

## Chapter 2

# Intercultural learning: theories, contexts, realities

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**T**his chapter introduces several perspectives on diversity, culture and identity. How people perceive these three realities shapes how they understand the world and, also, intercultural relations. The chapter also presents the competences needed for intercultural learning, understood as an educational approach that leads to social transformation. Stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination are analysed as the main challenges for intercultural societies. Finally, the chapter introduces elements of intercultural learning theory and models.

### CULTURE, IDENTITY AND SOCIAL REALITIES

Working in the field of intercultural learning requires an understanding of the role of culture in shaping individuals and communities.

Culture is a very complex concept and it can be misused or misinterpreted (consciously or unconsciously). Culture is not an abstract concept, it is very much embedded in the realities of everyday life. In fact, culture cannot be separated from the social realities in which it is developing or from the people who are both influenced by it and are influencing it. Taking into account social realities, and political, geographical and economic aspects, leads to a more nuanced understanding of culture, genuine interactions and avoidance of simplistic interpretations.

Here are three examples of how culture is defined: firstly, from a macro-perspective; secondly, from an individual perspective; and, thirdly, from a more process-oriented perspective.

- ▶ UNESCO (2002) defines culture as “a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or of a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs”.
- ▶ Cunha and Gomes (2009) define culture from the perspective of intercultural learning, as a “set of shared characteristics that gives to a person the sense of belonging to a certain community”.
- ▶ Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) provided an even more pragmatic definition: “culture is the way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas”.

### Different views on culture

Culture has been approached differently over the years. It has evolved from an essentialist view (the idea that culture is predefined and static) to a more constructivist view (culture as dynamic, in continuous evolution and multifaceted).

The **essentialist view** on culture is based on the idea that culture has fixed characteristics, variation among members being considered as secondary. This approach is inadequate in contexts nowadays in which people often migrate from one place to another, travel both physically and virtually and live in continuous interaction with other people. Moreover, this reductionist view on culture has the effect of limiting human understanding to theories and methodologies that are not adequate for the realities of young people and that promote simplistic analyses and solutions to complex problems.

In the **constructivist view**, culture is defined through interactions among people, it is fluid in its expression and continuously evolving and adapting to the realities experienced by its members. Culture evolves and reshapes itself throughout the years; it is influenced by the interaction of its members with members of other cultures, and with their surroundings, by cultural and economic exchanges and by globalisation.

Another type of discourse refers to culture as a making process, as multifaceted and diverse in its values, beliefs, practices and traditions – some of which may be recent inventions. Hence, in this view, culture is negotiable and subject to personal choice, and a dynamic process through which the understandings and the boundaries of groups or communities are renegotiated and redefined according to current needs (Council of Europe 2009a: 8).

For many years, a popular representation of culture was what was known as the “iceberg model of culture”. This model shows that certain aspects of culture are visible (like the tip of the iceberg above the water), while others are hidden (under the water). The visible aspects are artefacts and behaviours, such as food, art, dress, language and celebrations, while the invisible aspects are values, beliefs, norms and assumptions. As the understanding of culture has evolved from essentialist to constructivist, the inconsistencies of this model became clearer. The model assumes that culture is a “thing”, failing to represent the dynamics of culture, its fluidity and how it manifests itself in relations between people. The model views culture as something very compact and isolated, leaving little room for personal choices and interpretations or for the changes that culture goes through when its members interact with members of other cultures or with the environment. Additionally, the model provides an implicit qualitative gap between what is above and visible and what is underneath and hidden. It gives the impression that the visible elements, the cultural “folklores”, are superficial and bad, whereas what really matters is under the water. This is a very simplistic and superficial way of separating various elements. Culture is a dynamic combination of all these elements, an important aspect to take into account when planning intercultural learning activities.

## Culture and identity

The way in which we view culture has consequences for the interpretation of cultural reality; it influences our interaction with other people, and the way in which we understand our identity and the identities of others. We deal with culture in intercultural learning not because culture is the answer to every question, but because it is an important aspect that shapes our world view and our interpretations, along with other aspects, like living conditions, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and various other situations. As Gavan Titley (2009) states:

The tendency to see and valorise people as belonging to cultural groups underplays and simplifies identity and the importance of gender, class, sexuality, disability and political allegiances in practices of identity as well as practices of discrimination. ... The question is not whether or not culture should be engaged with, but how, in relation to whom, to what extent, in interrelation with what, and with which underlying meanings.

Therefore, “identity, in relation to culture and the many other dimensions that identities have, is constantly ‘under construction’ – a lifelong process of role-taking and role-making that is mediated by extrinsic (societal, political) as well as intrinsic (psychological, emotional) aspects” (Ohana and Otten 2012: 187). Or, as Erikson described it, it is a process in which the two identities – of the individual (or the personal) and of the group (or the social collective) – are merged into one (Kim 2009: 54). Identity, then, is always in process, never an absolutely accomplished fact (Brah 2004: 34).

If we view our identity as static, as something given at birth, we tend to behave in a way that fits into the box defined by what we and others believe that specific identity to be – based on expectations about cultural norms, gender roles, religious beliefs, etc.

If we view our identity and the identities of other people as something that evolves and reshapes continuously in interactions, we allow ourselves to continuously reshape our identity according to our expectations from the world, not according to what the world expects from us. More importantly, we allow other people to construct their own identity and we refrain from putting them into boxes, from labelling them, from looking at them through the lens of stereotypes.

Identity can then be defined both as belonging to certain groups and differentiating from others, with variations in these feelings of being “inside” or “outside”. Depending on the contexts we are in, we constantly redefine our identity. For example, as the only woman in a group of men, the awareness about gender identity might be stronger than in a gender-mixed group. Various researchers therefore speak about the concept of “multiple identities” (Burke and Stets 2009). Although this concept is mainly used to describe people growing up with various cultural backgrounds, it can be extended to any human being in changing social contexts.

Intercultural learning processes aim at deconstructing the meaning of “having an identity”:

Identity becomes a “moveable” feast formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us ... Within us are contradictory identities pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about (Hall 1992: 277).

A person’s identity is defined both through auto-identification (how we identify ourselves) and through hetero-identification (how others identify us). At an individual level, identity is strongly connected with the need to relate to other people, to society at large and to the perception of one’s own autonomy. More often than not, the identity that one person assumes is different from the identity that is “given” by others.

Even if, as mentioned before, culture has evolved from a static, essentialist view to a dynamic, constructivist one, we often communicate in a way that assumes there can only be one cultural identity (for example, when responding to queries such as: Where are you from? Do you consider yourself Serbian or German? How come you go to church if you are gay?). This type of world view has a great potential to create a cognitive dissonance (a discomfort caused by holding simultaneously conflicting ideas, emotions, beliefs or values). In order to avoid this, and to reach a coherent narrative about ourselves, we need to go through a process of accommodating the different facets of our identity, to feel like a unique and complete human being. The Council of Europe published the European Manifesto for Multiple Cultural Affiliation (Council of Europe 2007b), which openly affirms that, at a given time or at different stages in their lives, people may adhere to different cultural affiliations:

Multiple cultural affiliation makes it possible both to conceive and to experience the complex, differentiated development of cultural identity in mature democratic societies. It firstly recognises communities which bring with them different references in terms of identity and secondly allows each individual to have a number of specific identities expressed through belonging to various cultures ... Multiple belonging is perceived as the possibility for everyone, either individually or in a group, to feel simultaneous or successive affiliation with a set of values or cultural references shared by several groups or communities of beliefs or interests.

