

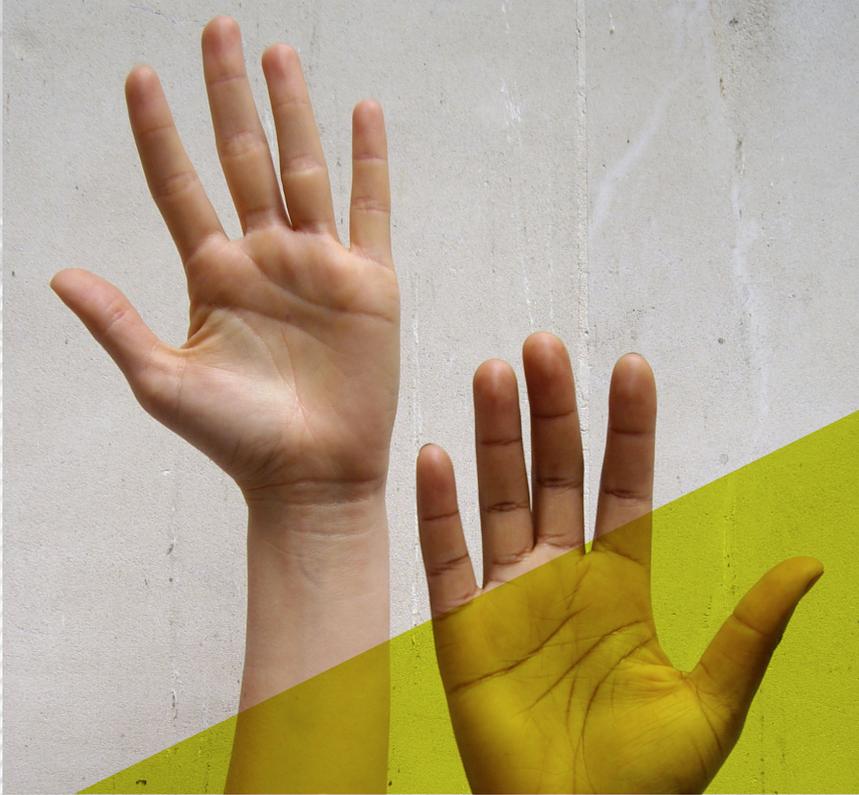


# salto | youth

## Intercultural Competence Research Report

Developed and demonstrated within the framework of Youth in Action  
Paola Bortini • Behrooz Motamed-Afshari • Released 16 March 2012

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# Introduction

SALTO Cultural Diversity is part of a support structure to the Youth in Action programme<sup>1</sup>, working specifically on fostering Cultural Diversity by providing tools (training, seminars, thematic and methodological publications, other tools) as well as long-term strategies and discussion platforms to the actors of European youth work (National Agencies, youth organisations, youth workers and youth leaders).

As part of its work SALTO Cultural Diversity started a long-term project to investigate how to better support the development of Intercultural Competence in youth work by taking into account changes that have occurred in society in the last decades and in particular trends that will shape Europe in the next ten years.

The aim of this long-term strategy is to provide more adequate support to youth workers and youth leaders in making the development of Intercultural Competence central in their work and going beyond the traditional way of looking at culture as a static concept, but moving towards a multifaceted concept of cultures where the dynamics and nuances sometimes become predominant and essential in daily

interactions and not only in youth activities.

The youth field at European level is a wide community of practitioners where consolidated tools and approaches have established themselves over the years and have greatly contributed to raising young people's awareness of their role as citizens in Europe, thus contributing to the construction of Europe. Therefore, the transfer of knowledge is mostly done by participating in training courses and then adapting the learning outcomes to the local context with the freedom of choosing and applying what and how to pass on entirely in the hands of the youth workers and youth leaders.

Already some years ago, more and more trainers working at European level noticed that the 'top tools and approaches' they had been successfully using were sometimes not achieving the educational objectives they had been set for or even proved to be counter-productive, in opposition to the consolidated practice in the field. Thus an initial informal trial of new practices and informal talks about the new challenges of the changed situation in many countries in Europe have

grown into a more and more consolidated awareness of the need to review the concept and practice of Intercultural Competence at European level. Several initiatives took place across Europe by different stakeholders.

This research aims at giving validity to the 'working definition' created for SALTO Cultural Diversity as well as linking the current practice to theory. The report in your hands elicits how far the qualities within Intercultural Competence – as defined by the Intercultural Competence working group<sup>2</sup> – can be part of youth work practice, and it illustrates them with real examples to make the definition operational (see from page 21 onwards).

## **Intercultural Competence (ICC) developed and demonstrated within the framework of European youth work...**

...are qualities<sup>3</sup> needed for a young person to live in contemporary and pluralistic Europe. It enables her/him to take an active role in confronting social injustice and discrimination and promote and protect human rights. ICC requires an understanding of culture as a dynamic multifaceted process. In addition, it requires an increased sense of solidarity in which

<sup>1</sup> The Youth in Action programme is a funding scheme of the European Union aiming at fostering youth mobility by providing learning opportunities through non-formal learning/ educational activities. For more information, please consult the Youth website of the European Commission <http://ec.europa.eu/youth/>

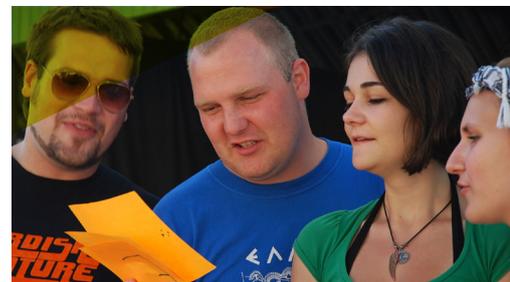
<sup>2</sup> The Intercultural Competence working group was driven by SALTO Cultural Diversity and facilitated by two trainers in charge of the overall process: Paola Bortini and Behrooz Motamed-Afshari. The fixed members of the group were representatives from the research and youth work field:

individual fear of the other and insecurity are dealt with through critical thinking, empathy and tolerance of ambiguity.

After some explanations of the background of the research, clarifying the key question to be answered and the objectives of the research, the reader will learn more about the context of the research, including qualitative and quantitative aspects in addition to assumptions considered and challenges faced during the process. A key section of this research explains what is meant by each 'quality' which builds the basis of a comparative analysis regarding those qualities in practice.

Finally, key findings are highlighted, outstanding questions raised and possible next steps suggested which are believed to be of major importance for the future development and progress of Intercultural Competence within the context of European youth work.

Enjoy!



