3 Intercultural learning

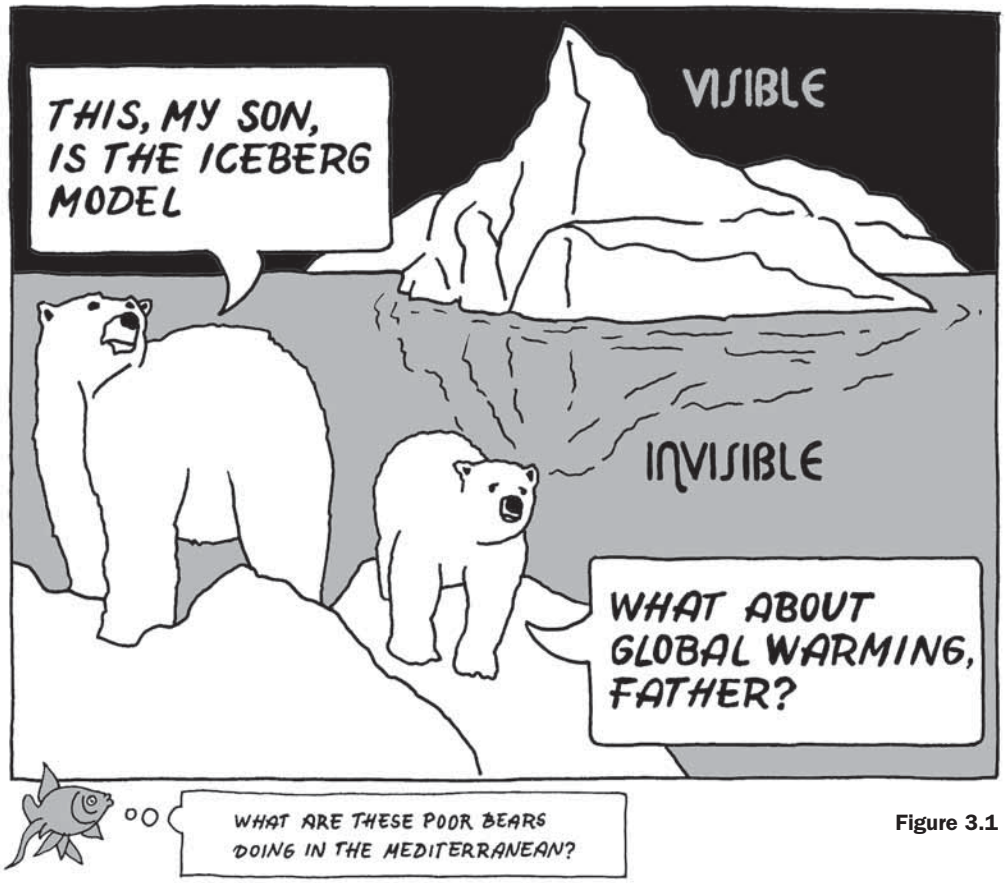


Figure 3.1

> [W]hat brings the peoples of the Mediterranean together is not so much the search for common interests or the nostalgia for an hypothetical golden age as the deeply rooted, absolute conviction that there is no other oil than olive oil.
>
> Farouk Mardam-Bey, *La cuisine de Ziryab*

> [A]ll cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic.
>
> Edward Said, Culture and imperialism

3.1 Introduction

Imagine that you go on holiday abroad in your UK-licensed car. When you come up against some sort of police check, on which side of the car would the police officer approach you? Or you see an Arabic newspaper in a café and you want to have a look at it. From which end would you open it? Or over a period of several days, you notice that some people are not eating or drinking anything before sunset. What would you think the reason is?

Our perceptions, habits and daily practice are based on and directed by our cultural environment as well as the norms and rules set out within it, which are sometimes visible, sometimes invisible. In fact, people are very similar for the simple reason that they are human beings: they are born, live and die, and they pass through these stages of life with very similar feelings, such as happiness, sadness, anxiety, fear or anger. However, cultures also shape the lives of human beings and all human acts of living.

Bearing various cultural traits, people interact voluntarily or involuntarily in living together on earth. Interaction and dialogue between cultures and some ways of learning about the "others", such as intercultural learning, are not only necessary but inevitable, even more so with the realities of globalisation.

Historical exchanges and interactions between peoples across the Mediterranean have not always led to better knowledge of and respect for others' culture and identity. Prejudice, ethnocentrism and mistrust are as much part of the landscape as the affirmed aims of dialogue and co-operation. Euro-Mediterranean youth work has a particular responsibility to effectively promote interaction, dialogue and learning opportunities. At the same time, it is itself conditioned by the same obstacles and difficulties it tries to address. Respecting cultural diversity and adopting intercultural approaches do not happen automatically in Euro-Mediterranean projects. They may be facilitated by an awareness of the issues and by the competence of project leaders and organisers in using the experience of the project as an opportunity for learning. The following pages provide various concepts and approaches that can help youth workers and young people in the Euro-Mediterranean basin to achieve mutual understanding and recognition in a multicultural setting.

3.2 What is culture? What is interculturality?

Linguistically, the word "culture" is derived from the Latin verb *colere*, meaning to cultivate, inhabit or honour. The word evolved to mean the pattern of human activities, including the "customary beliefs, social forms and material traits"[1] of a certain group. In Greek *i pethia* is rather the "cultivation of the mind, of the soul",[2] referring to education and sophistication. In Arabic, similarly, the root of the word *thakafa* implies showing brilliance or becoming brilliant, along with a person's refined social standing. It also means empowerment in science, arts and literature.[3]

Q: What does 'culture' mean to you? What do you notice when you compare the notion in different languages?