Usually, individuals subjectively identify with more than one social group. In addition, people frequently use their personal attributes (such as fun-loving, conscientious, conservative, tolerant, etc.) and their interpersonal relationships and social roles (such as mother, friend, son, employee, etc.) as further components of their self-concepts. These multiple identifications with social groups, attributes, relationships and roles help individuals to orientate their position and define themselves in the social world relative to other people (Council of Europe 2009a). In order to be involved in a meaningful and authentic intercultural encounter, one needs to find the balance between acknowledging the cultural specificities of a certain group and carefully listening to the person in front with an open mind and without labelling.

Individuals aim at maintaining a positive self-identity and at feeling secure in their identity. Different strategies are used in order to attain this. One of them is to make a distinction between the in-group (“us”) and the out-group (“them”). When people define their group belonging in opposition to other groups, an artificial categorisation is created, one that accentuates differences and reduces similarities, saying basically that “we are good and they are bad”. Various social studies in the 1970s showed that the single act of putting people into two distinct groups was sufficient for creating a feeling of competition or confrontation with, in some cases, quick escalation to violence and discrimination. The most famous example remains the Stanford prison experiment.<sup>9</sup>

## Culture, identity and intercultural learning

Intercultural learning promotes the view that no culture is better or worse than the other, that there is no hierarchy of cultures. It leads to an understanding that the definition of groups of belonging, of in-groups and out-groups, can be superficial and changing.

All too often, culture has been considered as completely overlapping with nationality, with the borders of nation states, or even an entire region (for example, Arab culture). Intercultural learning acknowledges that there are general characteristics of a culture, but there is also a multitude of specificities related to how a culture is lived and that cultures themselves are internally heterogeneous. Therefore, instead of putting people into “boxes of culture”, it looks into how people are influenced differently by their dominant culture, how they identify with characteristics of various cultures and how they create their own mosaic of identity. Putting people into boxes because of their passport, their birthplace, their appearance or any other element that enforces the potential of stereotypes, or seeing participants in an international training course as “ambassadors” of their country is a biased way of engaging in intercultural learning. Just because people were born or live in a certain country

9. See [www.prisonexp.org](http://www.prisonexp.org), accessed 3 October 2017.

it does not mean they can speak for the entire population or they can be made accountable for the decisions of their government. Intercultural learning processes support participants in understanding the impact of the cultural background on their identity development and on their interpersonal and intercultural relations.

Intercultural learning guides young people to adjust their images about cultural groups and about individuals belonging to cultural groups, to actively listen and understand others, in order to offer them the space to freely manifest their cultural identity. In this process, they learn to refrain from labelling people, from putting them in the categories that were already created before the actual encounter.

Once we stop categorising the world into “us and them”, we begin to see more similarities between people, between their cultures, identities, behaviours and world views. Identities that partly overlap are no contradiction: they are a source of strength and point to the possibility of common ground (Council of Europe 2008b).

Therefore, in intercultural learning processes, it is important to give enough space for people to explore their identities, to create opportunities for self-analysis and self-understanding, both individually and in relation to others. There is no linear relation between learning about us and learning about others. Self and others are interdependent; the better we understand ourselves, the better we can understand others and vice versa.

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### Some questions to reflect on

- ▶ What is your understanding of culture?
- ▶ As an educator, does your approach support the static or the dynamic notions of culture? Or maybe both? Or yet another notion?
- ▶ What are the different groups with which you identify yourself now?
- ▶ Is your image about yourself (auto-identification) coherent with the image other people have about you (hetero-identification)? How can you find out?
- ▶ How can young people be supported in understanding and affirming their identity?
- ▶ What is, in your opinion, the impact of migration on culture and identity?
- ▶ What is, in your opinion, the impact of globalisation on culture and identity?
- ▶ In some societies, migrants and minorities are viewed strictly in terms of culture and their social and political interactions are disregarded. What do you think about this situation?

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## NARRATIVES ON DIVERSITY FROM DIFFERENT SOURCES

Cultural diversity is not a new phenomenon. But narratives on diversity, interpretations and practices are changing continuously. Diversity is a concept widely used in everyday conversations and policy discourses. The current perspective on diversity has shifted from celebrating, appreciating or managing diversity to inclusion and development of an intercultural society. This perspective goes beyond the celebration of diversity per se and organising “folkloric events”, to creating frameworks for the affirmation of cultural identity in all aspects of life and for an equal basis in personal development, as well as for the contribution to the development of society as a whole.

### Institutional definitions of cultural diversity

In 2001, UNESCO adopted the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO 2002). The first two articles define cultural diversity as follows.

Article 1 – Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognised and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.

Article 2 – In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together. Policies for the inclusion and participation of all citizens are guarantees of social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace. Thus defined, cultural pluralism gives policy expression to the reality of cultural diversity. Indissociable from a democratic framework, cultural pluralism is conducive to cultural exchange and to the flourishing of creative capacities that sustain public life.

The motto of the European Union, “United in Diversity”, aims to promote the idea that “via the EU, Europeans are united in working together for peace and prosperity, and that the many different cultures, traditions and languages in Europe are a positive asset for the continent”.<sup>10</sup>

In 2008, the Council of Europe adopted the “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue”, stating that the intercultural approach offers a forward-looking model for managing cultural diversity, based on individual human dignity:

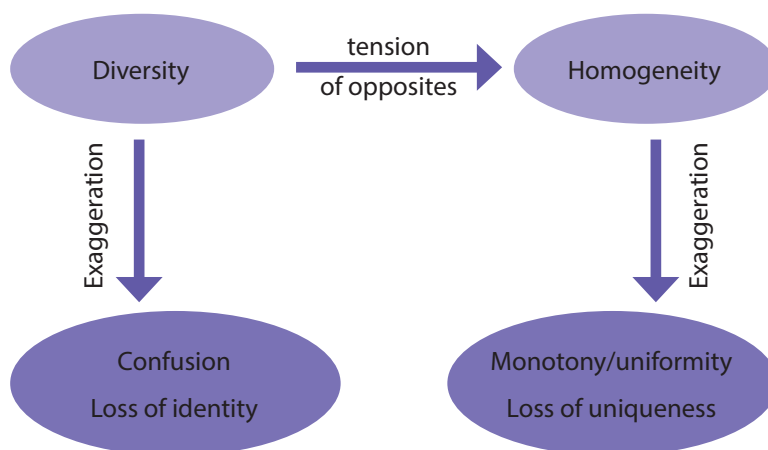
Managing Europe’s increasing cultural diversity – rooted in the history of our continent and enhanced by globalisation – in a democratic manner has become a priority in recent years. How shall we respond to diversity? What is our vision of the society of the future? Is it a society of segregated communities, marked at best by the coexistence of majorities and minorities with differentiated rights and responsibilities, loosely bound together by mutual ignorance and stereotypes? Or is it a vibrant and open society without discrimination, benefiting us all, marked by the inclusion of all residents in full respect of their human rights? The Council of Europe believes that respect for, and promotion of, cultural diversity on the basis of the values on which the Organisation is built are essential conditions for the development of societies based on solidarity. (Council of Europe 2008b)

### Other perspectives on diversity

Going beyond these institutional definitions and the values they are guided by, we must acknowledge that different people have different attitudes towards diversity. And these attitudes are often defined in terms of “positive” and “negative”. Those who consider diversity to be a positive aspect see it as a source of progress and try to make use of its potential. Those who consider it a negative aspect see it as a source of conflict.

This can be pictured well through Schulz von Thun’s value-square model.<sup>11</sup> This model looks at concepts such as “diversity”, and searches for their opposites, as well as for an exaggeration of both.

