

IEREST. Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers. Aminkeng Atabong, Lut Baten, Luisa Bavieri, Ana Beaven, Claudia Borghetti, Neva Čebroň, Miguel Gallardo, Sara Ganassin, Irina Golubeva, Prue Holmes, Lucia Livatino, John Osborne, Jan Van Maele, Basil Vassilicos. Annales University Press, Koper (2015). 126 pp., ISBN 978-961-6964-45-6.

The IEREST manual is the result of a three year Lifelong Learning Programme that involved six higher education institutions from five different countries with the aim of increasing intercultural awareness of Erasmus mobility students before, during and after their international experience through reflection and analysis. The potential users of this freely downloadable tool are higher education students who embark on an Erasmus experience and their teachers. It is unique as most such manuals concentrate on cross-cultural aspects, while the intercultural have often been neglected, perhaps due to the assumption that a sojourn in a foreign country is by itself enough for the development of intercultural communicative competence. However, as stated in the introduction to the manual, studies have proven that this is a false assumption; hence the idea of a manual that does not focus on culture-specific information, rather treats intercultural education and provides students the necessary knowledge to deconstruct communication between individuals within a group. The range of input material is wide enough to strike a chords with each and every individual no matter their background.

The proposed activities cover most intercultural topics that Erasmus students should be acquainted with. The manual exploits Kolb's learning cycle as the approach to immersion into individual topics. The acquired knowledge includes specific as well as general objectives and goals, giving students basic concepts and terminology for discussing various aspects of intercultural encounters, thus equipping them with the necessary tools to observe intercultural communication autonomously, accept otherness and recognize bias in themselves and others. More generally, the intention is to elicit cultural awareness, facilitate acceptance, promote diversity and open mindedness and give feedback information, not only for the period of the exchange programme but also for future life.

In terms of contents, the manual follows the milestones of the Erasmus exchange process and is therefore divided into three modules. Modules 1 and 3 have been designed to be taught face-to-face, while Module 2 must be done online for the departing students, while in-coming students can have the course delivered face-to-face. The first module is intended for students before the exchange experience and it is further subdivided into four activities dealing with facets of students' expectations. The intent of these activities is to help students understand other people by looking beyond the established stereotypes and see each person as an individual with their multiplicity of unique characteristics. The second module

consists of three activities and focuses on the perception of the experience abroad on a day-by-day bases using an observation method followed by reflection. The activities gear students towards self-reflection and towards observation of the hosting community, while focusing as well on the language experience. The last module contains three activities and it helps students rethink and reuse their experience. Additionally, it gives them some hints as to how to take advantage of their acquired knowledge for future social or professional purposes by recalling most theoretical concepts introduced previously and introducing some new notions.

As for the activity structure, they are sequenced in the same fashion, designed with particular attention to satisfy the needs of both the teacher and the student. The former is provided with a step by step guide to all activities with comments on techniques and attached materials, while the latter has more than sufficient heterogeneous materials, which will make each lesson interesting and motivating.

The manual is easily readable and well-organized; all attachments can be printed or modified according to the lesson's objectives. The input material is attractive for the student because it covers current topics; it is engaging and relevant for everyday life. Last but not least, each activity provides a variety of inputs: from links to video, audio, written and photo material and slides - all of which, combined with diverse exercises, should satisfy multiple cognitive styles.

A significant strength of the manual is that the activities are connected in a loose way that does not require a fixed teaching order. Teachers can decide to choose any particular activity, any number of them, and in any order as each is complete in and of itself and there are no requirements as regards the number used.

The manual is also versatile: all activities can be adapted to other mobility programmes or to target specific students and their needs (for example, specific sectors such as engineering, economy, etc.). A great deal of freedom is granted teachers, who obviously play a crucial role in identifying target group needs. Each activity contains the section Suggested Readings, which can be a starting point for new ideas. If teachers decide to modify materials they have the possibility to upload their variations of the activities onto the Humbox platform, sharing them with a wider public of interested educational community. Similarly, new materials, specific for a certain country and language, can be added on line. This supports the very essence of the latest common EU teaching practices, exchanging best practices, encouraging creativity and diversity, and especially erasing borders.

The concept of the manual fits the needs of a multi-level class, because the questions are open-ended enough so that everyone can give an answer according to their ability and feel confident in it. But a problem does arise in regard to the simple matter of the language of the text, which is limited to English, which, though it is the common currency of Erasmus students, has not yet become widespread enough within European educational systems to justify its use to the exclusion of non-speakers. A teacher who must invest a great deal of time and hard work into adapting the material to a different language might instead opt not to use the manual. The hope is that the Humbox platform will bridge this gap over time. It will also help a wider teaching community to spread knowledge, share materials and experiences, thus contributing to the continuation of the project long after its "official" conclusion. Another possible improvement regards the suggested links, which may rapidly become obsolete and

therefore need to be changed students may find they have been removed from the web. A CD including all recordings could be made to facilitate the teachers' work, while helping them to promote the increasingly popular self-study approach. The manual still doesn't cover a *hic sunt leones* area of interculturality, the linguistic aspect which covers pragmatics and vocabulary use, a gap which should be filled in the near future.

All in all, the IEREST manual unquestionably offers a rich variety of good didactic materials from the contents point of view as well as a nice design, suitable for the targeted public. It can be defined as a model for the intercultural education of university Erasmus students. Its use can only increase the benefits of the international experience from an intercultural point of view. I would definitely recommend its use and the follow-up, feedback interaction onto the Humbox platform.

The manual should have a double impact on students: leading them to improve their language proficiency through an interesting choice of topics, tasks and materials, while enriching them with some basic theoretical knowledge on interculturality. It is based on rethinking and reanalyzing an experience and thus generating permanent understanding and knowledge. Variegated authentic materials, activities planned in detail and the final self-assessment grids allow for each activity to become a springboard for professional and personal growth in a multicultural and multiethnic environment. The course's benefits will remain in the future as well in the students' professional lives.

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