"Culture" can be defined through different approaches in different social sciences. The most commonly used definition is taken from the anthropological approach, which defines culture as the product of a holistic human response to one's environment and history involving contact with other cultures. It can be described as "the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society",4 which is later enriched with the component of inheritance of cultural traits: "culture is the values, rules, norms, codes and symbols that human beings receive from the previous generation, and which they try to pass on – often a little changed – to the next generation".5 As a way of understanding the different dimensions of culture, the table shows the focus and characteristics attributed to "culture" by various approaches.

Approaches to culture			
Approach	**Culture is …**	**It focuses on …**	**Characteristics …**
Sociological	the way of life of a group of people.	the social heredity of people, their principal ideas, practices and experiences.	It is created, disseminated, experienced and shaped by practising individuals; it is produced, reproduced and altered by social action.[6]
Folkloric	a product of human response to history and environment.	oral traditions, mythology, folktales, folk ways, folk life and non-industrial occupations.[7]	The dynamics of living culture are mirrored in folkloric change.
Social / Marxist	the ideal expression of the material conditions of a society, shaped by its economic base.[8]	social class, status and power.	Behaviour shapes culture and culture changes behaviour.
Religious[9]	social values that a person acquires from birth.	behaviours, traditions, moral and social norms, especially guided by religious teachings.	Religious traditions and teachings lead to cultural development.
Perceptual (Subjective)	a shared set of ideas and practices that exist in people's minds as a form of "mental software".	the senses and physical perceptual experience of a person as part of a group.	Social groups determine what and how individuals perceive their lives. The groups teach their own definition of good and bad, right and wrong. People are conditioned by the cultures in which they are raised.

Whatever the approach to defining the term, it can be argued that culture is the developed consciousness of human thought and it is also the accomplishment of this consciousness. It does not "impose itself only in artistic areas but it also fuels demands relating to identity and binds groups together as well as linking up with social, economic and political aspirations".[10]

Interculturality, then, may be defined as "the set of processes through which relations between different cultures are constructed".[11] It is not something general, but it has facets including (but not limited to) interculturality as a means of addressing difference for fighting against discrimination; as communication in the context of linguistics and the media; as a critical approach to history; and as a contribution to the values of citizenship.[12] Interculturality refers to cultural pluralism, with an emphasis on "exchange, interaction and solidarity between cultural expressions, values, ways of life and symbolic representations which are different, but complementary".[13]

3.3 Elements of culture

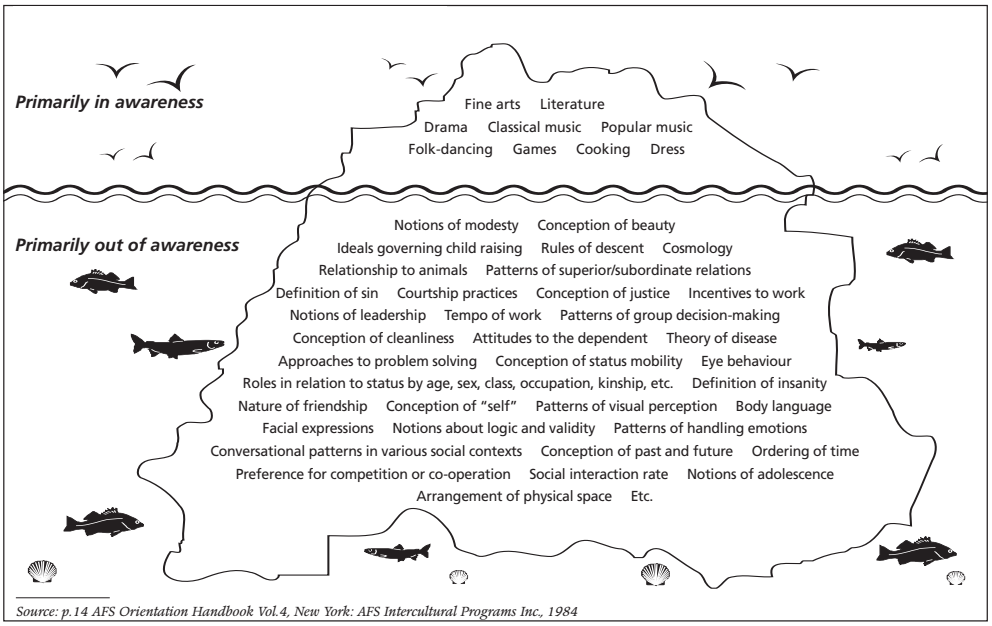
Time, place and variations in economic, political, social, religious and psychological settings influence the culture of a society. They all affect such elements of culture as customs, values, dress codes and acceptable patterns of behaviour or taboos, to mention only a few.

Elements of culture are acquired from the surrounding environment, and people naturally express them in different ways. Some of the elements are visible and some are not; some are expressed consciously, some unconsciously. Clothes, food and social organisation are all visible symbols of a culture.

What is expressed through values, concepts, norms and attitudes often constitutes the invisible part. However, in daily life, it is very possible that visible characteristics are accompanied by invisible elements, and in some other cases, invisible elements turn out to be visible in practice.

One well-known model for reflecting upon the elements of culture is the iceberg model, using the iceberg as a metaphor. Just as the visible part of an iceberg is only a small proportion of the whole iceberg, likewise visible parts of a culture are just extensions of its invisible parts, which may make it difficult to understand people from different cultures.

