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## LIMITATIONS TO LAUNCHING DEVELOPMENT PROJECT OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN THE MILITARY ENVIRONMENT

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**Abstract:** *Through this article we intended to highlight the stage in which projects on developing the intercultural communication competence were launched and implemented that is, to identify the possibility of applying them within the military environment. Generally speaking, projects have been implemented within the European environment, on topics related to training persons willing to work abroad and also "training" teachers` intercultural communication competence. The military environment has been "avoided" by launching some international projects, although researchers have identified the need to form at least some skills/abilities concerning intercultural communication. In the present article an important emphasis is on directions and limitations regarding the possibility of launching such projects having as starting point the Romanian military educational environment.*

**Keywords:** *projects, communication competence, Romanian military personnel*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

A prolific direction of developing an interpersonal communication competence and, especially, an intercultural one, concerns the launch of projects that involve military educational institutions of Romania and of partner countries of the North-Atlantic Alliance or of the European environment. For a judicious projection of such a tool of developing the intercultural communication competence, we have pictured projects on this topic regarding the general educational environment, then, we've focused on the military environment, in order to identify, in the end, the directions and limitations on the possibility of promoting the formative design of Romanian military personnel in accordance with the intercultural requirements derived

from their working performance in the theatres of operations.

### 2. PROJECTS ON GENERAL EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Starting from the models of forming/developing the intercultural communication competence, some developing projects of this competence have been implemented. One of these is the IICEE project (Interpersonal and Intercultural Competence for Enlarged Europe), accomplished within the framework of Erasmus/Socrates program that aimed at and applied a module for training persons willing to work into a boundless world. This module has been structured on three learning units:

- „*interpersonal and intercultural communication abilities, of presentation and team working*;
- *problem-solving creative strategies*;
- *trans-cultural project management and team working facilitation*” (Sola, Wilkinson, 2008:59).

Accomplished with the financial support of the European Committee, coordinated by Great Britain and with partners from Germany, Spain, France, Finland, Italy, Netherlands, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia, the IICEE project aimed at developing the communication competence by the accomplishment of an interrelation between the cognitive, affective and conative subcomponents, of this competence, courses being „*experimental, conceptual, practical, prospective and imaginative*” (Schneider and Barsoux, *apud* Sola, Wilkinson, 2008:60). The IICEE module intends to allow managers (the present or future ones) to continue their objectives within diverse cultural environments and to assure them the necessary abilities to act into a multicultural context. In order to develop the intercultural communication competence, this module aims at, among other things, assuring the needed level of knowledge and at forming the abilities necessary for intercultural communication competence<sup>1</sup>. For example, in Great Britain, at Thames Valley University, the project included the ICBE module (Intercultural Communication for Business Environment) organized for 15 weeks, that presupposed

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<sup>1</sup> The purposes of the course are: „*1. to equip learners with the necessary knowledge, capabilities and skills, drawn for a range of academic disciplines and vocational backgrounds, to work and provide leadership in cross-cultural management contexts; 2. to introduce learners to the major principles strategies and tools of „cross-cultural management”; 3. to provide current and future practitioners with an internationally respected cross-cultural expertise and to broaden learners’ awareness of the European dimension by consciously focusing on perspectives provided by the new member state; 4. to enhance learners’ employability and job performance in the European and global labour market*” (Sola, Wilkinson, 2008:62-63);

spreading from the European level to the global one.

Other projects in the field of forming/developing the intercultural communication competence targeted the communication efficiency within a variety of cultural frameworks, of the development of multicultural consciousness or social mobility into a world where multicultural professional staff became an everyday reality. The European Council supported many projects that intended to develop the intercultural communication competence and/or the critical cultural consciousness for native or non-native speakers (Penz, 2009:55-58).