# The research

## Background

The research is a further step in a process which SALTO Cultural Diversity started in May 2009 during the first Intercultural Competence round table in Rome<sup>4</sup>. The interesting findings from the round table, as definite food for thought, shaped SALTO Cultural Diversity's process of analysing and exploring the fundamental concepts behind Intercultural Competence, which is a small but vital part of the Lifelong Learning Social Competence.

In the long-term, SALTO Cultural Diversity aims to introduce the idea and concept of Intercultural Competence in a more concrete way through this process. By linking most valued academic theories with genuine practice, SALTO Cultural Diversity wants to create a pool of skills, tools and expertise addressing trainers' and youth leaders' needs who are engaged in intercultural youth work across Europe.

For this purpose several consultative meetings took place during 2010 on whose basis a draft working definition was developed by an expert group. This working definition<sup>5</sup> highlights

the need to review and hence to replace the classical, a rather 'biculturally' oriented concept with a new and updated approach that equally considers multifaceted identities as 'culture' in a dynamic and pluralistic Europe. It describes 'Intercultural Competence' as a meta-competence which can be acquired after developing and enhancing eight identified qualities which demonstrate a holistic understanding of the individual combining knowledge, skills, values and attitudes.

This research is therefore a check point, an intermediate step ambitious and at the same time limited in scope (only activities taking place at European level in the last 18 months and financed through the Youth in Action programme were considered), time (the research was conducted in about three months) and number of participating youth workers, leaders, trainers and officers (respondents to the online survey, participants in activities where formal and informal observation took place). It renders evidence to what informally has already been discussed amongst experienced colleagues. It wants to bring to the surface the turning point where consolidated

experiences co-exist with new emerging approaches making the picture sometimes complex.

## Research question

The key question of this research is:

How far is the definition of Intercultural Competence (as specified in this report on page 21) already in practice and what approaches are used to facilitate the learning of these qualities.

## Preliminary biases, suppositions and hypotheses

Being aware that the research question can be answered in very different ways and through various perspectives and approaches, the researchers have set the following preliminary biases, suppositions and hypotheses as a starting point to narrow down the scope of the research and hence to make it more goal and target oriented:

- ▲ Considering the complexity of Europe and the multitude of ways in which the competence can be demonstrated, the research concentrates on some aspects that can be developed through European youth work.
- ▲ The identified definition itself lists the key elements that are object of the research.

<sup>4</sup> The publication resulting from the round table is available online on the website of SALTO Cultural Diversity [www.salto-youth.net/rc/cultural-diversity/publications/reflections-based-on-ideas-from-intercultural-competence-round-table/](http://www.salto-youth.net/rc/cultural-diversity/publications/reflections-based-on-ideas-from-intercultural-competence-round-table/)

<sup>5</sup> A detailed explanation of the Intercultural Competence definition can be found on page 21

- ▲ The research considers the identified definition as a basis for this research which is a necessary starting point in order to achieve the goal.
- ▲ Our hypothesis is that some applied tools (activities and methods) are fostering the development of Intercultural Competence while others are counter-productive as they are limited in their concept of Intercultural Competence.

### **Why are we doing this research?**

According to the reviewed literature<sup>6</sup>, the outcomes of the Intercultural Competence round table as well as a backing academic article<sup>7</sup> prepared in the current move towards better recognition of non-formal education and non-formal learning and a better understanding of key competences for young people and youth workers, there is a need to offer a renewed framework for Intercultural Competence within European youth work with tools and support for youth workers. The research wants to understand the extent to which the working definition is valid.

Therefore, the research looks at ways that are commonly used by practitioners in the youth

field for developing Intercultural Competence. Looking at the complexity of the competence and the duration necessary for an adequate development, the research limits its scope to some key activities.

### **Objectives of the research**

In order to provide an appropriate basis to answer the key question described above, the research team has identified the following objectives:

- ▲ To investigate how far the key elements within Intercultural Competence are a part of youth work practice and illustrate them with real examples to make the definition operational;
- ▲ To critically engage with current practice;
- ▲ To establish good practice of Intercultural Competence as defined in the working definition.

<sup>6</sup> See bibliography

<sup>7</sup> Hoskins, B. & Sallah, M. (2011): Developing intercultural competence in Europe: the challenges, language and intercultural communication, 11:2, 113–125, Oxford: Routledge.  
The authors are members of the expert group.



### Research approach

The research activities were both exploratory and descriptive.

The **explorative purpose** of the research targeted the tools used by the practitioners for developing Intercultural Competence in young people.

Practitioners (former participants and trainers of training courses financed by Youth in Action and held in the last 18 months as well as National Agency officers) were reached through the National Agencies and SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres. The former participants were asked to name and describe the tools they experienced and their reflections on the impact of experiencing such tools on developing Intercultural Competence through semi-structured online questionnaires, which were not anonymous. The trainers and officers were asked to name and describe the used tools and their reflections on the impact of using such tools and events on developing Intercultural Competence.

The responses to the questions were collected in the form of closed answers (yes – no) and open answers allowing written

comments. The closed answers were given as descriptive statistics, the open answers were partly summarised and grouped according to their content and partly just listed as quotations.

The **descriptive purpose** of the research was investigated through qualitative analysis of training activities taking place at European level and targeting youth workers and youth trainers. The analysis was conducted through direct observation of the training activities in combination with plans made by the team. Some participants of the events were targeted for semi-structured interviews.

In order to have a representative sample for the observation, different training courses had been identified taking place between October and end of November 2011:

- ▲ **'How do I learn best'** addressing youth workers and youth leaders who would like to understand better how they learn and how they can facilitate the learning of others in the framework of Youth in Action activities. The course was in its first edition. Organised by Pame Ambro and UNIQUE, Italy, 27 October–2 November 2011.

- ▲ **‘European Citizenship’** for youth workers and youth leaders who would like to integrate the topic of European Citizenship in their youth work. The course has a standard format, and it is run four times a year by a selected pool of trainers. Hosted by the British Council, UK, 27 November–4 December 2011.
- ▲ **‘Youthful Europe’** – training course about ‘Europe’ in youth work by the German National Agency for Youth in Action. The course has a standard format but is adapted each time to the needs of the respective group of participants. Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia/Ohrid, 23–27 October 2011.
- ▲ **‘European Voluntary Service on-arrival training course’** in Austria by the Austrian National Agency for Youth in Action. The course has a standard format, and it is run six times a year by a selected pool of trainers. Austria, 3–6 October 2011.
- ▲ **‘Multilateral Youth Exchange’** organised by DOYOBE taking place in Austria, 17–23 October 2011.

In addition the research was presented to the **Symposium on the Recognition of Non-Formal Learning and Youth Work** held in Strasbourg (France), 14–16 November 2011. Hosted by the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, it gathered some 100 researchers and practitioners in the youth field.