**Figure 1: Schulz von Thun’s value-square model**



Source: Adapted by Nadine Lyamouri-Bajja

According to this model, too much diversity could lead to confusion or loss of identity, whereas too much homogeneity could lead to monotony, uniformity and loss of individuality. This model enables us to get rid of a “right or wrong” approach, and rather to consider the potential of “both”, thus recognising the needs and limitations of both diversity and its opposite, as well as the risks of reaching extremes in both cases. Furthermore, the words chosen by people help us understand the hidden fears or representations around a word such as “diversity”, which then makes it easier to deconstruct or transform. These value squares can be a constructive way of entering dialogue with people who strongly disagree on themes related to intercultural learning.

When speaking about diversity, there is both the risk of dilution (to consider every aspect of life, every experience, every difference in the concept of diversity) and the risk of essentialisation (to consider that a person who belongs to a certain group that is “different” necessarily represents the viewpoint of that particular group). In the first case, there is too much emphasis on the individuality to the detriment of group belonging, while in the second case there is too much emphasis on group belonging and presupposed homogeneity within groups. For example, in the first case we might believe that we have diversity in a group of heterosexual men with the same religious and cultural background just because they had very different life experiences. In the

10. See [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/motto\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/motto_en), accessed 3 October 2017.

11. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four-sides\\_model](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four-sides_model), accessed 14 December 2017.

second case, we might have the tendency to always look at the African or Australian participant, or search their approval when speaking about things related to Africa or Australia, as if they would represent the point of view of an entire continent.

In the same way, one of the core dilemmas of intercultural learning concerns dogmatism versus relativism. On the one hand, dogmatism signifies that there is only one way of doing things, that “our way is the right way”. In relation to culture, it includes an assimilative idea that people from other cultures should behave in a certain way in order to fit in. On the other hand, cultural relativism implies that all ways of behaving or acting are acceptable if they are defined as cultural practices: “if this is their culture, then it’s OK”. Both extremes are dangerous. Whereas dogmatism leads to a form of fundamentalism and closeness, cultural relativism can lead to perpetuation of unjust or inhumane practices. One way of dealing with this dilemma is through the human rights perspective. The human rights framework allows and supports manifestations of diversity, but at the same time protects people from extreme practices or hurtful behaviours.

Diversity is also viewed differently depending on the particular group it refers to. Some people value certain cultural groups more than others. Therefore, they see cultural diversity as positive only in certain conditions that correspond to their hierarchical view of cultures. They are open to intercultural encounters with the valued groups, but not with those considered inferior or coming from a state that is in conflict with their own state.

All human beings are different and unique in their individuality, talents, potential, desires, but they are equal before the law, as citizens and with regard to their human rights:

He who reduces political language to difference only will come out as an individualist and social Darwinist, he who does the same with regard to equality will end up as collectivist. It is only by keeping the concepts of difference and equality in balance that one can speak of a fair and just society (Council of Europe 2008a).

## Multiculturalist and interculturalist approaches to diversity

One of the recurrent themes of the consultations for developing the “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue” was that old approaches to the management of cultural diversity (such as multiculturalism) were no longer adequate to societies in which the degree of that diversity was unprecedented and ever growing.

Multiculturalism, an approach that focuses on the preservation of different cultures or cultural identities within a unified society, as a state or nation, is a policy focused on sharing a territory and living next to each other, without necessarily interacting with each other.

Multiculturalism is now seen by many as having fostered communal segregation and mutual incomprehension, as well as having contributed to the undermining of the rights of individuals – and in particular women – within minority communities, perceived as if these were single collective actors.

If multiculturalism was a policy aimed at respecting cultural identities of people living in the same social space, interculturalism goes beyond mere coexistence, towards living together in a space of respect, but also of interaction, communication and genuine exchanges. “In this understanding, interculturalism has already processed the lessons of multiculturalism’s limitations, replacing a static parallelism with an emphasis on dynamic interaction and exchange” (Ohana and Otten 2012: 164).

The intercultural perspective first requires us to recognise that reality is plural, complex, dynamic and changing, and that interaction is an integral part of all lives and cultures. Then it asks us to ensure that such interaction fosters mutual respect and the enrichment of mutually supporting communities and individuals, rather than the strengthening of relationships based on domination and rejection. The aim is therefore to search for the truth through dialogue and to work towards mutual understanding (Olafsdottir 2011).

Interculturality refers to the capacity to experience cultural otherness, and to use this experience to reflect on matters that are usually taken for granted within one’s own culture and environment. Interculturality involves being open to, interested in, curious about, and empathetic towards, people from other cultures, and, using this heightened awareness of otherness, to evaluate one’s own everyday patterns of perception, thought, feeling and behaviour in order to develop greater self-knowledge and self-understanding (Council of Europe 2009a).

In a multicultural society diversity is tolerated, but not valued. In an intercultural society all citizens (beyond any categorisation such as national, migrant or minority) have the opportunity both to affirm their culture and to participate in dialogue and democratic processes with the rest of society.

In recent years, the term transcultural has (re)appeared, to recognise the fluidity of cultures and of the “borders” between cultures. It is defined as “involving, encompassing, or combining elements of more than one



culture”<sup>12</sup> a process from which a new, complex and composite reality emerges – a reality that is not a mixture of cultural elements, but a new cultural phenomenon. It is a way for individuals to overcome determinations of their own culture.

With globalisation, there are more and more individuals that do not identify with a specific cultural framework, having lived in various contexts and interacted with diverse individuals on a daily basis, thus creating their own combination of cultural elements with which they identify. Some promoters of transculturalism are critical of both multiculturalism and interculturalism; others recognise the merits of interculturalism in combating discrimination, rejecting ethnocentrism, encouraging respect for differences and supporting access to fundamental rights for members of minority groups, but consider that transculturalism is needed to overcome the polarity of cultures (Intercultural Institute of Timisoara 2017).

Transculturalism focuses on individual rights, freedoms, responsibilities and action. The critics of this approach highlight its failure to take into account power relations and social realities that shape people’s identities and give them different degrees of freedom to combine and interpret cultural factors.

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### Some questions to reflect on

- ▶ How do you perceive diversity in your context? Which aspects of diversity are visible and which are invisible?
  - ▶ What is the link between diversity and discrimination?
  - ▶ Are the young people you work with aware of diversity in society? Which forms of diversity? Which ones not?
  - ▶ Are you aware of any initiative that helps strengthen interactions between different groups in society?
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## WHAT IS INTERCULTURAL LEARNING REALLY ABOUT?

The main purpose of intercultural learning – to reduce ethnocentric perspectives, fight prejudices and promote solidarity actions that support equality in human dignity and respect for the plurality of cultural identities – remains fully valid and more relevant than ever in European societies whose futures are ever more intertwined with and interdependent on the rest of the world (Cunha and Gomes 2009).

This section highlights the key elements and meta-competences that define intercultural learning, acknowledging at the same time that intercultural learning needs to be contextualised and adapted for the needs of the young people educators work with. Intercultural learning requires dedication, consistency, curiosity and respect for human dignity.

First and foremost, intercultural learning is an **educational approach** aiming at the development of individuals’ willingness and ability to live together in diverse societies. It is a holistic and transversal educational philosophy guiding choices made in planning training programmes. It is a lifelong process.

Intercultural learning intersects with education for democratic citizenship, human rights education, conflict transformation and global education; it contributes to the promotion and respect of human rights for all, majorities and minorities; it leads to a deep understanding of the fact that equal opportunities do not mean favouritism, but instead a process that aims to reduce injustice. Intercultural learning is not a separate reality or a set of models and techniques for group work and simulations of culture, it is a world view that respects and promotes diversity, while continuously challenging the status quo and the power structures in society.

