

An abstract for

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"Evaluation on the current socio-linguistic research. New trends and paradigms"

Multilingual Online Training for Cultural Understanding – Starting Points and Challenges

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An abstract: Could increasing of cultural understanding be the most needed and effective tool for better tolerance and support of language diversity and minorities? Are not the decrease of biodiversity and the oppression of a small human being coming from the same root? If we knew ourselves better and had more holistic and cross-cultural approach to the reality, then maybe we were better equipped for both sustainable development and global peace.

The project Intercultural Learning in the Internet (IntCultNet) is a multilingual training and research initiative that enhances trans-national cooperation, understanding and cultural competence. The training is a combination of international cooperative learning in a web-environment and of working in local teams thus enabling cooperative learning and interaction between groups that might never otherwise be in touch with each other. Action research is an integral part of the project as well as joint multi-cultural development of the contents.

The project IntCultNet has local and global dimension both in terms of geographic and the broad range of end users. The project consortium consists of five European partners, one Asian and one from Middle East. So far the incentive contents materials and participation are realized in the current web-community in four languages: Serbo-Croatian, Czech, Finnish and English. There are plans to prepare contents versions for several new languages including Hebrew, Arabic, Vietnamese and Chinese. The IntCultNet training concept can be later applied even worldwide as well as for many different target groups. Potential user groups may be e.g. university teachers and students, personnel of enterprises, special groups like people with disabilities, handicapped; marginalized; foreign embassies; NGOs; people preparing for international assignments; consultants, minorities; immigrants, staff of refugee centers; social workers and life-long learners.

The IntCultNet training differs from traditional culture training courses in its competence-based approach instead of knowledge-based: the starting point is not the habits, behaviour and stereotypes of different cultures, but cultural and social self-awareness, interaction, diversity management and value competence. We explore and analyze possibilities for increased self-awareness as a basis for successful cultural communication, seek for tools for diversity management and adequate online methodologies. The participants are invited to analyse, reflect, share and rethink their values and attitudes. By starting to better understand one's own cultural biases, the learner becomes aware of his/her development needs. Transformative learning is the main pedagogical goal of the course. As values are the basis for understanding and appreciating cultural diversity, so are they in appreciating

biodiversity. A more interdisciplinary view is needed both for cultural competence and sustainable development.

Language is a starting point for introduction to culture. Successful cultural communication and new skills learnt we see as potential for increase of self-awareness and comfortable quality performance. With joint international creation of the content the project is seen as a constant developing process.

In our article we present experiences from the pilot programmes of the project Intercultural Learning in the Internet. With four groups of students in two or three countries simultaneously during the two years of the project we conducted online courses in cultural understanding. One of the main challenges was the language barrier or bridge that we had to deal with, especially when we have two languages, "outsiders" from global perspective. Still the potential of students in the course and their willingness to communicate were beyond barriers. We explore how we can develop a better Internet tool for learning cultural competence and reach understanding on meta-cognitive level. We would like to present our experiences and ideas for joint learning, using English but also minority languages and using them to create better tools for tolerance, diversity management and overcoming racism and xenophobia.

Language is manifesting creative spirit. It in its diversity brings manifestation of cultural influences together, which certainly improve the quality of life and communication. IntCultNet is a possible, certain compound of this kind of understanding. More, understanding different worldviews and qualities of life are needed to promote mutual understanding even in the Internet. With this project we try to identify "intercultural language", we would like to introduce new ways of communication, a language that has its own sociological, political and cultural dimension. With the issues of intercultural learning we set our course toward it. These language pick in imaginable coordination system create a line of successful communication. In such way, a language as a part of Internet culture changes a perspective of old and refused models which are either privilege of small group of people. In that way it is our intention to find proves that IntCultNet breaks barriers of xenophobia of small and large ethnic groups and set new motivation for exploring on personal level as well as sustaining healthy social-cultural and political communication.

Introducing the issues of culture, cultural diversity, self-awareness and personal development, IntCultNet project tackled the issue of language and its potential for and ability to create link between worldviews and cooperation is its most fascinating social phenomenon. By setting our course toward seeing language as a starting point for introduction to culture, we see the Internet as a way to know language synthetic character and its motivational value. Language is also seen as a source for creating mutual trust in the Internet course and overcoming a distance online.