One can only see the visible part of the iceberg but not its foundations, which lie deep underneath; the table lists some examples of visible and invisible elements of culture. Although the model does not answer all the questions related to culture, it is still a good starting point for a more in-depth look at culture.[14]



Source: p.14 AFS Orientation Handbook Vol.4, New York: AFS Intercultural Programs Inc., 1984

Figure 3.2: The iceberg

Some examples of visible and invisible elements of culture[15]	
Visible	**Invisible**
Dress, food, language Customs, symbols Traditions, ceremonies, celebrations Behaviours Family relationships Religious practices Social organisation Arts, literature (stories, myths, legends, jokes)	Concept of beauty Incentives to work Notions of leadership Concepts of past and future Patterns of handling emotions Modes of social interaction Nature of friendship Attitudes to dependence Tempo of work Definition of sin

With the cultural exposure of various international youth activities and programmes, young people around the Mediterranean Sea acquire new experiences and new perspectives. It is possible to be surprised to find out that it is not only the English who drive on the left-hand side of the road, but also Cypriots and Maltese. Apart from the obvious confusion which can be caused for those trying to cross the road, it is possible to observe that this fact influences people's sense of visual direction, scanning a space from left to right. A similar confusion can be experienced by a young person who is used to the Latin alphabet system, when trying to open an Arabic book.

Examples of visible differences and similarities in cultural elements extend in the Euro-Mediterranean basin to many aspects of life, including behaviours and customs. Similarities exist not only as a result of the long history of interaction and geographical proximity but also because of the fact that, deep inside, human cultures are very close to one another. One should consider that interaction with individuals from different cultures requires consideration and acceptance of the invisible elements of culture, as well as of the visible ones.

Despite all the definitions, it is impossible to define what is "cultural" and especially to distinguish it from what is strictly "personal" (related to one's personal identity). The easy solution is to categorise everything that is difficult to understand or give meaning to under the definition of "cultural" but this is only partly useful, because in that process people usually "culturalise" the "other" rather than themselves. As Gavan Titley states, to see and categorise people as belonging to cultural groups oversimplifies identity and diminishes the importance of other elements of identity such as gender, class and disability as well as encouraging practices of discrimination.[16] In that sense, "the concept of culture does not represent a fixed entity in an independent object world but is best thought of as a mobile signifier that denotes different ways of talking about human activity with divergent uses and purposes … the concept of culture is plastic, political and contingent".[17]

3.4 Cultural diversity[18]

Culture as a term, concept and phenomenon implies diversity: diversity of visions, values, beliefs, practices and expressions. This diversity refers to differences between cultures, but at the same time between groups and people within the same culture. The cultural background of people can be a clear source of identity and self-definition. To construct a national, regional or minority identity, culture is sometimes used to unite communities and, therefore, to differentiate them from others in a process of inclusion or exclusion. Cultural diversity and differences are sometimes used as an excuse to reject unions, alliances, treaties, charters and universal rights, and to foster an underlying climate of suspicion and resentment, and even hostile attitudes, which can pave the way to armed conflict.[19]

Cultural diversity is the variety of human cultures in a specific geographical region. Different ways of dealing with cultural diversity within the boundaries of nation states can be listed: states would like to assimilate people from different cultures, mostly immigrant groups (monoculturalism); states may embrace many cultures, producing a new hybrid social and cultural form (melting pot); and states may preserve different cultures and enable an interaction between them (multiculturalism).[20] Although multiculturalism as a policy can be expressed differently in each state, it is a common yet problematic concept, since it treats difference as an asset in itself and "does more than simply take note of the diversity of affiliations, value-systems and cultural practices". It is torn between two opposing approaches: assimilation, which "denies differences by absorbing foreign inputs", and the explicit recognition of "ethnic minorities".[21] In any case, to deal with cultural diversity, we need a consciousness of cultural differences, an understanding of cultural elements and a respect for the lifestyles of all cultures.

The relation between "multicultural'" and "intercultural" may not be as simple as it might seem at first glance. The term "multicultural" refers to those societies with different cultures and national, ethnic or religious groups all living within the same territory, but not necessarily coming into contact with one another. The term "intercultural", on the other hand, refers to the relations of interaction, exchange and mutual recognition of values and ways of life of different cultures or national groups living together within a territory. From this perspective, multiculturality is a reality of all our societies; whereas an intercultural society is a process, not a goal in itself.[22]

Our world has about 6 000 languages. Only 4% of these are used by 96% of the world's population and 50% of them are in danger of extinction!

About 175 million people live outside the country of their birth and one in every 10 people in the developed regions is a migrant. [23]

3.5 Culture and globalisation

Globalisation and the reaffirmation of different cultural identities, such as religious, national, ethnic, territorial, gender and other specific individualities, coexist in today's world.[24] While globalisation has accelerated inter- and multicultural encounters in the modern world, it has also brought about many challenges, both positive and negative, for the inhabitants of the globe, especially for young people.[25]

In general, globalisation refers to the process characterised by expansion of telecommunications and information technologies; the lowering of national barriers to trade and investment; and increasing capital flows and the interdependency of financial markets.[26] Although globalisation in the first instance is used to refer to global markets and global economics (trade, investments, multinational companies, financial mobility and so on), it has also become evident in many other spheres simultaneously: politics (decisions made at international level rather than national), culture (local and national levels vs. global), ecology (pollution, environmental regulations) and so on.[27]

Argument continues about the positive and negative aspects of the effects of globalisation on people's lives. Three of these aspects can be listed:[28]

- Redefining citizenship. Globalisation allows space for a new dimension: the concept of global citizenship. Combined with the traditional concepts of citizenship and the exercising of political rights and obligations, this concept signifies awareness of global issues such as poverty, environmental problems or violence.
- Increasing mobility and faster communication. Despite the problems of mobility, the development of the Internet and telecommunication and transport technologies facilitate travel from one country to another or communication between people all over the world. This may provide an opportunity (especially for young people, who are supposedly more aware of technological developments) to share and learn from one another and from other cultures.
- The gradual opening-up of borders. Globalisation may facilitate the development and implementation of transnational and regional judicial systems for the protection of human rights, which may lead to a decrease in human rights violations.