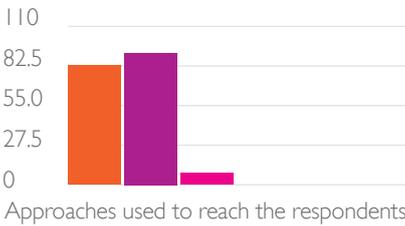
It is important to note that the researchers are combining several roles in this research. They are co-ordinating the research, analysing the data from the online questionnaires, making the observations and holding the interviews as well as using their long-standing experience as practitioners in the youth field at European level. All that has gathered a quite considerable amount of data.



**Participants in the research**

**Profile of the respondents**

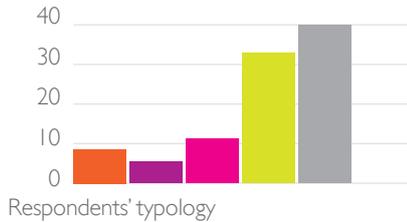
The research addressed different types of respondents. Some were targeted and invited to answer an online questionnaire according to their roles, some were observed and some were interviewed.



- Questionnaires received
  - Interviews held
  - Participants in the observed activities
- Absolute values based on a total of 214 individuals reached*

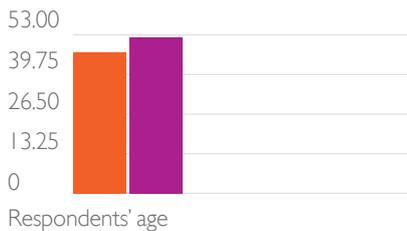
Youth workers who attended a training course since April 2010, trainers who were involved in training events since April 2010 and youth officers were invited to fill in a semi-structured online questionnaire. Many of the respondents have a profile combining direct work at local level with national and international activities and contacts relevant for their work in the youth field. We tried to summarise their multiple belongings in

categories addressing young people directly and indirectly.



- Expert/advisor in youth/NFL-E 9.2%
  - Project Manager 6.2%
  - Officer 10.8%
  - Youth/Social Worker 33.8%
  - Trainer/Coach 40%
- Percentage values based on 65 valid responses (more than one answer allowed)*

Almost the total majority have international experience and just a few have only local experience. The age of the respondents also ranges from 14 years old to 59 years old, equally spread under and over 30.

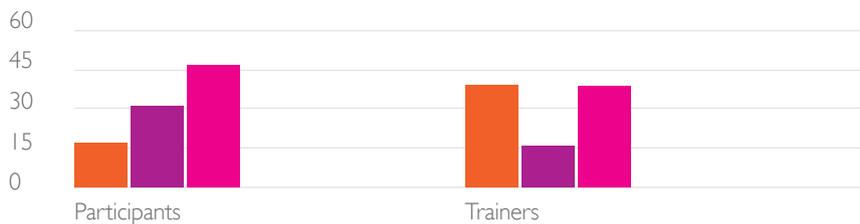


- Under 30–47.1%
  - Over 30–52.9%
- Percentage values based on 51 valid responses*

### Some words about the providers of the training courses

We considered three main stakeholders in the field, the National Agencies directly responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the Youth in Action programme at national level, SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres as transversal bodies

providing specialised advanced learning and training opportunities across countries on specific topics relevant to the Programme and the NGOs, associations and youth organisations that can also – in co-operation amongst them – provide training opportunities for their members.



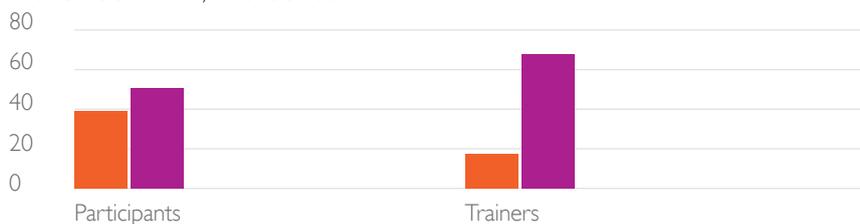
- NGO/association/youth organisation
- SALTO
- YiA National Agency

Percentage values based on 56 valid responses from former participants and 25 trainers

### Timeline of the training courses

The research targeted events spanning across the last 18 months, from April 2010 to November 2011, in order to

ensure a combination of fresh and consolidated memories that can also represent the impact of the event.



- April 2010–March 2011
- April–November 2011

Percentage values based on 56 valid responses from former participants and 25 trainers



### Literature review

The literature reviewed for the purpose of this research is listed at the end of this report. In this section we would like to address some texts that we consider particularly relevant to our work as they are specifically written for the European youth work field or based on the experience of the authors in the European youth work field.

Our main reference is the article 'Developing intercultural competence in Europe: the challenges, language and intercultural communication' which academically backs up the Intercultural Competence definition and the research as such as it was independently written by the authors but in parallel to the work of the Intercultural Competence working group. It 'traces the use of the terminology of culture within European policy and practice [today], in particular focusing on intercultural learning in European youth work'. Dr. Bryony Hoskins and Dr. Momodou Sallah (the authors) argue here (based on a few examples) that there has been 'a change of emphasis since 2001 from an anti-racism discourse towards a focus on culture' within European education,

culture and youth policy texts. This change is explained as a possible reaction to the terrorist attacks in New York, Madrid and London as well as increased cultural and religious diversity in Europe.

The authors point out that this policy shift has caused a rather simplistic focus on culture where 'ethnic differences become primary modality in which social life is constituted and experienced'. They conclude that this 'can lead to a reification of culture as fixed, unique and a final product' and hence criticise that this 'simplistic focus on culture hides unequal power relations, including poverty, violence, structural inequalities such as racism and the possibilities of multiple identities'. Today's institutional approach to culture, so the authors argue, often falls into the trap of cultural relativism and supports to some extent (e.g. through specific types of events) reifying stereotypes of specific cultures rather than challenging perceptions.

Intercultural learning has become the essence of European youth work with the objectives to 'recognise and address prejudice' and 'combat aggressive and exclusive forms of nationalism'. However, the authors state that

'not all courses have been run with or have implemented such clear anti-discriminatory objectives' while the actual practice is often built around the above mentioned simplistic focus on culture, e.g. through intercultural evenings during youth encounters.

