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Some Considerations and Proposals as to  
**Intercultural Competence and its Certification**  
within the Framework of the Leonardo da Vinci Project *Icudriving*

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## **0. I see you driving – towards new horizons**

Intercultural competence ranks as one of the key concepts of today's pedagogy; it is regarded as a crucial ability for the social and professional life in the age of globalization. So there is already a vast variety of ideas and approaches as to this topic. Starting a new project like *Icudriving* in the knowledge of this situation, means either to plagiarize or to propose something *really new*. So it seems necessary to determine a kind of **unique characteristic** (or 'unique selling point'). From my point of view this unique characteristic should be **the certification of intercultural competence, consistently defined for the vocational and the (upper) secondary education.**

## **1. The need for certification of intercultural competence as a vocational qualification**

The title of our Leonardo da Vinci Project is "Intercultural Driving Licence | Vocational" and that means a certificate of intercultural competence as a *vocational* qualification, satisfying the needs of employers (enterprises and institutions) under the conditions of a globalized economy.

If a person wants to work in a certain social or professional environment especially *due to her/his intercultural competence (IC)*, it is a matter of course that the future partners or employers want to know, *in what it consists*. But how can a young professional or a student *prove to have* this competence? If a **certificate of intercultural competence** shall have any value for its owner, it has to be:

1. **transparent** = it must describe *in what* the certified intercultural competence *concretely consists*.
2. **individualized** = it has to show to what extent intercultural competence has been acquired by the *individual*, not by the learning group as a whole. (That is why the value of statements like "has successfully participated in..." is rather limited.)

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<sup>1</sup> BIT means Bilbao Icudriving Team.

3. **credible** = the certifying institution respectively approved teachers or trainers of intercultural competence have to have a certain reputation in this area (e.g. universities, cultural institutes, educational institutions).

These "TIC criteria", especially those of transparency and individualization, have to be based firstly on a certain definition of intercultural competence as a vocational qualification. But this is not enough. They require:

1. **stakeholder information** about typical work situations, in which IC has proved to be indispensable or in which its lack can lead or has already led to problems
2. **a common effort of experts, especially scientists and teachers** (both of the vocational and school education), as to...
  - a. a systematic description of the modules of intercultural competence
  - b. a collection of learning styles as to these IC modules
  - c. an evaluation tool

Adapting freely Immanuel Kant's *Categorical Imperative*, I propose that intercultural pedagogy (at least within the framework of *Icudriving*) should apply the following 'imperative': "Define the modules of intercultural competence in *whichever social area* only in a way that you consider at the same being applicable to intercultural interaction in the *vocational field*." One of the most important social areas in this context is *school*.

That is to say that the notion that the contents of this qualification should be defined according to economic and *not* to school challenges is falling short. As it is – or should be – the main aim of school to prepare young people for real life, it wouldn't make any sense to define intercultural competence at the *school level* and at the *vocational one in different ways*. Intercultural learning at the school level, for example in the form of international school projects, should be as far as possible a *simulation* of international cooperation at a vocational level. Recognizing this doesn't mean, though, to overlook the differences between the two areas:

- "Simulation" refers here only to the *structure (procedures, communication relationships)*, not to the contents of professional teamwork.
- The styles of intercultural learning within the framework of school education and vocational education must be different
- and, consequently, the methods to evaluate the learning success as well.

Achieving we will get two levels of certification:

- the "Intercultural Driving Licence" – vocational level
- the "Intercultural Driving Licence" – school level

## 2. What *is* intercultural competence?

I propose the following definition (partly based on Mommsen 2002, p. 424): Intercultural competence is the psychosocial qualification of an individual to interact more or less successfully within multicultural relational systems. It is the ability to communicate and to cooperate with individuals of different cultures, understanding their ways of perception, thinking, feeling and acting, and dealing with them. Intercultural competence is learnable and contains at least the following three main psychosocial sections:

- knowledge
- emotions and dealing with them
- behavior

Different from other competences like the ability to write, the term of "intercultural competence" doesn't reveal the content-related specifics of an action, but *the special social*

*relationship* in which it takes place. It is related to whatever *interaction* between persons of *different cultures*.

The concept of *competence* is related to a person with a certain (conscious or unconscious) aim, to a particular section of reality, where the aim can be achieved, and to a *successful* strategy of achieving it. Social competence is the main objective of education, usually related to the life *inside* a certain cultural framework and according to the values and norms of this certain culture.