On the other hand, many sectors of civil society[29] are concerned with the negative consequences or challenges of globalisation, because not everybody can enjoy these benefits equally. This situation is not relevant only to the Mediterranean or Europe, but is a concern for everybody in the world. Some of the key challenges that have been identified can be summarised as follows:[30]

- Reduction of state sovereignty. Globalisation challenges and redefines the traditional role of nation states, especially with the shifting of economic and financial decision-making mechanisms towards international financial institutions and structures.[31]
- Being economically focused. Economic considerations of international organisations or powerful corporate companies prevail over political and social considerations, and so other fundamental issues related to society, health or the environment are sometimes ignored.
- Lack of transparency and accountability. Especially when decisions are taken behind closed doors by multinational corporations or international/regional institutions, concerns grow about the lack of transparency in these decision-making mechanisms.
- Race to the bottom. The liberalisation of trade means that multinational companies tend to move to countries offering comparative advantages, which in practice mean lower wages, less strict labour legislation, lower corporate taxes and more flexible working conditions. This practice can affect human rights, especially (but not exclusively) the economic and social rights of workers.

- Homogenisation. The movement of goods and the idea of living in a society with standardised social and cultural patterns of behaviour could produce a situation in which people living in different parts of the world eat the same food, listen to same music and watch the same movies. Such a situation would reduce the specificity of each country and culture.

The last of these challenges, the globalisation of culture, is particularly important for young people. The exchange of ideas has become increasingly widely spread throughout different media: satellite TV, the Internet, and newspapers and magazines. The media play the biggest role in having an impact on this process and have a powerful and unappreciated influence on people and their way of life. Through the media, young people around the world are exposed to the same consumption culture: the same music, news, dress codes, dreams, aspirations and lifestyles. New trends and ideologies which may be received without questioning by young people can cause them to lose touch with their traditions.

Q: Do you think that new global trends cut the ties between you and your own culture?

3.6 Relative notions of culture

Culture shapes people's personal awareness and understanding of other individuals and groups. This may lead to other people suffering conflict and abuse, because differences between cultures are often perceived as threats. Ethnocentrism is a tendency to interpret or evaluate other cultures in terms of one's own,[32] which ultimately carries the implication that one's own "race" and culture is superior to those of others. It is to put oneself at the centre first and then reinforce this feeling with prejudices, by making oneself superior to others. Ethnocentric behaviours are shaped by and represented in such social phenomena as prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination, social exclusion, xenophobia and racism.

Prejudice:[33] a negative or positive judgement or assessment of an individual or group, without having enough knowledge about them.

Stereotype: shared beliefs or thoughts about the character of a particular human group, mostly in terms of behaviour or habits, done with the objective of simplifying reality.

Discrimination: a distinction or exclusion based on prejudices about, for example, sex, sexual orientation, "race", skin colour, language, religion, national or ethnic origin. "Positive discrimination" is deliberately taking measures in favour of certain groups, with the aim of reversing inequalities resulting from (negative) discrimination.

Xenophobia: the fear and hatred of strangers, foreigners or foreign countries, based on blurred knowledge and presumptions of the other; a feeling or perception based on socially constructed images and ideas, not rational or objective facts.

Racism: a conscious or unconscious belief in and sense of superiority of one "race" over another, a belief that "race" is a determinant of human behaviour and capabilities in the form of a superior/inferior perception.

The study of cultural differences has intensified during recent decades with the expansion of global industry and the emergent need to understand the consumer, and the cultural characteristics of foreign customers and workers, in order to grow. The field of communications has seen the largest proportion of research and development, but many people in this area have fallen into the trap of ethnocentric perspectives. Often, they have created further stereotypes by introducing dimensions related to the cultural conditioning of groups and they have assumed a static condition of cultures.[34]

Stereotyping is assigning a pattern of characteristics to all members (parts) of a specific group of people. Such patterns may refer to age, sex, religion, nationality or profession or indeed to anything else such as location or possessions. It is likely to be used to classify and generalise: "old people are conservative", "young people only wear jeans", "Arabs are Muslims" or "villages are boring places". Stereotypes in themselves can be positive, neutral or negative. Negative stereotypes are also prejudices and have negative consequences for those who are stereotyped.

Q: Can you think of any common stereotypes, for example about the peoples of your neighbouring or Euro-Mediterranean countries? Are they embedded in your cultural conceptions of others? Are there any stereotypes about your own nationality? To what extent do you agree with them?

Ethnocentric behaviour is embedded in stereotyped images: it is made up of the accumulated elements of family upbringing, schooling and exposure to cultural surroundings. It comes mostly from a single-sided 'narrated' experience or no experience at all. In the process of intercultural learning, one learns to correct others' prejudices by providing proven facts, building upon experiences with others and helping them to understand the reasons behind why, for example, there are also Christian Arabs or clever blonde women.

Cultural differences exist alongside similarities. The way a society is organised influences the way the whole society lives and results in differences even between neighbours in a given region. However, increased knowledge about other cultures facilitates a deeper understanding and appreciation of cultures which are different from one's own, as well as of the similarities between them. When it was realised that universal needs could be served through culturally diverse means, a new view emerged that each culture should be understood and appreciated in terms of itself. The view that elements of a culture are to be understood and judged in terms of their relationship to the culture as a whole led to the conclusion that cultures themselves could not be evaluated or graded as higher and lower, superior or inferior.[35]

When one looks at Europe and the Mediterranean in terms of ethnocentrism and stereotyping, it seems that, in addition to the role of historical events such as colonialism, an expanded migration network (mainly from the North African countries, Turkey and Asia towards Europe) and various cultural encounters create a lot of misconceptions and biased images both in European and Mediterranean countries. For example, Europeans are now becoming increasingly familiar with mosques, veiled women, and *halal* meat shops and restaurants, in addition to synagogues and *kosher* restaurants. The enlargement of Muslim communities in Europe sometimes leads to misconceptions which define all Muslims and Arabs under one identity. Although

many Mediterranean states are officially defined as Muslim in terms of their predominant faith and their legal framework, each country has its own cultural and social practices specific to its history and geographical features, as well as non-Muslim communities. In addition, historically speaking and as a common phenomenon, particular groups of people experience Antisemitism, Romaphobia and Islamophobia in Europe and the Mediterranean as various forms of discrimination, hatred and prejudice.[36] Thus, it would not be wrong to claim that prejudice is still in action in European and Mediterranean countries.