While recognising the need of a more nuanced understanding of Intercultural Competence, the authors refer to the critique pronounced by both the Council of Europe and the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the youth field, high-lighting three key issues: 'First, the concept of culture is understood as being "wooden, apolitical and universally fixed" rather than "plastic, political and contingent"<sup>8</sup>. Second, it cannot be separated from other forms of discrimination, in particular people's "living conditions", and this has frequently been left out of the discussions of intercultural learning. Third, intercultural learning has a tendency to support cultural relativism rather than emphasising the political needs to provide human rights and social justice.' The authors value in this regard to some extent the recent developments and approaches mainly by

SALTO Cultural Diversity and the Council of Europe which seek to address this need and 'improve the competence levels of youth workers and trainers on intercultural competences.' However, they criticise that even there are considerable steps underway to fill the gap, the general focus is still much based on individual learning and interaction, so 'the obligation of mainstream organisations and public bodies to address discrimination and oppression is often overlooked.'

Other documents relevant to this research – which have not been referred to in the above article – are a preparatory study and a 'draft list of criteria and possible indicators', both prepared by Areg Tadevosyan. These were published in the course of a series of meetings and seminars implemented by the Council of Europe under the title: 'Indicators for Intercultural Dialogue in Non-formal Education Activities'. The list of criteria and possible indicators was drafted as a response to the need identified through this study in order to [better] assess the effect of the programmes on intercultural dialogue and learning', especially in the Euro-Mediterranean context. The indicators shall give practitioners

and assessors of future projects under the Youth in Action programme 'a tool to plan and to assess "intercultural dialogue" in their international youth projects'. The study highlights the lack of a common vocabulary regarding the terms 'culture', 'intercultural learning' and 'intercultural dialogue' inside and between the practitioners and institutions and suggests in this regard to focus on 'mainstreaming with other fields of action (such as Conflict Resolution, Human Rights, Education, Democracy, Inclusion and others)'. Hence the process of developing the common vocabulary and intercultural dialogue indicators shall take a wider political context into account.

The 'draft list of criteria and possible indicators' provides 23 specific criteria and possible indicators for assessment when preparing, implementing and following up activities and projects aiming at supporting intercultural dialogue. The scope of the proposed criteria is rather wide and includes procedural and contextual issues as well as issues related to the combination and profile of the individuals/groups involved in the activity.

<sup>8</sup> 'Plastic, Political and Contingent': Culture and Intercultural Learning in DYS Activities, Discussion document based on the evaluation of the long-term training course Intercultural Learning and recent research activities Dr. Gavan Titley, 2005



We are aware that the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth is currently in the process of writing a new edition of the T-kit on 'intercultural learning'. It was not possible to get hold of the draft version to understand the changes that the editorial team is proposing. What we know is that the team wanted a new approach to the topic in comparison to the current version of the T-kit on intercultural learning. The complete rewriting of the T-kit and not just an update of the content is the reason for its delayed availability.

We are also aware that Hendrik Otten and Yael Ohana are in the process of publishing a book on the situation of interculturality in Europe based on the revised ten theses on intercultural learning written by Hendrik Otten.

The Intercultural Competence definition presented in this report owns much to the ten revised theses, and the authors of the key article backing up this research refer several times to the same theses as well. We are sure that the book, once out, will bring new light to the definition and the challenges that youth workers and young people in Europe may encounter and it will call for revised approaches to the educational interventions.

# The process of acquiring and demonstrating Intercultural Competence

The acquisition of Intercultural Competence as described by the expert group is a long-term process which builds on previous knowledge and experiences to co-construct new knowledge. We have investigated how far the activities proposed by and financed by the European Youth in Action programme can contribute to its acquisition.

In particular we have addressed our research interest to training courses for youth leaders and youth workers who are in charge of facilitating the process with young people, being young people themselves. It is a well defined limited field which shows the potential of physical mobilities for mental mobilities, it is about temporarily leaving a known environment for experiencing new ones, sometimes passing through stereotypes and reinforcing prejudices as a way of consciously overcoming them.

Our assumption was that each event in the framework of Youth in Action had some element that could contribute to the acquisition of Intercultural Competence, as this is one of the requisites of the Programme<sup>9</sup>.

In this section we look at the processes of acquiring Intercultural Competence from the point of view of those who participated in events offered in the last 18 months and have invested their time in reflecting on their participation and its impact.

The challenge we deliberately took was to invite the respondents to indirectly assess their intercultural experiences through the lenses of a definition of Intercultural Competence that was not necessarily part of their experience. This has led to a number of answers which directly mentioned their incapacity to answer our questions but as well to a number of answers that tried to explain the past experience with a new perspective.

This chapter also looks into the tools used and the perception of their sustainability from the participants' and trainers' perspectives.



## Ways of addressing intercultural competence

Intercultural Competence in residential training courses for youth workers and youth leaders can be addressed directly through specific activities including talking about it from a theoretical point of view or rationalising an experience the group had together. It can also be addressed indirectly as an integrated aspect through side activities and special attention given to other topics addressed. When it is not explicitly addressed, it may appear more difficult to recognise it. Though addressing it directly is not a guarantee that it is more effective for acquiring it.

We are now showing how the respondents of our research have looked at Intercultural Competence in the events they were part of.

### Perception of the presence of ICC during the training courses



Percentage values based on valid responses from 57 former participants and 26 trainers

The results confirm our observation that international youth events within Youth in Action for their nature have the potential to develop and practice Intercultural Competence. This is mostly present as an integrated and integral aspect of the activities proposed and carried out together by trainers and participants. It is important to mention that many respondents linked their answers to the aspects of communication amongst participants from different cultural backgrounds as presented in the T-kit on intercultural learning and very functional to the time spent together as nice memories to bring back home and for further use.

Simulation exercises and structured discussions were the most mentioned activities that contributed to the intentional development of Intercultural Competence as ways to provide a taste of reality and an insight in the complexity to deal with, once back home.

## Taking action as a way to acquire the Intercultural Competence

### During the event

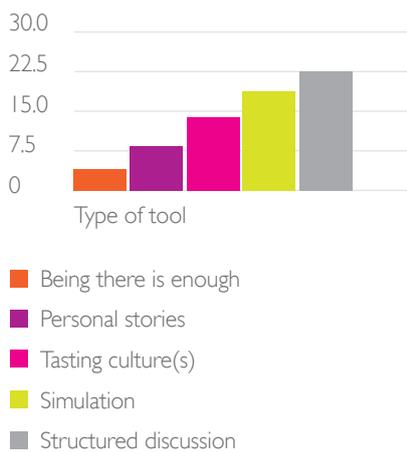
Training courses for their nature are very intense. Participants and trainers share the same roof for a few days. The level of interaction amongst them gets exponential. In particular the capacity to work together to achieve a common aim or perform a meaningful task or reach a shared decision is complemented with a genuine interest and curiosity towards the others seen as persons, human beings and not merely representatives of a given culture associated with a state or an ethnic group.

We are now looking at the tools that in the eyes of the participants have best contributed to the acquisition of their Intercultural Competence.