Intercultural learning has the **potential for social transformation**; it is a tool for social change that deals with everyday social and political realities in Europe. It provides a framework for the analysis of one’s own living and working context and ways for young people to assess when the framework of “culture” is useful to understanding and acting in their context, and when it is less useful.

As an educational approach that has potential for social transformation, intercultural learning equips participants with a set of competences that help them navigate the complex realities of diversity, while focusing on ensuring social justice and human rights for all members of society. We present below a model that highlights the main aspects of a coherent approach in intercultural learning.

Intercultural learning **values diversity** and promotes a world view in which diversity is rooted in equality and is not seen as an obstacle or used as justification for marginalisation or exclusion. Intercultural learning does not simply mean learning about cultural differences, it means engaging with them and using this knowledge

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12. Webster’s New World College Dictionary (2014).

to create new meanings and narratives. It also means understanding the complexity of cultural groups, the intricate connections and the power relations among them. Respect for cultural diversity is strongly linked with respect for human rights. Promoting the art and traditions of a culture while its members are not able to enjoy their human rights is a superficial way of addressing diversity. At the same time, not being aware of cultural specificities makes it difficult to allow access to human rights, to adapt services to the needs of various groups and to develop authentic relations between different groups in a given society.

Intercultural learning is about **multiperspectivity**. It acknowledges the fact that there is no single perspective about reality. The way in which people perceive reality is the reality for them and attempting to find an absolute truth is pointless. Shifting perceptions leads to changes of reality. Depending on from where you look at it, the number 6 might look like a 9 and a 9 might look like a 6. Depending on their cultural or socio-economic background, people might look at the same things and see something totally different. And they might all be right. What is considered acceptable or not, good or bad, the “right” values to have, is all a matter of perspectives. Intercultural learning encourages the use of diverse sources of information, to learn about the perspectives of diverse groups in their own voices, in order to get a more nuanced understanding of reality and broader viewpoints. Moreover, intercultural learning works on deconstructing the nation-centred narratives often used in teaching history.

Intercultural learning takes a clear stand **against discrimination and other forms of intolerance and social injustice**. An important objective of intercultural learning is to develop the abilities of young people to recognise the existence of stereotypes and to understand the impact of prejudices on their lives and on other people’s lives. It offers the means and tools to break the stereotypes and to deconstruct the ethnocentric perspectives. It promotes attitudes and behaviours that address social injustices and foster positive relations. Intercultural learning denies any reminiscent idea of racial superiority or a hierarchical distribution of ethnic groups.

Intercultural learning offers an **alternative to multiculturalism**. Interculturalism goes beyond simple co-habitation or respecting cultural identities “from a distance”. The intercultural approach facilitates dialogue between different socio-cultural groups as a way to learn about and from each other and to work together for the development of society as a whole. It also offers an alternative to cultural relativism by taking a stand against practices that do not respect human rights instead of simply labelling them as “cultural traditions”.

Intercultural learning promotes **equal opportunities and active participation**, by giving everyone a voice. Ensuring a ratio of migrants or minorities in order to “satisfy the cultural diversity requests” is not enough. The aim is to create the conditions for people from disadvantaged groups to participate.<sup>13</sup> Equal opportunity does not mean equal treatment; it means differentiated treatment with the aim of reaching equality and social justice.

Intercultural learning contributes to the development of **solidarity and social cohesion**, defined as “the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation” (Council of Europe 2004). Intercultural learning processes develop the capacity and willingness of individuals, groups and organisations to co-operate and work together for collective goals by encouraging people to practise empathy and engage in civic, political and cultural participation.

Intercultural learning takes into account the **political and structural implications** of everyday life. Speaking about intercultural learning without including the **power context** in which intercultural encounters occur would exclude a big part of our reality. Too often conflicts are characterised as “cultural” by the state and racism is perceived as an individual pathology, while omitting the institutional and political fundamentals of racism and discrimination. Tolerance and awareness, even though they are crucially important, are sometimes presented as the end game of intercultural learning. This approach assumes that cultural identities are inherently problematic, without taking into account the deep foundations of institutional and state racism (Titley 2009: 80). By addressing structural discrimination and developing strategies for consensus, social action and transformation, intercultural learning contributes to changing the status quo and redressing social justice.

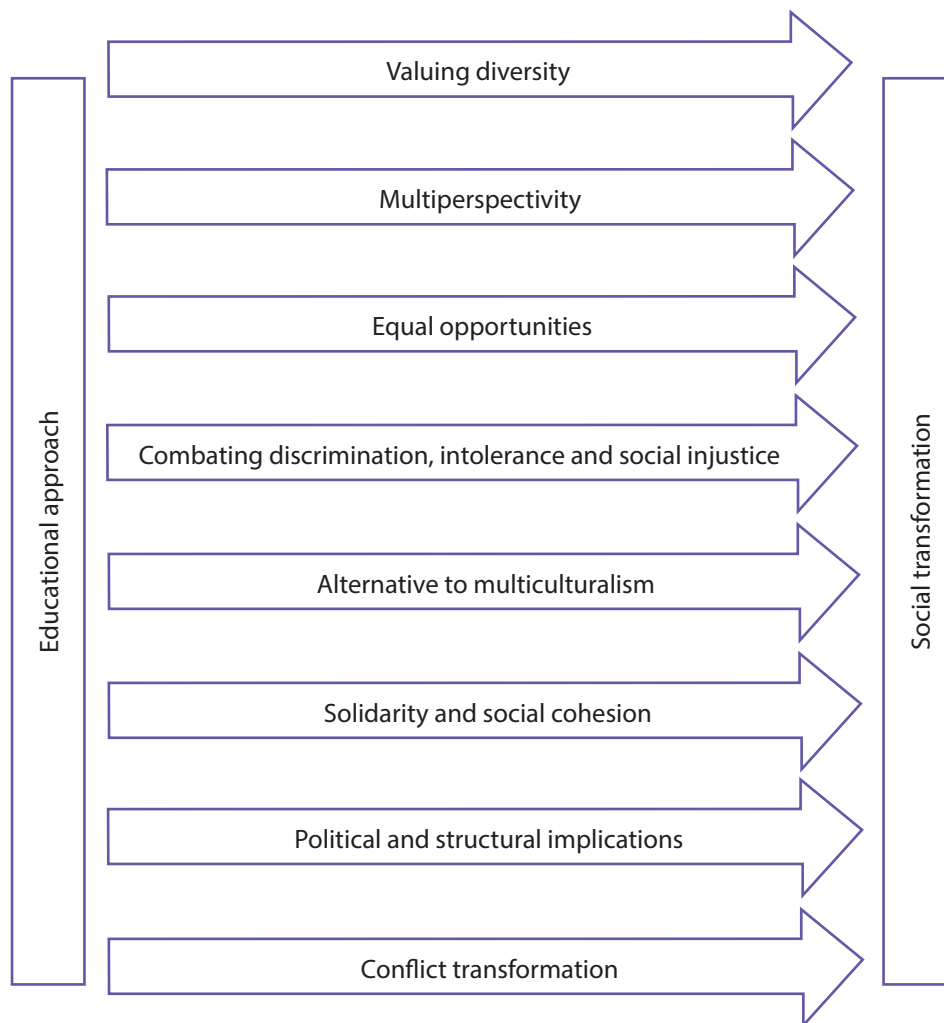
For many people, intercultural learning is instantly associated with **conflict**. From an intercultural learning perspective, conflict is seen as a source of development. It is regarded as a neutral form of disagreement, which can be an opportunity for clarifying opinions, perspectives and ideas. Whenever people come together, there is potential for conflict. Avoidance of conflict only serves to aggravate the situation and exacerbate the effect or to create parallel societies. Intercultural learning offers the tools for being an active citizen who is able to question and is prepared to be questioned by others, one who listens and is listened to, who has the courage to disagree, but also the willingness to work through a conflict and to reach a common solution.