Some common forms of prejudice and discrimination across societies in the Euro-Mediterranean space

Ageism is stereotyping and prejudice against individuals or groups because of their age.[37] Its acts can be directed to members of various different age groups.

Antisemitism is hostility towards Jews as a religious or minority group, often accompanied by social, economic and political discrimination, It is a combination of power, prejudice, xenophobia and intolerance against Jewish people.[38]

Disabilism is discriminatory, oppressive or abusive behaviour arising from the belief that disabled people are inferior to others.[39]

Homophobia is an example of discrimination based on sexual orientation. It is "an irrational fear of and aversion to homosexuality and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people based on prejudice." It manifests itself in the private and public spheres in different forms, such as hate speech and incitement to discrimination, ridicule and verbal, psychological and physical violence, persecution and murder, discrimination in violation of the principle of equality, and unjustified and unreasonable limitations of rights.[40]

Islamophobia literally means a fear of or prejudice towards Islam, Muslims and matters pertaining to them. It is a form of racism and religious discrimination.

Romaphobia (also called **anti-Gypsyism**) is a form of racism, an ideology of racial superiority and a form of dehumanisation, which manifests itself most visibly through violence, hate speech, exploitation and discrimination against Roma people. It is based, on the one hand, on imagined fears, negative stereotypes and myths and, on the other, on denial or erasure from the public conscience of a long history of discrimination.[41]

Sexism is the actions or attitudes that favour one sex over the other and discriminate against people based solely on their gender. It is linked to power, in that those with power are typically treated with favour and those without power are typically discriminated against. Sexism is also related to stereotypes, since the discriminatory actions or attitudes are frequently based on false beliefs or over-generalisations about gender and on seeing gender as relevant when it is not.[42]

3.7 Prejudice and ethnocentrism in practice: Orientalism and Occidentalism

In Euro-Mediterranean history, Orientalism has been a very dominant form of ethnocentrism. It has produced many stereotypes, prejudices and cultural myths, the effects and signs of which are still visible in the modern world.

Orientalism is a series of cultural assumptions that were put forward by European scholars as a product of colonialism and its aftermath, particularly during and after

the 19th century, describing the East, a vast region that includes most of Asia as well as the Arabic-speaking world with all its peoples and countries. Orientalism analysed and denounced the ways in which Europeans had previously represented the Orient.[43] Within this particular strand of literature, scholars like Edward Said, Franz Fanon and Gayatri Spivak were concerned with the social, cultural and political effects of colonisation.

Said defined Orientalism using three characteristics. Firstly, he applied it to the academic discipline used to construct European attitudes towards Islam and the Arabic world and attempts to analyse the western discourse about the 'other'. Secondly, he used the term to describe the system of thought, which is based upon "a distinction made between 'the Orient' (the east) and (most of the time) 'the Occident' (the west)". Finally, he employed it "to denominate the projection of power by the West which sought to dominate, restructure and control the Orient in order to create a discourse that would be at the service of imperial and colonial power".[44] In his work, Said criticised the Western cultural critique of the developing states, which did not come to an end with decolonisation. He viewed Orientalism as a "subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture"[45] and he argued that many Orientalists look at the East from a colonial and culturally dominant viewpoint, describing the 'other' – the East – as irrational, untrustworthy, dishonest, culturally static, underdeveloped, violent and anti-Western.

Said proposed that Orientalism served political ends: "colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact". Secondly, he suggested that it helped Europe to define its self-image: "the development and maintenance of every culture requires the existence of another different and competing *alter ego*". Orientalism led to the view of Islamic culture as being static and "eternal, uniform and incapable of defining itself" and placed it in contrast to a dynamic and variable West. Thirdly, Said argued that Orientalism produced a false description of Arabs and Islamic cultures, questioning if an Islamic society, an Arab mind and an Oriental psyche really exists.[46]

Altogether, Orientalist views created a dichotomy between Islam (as a religion) and the West (as a geographical entity), which did not need to exist in reality. In the contemporary world, it is possible to trace Orientalist arguments and construction of "the other" in many events and their aftermaths, such as the 11 September attacks in the United States. Said's writings put forward the need to question the studies and the representations of the Orient that had been generally accepted until then and that had even been proposed as a basis for dialogue between cultures and civilisations. Instead of taking those distorted reflections and images for granted, Said proposed "to use one's mind historically and rationally for the purposes of reflective understanding".[47]

Q: Have you ever read colonial/post-colonial narratives such as *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, *Around the World in Eighty Days* by Jules Verne, or *The Crusades through Arab Eyes* by Amin Maalouf? If so, have you observed how these narratives perceive the other? For example, how were the cultural elements described? How were the colonialists/settlers/travellers presented (oppressive, charitable, brave, religious, tolerant)? And how was the other's culture presented (barbaric, anti-religious)? Can you see stereotypes or prejudice in those narratives?