The word tool in this research is used with a wide meaning ranging

from activity held, exercises or even part of the training itself as well as a methodological tool.

The question about the tools that were mostly contributing to acquiring Intercultural Competence was an open one. Here the respondents could not select from a pre-determined list of closed answers. This helped to collect a series of nuances in the perception and description of the same tools. The grouping here below is our construction based on the respondents answers.



*Absolute values based on 81 valid responses from 56 former participants*

The terminology used deserves an explanation to avoid misunderstandings. **Being there** (7%) as the possibility to be present is in itself considered a

sufficient experience for learning Intercultural Competence. The multicultural composition of the groups is valued both by the participants and by the trainer often giving the possibility to get in touch with realities to the participants for the first time. This element is also listed in the intercultural dialogue indicators of the Council of Europe, currently in its finalisation phase. The so-called informal time in events is considered by the participants as the best opportunity to talk about their **personal stories** (16%), when they can refer and share their experiences and ask questions of interest to each other. In the answers in the questionnaires respondents mention sharing of information according to their needs, about curiosity in the youth work done by the others as well as towards society issues. This exchange can also happen in more structured time and activities. The essence is very important to the participants, not the format.

There were participants from over 14 countries working well together, working in teams, taking part in presentations and planning activities together.

The whole atmosphere within the group was always open-minded, nevertheless critical and interested in serious and deep discussions. Plus the motivation to really understand the other was exceptionally high.

The majority of participants took every opportunity to engage with participants from other countries even during social time.

A lot of mingling, people were talking, sharing life experiences.

Getting in touch with new cultures is also part of what is listed with **'tasting culture(s)'** (20%) which includes the possibility to visit local realities around the venue of the training course, either because the venue of the training course is interesting in itself from the social point of view or because of the type of youth work experiences the participants get in contact with. It includes also the very controversial activity where participants display information about their country. The participants value such an activity, regardless of the name given – International evening, Intercultural evening, European breakfast/evening – which has an important meaning from the trainers' perspective but is often not perceived as such by the participants. In the examples given by participants the fact is valued that it can be the first time to taste some type of food as well as to listen to some music and to compare with daily life in their home contexts.

The European evening was meant to give us an image about the countries we represent. Then the NGO Agora was very important for going much more deeply.

The respondents refer to a variety of simulation exercises or to **simulation** of situations (27%) as good examples to think of real situations either lived by them or might be faced in the future. For many the simulation is a very good way to realise how complex society is and how the decision-making process should take into account different perspectives and still be inadequate to the new social situations as relying on past models of considering society.

After some arguing both agreed that there are indeed different understandings and that none of them should impose an opinion upon the other.

The majority considers then **structured discussions** (30%) as the best way to deal with the acquisition of Intercultural Competence. In the examples given some refer to it as a pure intellectual process while others refer to it by including some experiential and emotional components. For this second

group using the reality of what happens back home or what has happened in the event itself is valued as well as purely theoretical input and information provision.

The participants' answers to the online questionnaire partly match the answers of the trainers who are more concerned with the educational objectives than the 'pleasure' of the activities as emerges from the participants' responses.

The challenge of acquiring and developing Intercultural Competence lies in the capacity to combine pleasure and educational objectives by ensuring that the pleasure will not negatively affect the educational objectives. Some trainers have highlighted how they have re-worked the concept of the international evening by addressing the very specific local realities of the participants and not national realities, by pointing out the role of stereotypes in every categorisation, by addressing the issue of identity and its cultural aspects and by looking at a variety of perspectives of understanding social interactions.

#### **After the event**

The intensity of the event does not necessarily correspond to the intensity of interaction after the

event, either with those who were at the same event or with the community back home. Once back home Intercultural Competence is seen mostly as a working tool necessary to interact with foreigners either in hosting them or in keeping contact for future projects with former participants now referred to as friends. By some the transfer from the 'training setting' to a real life has been evidenced.

I try to show more empathy to my colleagues, partner, friends.

It helped me a lot to get used to a new life and in contact with people, their backgrounds are now easier to understand (living now in another country).

We stayed in contact with each other. I even went to visit a couple of friends who I have met at the training course. I went to Sofia and Lisbon and I saw a lot of cultural differences.

First of all we are all humans, only after that we are citizens of our countries and followers of different views. So let's treat people through the frame of tolerance and mutual understanding.

# From current practice to future practice



After giving a short analysis of the current practice of acquiring Intercultural Competence in training courses and other activities implemented under the Youth in Action programme, we take a step further and look at the new definition.

Our main interest and focus in the previous chapter was to elicit how Intercultural Competence is generally understood and perceived both by participants and trainers but also officers involved in the Programme. In our understanding the analysis itself, even though this was initially not meant to have such an impact, proves the fact that the current practice is much too far away from the ambitious and multifaceted concept (the definition) that is subject to this research. We particularly refer this to the answers given by trainers who should be more aware of the current debate about Intercultural Competence that has been going on for some years already. We assumed that the practice had already better integrated elements of the debate through concrete activities and methodological approaches. We also acknowledge that some attempts were done and are documented in our research.

In the following we will now explain in short the background of the definition, what it is based on and what it includes. Further, we look at what the respondents and interviewees understand under the eight identified qualities and how, in their opinion, these qualities can be acquired.

## Definition of Intercultural Competence

As defined by the Intercultural Competence working group, October 2010

A working group of seven individuals from different professional backgrounds in the youth field was established in 2009 by SALTO Cultural Diversity with the mission to work on some of the key questions raised at the Intercultural Competence – Round Table meeting (Rome, May 2009). Here, the group focussed on two particular issues: Which are the components of Intercultural Competence within European youth work and how can they be measured?

As a result the Intercultural Competence working group developed after several physical and virtual meetings during 2010 the following definition by putting together identified key qualities necessary for acquiring Intercultural Competence.

### **Intercultural Competence:**

Intercultural Competence (ICC) developed and demonstrated within the framework of European youth work...

...are qualities\* needed for a young person to live in contemporary and pluralistic Europe. It enables her/him to take an active role in confronting social injustice and discrimination and promote and protect human rights. ICC requires an understanding of culture as a dynamic multifaceted process. In addition, it requires an increased sense of solidarity in which individual fear of the other and insecurity are dealt with through critical thinking, empathy and tolerance of ambiguity.



\*qualities: demonstrate a holistic understanding of the individual combining knowledge, skills, values and attitudes.

## Analysis of working definition of Intercultural Competence

The renewed 'Intercultural Competence' working definition calls for action beyond some exemplary activities that can be experienced in some international encounters or intercultural situations. Without taking away the importance of such activities, the Intercultural Competence working definition recognises that the development of Intercultural Competence is much more than intercultural learning and that this can be experienced and learnt in local contexts where its relevance and applicability are necessary for everyday peaceful coexistence.

