goodbye and how are you. But still, it was… that was really nice at the same time. Technically, obviously, using {her mother tongue} as a lingua franca only works when everybody understands {her mother tongue}. So of course, if there's somebody else joining again, you would just switch to English to move

10   to let somebody else join that conversation. But it was strange in a way, I think.

Extract 2.6

1   33:50 - B: So working with someone from the same culture, like lingo, cultural background, made me think that it was going to be easy, or easier. But we still had to, for example, communicate who does what, when, how do we do this, and we still had some …it was not like, it was telepathic, and I could think something and she knew what I wanted. And we still had [to] explicitly talk about these things.

5   So either because of the other group work, because this was the very last paper that I actually wrote. So maybe throughout the whole Eurocampus, I just learned to kind of navigate and be more attentive to

what could go wrong, and how can I be very explicit to make sure that somebody else understands, but doing that somebody else who's {nationality}, I think, I thought it was gonna be easier than in the end. It was still easy, and it was great. It was a lot of fun. And I do think it worked really, really well. But we

10   still had to communicate and we still had some…not differences. But actually, yeah, like, we still had some difference in how we approached, for example, adding for the literature, or how we understood the task, actually. So I remember that we both had different interpretations of how we should do a task and what to include and what not to include.

Interview 3 with Student C

Extract 3.1

1   7:02 - C: "So when we were there, I think almost all of the {nationality}people were one year older than the Spanish one. So like, we were 16. And the Spanish people were 15, let's say. And when you're in Spain, when you're 16, you can go to clubs, like they're like, it's a thing, you can enter clubs at 16 years old, but like most of the Spanish people were 15. And they almost all had fake IDs, we first of

5   all, for me, seemed really crazy, because I had never had anyone in my environment that had a fake ID, especially when you're 15. Like, if you if it's like a fake ID when you're 17 to get alcohol, I would like I was like, Okay, maybe for that. But this was to get into clubs. And so that was one first thing and also, okay. I think something very interesting was that, so we did go to a club with the exchange students. And when we went there, I remember all the girls being dressed very, like, what we would

10   like, say provocatively, like as if they had short shorts or short skirts. Yeah, a lot of makeup, like really, really heavy makeup for 15 years old. Like, for me, I was like, I was barely wearing any makeup. And I [came] from this high school. That's like, I mean, oh, I mean them as well. But I was gonna say, like, a Catholic High School, but their high school was also Catholic. So that doesn't really say much, but I think, I don't know. It's just like, in my case, like, it was not the norm at all for girls to have, like, a lot

15   of makeup. Some did have, like, makeup, and I was wearing makeup, but it was not the same level at all.

Extract 3.2

1   9.34 - C: Yeah, it was like I was really confused. I remember being… because at this point I was with I think maybe five or six Spanish girls and just like three or two other {nationality} girls so we were like even less {nationality} girls. And we just, like, spoke like this when one another really confused like what's happening like we were really lost to everything that was happening. So yeah, I think that's one

5   of the things that [were] really weird. Yeah, we were still worried.

Extract 3.3

1 8:31 - C: And they had this really big gap [between us]. Alcohol was like, oh my god, they had to really hide themselves when they were drinking. I remember at one point, we were going to a party and they got the alcohol from like the older brother who was like, I don't know, 19 or something. And it was like, Oh my God, you were able to get alcohol? And for me it was the other way around. Because

5 like in {country of provenance}, we would get alcohol really easily very, very young, if I can say. Well, [...] for them it was… Like, you could dress really the way you wanted, you could have a lot of makeup but alcohol was like oh my god and it was completely like the opposite for me. And so it was really interesting to see this, like, really big gap.

Extract 3.4

1 23:31 - C: But first of all, I was really happy with the group we had, like, let's say {university of provenance} people. Because yeah, I think it was really nice that first of all, we were kind of like, all from different places. Because obviously, again, you know, there's the whole thing about like, the Italian group and the German group. And I think it was really nice that we're all from different places,

5 because it kind of, I don't know, I think it made something nice out of it. [...] I think, actually thinking about it. Maybe we could have had, like, more differences being from the same country because like, for instance, I knew the German girls were always talking about like, Oh, you have a different accent for me, like, within their group. Yeah, they were all from different parts of Germany. And so I think it's funny how they still had a lot of like, differences, like cultural difference while being from the same

10 country

Extract 3.5

1 27:33 - C: I think sometimes it was tough, because we had very different expectations [...] when it came to, like, group work. And so, you know, [...] some people had very specific ideas of what… the way they wanted things to be. And then like another person going to completely clash with another person's perspective on the same thing. But at the same time, I also think it was very interesting,

5 because we could like really see the different ways of working. And I remember like talking with some of the Italian girls and being like, Oh, we kind of have like the same way of working with the French people. But like, then, I don't know what, like the German girls had difficulty, a completely different way of working. So it was really interesting to see that. And also, because the teachers were all from different places. I think that also impacted a lot like… we had very, yeah, like, I think finding, like, a

10 kind of a consensus on what people wanted, where the teachers wanted, what the students wanted. It was kind of complicated, but also it was so enriching.