If Orientalism can be defined as the rhetoric of colonialism, reflecting the West's reasons for ruling the East, Occidentalism can be taken as a response to the West, and as an effort to complement the process of decolonisation and post-colonialism for the Third World.[48] According to Hanefi, Occidentalism can be seen as a counter-opportunity to define the West from a non-Western world view in the East, although at the same time some Western scholars joined this approach in criticising the Western way of thinking. It changes the roles of the 'I' and 'the other', in which 'the other' becomes the West. Occidentalism attempts to create a balance between Western ideals which are owned by the elites in the decolonised nations, that is, by the oriental Orientalists, and anti-Western reactions such as fundamentalism and religious conservatism.[49]

Both Orientalism and Occidentalism are based on consciously created stereotypes and images of 'the other', in one for 'the East' and in the other for 'the West', and they are both forms of ethnocentrism. For centuries these have been perpetuated, sometimes unconsciously, through various means such as the media, and their effects are still traceable in the modern world. Humanism, on the other hand, affirms "the dignity and worth of all people, based on the ability to determine right and wrong by appeal to universal human qualities, particularly rationality".[50]

In that sense, Said's critique of Orientalism leads to a humanism which refers to rational interpretative skills and critical thought, so that "the terrible conflicts that herd people under falsely unifying rubrics like 'America', 'the West' or 'Islam' and invent collective identities for large numbers of individuals who are actually quite diverse" can be questioned and "cannot remain as potent as they are". And he continues: "rather than the manufactured clash of civilisations, we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together in far more interesting ways than any abridged or inauthentic mode of understanding can allow".[51]

In practical terms, an intercultural approach refers to first being aware of images, stereotypes and prejudices, and second, to making an effort to change them within the framework of mutual respect, understanding and dialogue. International youth work is a good means of questioning these images that impact on the perception of 'the other' and of not falling into the trap of stereotypes and prejudices. Young people's chances to experience this through international exchanges and youth activities also give them the opportunity to nullify prejudices and acquire knowledge that would be closer to the cultural reality of the other, which would in turn help to reveal the hidden piece of the iceberg. However, mere contact between people from different cultures does not automatically lead to improved mutual understanding. That is why intercultural learning, which we will be dealing with further at the end of this chapter, should start with people's own everyday lives before going into any short- or long-term intercultural encounter.[52]

Butter or olive oil culture?
Some researchers suggest that a dividing line between European and Mediterranean culture can be established according to whether it is butter or olive oil that traditionally prevails in cuisine. This border, purely imaginary, is progressively fading as a result of the increasing exchanges of goods and people, which have for example made olive oil very popular in some central and northern European countries, while butter is now found practically everywhere north and south of the Mediterranean.

Figure 3.3: Butter –Olive oil map

Q. Does this "border" make any sense to you in explaining cultural differences and similarities in Europe and the Mediterranean?

3.8 Cultural specificities in the Euro-Mediterranean region: uniformity versus diversity

The Euro-Mediterranean countries individually and the "Euro-Mediterranean" as a region are culturally rich, encompassing a variety of religious, linguistic, national and ethnic groups. Cultural specificities not only change from one country to another but also within the different cultural circles within the same country or region. Each circle would also have its own specificities and cultural elements that distinguish it from another.

Still, the Mediterranean states, whether north or south, also share many common cultural aspects that have been formed by geographical proximity and a similar ecological sphere and have been developed through exchanges.[53] These exchanges continue up

to today with the mobility of people in all directions, which has an impact on the present cultural environment and identity, and which is leading to increasing closeness among people.

The similarities among Mediterranean states can be seen in certain social customs, in perceptions of right and wrong, non-verbal communication, social relations and perceptions of time, and they may extend to dietary practices, clothes, songs and other things. Such a level of similarity makes the argument that "a Mediterranean identity exists" sound valid. Quoting from Russell King's essay on Mediterraneanism, "on physical, cultural and historical criteria, the Mediterranean presents itself as a more unified region than either Europe or Africa".[54] Hence, one may talk about a Mediterranean identity or Mediterranean culture as a holistic concept, in spite of the variety of religions, languages and ways of living in the region. However, "the Mediterranean is both homogeneous and diversified, like its languages and cultures, its music, its colours, its fragrances and its forms"[55] and making generalisations that cover the whole Mediterranean would not only be misleading, but would also underestimate the rich diversity of the region as a whole.

The following issues, among many others, should be taken into consideration in organising a Euro-Mediterranean youth activity:

- participants' dietary needs. Vegetarians are not the only people who need to be considered. Muslims and Jews do not eat pork. For many Muslims, meat should be *halal* and food and drink should not contain alcohol. For many Jewish people, the food should be *kosher*.
- clarity with your partners about which countries are involved in the activity. Some participants may be legally prohibited from participating in activities involving members of certain states.
- introduction of ice-breaking activities or energisers that do not require physical contact with other participants, as some participants may not feel comfortable with this in certain cases.
- religious practices: prayer times, observance of religious days and fasting customs.
- concepts of time and punctuality (and the importance attributed to them) may differ among participants!
- mixed-sex dormitory accommodation may not be appreciated by many participants.

Q: What other cultural points can you think of that one should consider when planning Euro-Mediterranean youth activities?

On the other hand, the elements of culture within European states are not all the same, as Europe is composed of different linguistic and cultural groupings. It may be difficult to draw comparisons between the lifestyles of eastern, western and northern Europe. Moreover, immigration, affirmation of the existence of cultural minorities and the increasing mixing of communities in European countries has changed the structure of societies. A united Europe is not unified along the same lines as the Mediterranean region, although this may occur to some extent, but is founded on the

aspiration to build a plural 'political' Europe that respects freedoms, equality, welfare, the rule of law and the identity of all its people.