The Intercultural Competence working definition assumes that multicultural society is already a fact all over Europe, in big capitals and in small villages, in centralised and in decentralised areas, and is part of every European life even when not travelling abroad. This new reality will become more and more pertinent in the years to come and it is absolutely necessary to be prepared for facing new situations that will call for new decision-making processes asking everybody to go beyond usual and familiar ways of thinking.

These were the reasons that the expert group identified as a framework for the working definition, trying to connect reality with the necessary knowledge and skills, attitudes and behaviours based on the principles of human rights and expressed through citizenship.

The identified key qualities necessary for acquiring Intercultural Competence can be in short described as follows:

### 1) Taking an active role in confronting social injustice and discrimination

This includes the awareness of possible situations (and reasons behind them) in which social injustice and discrimination appears, information about instruments (legal, social, political) as well as appropriate skills needed to enable a young person to actively confront them.

### 2) Promoting and protecting human rights

Includes the competence (based on knowledge, attitudes and skills) enabling a young person to exercise the right 'to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental

freedoms at national and international levels.'

### 3) Understanding culture as a dynamic multifaceted process

This quality relates to the ability to understand that culture is not a universally fixed and apolitical concept but a dynamic and interactive process that is subjected to a wide range of influences. This includes knowledge of the dynamism of one's own culture as well as willingness and skills in discovering information about other cultures in a critical manner while exploring the connectivity and complexity between identity, politics, society and history but also geographical aspects in a modest and sensitive way.

### 4) Creating a sense of solidarity

Increased social and personal awareness of one another as well as enhanced skills to exercise both as members of a democratic society and as a human being our right and duty to speak up against every abuse of power against oneself and others.

### 5) Dealing with insecurity

In this context dealing with insecurity is rather seen as an

ability to overcome the feeling of insecurity and fear which may appear during international/ intercultural situations. In this regard various skills and tools can be of help to overcome those feelings such as enhanced communication skills and increased self-confidence as well as flexibility in cultural and communicative behaviour.

#### **6) Fostering critical thinking**

Supporting the ability to not take things for granted. Critical thinking is a disciplined process of actively and skilfully conceptualising, applying, analysing, synthesising, and/ or evaluating information gathered from or generated by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication. It includes also the capacity to de-construct situations and last but not least the ability to, in obvious and justified cases, say no and being intolerant (e.g. when violation of rights is explained as a cultural habit). It is about seeing how the world can be different, being able to criticise a paradigm and not just solving a problem.

#### **7) Creating empathy**

Supporting the change of stagnant and stereotypic viewpoints over 'cultures' and the move towards a critical dialogue based on mutual curiosity with the aim to gain and to give. This requires among others willingness to suspend judgement and valuing cultural diversity.

#### **8) Fostering tolerance of ambiguity**

Fostering the ability to tolerate different interests, expectations and needs and make 'space' for them in situations of interaction and/or establishing an understanding. To accept that there are different mental structures even though one does not fully agree with nor fully understand them. It is about accepting the reasons of the other's actions/beliefs even when not fully understanding the reasons as they do not belong to my 'way of thinking'. This obviously requires empathy first.

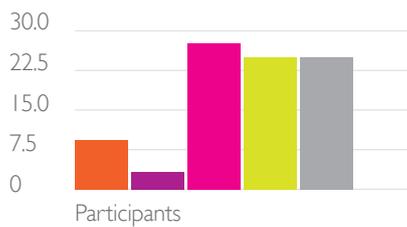
This description was indirectly provided to the respondents by mentioning the website where they can further explore the meaning and the process followed to arrive at such a definition of Intercultural Competence.

The research was not meant to engage with the respondents in a discussion about the correctness of the definition. Instead it aimed at looking at the respondents' understanding through inviting them to look back at their training experience within Youth in Action and to see how far – in their perception – the activities carried out were contributing to the achievement of the eight qualities of the working definition in the context of acquiring Intercultural Competence.

On the following pages you will find the respondents' understanding of the qualities and examples of their presence at the training events.

## Taking an active role in confronting social injustice/discrimination

Perception of its presence during the events



1 – not at all

2

3

4

5 – a lot

*Percentage values based on 49 valid responses from former participants*

### How it was addressed

According to the respondents, both the participants of former training courses as well the trainers, this component was mainly addressed through three main categories of activities during the training courses:

By deepening understanding of the other or oneself, through developing and testing tools for action and finally by building motivation to take an active role in the future.

Moreover, the respondents report also on non-planned situations during the training courses which had an influence on 'taking an active role in confronting social injustice or discrimination'. In those situations the participants but also the trainers had to take a stand and react accordingly. Be it because of a conflict/misinterpretation within the group or because of the environment/location in which the training course took place.

Everything during the five days was perfectly building at this.

We discussed religious and sexual minorities in Eastern Europe.

We dealt with the importance of taking action to defend human rights.

We wrote a letter to Barroso on issues that the participants thought needed addressing.

## Promoting and protecting human rights

Perception of its presence during the events



Percentage values based on valid responses from 48 former participants and 18 trainers

### How it was addressed

For the respondents, primarily the participants of the former training courses, human rights are mainly linked to prejudices, differences and stereotypes as well as to democracy and the rule of law.

The main rights and freedoms addressed or tackled through the training courses, as indicated mainly by the participants, are those rights which guaranty equal treatment and opportunities, safety, freedom of choice (in any respect) as well as citizen's rights in general.

The core focus of all activities addressing human rights, mentioned by both groups, was primarily on awareness raising of different situations or groups in which those/who's rights and freedoms are violated. However, no evidence is given that activities directly promoted or addressed tools for protecting those rights.

Hence the issue of human rights has been tackled rather indirectly in the framework of the training

courses mainly through activities focusing on discrimination, racism and cultural diversity.

Most of the workshop topics were related to democracy and relevant issues including human rights.

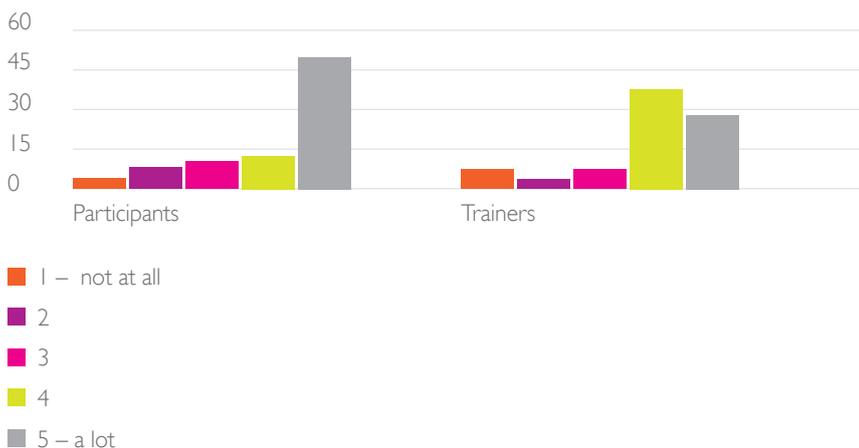
We did a game about human rights: stereotypes and prejudices.