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13. In 1992, Roger Hart developed a model for children’s participation, available here: [www.coe.int/en/web/compass/on-the-ladder](http://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/on-the-ladder), accessed 3 October 2017.



Figure 2: Main aspects of a coherent approach in intercultural learning



Source: Oana Nestian Sandu

## STEREOTYPES, PREJUDICES AND DISCRIMINATION

Stereotypes and prejudices are interrelated concepts that affect our perception of people and our intercultural relations. Intercultural learning aims to equip young people with the tools to identify stereotypes and prejudices in their own and in other people's behaviour, to understand how they function and to take conscious steps towards breaking them.

**Stereotypes** are generalised, oversimplified or exaggerated beliefs about a group of people. A stereotype is "an image in our mind", that determines how we come to hold certain beliefs about a person, just because that person belongs to a certain group. A stereotype is not a category, but a fixed idea or belief about that category, a cognitive representation of a social group and its members. Stereotypes are born from the need to categorise the world into clear and simple groups. Categorisation saves time in processing information, satisfies the need to understand and predict actions and makes people feel better about themselves (since usually they think their group is better than other groups). At the same time, this simplification of the world leads to a partial and inadequate understanding of it.

When we base our perception on stereotypes, we categorise others based on a few easily identifiable aspects and we believe that most people in that category are similar to each other, but dissimilar to people in other categories. The stereotype acts as a filter of information and attributes a standard of behaviour to all members of a particular group, triggering prejudices and blocking the possibility of a real dialogue between members of cultural groups that perceive themselves as different.

**Prejudices** are negative attitudes of rejection towards the members of a group, based on the simple fact that we see them as belonging to that group. One can be prejudiced against someone based on characteristics such as perceived race, gender, ability, ethnicity, nationality, religion, age, social status, sexual orientation, etc.

Stereotypes and prejudices make us act like this: we do not see before we define, but we define before we see. Therefore, based on our pre-definition about other people, we unconsciously choose to see only the aspects that confirm our stereotypes and prejudices. It is a selective interpretation of the reality. Stereotypes are mediators, filters through which we see the reality, a shortcut that our brain activates when it has to deal with complex or unknown situations. When we meet people who are different, there is the tendency to choose the preferred knowledge, the knowledge that confirms our stereotypes.

Stereotypes are a way of mentally organising complex information in order to simplify the world and make it more familiar, so that the brain can operate easier. The problem is that once we create the categories and put people in them, there is the human tendency to avoid any information that is new, or does not correspond to our categories. Even though stereotypes about certain groups can be considered positive in terms of the attributes (certain cultures are considered punctual, good at languages or at maths, etc.), they are generalisations that prevent us from looking at the person behind the category.

While stereotypes are cognitive structures and prejudices are attitudes based on value judgments, **discrimination** refers to behaviour. It is an unfair behaviour towards the members of a group, based on the prejudices that exist towards that group.

There are different types of discrimination.

- ▶ Direct discrimination – Policies and behaviours that intentionally differentiate by cultural belonging and harm certain groups.
- ▶ Indirect discrimination – A standard that apparently is neutral, but in fact the ones who use it are aware that a specific group cannot conform to the standard; for example, a certain dress code that is either too expensive for some socio-economic groups or is not in accordance with their religious practices.
- ▶ Structural discrimination – A complex form of discrimination in which the state institutions and structures fail to provide adequate services and equal opportunities to people because of their cultural belonging. It persists because state institutions fail to recognise and address its existence and its causes and do not act to repair the historical injustices that were carried out towards specific groups of people.

Many people experience discrimination on more than one ground. This is called multiple discrimination or intersectional discrimination. For example, a disabled Roma woman may experience discrimination based on her disability, ethnicity and gender. Our identities are multifaceted and recognising how different aspects of our identities interact has important implications for combating discrimination. A single-ground approach to discrimination fails to understand the diversity within a certain cultural group and the complexity of people's identities.

Discrimination is, most of the time, practised with the support of (or at least with no interference from) the government.

Intercultural learning challenges and rejects discrimination in all its forms and affirms pluralism (ethnic, linguistic, religious, economic, gender, etc.). Moreover, the European Court of Human Rights has recognised that pluralism is built on "the genuine recognition of, and respect for, diversity and the dynamics of cultural traditions, ethnic and cultural identities, religious beliefs, artistic, literary and socio-economic ideas and concepts", and that "the harmonious interaction of persons and groups with varied identities is essential for achieving social cohesion".<sup>14</sup>

The effects of stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination are very powerful. They are identifiable not only at individual level, in specific cases of discrimination towards one person, but also at societal level. People who are stereotyped or discriminated against have limited access to public services, their human rights are not respected and their personal development and opportunities to contribute to the development of society are hindered. As a consequence, they might internalise those stereotypes and develop a lower self-esteem, choose isolation or manifest violent behaviour.

Reporting discrimination is not always easy. While there are certain policies and mechanisms that people can use, the procedures are often laborious. At the same time, people might choose not to report discrimination out of fear of being targeted further. Therefore, many situations of discrimination might go unnoticed. This is even more the case when it comes to prejudiced behaviour. However, there are certain aspects that are clearly visible at societal level that can be seen as "red flags", signalling that more needs to be done to combat discrimination and develop intercultural societies. The following are some examples.

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14. See *Gorzelik and Others v. Poland* [GC], No. 44158/98, 17 February 2004 (Council of Europe 2008b).

- ▶ Access to human rights and social rights:
  - Do all people have access to quality services in all areas of life?
  - Are they able to enjoy their rights fully?
  - Can they be active citizens and contribute to the development of society?
- ▶ Presence in public spaces. Visibility of people belonging to various minorities means they are not segregated or excluded. It shows they are viewed as equal citizens and that their presence and contribution to society is valued. For example, are they present:
  - in the news (but not as scapegoats for all the problems of society);
  - in the entertainment industry or advertising (but not as alibis for diversity);
  - in public events;
  - in school books;
  - in political positions, in the government?