If both the Mediterranean and Europe are diverse within their own geographical boundaries (but there are also many obvious overlaps between 'European' and 'Mediterranean'), then the question is how to live with and within such a diversity and plurality of values in the modern world in this particular geographical area called the Euro-Mediterranean? Intercultural dialogue and intercultural learning suggest two inter-related ways of dealing with the complexity of diversity and enjoying the similarities through and within youth work.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity to reaffirm the world's conviction that intercultural dialogue is the best guarantee of peace and development. The Declaration emphasises issues that safeguard cultural identity, diversity, pluralism, human rights, creativity and international solidarity.

Upon the adoption of the Declaration, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed 21 May as "World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development" to deepen the understanding of the values of cultural diversity.

3.9 Building cultural understanding: intercultural dialogue

There is a major difference between accepting an action and understanding it. It is possible to understand people from different cultural backgrounds without agreeing with them. However, it is also common that people disagree because they have not understood each other. The multicultural realities of today carry tensions which can create social conflicts at some point, but they ultimately have the potential to lead to cultural exchanges that groups on all sides can benefit from.

Intercultural dialogue[56] is a concept, mostly used as an antidote to rejection and violence, in which the objective is to enable people to live together peacefully and constructively in a multicultural world. It is also seen as a tool for the prevention and resolution of conflicts by enhancing respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.[57] The reasoning behind intercultural dialogue rejects the idea of a clash of civilisations; on the contrary, it supports increased commitment to cultural co-operation.[58] It recognises the difference and multiplicity of the world, in the sense that these differences of opinion, viewpoint and values exist not only within each individual culture but also between cultures.[59] Accordingly, intercultural dialogue is an attempt to approach these multiple viewpoints with a desire to understand and learn on the basis of mutual understanding and respect, which requires, among other things, the freedom and ability to express oneself, as well as the willingness and capacity to listen to the views of others.[60] It also requires many of the attitudes fostered by a democratic culture, including open-mindedness, willingness to engage in dialogue and allow others to express their point, a capacity to resolve conflicts by peaceful means and a recognition of the well-founded arguments of others.[61]

In its White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, "Living Together as Equals in Dignity",[62] the Council of Europe defines intercultural dialogue as "an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect."

Intercultural dialogue may serve several purposes, within the general objective to promote full respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law:

- It contributes to political, social, cultural and economic integration, and the cohesion of culturally diverse societies. It is an essential feature of inclusive societies, which leave no one marginalised or defined as an outsider.
- It fosters equality, human dignity and a sense of common purpose. Freedom of choice, freedom of expression, equality, tolerance and mutual respect for human dignity are among its guiding principles.
- It aims to develop a deeper understanding of diverse world views and practices, to increase co-operation and participation (or the freedom to make choices), to allow personal growth and transformation, and to promote tolerance and respect for the other.
- It contributes to strengthening democratic stability and to the fight against prejudice and stereotypes in public life and political discourse, and to facilitating coalition-building across diverse cultural and religious communities, and can thereby help to prevent or de-escalate conflicts – including post-conflict situations and frozen conflicts.

In the White Paper, the conditions of intercultural dialogue are summarised as:

- human rights, democracy and the rule of law,
- equal dignity and mutual respect,
- gender equality, and
- combating the barriers that prevent intercultural dialogue.

Five distinct yet inter-related dimensions to the promotion of intercultural dialogue, which involve the full range of stakeholders, are identified in the White Paper. Accordingly, intercultural dialogue depends on the democratic governance of cultural diversity (a political culture valuing diversity, human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as an approach from equal opportunities to equal enjoyment of rights). It requires participation and democratic citizenship. It demands the acquisition (learning and teaching) of intercultural competences, such as democratic citizenship, language, history at different levels of education (primary, secondary, higher education and research; non-formal and informal learning; the role of educators, and family environment). It needs open spaces for intercultural dialogue. Finally, it must be taken to an international scale, in international relations.[63]

The idea behind intercultural dialogue is very much linked to the concepts discussed in this chapter, as well as to Euro-Mediterranean co-operation: promoting awareness, understanding, reconciliation and tolerance, overcoming stereotypes and prejudice, preventing conflicts, and ensuring integration and the cohesion of society. However, one should also recognise that intercultural dialogue is not "a cure for all evils and an answer to all questions", and its scope can be limited.[64] Dialogue with those who are ready to take part in it but do not (or do not fully) share "our" values may be the starting point of a longer process of interaction.[65] In that sense, encouraging intercultural dialogue across Europe and the Mediterranean necessitates the active involvement of young people at all stages of the process.

Q: How do these principles of intercultural dialogue work in your practice of Euro-Mediterranean youth activities?

3.10 Learning to live with(in) diversity and enjoying similarities: intercultural learning

Increasing levels of multiculturalism in societies and the increasing frequency of short- or long-term intercultural encounters necessitate not only being aware of the differences but also learning to live and deal with them and to enjoy the similarities. Otten states that contact between people from different cultures or "cultural proximity" does not automatically lead to improved mutual understanding, because many people feel unable to cope with, or even threatened by, the presence of people with different customs or habits rooted in other cultures. This is the reason why intercultural learning should start with young people's everyday lives in order to extend the means of perception and behaviour under different conditions. Only then can the intercultural encounters serve the ends of the intercultural learning process and be sustainable: the experiences gained as a result of an intercultural encounter are to be used systematically for providing long-lasting effects for an individual's own everyday life and in other intercultural settings.[66]

Equipo Claves defines intercultural learning as "a process of social education aimed at promoting a positive relationship between people and groups from different cultural backgrounds, based upon mutual recognition, equality of dignity, and giving a positive value to cultural differences". This approach calls for removing prejudices and studying first one's own perceptions, habits and stereotyped patterns of interpretation.[67]

Otten assumes that there are two central elements of intercultural learning: the ability to interact and the capacity to act. Borrowing from Iben,[68] we can explain those elements as follows:

- getting to know oneself, one's own abilities, possibilities, desires and goals, assessing one's own social position;
- awareness of one's own situation in life, by recognising dependencies, interests and causes, as well as through precise observation and analysis of one's environment;
- developing communication skills; verbalising feelings and interests, experience and observations; furthering one's understanding of symbols *vis-à-vis* verbal and non-verbal signal systems; developing insights into the real conditions of communication forms; and increasing one's ability at the meta-communication level;
- increasing one's ability to interact, and one's capacity to act, by developing ego strength, frustration tolerance, resistance, creativity and curiosity, self-reflection and reduced egocentricity; removing prejudices and promoting empathy; developing role flexibility, the ability to co-operate and act in solidarity; improving awareness of rules and coping rationally with conflict situations; and learning ... interaction patterns as well as action strategies.