Protecting the right to feel safe and equal treatment of everyone.

There was a role play about the dilemma of building a mosque in the city centre. It was related to this item and challenged the participants.

## Understanding culture as a dynamic, multifaceted process

Perception of its presence during the events



Percentage values based on valid responses from 49 former participants and 19 trainers

### How it was addressed

According to the respondents, the topic 'culture' as such was tackled in many ways, intentionally or unintentionally. Be it through activities providing a structure to exchange information about cultural similarities and differences or through sharing during informal moments. Often the constellation of the group, coming from different cultural backgrounds, was mentioned as a helping factor to better understand differences and varieties of cultures.

Only two of the respondents (participants) indicate explicitly that during the training course activities aimed at 'changing the concept of culture as something static' and 'understanding how it changes' while the majority of the participants explains that activities aimed at understanding 'different' cultures.

Based on what both participants and trainers answered to why they believe this quality was present in the training courses,

one can crystallise two general understandings: The pre-dominant is that culture is composed of traditions, a way to carry forward the past. The second is that culture as an evolving concept.

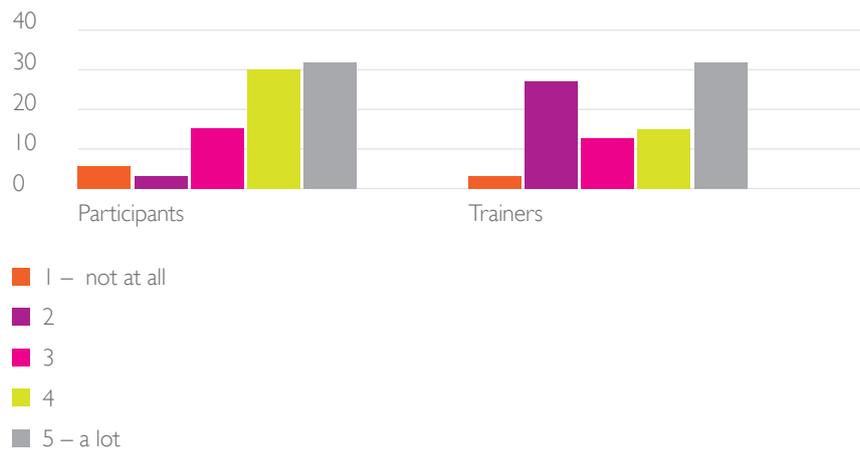
We had culture sharing party where we tasted foods and drinks from all different countries. We also enjoyed the sense of humour of each culture.

Variety of cultures coming together, exercises and debates promoted equality and tolerance.'

Realising that there are so many different phases when adapting to a new culture created an awareness of how multifaceted culture is and possibly very different from how it appears on the surface.

## Creating a sense of solidarity

Perception of its presence during the events



Percentage values based on valid responses from 49 former participants and 21 trainers

### How it was addressed

Solidarity was addressed through co-operation activities where participants were encouraged to work together and make common decisions. Through interactive methods (cooking together, developing projects, informal fun activities, thematic workshops, etc.) used during the training courses, the participants had to accept different points of view and make compromises which in fact were considered as supportive in creating a sense of solidarity among the group of participants.

Sense of solidarity with 'other' groups was not playing a major role. Only one participant indicates that the training course helped them to create a sense of solidarity with people with fewer opportunities. Another participant highlights the fact that after the training he did not feel alone anymore, being aware that 'there are other youth workers all working towards the same goals'.

The picture above is also shared by the trainer group who participated in this survey.

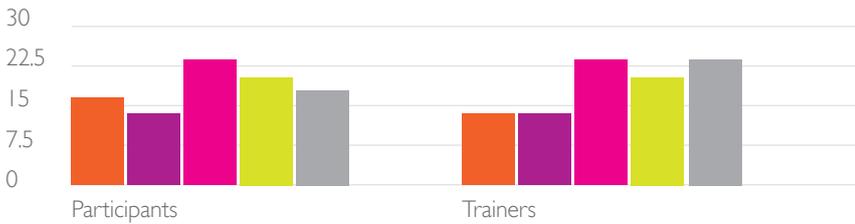
Through practical exercises in the group we experienced team work.

General working together, informal time created new lasting networks and friendships.

We had a lot of opportunities for networking and for celebrating cultural diversity – we had a multicultural evening and an NGO market, which encouraged sharing.

## Dealing with insecurity

Perception of its presence during the events



1 - not at all

2

3

4

5 - a lot

Percentage values based on valid responses from 45 former participants and 20 trainers

### How it was addressed

Both groups of respondents, the participants of former training courses as well as the trainers, mostly refer to dealing with insecurity during the training course itself. Be it because of being a 'stranger' or being in a 'strange' place, in the country or region where the training course is implemented.

Self-reflection and personal feedback are mentioned as main tools used for dealing with insecurity as well as support in/from the group which is considered as an important factor to feel safe and secure.

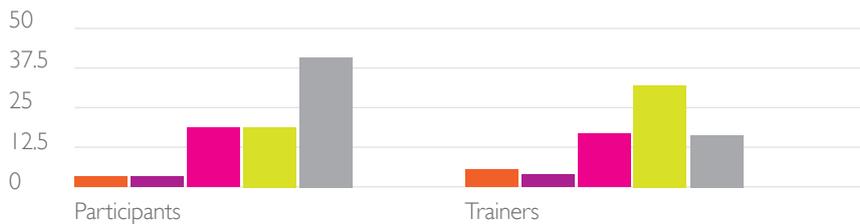
I learned that there are many questions that can't be answered. And I learned that this is OK.

Supporting the volunteer through the phase of insecurity they can feel when getting accustomed to a new culture was addressed.

Yes, the situation was very uncomfortable and we discussed later why.

## Fostering critical thinking

Perception of its presence during the events



- 1 – not at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 – a lot

*Percentage values based on valid responses from 49 former participants and 20 trainers*

### How it was addressed

Looking outside the box and getting a brighter picture of what we are taught, being creative and seeing the connections... This is what the majority of the respondents understand under this quality.