However, the awareness of *different normative systems* and their effects upon social interaction is not a unique characteristic of *intercultural competence*. Each modern society consists of a lot of different social action fields with specific *sub-cultural norms* and nearly everybody learns to move inside of them. Being able to play different social roles and even to keep an individual *role distance* implies already a kind of *awareness of diversity*: This is why I think, that each person has already at least the basis for intercultural competence because of his ability to adapt his intra-social awareness of *sub-cultural diversity* to *other* contexts of diversity. Conclusion: The point is not that intercultural competence would be something exotic and completely new; what we have to do is to find out how to support, to evaluate and to certify the progression of an individual's "diversity competence" within an intercultural context.

It seems quite clear to me, that the evaluation and certification of an individual's concrete intercultural competence cannot be based only on a *generic* definition of IC. As far as I can see, one day a certain system of criteria will be required, consisting of specifically defined *modules of intercultural competence* – which could be gathered by means of a special Wiki.

### **3. Intercultipedia: The *trait d'union* Wiki of Intercultural Competence**

A special Wiki of Intercultural Competence containing different groups, especially:

- Psychosocial sections of intercultural competence
- Modules of intercultural competence
- Learning methods
- Evaluation
- Integration of intercultural learning in educational structures and curricula, both in the vocational and the school area
- Certification  
(individualization, transparency, credibility, institutionalization...)
- Socio-cultural needs
- Economic needs
- Information transfer
- . . .

could be useful.

We, people working at the German School of Bilbao, the iScience group at Universidad de Deusto, Bilbao, and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, Bilbao, being at the same time members of the *Bilbao Icu-driving Team (BIT)*, want to experiment with a kind of *beta version* of such a Wiki: called "*Intercultipedia*" and being a part of the newly conceived *Intercultural Youth Magazine "trait d'union"*. In a later phase it may be discussed by the members of the Icu-driving Project, whether it makes sense to integrate a Wiki like *Intercultipedia* in an eventually applied Leonardo Innovation Project.

If you want to get an idea of the present Intercultipedia concept, you can read the text "*Intercultipedia: The trait d'union Wiki of Intercultural Competence*", with *one example* for a module of intercultural competence, the *courage of respectful criticism*.

#### 4. The new Intercultural Youth Magazine [trait d'union](http://www.traitudunion-online.eu)

"trait d'union" saw the light of day in 2000 in Toulouse (France) as an *international multimedia school magazine* within the framework of the pedagogical cooperation between the *Deutsche Schule Toulouse* and the *Lycée International "Victor Hugo" de Colomiers*, supported by the European Commission (Comenius Programme). Until today students of 25 schools from 13 countries and 4 continents have contributed articles, pictures, audios and videos in 29 languages: [www.traitudunion-online.eu](http://www.traitudunion-online.eu). At present an issue entitled "Our World is Changing" is being prepared within the framework of a Comenius Project with partner schools from 7 countries.

While some of the present member schools except the German School of Bilbao want to continue their cooperation on the base of a 'classic' international school magazine (a new magazine is planned by them to be started in the internet in autumn 2013 under the name of "Miteinander" [Together]), *trait d'union* however wants to evolve now into an *intercultural youth magazine*, widening the potential group of participants: inviting besides students (school pupils) also undergraduates, vocational school students, young professionals, unemployed persons, expatriates, immigrants and representatives of the institutions dealing with them, as well experts, stakeholders and scientists (of *all* ages of course :-)) to discuss the problems and topics by which young people of today are or might be concerned. Of course the label "Youth Magazine" doesn't prevent the treatment of "middle age" or "old people" topics! Why shouldn't young people reflect or get information about them?

As topic for the first issue of the new *trait d'union* I propose **"Working: yesterday, now and in the future"**. It can serve as an important source of information for IcuDriving: While *Intercultipedia* shall be reserved for experts, the intercultural youth magazine *trait d'union* offers to almost everybody a platform to give and share experience, to make polls and interviews, to discuss opinions and to receive information. To involve some of the hundreds of *trait d'union* alumni (ex-editors), who are now young professionals, could be especially interesting for IcuDriving.

We can begin to build up the structures for the issue "Working: yesterday, now and in the future" even immediately – preferably inviting institutions and individuals of the countries or even better towns of the IcuDriving members, not excluding others. In two of the partner towns there are German Schools (abroad): Izmir and Milano. If this project can be started soon, perhaps we will be able to comment on it during the IcuDriving meeting in Bilbao (May 2013). So, if you agree to this idea, dear IcuDriving partners, help us to find convenient (broad-minded and well-resourced) schools and other institutions, especially nearby you, but – if you have some interesting relationship – even also from other continents.

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