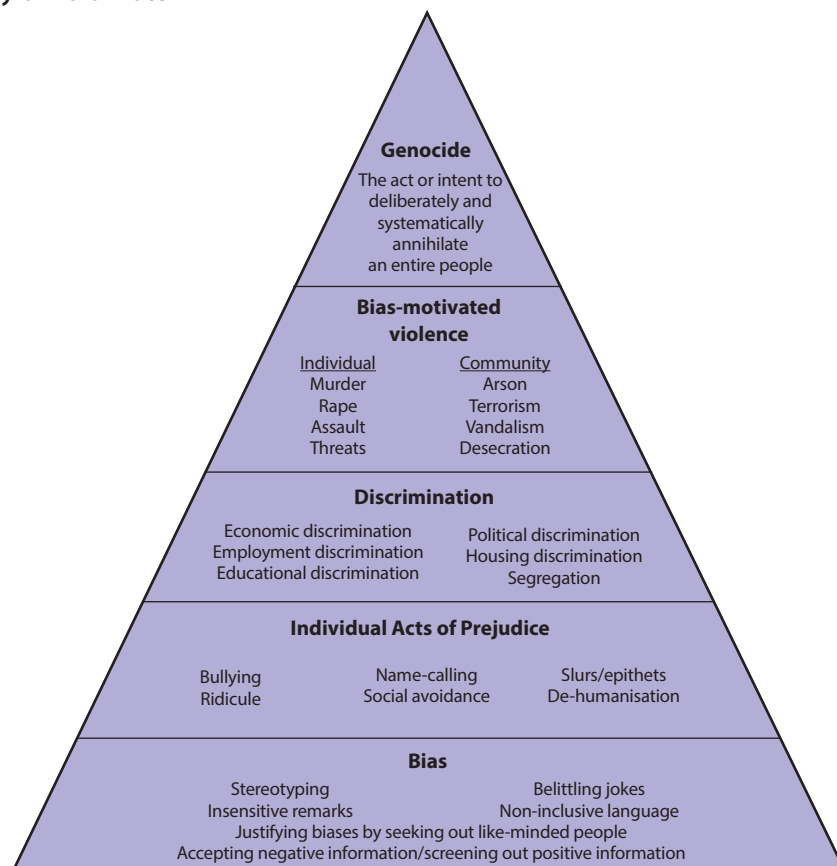
And if they are, is the ratio comparable to their ratio in society?

- ▶ Intercultural relations. Are people belonging to various cultural groups, abilities, gender or sexual orientations living together with the majority in intertwined relations or are they living separately, in a segregated way?

Discrimination has its roots in deeply ingrained beliefs that certain cultures are inferior to others, that there is a hierarchy of cultures and that some people deserve to be treated with less respect or to be given fewer opportunities. Acting upon these beliefs creates a snowball effect in which the targeted cultural group is treated worse and worse and the behaviour towards them gets more and more violent.

A very powerful representation of this escalation of bias is illustrated in the “pyramid of hate”. This model shows that practices like stereotyping, making belittling jokes, using non-inclusive language or name-calling – all of which could be considered “minor” – are at the root of discrimination, violence and even genocide. It shows that no bias is minor or harmless and that we all have a responsibility to review our daily behaviours, beliefs and language in order to break the conscious and unconscious perpetuation of social injustice. The idea of the model is not to categorise pain, since this is very subjective and experienced differently by everyone, but to show that our everyday behaviour is subject to bias. Looking at the model, it is easy to understand the importance of acting to eliminate the behaviours at the base of the pyramid, before they become even more harmful. The earlier we act to challenge bias and increase awareness about diversity and human rights, the more allies we will have in constructing an intercultural society in which everyone is able to affirm their identity and to develop positive relations with other members of society.

**Figure 3: The pyramid of hate**



Source: Anti-Defamation League (2005)

## How do we break stereotypes?

Stereotypes are easily formed and perpetuated. People learn them from parents, educators, peers, the media, etc. Unfortunately, they are not easy to eliminate from people's world view, vocabulary or interactions. Conscious effort is necessary, along with a variety of efforts made at both the individual and societal level. Creating spaces for people with various backgrounds to meet and learn about each other, campaigning and activism, ensuring visibility in the media of people belonging to stereotyped groups and presenting stories that challenge the dominant narrative, and taking cases of discrimination to court are all powerful examples of ways that can contribute to reducing or eliminating stereotyping.

The examples presented below describe behaviours that can be encouraged in intercultural learning settings, which can contribute to breaking stereotypes and promoting more inclusive societies.

### 1. Being mindful of the language we use

The language that we use can create stereotypes and perpetuate them indefinitely in conscious and unconscious ways. We can break this cycle if we understand the impact of the words we use. For example, in 2013 Associated Press stopped using the term "illegal immigrant" to describe a person, explaining that illegal should only describe an action, not a person. Moreover, various expressions exist in different languages that denigrate or dehumanise people belonging to certain groups. One might think that such expressions are harmless, but they contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes and to the perception that those people are inferior in some ways. There are even more subtle ways of using the language to promote stereotypes and division. For example, the "us versus them" distinction in phrases such as: our democracy, our jobs, their religion, their culture.

One important question to be raised in intercultural learning is the transformation of language. Language and the use of words change with history. Some words or expressions that used to be common are no longer acceptable, as they directly target certain groups or express some strong prejudice.

### 2. Engage critically with texts and discourses

It is not always easy to identify stereotypes, especially if we do not pay attention. However, once our critical thinking is activated we can certainly identify them almost anywhere. For example, the media always mention the ethnicity of a person if that person committed a felony, but rarely mentions it when the person has done something positive.

We can avoid falling victim to bias if we read between the lines of a text and ask questions such as: What is the source of this document and what are their intentions? Are statistics being used to manipulate public opinion? Are rhetorical expressions or metaphors used to create more sensationalism and buzz around the subject? Is it possible to read about the same event in other media in order to notice commonalities or differences?

### 3. Become aware of one's own stereotypes

One of the aims of intercultural learning is to create a safe space for participants to reflect on personal bias, knowing they will not be judged. Acknowledging that we have stereotypes or that we have committed acts of discrimination does not come easy, but it is an important step in developing the openness and curiosity for intercultural encounters. It is also crucial for changing the narratives and challenging the status quo. Once people become aware of their own stereotypes, they can take steps to break them and to become agents of social change.

### 4. Focus on similarities, not just differences

When addressing diversity, there is a tendency to focus exclusively on differences. While differences are certainly relevant, so are similarities. They help us get a broader and more nuanced perspective and become more open to a potential connection. Focusing on similarities makes people feel that we see them as individuals and not as cultural stereotypes. This does not mean completely ignoring the differences (which is described as "minimisation" in Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity presented in Table 2), but seeing differences for what they are – something different, which does not have to be immediately valued as good or bad.

### 5. Encourage self-affirmation

Research shows that people start to believe the stereotypes about themselves and internalise them. This means that not only do they unconsciously act in a way that confirms the stereotypes, but they also do not feel empowered to affirm their self-worth. Policies that support people in affirming their cultural identity in

various settings contribute to diminishing stereotypes and to increasing the self-esteem of people who are stereotyped. Moreover, intercultural learning creates contexts in which people can identify the stereotypes they internalised and that empower them to stand up against injustices and discrimination.

## 6. Engage in dialogue

Just as there are general characteristics about culture, there are also nuances and variations. We can avoid falling into the trap of automatically presuming that a person coming from a certain country or belonging to a certain culture should behave in a certain way, by being open to dialogue, by actively listening and asking questions instead of letting stereotypes take the place of genuine communication and interaction. This is only possible if we engage more in dialogue and “turn off the autopilot” that sometimes takes over.

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### Some questions to reflect on

- ▶ How are stereotypes perpetuated?
  - ▶ What can be the effects of stereotypes and prejudices upon our intercultural encounters?
  - ▶ How can we break stereotypes?
  - ▶ Which groups of people experience discrimination in your context? Are there any programmes and policies in place to address it?
  - ▶ Which levels of the pyramid of hate do you think you can specifically address through your work?
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## MODELS AND THEORIES OF INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

Various theoretical models explain the intercultural relations in our societies, define intercultural competence or describe intercultural learning processes. The theoretical models, applied to historical and social realities, help shape frames of reference. They help develop better ways to address these challenges in educational activities. As Bennett (2009) acknowledges, “there is very little intercultural theory that exists for its own sake: that is, theory that does not directly relate to the facilitation of intercultural practice”.