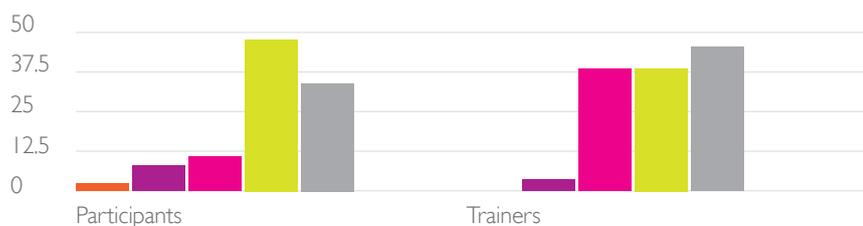
The quality has been addressed through debates, facilitated arguing, simulations and study visits. Learning to look for alternatives in critical situations or when a solution is 'too obvious to be true' is an important skill to be developed.

This aspect is present in all training we promote, as it is the basis for a responsible acting for active participation and citizenship.

This was integrated into every session, by using the existing knowledge of participants, by creating debate and by looking at EVS a wider political context.

## Creating empathy

Perception of its presence during the events



1 – not at all

2

3

4

5 – a lot

Percentage values based on valid responses from 48 former participants and 20 trainers

### How it was addressed

Empathy is seen by the respondents as an important quality in order to listen actively and communicate properly. The emotions shall be given adequate space and time in order to make oneself understood and understand the other. Creativity is mentioned to be as important as critical thinking and information; all elements needed for a successful creation of empathy. As pictured below.

Understanding what makes the other's culture special and important.

Through dramatisation we entered another point of view.

By listening to each others' stories you learn to understand things and this creates empathy for things that you looked at in another way before.

## Fostering tolerance of ambiguity

Perception of its presence during the events



Percentage values based on valid responses from 47 former participants and 20 trainers

### How it was addressed

This quality is probably the most 'misinterpreted' out of the eight qualities identified for Intercultural Competence. It is difficult (if not impossible) to define a common ground among the respondents. No matter if trainers or participants, their answers to 'Why do you think this quality was present in the TC?' are very diverse.

Variety of comments ranges from:

- ▲ 'can't explain' or 'there was no place for ambiguity'
- ▲ To 'safe space for making mistakes'
- ▲ To 'respect the other's opinion'
- ▲ To 'tolerate through understanding'

This variation of responses may be linked to a different understanding of the terminology. While some look at it as the ability to differentiate between different factors and situations and find a 'middle way' between those, the others describe it simply as the ability to deal with insecurity.

There were ambiguous moments during the training that presented a learning opportunity for the participants and the trainers.

Living with a group that you don't know and comes from other countries, with other habits, just for a few days creates sometimes moments that you have to learn to be tolerant.

It was fundamental to respect the other's opinion and ambiguity.

# Conclusions

## Key Findings

In the data gathered from the research no major differences appear in looking at Intercultural Competence between trainers and participants. Both groups predominantly look at Intercultural Competence in a classical 'T-kit style' way of dealing with interculturality from the mere cultural perspective. By T-kit style we mean here that in most of the training activities related to cultural issues the focus is mainly on intercultural learning (including understanding concepts and approaches) but less on the identified qualities necessary to acquire Intercultural Competence. Although there is no single definition provided in the T-Kit about Intercultural Competence, it is still the main reference document for the majority of trainers and youth workers in this regard. We acknowledge that the T-kit is currently under revision and the editorial team has decided to completely rewrite it rather than to just refresh it.

There are attempts mentioned to go over this 'implementation' and a few links can be observed to the qualities which have been identified as necessary to acquire Intercultural Competence;

however, these stem rather from the fact that both, the participants and the trainers, try to adjust their experience to the definition subject to this research, which seems not to have been an easy task for most of the contributors. This is understandable given the fact that the Intercultural Competence definition was kept until now as an internal definition, not to be shared with practitioners outside the working group members.

The process of recalling and structuring past experiences into a new format was commented on as a time consuming process indeed, sometimes discouraging the respondents to go until the end of the online questionnaire. It certainly helped the respondents to understand that 'actually, when reading the Intercultural Competence description, I realised we generally see much less in Intercultural Competence than what it is'.

While some respondents used the opportunity to be involved in the research as a 'learning opportunity' for acquiring Intercultural Competence, we felt that others experienced resistance to move towards accepting the new definition while feeling

more comfortable with more consolidated and experienced concepts and practice.

The results of the research tell that there is only a small number of trainers who declared they are now intentionally working with elements that come close to this new and more holistic concept. Being aware that practice experience is multiplied by practitioners, we confirm that in order to mainstream the new Intercultural Competence definition there is a need of visionary and skilled trainers, with a strong ability as multipliers to bring the new definition into the field by de-constructing and co-constructing.

## Outstanding questions

Considering the complexity of the research and the limits of collecting data from a wide diversified audience, we would like to highlight some questions that have appeared in trying to fully understand the responses and the observations we made.

The research cannot be considered exhaustive of all experiences not even in the framework of Youth in Action. The following questions can be of help in trying to identify pathways to

make the 'innovative' experiences and practices becoming predominant and supporting the further work of the community of practice of European youth workers on interculturality.

- ▲ How to capture the potential that is there and has not come to the surface yet?
- ▲ How to mainstream the innovation that is still belonging to a minority of practitioners?
- ▲ How to link intercultural communication as one way to acquire Intercultural Competence with other practices, in order to go beyond considering communication as the only way to acquire Intercultural Competence?
- ▲ How to reframe or reshape existing 'top-selling activities' looking at culture in a classical static way for making it possible to address culture in its multifaceted and dynamic aspects?

#### Possible next steps

Hence instead of 'linking theory to practice' per se we recommend to 'put the Intercultural Competence

concept into practice' and then explore possible links to other projects addressing Intercultural Competence or intercultural learning. This approach, while considering the definition as a variable hence pragmatic truth, would allow to look for more practical evidence and experience that can be appropriately shared and discussed in a larger context.

The way forward therefore could be to take the Intercultural Competence concept and any relevant new tools to the trainers directly, with an event or possibly a seminar, preferably series of workshops, exploring the definition contents and implication and testing new tools and possible opportunities to capture further data from trainers.

These trainers can then multiply these methods and concepts to participants, which should bring Intercultural Competence into a better position and bring greater recognition (and possibly provide further opportunities for research, especially looking at the extent to which the new identified practice actually achieved the acquisition of

Intercultural Competence, in other words to know if it works).

This should then enable us to bring together a group of interested parties working on interculturality (Council of Europe, T-kit team, Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the youth field which is working on generic trainer profiles etc.), in order to share concepts and look at possible opportunities and next steps.

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