

# Diversity as an asset: The cultural approach to migration

Training provided to the participants of  
the Erasmus+ project

**“The whole school approach in the  
integration process of migrants”**

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# Five words to work on:

Culture

Subjectivity

Identity



Diversity (or difference)

Interculture

*For each of these words, write down in five minutes time what they mean to you. Just very simple concepts, without thinking too much. After that, put what you've written somewhere, leave it there, and let's start talking about them*

# Culture

If we want to define (our) “culture”, we can easily refer to writings, songs, paintings, dances, God, religion, family and government definitions, foods, movies, sex, gender, etc., until we have time and wish to write something. It’s an endless exercise, useful, but not enough for what we want to do.

More interesting is to define culture watching it from “behind”: why we consider (our) culture that way of singing, painting, praying, writing, and not other ones? What is actually culture made of? In this case, we have to refer to a specific context, in a specific period, and for a specific (part of a) population.

In other words, we can’t say universally “culture is this and that”.

Universality is made out of singularities, and singularities differ from place to place, period to period, people to people, and, above all, produce more than one universality

# Culture

Culture is composed by norms that define containers, modalities and contexts within which principles, values, beliefs, categories, behaviour's codes, etc, in human beings' relationship are applied. These norms define a relation between significant and meanings.

Those norms turn a defined set of the above mentioned elements into the ones that “naturally” belong to a specific context, in a specific period and for the majority of a specific population. We can define this process as a no-stop production of enunciations.

This sense of “naturalness” is at the core of the way we are subjugated by those norms and we consider ourselves subjectivated in those same norms. We are subsequently interpellated, spoken and called in a way that we recognize and we respond to it.

This operations of culture is not “on our lives” but it is “**at the level of our lives**”. Its power is not applied on a specific component of our lives only, but it operates on **our lives as a whole**.

# Culture and subjectivity

A part of the population, or the majority of the population is not the whole population.

“Population” and “people” have two different meanings, but now we don’t keep in consideration such a difference.

There’s always a component out of the latter, as well as out of the former, that doesn’t recognize those norms or a part of them, that shows a different way to interact with them, that produces another set of values, principles, traditions, wishes, desires, acts, and subsequently another set of songs, paintings, sexual relationships, writings, thoughts, etc.

# Culture and subjectivity

What does occur in these cases?

An exceedance, a surplus, that can't fit the requested position for the subject, that produces a different form of subjectivity, because the subject in this case uses different cultural means to interact with other persons, with job, with sex, with family, God, etc.

We have here a “fleeing element”, that should be brought back to the norms; a usual way to do so is to “extract” what is somehow acceptable out of his being “fleeing”, and to thwart, to stigmatize what can't be acceptable of the exceedance. This is often translated in a “desires' government”

Culture is the field of a “position battle”, in which different forces face each other, evaluating the space that can be occupied, in a certain moment, what can be won and what can be lost.

What is at stake is always cultural egemony.

# Culture and identity

History – people’s history – is constructed along the dichotomies winner-loser, dominants-subalterns, culture-counterculture. It always occurs also within the State’s borders, within the city’s walls, within a small or bigger community.

Multiculturalism has been belonging to the modern human being for some centuries. It is not a phenomenon related to migration only. We are all products of a cultural battle, but the same battle can bring to different narrations, implies different points of view, generates different ways to be positioned in each of the many stages where we perform our life on a daily base.

# Culture and Identity

“Identities are names that we give to the different ways in which we position ourselves and we are positioned by the narratives of the past”, also very recent. From this point of view, cultural identity is combined with the concept of cultural tradition (also to be seen always in an evolutionary key and never consolidated once and for all). The identities are “positions that the subject is forced to take, even if he always knows that they are representations and that representations are always constructed through a lack, a division, starting from the place of the Other, and therefore they can never be entirely adequate - identical - to the subjective processes that are attributed to them” (S. Hall, 2006).

Identities are built on the basis of the "outside constitutive". What is not me (the negative) allows me to define what I am (the positive). It must be reiterated with a certain strength: **the construction of identity is an act of power, based on a process of closure.**



# Culture and difference

What chance do we have to operate in opposition to that closure?  
To understand this point clearly, we have to relate to the idea of “difference”.

Firstly, we have to consider “difference” as a concept continuously in progress: it depends on how one perceives himself in the relation with the other, and this perception depends on the position that I keep and the one the other keeps. In other words, it depends on the “in-between”, “deviation” that marks the area between two cultures. That area is not fixed, is not definable always the same way: it varies and is modified by the interaction of the two cultures. They stay one in front the other and produce a lot of temporary, isolated and partial contacts and contaminations.

That occurs in a “**third space**”, in-between the two cultures.

# Culture and difference

On a different plan, but very important indeed, we should ask: how differences work, or how are they put at work? What are they useful for?

We have to distinguish here between a first level difference, and a second level difference.

The former is an anthropological differences (undefinable and indissoluble), “which is used to govern the humanity of men and their unequal access to citizenship”.

The latter is the one that tends to the denial of differences and at the same time their erection at the principle of division of individuals between mutually exclusive identities. This is produced through the separation between neutralization of belongings and their absolutization (Balibar, 2018).

# Culture and interculture

The multicultural condition does not belong to the categories of static, quite the opposite; it does not limit itself to photographing a state of the art, but presents itself as the basis on which, in different areas and times, power relations, policies, practices and representations are produced. Interculture acts on the same level, it identifies those modes of interaction already existing in the facts between cultures, practices of identity representation; it highlights possible contaminations and contacts, with the awareness of the temporary nature of the value they have, within the context in which they are inscribed and which cannot be ignored.

# Culture and interculture

Organizations such as your school or Transglobal are located in that “third space” where hybrid, translation practices are continually acting, where the differences show daily their temporary and constitutive character of the subjectivities that are built there and that is built by them at the same time, on the basis of power relations and ideological representations, which are nothing more than the consequence of the relationship between subjects and living conditions, also always in transformation.

# Culture and interculture

These organizations live, by definition, the boundary, or, to better say, the boundaries that cut across the metropolises, creating areas of continuity and fragmentation between spaces and times that mark the differences in our contemporaneity. But in order to avoid that these differences produce divisions, the space between them must be considered as a work space, where they are recognized and valued as such, as an added value to our personal and collective growth.