Educators and trainers need to constantly evaluate the relevance and limitations of existing models and invite young people to do so as well, to make sure that those models do not perpetuate a hierarchical understanding of cultures and do not maintain the hegemony of certain groups.

It is equally important to connect theoretical knowledge with social realities of the past and the present, to understand the fundamental principles of the historical process, to realise how and why humanity has arrived at some of the present complex situations at local and global level and to develop positive visions of the future (North-South Centre of the Council of Europe 2008).

We would like to invite readers to take time to go deeper into these models in order to avoid the danger of oversimplifying theories. Complex realities imply that theories also have a certain degree of complexity. By oversimplifying a theory, one runs the risk of oversimplifying or omitting complex issues that are part of reality.

Here are some questions that can help reflect on the relevance of theories or models.

- ▶ Is this model really about intercultural learning?
- ▶ Does the model make it possible to take into account other aspects in the interpretation of reality, besides culture (for example, historical injustice or socio-economic factors)?
- ▶ Does the model offer a framework to interpret reality without oversimplifying it?
- ▶ How does this model relate to other models and theories of intercultural learning?
- ▶ Can this model be used in various contexts, parts of the world or groups?

Three theoretical frameworks used in intercultural learning are presented below. These models were also chosen on the basis of their depth and relevance to the context of youth work. The diversity of approaches was also considered. The first model is designed mainly from an educational approach. The second model, the model of acculturation orientations, shows a perspective of the relations in society, while the third one refers to intercultural sensitivity from an individual point of view.



## A model of intercultural competence

The authors of the “Autobiography of intercultural encounters” (Council of Europe 2009a)<sup>15</sup> used the following model of intercultural competence to frame a number of identifiable elements that an individual can develop in order to be “equipped” for intercultural encounters.

### Attitudes and feelings

- ▶ Acknowledging the identities of others – Noticing how others have different identities and accepting their values and insights. This means accepting the complexity of reality and of people, dealing with ambiguous situations and contradictory opinions.
- ▶ Respecting otherness – Showing curiosity about others and being willing to question what is usually taken for granted and viewed as “normal”. It starts with trying to understand others, acknowledging their identities and refraining from putting them into preconceived boxes. It involves willingness to relativise one’s own values, beliefs and behaviours, not to assume that they are the only correct ones.
- ▶ Having empathy – Being able to take someone else’s perspective, to imagine their thoughts, their feelings, their opinions and motives, and to consider them in our own actions.
- ▶ Identifying positive and negative emotions and relating them to attitudes and knowledge – Self-awareness and self-knowledge are important parts of emotional intelligence.
- ▶ Tolerance for ambiguity – The ability to accept ambiguity and lack of clarity and to be able to deal with this constructively. This means being able to grasp the ideas, feelings and intentions of other people, accepting that there can be multiple perspectives on and interpretations of any given situation, but also showing real interest in what other people feel and how they perceive situations.

### Behaviour

- ▶ Being flexible – Adapting one’s behaviour to new situations and to what other people expect.
- ▶ Being sensitive to ways of communicating – Recognising different ways of communication that exist in other languages or other ways of using the same language. It involves the ability to recognise different verbal and non-verbal conventions, and to negotiate rules appropriate to intercultural communication.

### Knowledge and skills

This kind of knowledge does not refer primarily to knowledge about a specific culture, but rather knowledge of how one’s own and others’ social groups and social identities function.

- ▶ Having knowledge about other people – Knowing facts about people whom one meets, and knowing how and why they are what they are.
- ▶ Having knowledge about social processes – Understanding the interaction processes in a given society, at group and individual level. This involves becoming aware of one’s own assumptions, preconceptions, stereotypes and prejudices.
- ▶ Skills of interpreting and relating – The ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one’s own.
- ▶ Skills of discovery and interaction – Using certain skills to find out about people one meets, by asking questions, seeking out information and using these skills in real-time encounters.
- ▶ Critical cultural awareness – The ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries. This means becoming aware of one’s own values and making them explicit in interactions with other people. It also means taking a fundamental position on values that acknowledges respect for human dignity and human rights, as the democratic basis for social interaction.

### Action

- ▶ Action orientation – The willingness to undertake some activity alone or with others as a consequence of reflection, with the aim of making a contribution to the common good.

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15. The “Autobiography of intercultural encounters” is a tool developed by the Council of Europe and designed to encourage people to think about and learn from intercultural encounters that have made a strong impression or had a long-lasting effect on them.

## Relevance to the context of youth work

This model gives an overview of specific characteristics that can be developed through intercultural learning. These characteristics are grouped into four categories: attitudes and feelings; behaviour; knowledge and skills; action. The model does not explain how these characteristics are interlinked or how they can be developed in non-formal settings, but it can be a helpful starting point in designing intercultural learning processes and running activities aimed at developing these characteristics.

An activity based on the “Autobiography of intercultural encounters” is described in Chapter 4, “Educational activities”.

## Interactive acculturation model

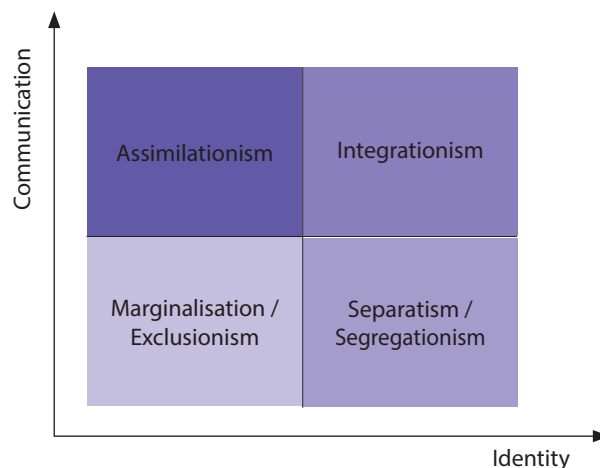
Acculturation is defined as an exchange process between people belonging to different cultural groups, which leads to cultural, linguistic, religious and psychological changes. Acculturation rarely takes place between groups with equal status and power. Most often it is an exchange process between the majority and minorities, or the majority and migrants.

The acculturation orientations defined below are drawn from the initial work of John Berry (1980), and further developed by Richard Bourhis (1997).

Acculturation orientations are defined based on the answers given to the following questions.

1. Is it considered to be of value to maintain one’s identity and characteristics? (Identity axis)
2. Is it considered to be of value to maintain relationships with society as a whole? (Communication axis)

Figure 4: Acculturation orientations



Source: Adapted from Bourhis (2007)

The answers to these questions reflect on the one hand how minorities/migrants view themselves in society and, on the other hand, how the majority expects minorities/migrants to behave.

These acculturation orientations are presented below, first from the majority community perspective and then from the minority/migrant perspective.

### Acculturation orientation of majority groups

**Assimilationism** – The desire to have minorities give up their cultural/identity characteristics in order to adopt the cultural/identity characteristics of the majority. This reflects a situation in which the behaviour of a person is considered “normal” only when it reflects completely the characteristics and values of majority culture.

**Segregationism** – A tolerance of the minority culture/identity as long as they live separately, in specific neighbourhoods or regions (ghettos, for example). Segregationists avoid contact with minorities as they believe this would dilute or weaken the integrity and authenticity of their culture/identity.

**Exclusionism** – No tolerance for the minorities’ culture/identity and a belief that certain groups can never assimilate within the majority community. Certain exclusionists create the conditions to incite minorities to leave the country/neighbourhood.