Extract 3.6

1   41:14 - Interviewer: [...] Could you tell me about a time when you found it difficult to work with someone with your same cultural background? And what could be the reasons for those things?
41:39 - C: [...] I think like group assignments in general, you're always gonna have, like, times where you disagree with people, but for so many reasons. Maybe sometimes, because you don't agree with the

5   way they're doing things. With just their opinions are stuff like this. I don't know. I think sometimes it can be like the most basic things as in just like, oh, I don't like the way you're presenting that page [...] But I think maybe like, when it's like from your own, like the same culture as you, it's mostly going to be probably like, just what are we talking about? Or like the way we're presenting things. Rather than like, really the whole like methodology that can be I think, maybe more of a problem when it's like a

10   completely different culture. I don't know. Because maybe, you know, maybe like, if it's to {nationality} people, we have been taught the same way of working. So that's not much of a problem. But maybe it's more like the way we're going to talk about something or like, Yeah, I think more maybe the content and then the way you're doing it, I don't know.

Interview 4 with Student D

Extract 4.1

1   3:42 - Interviewer: [...] I find it interesting how you said how life and family life and general life in Australia wasn't that different from home. So would you say that your experience between {country of provenance} and Australia, like you didn't experience a lot of differences?
4:00 - D: Yeah, I think so. But it's hard to tell whether I say this now. Because I think while I was there,

5   it was a lot about difference. And I was like, Oh, my God, look, there's a different tree. And I remember taking a picture of the light switch, because it was different than what we have in {country of provenance}. Okay. But I think I was looking for the difference in a way. But overall, just the way you interact in the family and just, I don't know, just the way of life that you get up early in the morning and then you go to work and then you get back home and then in the afternoon, maybe you

10   make good friends and you go out and have dinner or something that was very similar.

Extract 4.2

1   5:24 - Interviewer: And what are three things that you feel you've learned thanks to your campus, they don't have to be actual concepts. They can be like anything that you've learned about yourself or others.
5:38 - D: I think the first thing that popped into my head was to reflect on my experience, and also the way that I perceive my own experience. Because yeah, this is never something that just is there. You

5   know, it's always connected to the way that I think about things, and then also the way it is. [...] Yeah, I feel like we talked a lot about essentialism. And I would say I'm more aware of that now. Which is also connected to my first point, you know, to always, also reflect on my own essentialism, in my own thinking or doing. I guess.
7:07 - Interviewer: Do you find yourself doing that a lot?

10   7:10 - D: Not a lot, but sometimes, yeah. But I think that's normal, [it] just happens. And then…That's why we do intercultural studying, to be aware of it.

Extract 4.3

1   10:54 - Interviewer: So, you mentioned the social bubble. And like the group of people we were in? How would you describe the group dynamics within your campus?
11:04 - D: Oh, wow. Interesting. Um, I would say that there were groups from the beginning. And I felt that they were based on where people studied. So I feel, like, that each group goes together, right from

5   the beginning, the Italian group. And {university of provenance} also, we did it too, and Passau as well. Yeah, I just feel like we kind of grouped together based on where we came from, university wise. And we never, at least for me, I didn't feel that we were like, you know, like as a group overall. Yeah.

Extract 4.4

1   27:36 - Interviewer: So there were no issues with people from your same academic background or academic culture. Yeah. But were they issues with people with your same nationality? Or national culture?
27:48 - D: Yeah, not many. But yeah.

5   27:53 - Interviewer: Can you tell me about one example?
27:59 - Yeah, [...] with just one person, I just felt that we had different, just different opinions. And I felt that the other person maybe wasn't, yeah, wasn't happy to discuss their opinion. Okay, this is the way we have to do this. [...]

10   28:33 - Interviewer: and what do you think was the reason for this?
28:39 - D: I don't know, just…perfectionism?
28:46 - Interviewer: So on both sides, or I was that from you?
28:49 - D: Yeah, I think so. Yeah. And I think that maybe both of us weren't happy to rely on someone else. So this character trait doesn't really match somehow.

Extract 4.5

1   25:10 - Interviewer: So would you say that communication was the main reason for these issues? [...] Or would you say that there were other reasons for this specific issue you mentioned, so, not feeling like your expectations were met, because you didn't share your expectations all around before enacting them.

5   25:34 - D: Yeah, I think that's the main reason, because it's totally fine that people have different experiences and different ideas about the way things work and the way that, you know, you think academic work should function. And everyone, like each of us, had these ideas. So we should have talked about this, and we didn't. I don't think it's, you know, a lack of I don't know, what could it be? I don't think it's because they were from China.

Extract 4.6

1   26:16 - Interviewer: Could you tell me about a time when you found it difficult to work with someone with your same cultural background? And what were the reasons for that?
26:36 - D: Yeah, maybe with one person? What do you mean by you know, when you say the same, then I go to, okay {nationality} person.

5   26:49 - Interviewer: Uhm, I'm leaving this to you.
26:52 - D: Yeah. But then okay. Yeah. But they were not interesting. Then maybe…No, like, if I immediately went to okay, just {nationality} person, and then I kind of stopped and thought about it. And then if I think about the same, like, academic culture, then it's totally different. So then I would say no. There were no problems with someone from the exact same…yeah, academic background.