

## Session 1. Intercultural Communication and TNC

### *Summary report*

#### Rationale – why the topic is important

As humans we are much more alike than different, but we don't think in terms of how alike we are, we think in terms of difference. Difference is what we notice. And difference is what creates conflict. So human beings can either become all alike, or can accept and understand differences in terms of values and ways of life. However, different groups can live alongside each other without understanding themselves or each other, and face a continued future of distrust and antipathy. The aim of intercultural communication is to address the second of these scenarios. Intercultural communication is not about assimilation. There is no suggestion that we are all converging towards some common 'good'. Rather, the basic premise is that different groups of people have different values, and therefore each group will follow its own path. The aim of intercultural communication is thus to create awareness and, more important, understanding, not agreement.

Managing a project with different Member States is an enriching experience that can become a burden, for various reasons ranging from administrative problems to linguistic difficulties; therefore communication is essential for the success of a transnational project.

The goal of this session was to explore the underlying issues about intercultural communication and dialogue between people from diverse cultures and geopolitical contexts. It aimed to understand how misunderstandings in intercultural communications occur and how we can minimise them in order to facilitate the implementation of inter-regional and cross-border cooperation projects.

#### Speakers and contributions

The session focused mainly on presenting two different perspectives (bottom-up and top-down) of how to recognize and handle cultural misunderstandings in transnational projects.

**Rita Pakalniškytė-Rušnienė** joined the Northwest Lithuania LAG as senior administrator in 2010. She is in charge of helping applicants to prepare, develop and implement LEADER-based projects as part of the 2007-2013 Local Development Strategy. In addition, she is the coordinator of the TNC project "Mobile Art Exhibition in the Baltic States" which was successfully implemented in 2013.

**Focus of the presentation:** The main challenges faced by Lithuanian LAGs to find partners, develop ideas, approve agreements and implement projects. How Lithuanian LAGs manage to overcome cultural differences and succeed in project implementation.



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**Frank Schneider** has worked for over 10 years in the fields of public relations, public affairs and journalism for both profit and non-profit organisations in various European countries. Before joining the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme, he advised a high-level EU project (EU Advisory Group) and the Prime Minister's office in Armenia on communication and led the communication unit of the European Railway Association (CER) in Brussels.

**Focus of the presentation:** An overview of the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme and the intercultural challenges it involves, such as language and culture.

## Participants

The average number of participants was about 10, including representatives of Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies and National Rural Networks.

## Concept questions and key points discussed

- How can we handle an international project? Tolerance, patience and understanding are fundamental to achieve positive results.
- Most of our reactions come from how we have been programmed by our culture. People from different cultures vary in their concepts of time and space; how they interpret interpersonal distance, eye contact and silence; how their communication styles are reflected in the language patterns they use.
- Administrative burdens are sometimes more important than cultural differences. The most frustrating features are the length of application forms and the varying application deadlines. A lack of harmonization between countries, drawn-out prerequisites, such as feasibility studies, and late payments can result sometimes in some partners abandoning the project.
- The benefits of transnational cooperation projects are visible and tangible; however the step forward is to convince the people about the added-value of the project, not just the authorities and institutions. It is therefore important to concentrate on a real 'lobby' strategy, a one-on-one type of discussion and not only on outputs; there is a real need of professional trained communicators who would lobby by Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies and European Contact Points.
- Information available on best practices/surveys among LAGs about TNC partnerships is not easily available.



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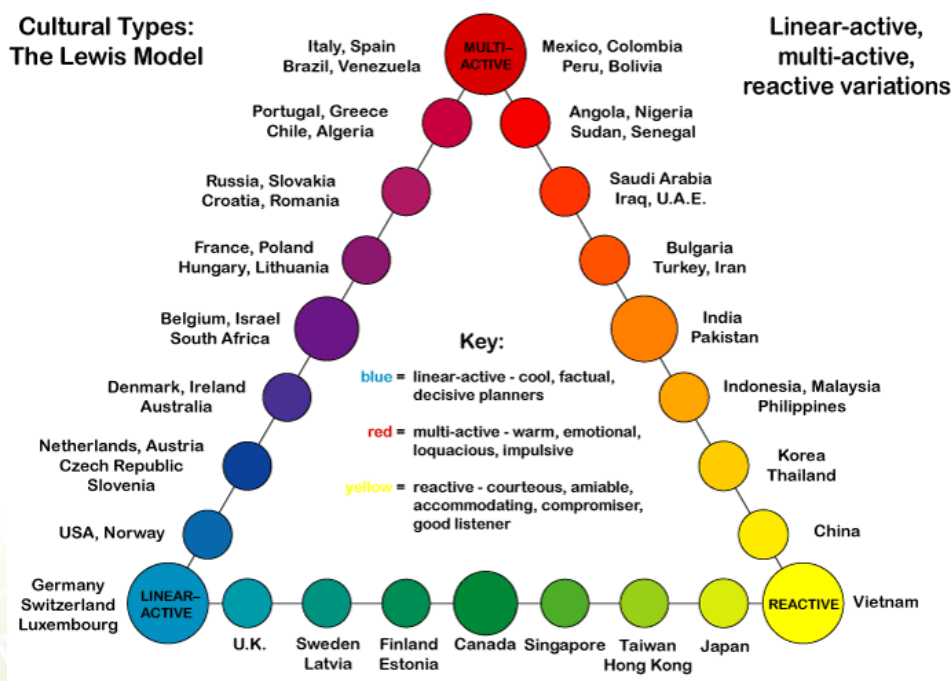
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## Conclusions

Intercultural communication is sometimes disregarded as not being an important element of a project implementation. For future activities, a best practices session among successful international project managers could be envisaged. Additionally, a workshop focusing on "getting it right" during which each participant would be able to work on their communication style in a predefined cross-cultural situation could be organised. Finally, an emphasis on conflict management and mediation could also help people involved in transnational cooperation handle more efficiently project management.



**Figure 1.** The Lewis Model of Culture – 'Promoting harmony through understanding'

During his presentation, Frank Schneider explained that "communication is planned centrally but without understanding national cultural contexts there is a risk of not reaching stakeholders in a proper way". The Lewis Model helps us to understand the communication characteristics of different 'culture types'.



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## Key lessons learned from participants

- Always consider the cultural context.
- There is no cooperation without patience. There is no cooperation without passion.
- Regulation and practices should be harmonized for TNC projects.
- Important to do a survey among LAGs/TNC partners about obstacles encountered in TNC projects.
- Persuade the Managing Authority/Paying Agency that even small TNC projects are important and to adopt user-friendlier rules.

## Download link for presentations and videos

All presentations can be found [here](#). Other session and workshop reports are also available under the section "[Outcomes](#)".