**Integrationism** – The valorisation of the maintenance of certain aspects of minority identity and a willingness to modify one’s own institutional practices and certain aspects of the majority culture to facilitate the integration of minority groups. It reflects a situation in which there is freedom of expression and opportunities to affirm cultural identity, as well as spaces for dialogue between different members of society.

**Individualism** – The tendency to define oneself and others as individuals and not as members of groups. This leads to an ignoring of cultural aspects in social interaction and a focus on individual characteristics.

### Acculturation orientation of minority groups

**Assimilationism** – This reflects the willingness to give up most aspects of one’s own culture for the sake of adopting the cultural practices of the majority.

**Separatism** – This is characterised by the desire to maintain all the features of one’s own culture, while rejecting the culture of and relations with members of the majority culture or other cultural groups.

**Marginalisation** – This characterises individuals who feel ambivalent and somewhat alienated from both their own and the majority culture, thereby feeling excluded from both their heritage culture and the culture of the majority.

**Integrationism** – This reflects a desire to maintain key features of one’s own culture, while also valuing the adoption of key elements of the majority culture.

**Individualism** – The tendency to define oneself and others as individuals and not as members of groups. This leads to an ignoring of cultural aspects in social interaction and a focus on individual characteristics.

### Relevance to the context of youth work

This model offers a framework for understanding intercultural relationships in society. An interesting aspect of the model is the fact that it presents the reality from the perspective of both dominant and non-dominant groups. It can serve as a tool for interpreting the policies of institutions regarding minorities and migrants and for analysing discourses, media articles or general attitudes towards different groups of people. The activity “From exclusion to integration”, described in Chapter 4, is based on this model.

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Questions to be asked in youth work in relation to this model could be as follows.

- ▶ Who should adapt to whom? Why?
  - ▶ How much should I give up in order to adapt/integrate? What are my personal limits?
  - ▶ Is this model applicable in the same way if I move by choice (for studies, to work abroad or travel) or if I am forced to flee my country?
- 

### Developmental model of intercultural sensitivity

This model provides a theoretical framework to understand and assess how we subjectively experience differences. The underlying assumption is that difference must be experienced and then processed in order to increase the potential of intercultural competence and to effect changes in the levels of intercultural sensitivity. The model is a continuum of six stages of intercultural sensitivity. Three of these stages are ethnocentric (denial, defence and minimisation) and three are ethno-relative (acceptance, adaptation, integration). In the ethnocentric stages, the tendency is to avoid cultural difference, while in ethno-relative stages it is to seek cultural difference.

**Table 2: Developmental model of intercultural sensitivity**

<i>Ethnocentric stages</i>			<i>Ethno-relative stages</i>		
<i>Denial</i>	<i>Defence Reversal</i>	<i>Minimisation</i>	<i>Acceptance</i>	<i>Adaptation</i>	<i>Integration</i>

Source: Adapted visualisation from Bennett (1986)

**Ethnocentrism** – One’s own culture is experienced as central to reality and maintains the assumption that one’s world view is superior to others.

The three ethnocentric stages are as follows.

**Denial** – One’s own culture is experienced as the only real one. Denial can be based on isolation or separation. In situations of physical isolation, there is little chance of being confronted with difference, therefore cultural difference is not experienced. Nowadays, this situation is almost impossible, but partial isolation is still possible. In situations of separation, physical and social barriers are created intentionally, so that people can remain comfortably in denial. “The other” is seen in a general and undifferentiated way, such as “the foreigner” or “the immigrant” and needs to be kept at a distance. Ethnically distinct neighbourhoods, intense nationalism or viewing the others as humans of a lower level are examples of barriers set in the denial stage.

**Defence** – When people move beyond denial and realise that cultural difference does exist, the first tendency is to fight against it. In the defence stage, cultural difference is perceived as threatening, as something that needs to be fought against. One’s own culture is experienced as the only viable one. Cultural difference is experienced in a stereotypical, racist manner. The world is organised into “us” and “them”; one’s culture is superior to the culture of others. There is an emphasis on the positive attributes of one’s own culture, and no or little attention to that of others, which implicitly is valued lower.

A variation of defence is **reversal** – One adopts another culture that is viewed as superior, denigrating one’s own cultural background. Even if people in this stage know more about other cultures, they are still at an ethnocentric stage; the only difference is that they have changed the culture at the centre of their reality. They still act out in a defensive manner towards their original culture and consider there to be a hierarchy of cultures.

**Minimisation** – In this stage, difference may not be fought against, but there is an attempt to minimise its meaning. Elements of one’s own cultural world view are experienced as universal. Cultural differences may be subordinated to the fact that we are all humans (and we have the same physiological needs – ignoring the fact that we might have different ways of satisfying them) or that religious, economic or philosophical concepts have a cross-cultural applicability. Even if differences exist, they are not perceived as relevant.

**Ethno-relativism** – Difference is no longer perceived as a threat, but as something that needs to be sought in order to progress. An attempt is made to develop new categories of understanding, rather than to preserve existing ones. One’s own culture is experienced in the context of other cultures.

The three ethno-relative stages are as follows.

**Acceptance** – Difference is acknowledged and respected. At this stage, there is both an acceptance of different behaviours and their underlying values. Acceptance does not mean agreement, but the differences are not judged based on ethnocentric and hierarchical world views. Cultural relativity is accepted and one’s world view is considered to be just one of many complex world views.

**Adaptation** – Difference is perceived as part of one’s normal self, as one has internalised it in two or more different cultural frames. Culture is not seen as something one has, but more as a process. New behaviour that is appropriate to a different world view is learned and added to one’s repertoire of behaving, with new styles of communication being at the forefront. Central to adaptation is empathy, the ability to understand others by taking their perspective, not only at a cognitive level, but also at affective and behavioural levels. An individual can rely on several distinct frames of reference, or multiple cultural frames. One does not have to give up one’s own culture and adopt another. One’s world view is expanded to include relevant constructs from other cultural world views.

**Integration** – Whereas in the adaptation stage several frames of reference exist next to each other within one person, in the integration stage an attempt is made to integrate the various frames into a coherent whole that is culturally marginal. Integration demands an ongoing definition of one’s own identity in terms of lived experiences and one’s own relationship to a given context. Contextual evaluation is the ability to evaluate different situations and world views from one or more cultural perspectives. Individuals in this stage are marginal to all cultures and therefore create their own realities. This can be a very uncomfortable place (if people fail to assume responsibility for the reality they create), but it is also a powerful state. People in this stage are well suited to act as cultural mediators.

## **Relevance for the context of youth work**

People are generally more inclined to fear difference than to seek it. Overcoming ethnocentrism requires hard work in becoming more aware of the differences, understanding why people react the way they do in certain

situations and exploring new relationships across differences. Bennett's model has proven to be a good starting point for the design of educational programmes for developing intercultural sensitivity. Bennett implies that intercultural learning is a process characterised by continuous advancement (with the possibility to move back and forth in that process), and that it is possible to measure the stage an individual has reached in terms of intercultural sensitivity.

This model can be a useful frame of reference for reviewing content and methods of training, for analysing the degree to which they contribute to the development of intercultural sensitivity. The model does not have to be strictly interpreted in terms of stages; it can also be viewed as different strategies to deal with difference that are applied according to circumstances and abilities.

The activity "The stages of intercultural sensitivity", described in Chapter 4, is based on this model. The Pixar short film *Day and night*,<sup>16</sup> which shows the stages of the Bennett model, is another good resource for presenting the model to participants in a creative way.

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16. [http://pixar.wikia.com/wiki/Day\\_%26\\_Night](http://pixar.wikia.com/wiki/Day_%26_Night) accessed 14 December 2017.