Just being aware of cultural differences is not enough; young people need specific competences to deal with different situations.[69] The ability to interact and the capacity to act as central elements of intercultural learning are further elaborated with three basic qualifications, attitudes and competences: role distance, empathy and ambiguity tolerance.[70]

Otten suggests that, in international encounters, each interaction is a communicative act and is regulated by role relationships. In our everyday lives, we do not question the adoption of these roles; it is something we have internalised and we act accordingly. However, in intercultural learning, the interaction in bicultural and multicultural situations is characterised precisely by the comparatively strong need to change roles.

Young people need to be presented with and learn new roles for themselves, which means examining other roles previously unknown to them. To take on new roles and be

able to accept others, role distance is necessary. This describes the individual ability to look at one's own views, behaviour patterns and so on against the background of national socio-cultural norms. This is important because, if these are not seen in relative terms, different cultural stimuli will not be absorbed as positive learning stimuli; rather, they will tend to strengthen existing prejudices.[71]

The process of establishing common ground in international encounters lies essentially in mutual empathy, which means anticipating (presumed) interpretations by the other person and conducting an examination of one's own possibilities in adjusting to this. This process of establishing common ground is not always free from conflict, because any young people coming together are from different socio-cultural backgrounds and they have different interests. The ability to tolerate different interests, expectations and needs, and make allowances for them in the process of establishing an understanding, is known as tolerance of ambiguity.[72]

Culture is not something static, and neither are the elements and methods of intercultural learning. This means that abstract theoretical learning about the cultural background of others is necessary but not sufficient. In intercultural learning, the aim is to facilitate learning from specific social situations, in which other thinking patterns and ways of behaviour (due to culture and tradition) are clear and available.[73]

3.11 Intercultural learning and dialogue through Euro-Mediterranean youth work

The richness of European and Mediterranean societies lies in cultural diversity expressed by the variety of religious, ethnic and cultural groups and communities which have been present across the region for many centuries. In this context, intercultural dialogue[74] is essential to counter and overcome mutual prejudices and the clash of civilisations, and instead to learn "to live together peacefully and constructively in a multicultural world." Because otherwise we are doomed to be people who are full of fear, anger and enmity in our Euro-Mediterranean environment.

Understanding another culture, but also recognising and accepting it, is a lifelong process. Intercultural encounters, national and international, create numerous chances for intercultural learning to take place, with its emphasis on knowledge, acceptance, recognition, respect, solidarity and co-operation. In this context, Euro-Mediterranean youth work also has a role, being a means of reaching young people and providing them with opportunities to come together and learn from each other. However, increasing contact between culturally diverse people and/or making them aware of cultural differences do not automatically result in tolerance, acceptance and mutual understanding.[75] On the contrary, intercultural encounters always carry the risk of regenerating and/or multiplying the existing prejudices or stereotypes.

Intercultural learning in non-formal education[76]		
Political and Social Level	*Educational Level*	*Methodological Level*
• Equality of opportunities • Respect for cultural diversity • Overcoming ethnocentrism • Basis for European co-operation and integration	• Raising awareness of cultural diversity • Understanding stereotypes and prejudice • Cultural awareness • Interaction and social integration	• Equal opportunities in learning processes • Autonomy and creativity • Experiential learning • Holistic approaches • Emotional or attitudinal development

So, how can Euro-Mediterranean youth work contribute to a process of intercultural learning and dialogue? Learning-by-doing approaches in youth work refer to active learning not only about diversity and others' cultures, but also about one's own identity in relation to others, finding connections and developing empathy. It is obvious that Euro-Mediterranean youth activities can provide an environment for bringing culturally diverse groups of young people together, for learning about the "other", but also about "themselves" through interaction with others. Since mere interaction would not guarantee intercultural learning, one way of ensuring positive outcomes may be helping the participants, youth leaders, youth workers and trainers active in the Euro-Mediterranean youth work develop specific competences to deal with different and unexpected situations. This also refers to the need of developing specific training approaches for each situation, instead of just using similar training tools (for example, the same simulation exercises) for each youth activity.[77] It is also important to prepare individuals and teams for the sensitivities and surprises of working in the Euro-Mediterranean context, especially by being aware of the abundance of possibly biased information produced about the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Another aspect of ensuring positive outcomes of Euro-Mediterranean intercultural learning and dialogue is to work on multiplying the effect of the positive individual/group experiences of the Euro-Mediterranean participants when they go back home. To the extent that intercultural learning is more relevant to "ourselves" than the "other", it is important to create awareness about the individual responsibilities of the participants in bringing their experience back home, sharing it with those around them and continuing to work on it in the future – bearing in mind, nevertheless, that the richness, potential and challenge of intercultural learning is the learning about oneself, one's own multiple cultural affiliations and, therefore, about relating to others. This is always a challenging personal process that can hardly be understood if it has not been experienced. The possibility to experience it is the greatest opportunity that Euro-Mediterranean youth work has to offer to young people.

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