One of these projects, ICCinTE (Intercultural communication training in teacher education) coordinated by Ildikó Lázár, aimed at introducing the „training” intercultural communication competence into the teachers’ training schedule. The project ended with the achievement of a guide about forming and evaluating the intercultural communication competence (Lázár *et al.*, 2007). The reference model used within the forming project is that of Byram’s, a set of forming and evaluating methods being proposed, such as:

- intercultural knowledge (*savoirs*) from the humanist perspective, in terms of culture and civilization, from anthropological perspective, in terms of diversity knowledge and from sociological perspective, in terms of knowledge of socio-cultural background;
- the intercultural *know-how* (*savoir-faire*), that is, forming/evaluating with the purpose of interaction, adequacy, integration, interpretation and negotiation within distinct cultural backgrounds;
- intercultural identity (*savoir-être*), that is forming/evaluating critical cultural consciousness, considering other identities, beliefs and values in relation to own identities, beliefs and values (Lázár *et al.*, 2007:27).

Evaluation, predominantly formative, targets not only the enhancement of knowledge level but also catching performative abilities in the given contexts, along with displaying the reference elements from the new world perspective.



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LEA Project (Language educator awareness), coordinated by Mercè Bernaus, made on support structure of competences, as they were defined through the European Common Framework of Reference, aimed at teachers' training in order to develop the multilingual and multicultural consciousness. LEA project objective was to develop social cohesion through teaching/learning a foreign language, and for that, within the process of teaching, a set of useful materials has been elaborated to introduce into teaching practices of multilingualism and multiculturalism. The intercultural communication competence (or the multilingual and multicultural competence) can not be acquired by overlapping other competences, but it represents a complete complex, dependent on the accomplishment of four dimensions: the socio-affective dimension, the dimension of linguistic and communicational registers, learning strategies dimension and interaction management dimension (Bernaus *et al.*, 2007:15). The working areas, inseparable at the practical level, but possible to be interpreted distinctly at theoretical level, were the social and the personal ones, that is, the professional one.

ICOPROMO project (Intercultural competence for professional mobility), coordinated by Evelyne Glaser had objectives close to those of IICEE project: it triggered the development of critical cultural consciousness into native and foreign cultures and the development of intercultural communication competence for persons that intend to work into distinct cultural environments or into international companies (Glaser, Byram, 2007). Made after the intercultural mobility model, and presupposing intercultural learning through mobility, the project intended to provide the multicultural teams with the necessary background for team- working with other cultures representatives. The project

benefitted of Michaël Byram's involvement as expert in the field of forming the intercultural communication competence. The project coordinators considered that forming the intercultural communication competence represents a process that never stops during the whole life, each new experience increasing the competence.

GULLIVER project (To get to know each other leads to better mutual understanding), coordinated by Magdalena Bedynska, offered the possibility to organize a forum for intercultural interaction of 23 categories from 22 European countries (Penz, 2009:56-57). The organization of this virtual discussion forum analyzed the possibility to integrate such authentic interaction instruments into the routine of classroom teaching act, with the purpose of forming/developing the intercultural communication competence.

### 3. PROJECTS REGARDING MILITARY EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

In the military field, the problem of cultural contact with other cultures representatives was not given special importance. In order to accomplish the peacekeeping mission, the soldier (no matter the source culture), follows a training program in the country and where the mission takes place. But, in some cases, due to the lack of some relevant international experiences and, as there is no adequate training, the own cultural matrix will shape the way of thinking and acting in relation to the others. The necessity of adequate training, and especially, of forming/developing the intercultural communication competence, has been remarked by various researchers, but no training program has been implemented based on one of the models previously mentioned or

a theoretical substratum that came from the adaptation of one or more models to the inland cultural stock. As a rule, military field researchers speak of the necessity of shaping some skills/abilities or see the intercultural communication competence as a juxtaposition or addition of abilities, formed and automatically put into play. „*Many of the skills required for intercultural competence also relate to learning – learning about one’s own culture and that of the stranger, learning new communication styles and scripts, learning to suspend judgment and perceive new ways of looking at situations, and learning new patterns of behavior*” (Elron *et al.*, 2003:269). In such a case, a way of developing this competence is the cultural adaptation of the military personnel to the terms of mission development, by social engagement into the cultural background in a comparative manner (when representatives from more cultures meet within a common and normalized framework of mission development, they usually do, in the beginning, comparisons between affiliated cultures, followed by learning out of specific differences related to customs, norms and values of The Other), that is, by involvement into specific aspects of requirements, by exploitation of cultural differences and by trying to find the optimum modality of meeting the mission demands (inclusively by identifying those differences that can lead to lifting of some communicational barriers) (Elron *et al.*, 2003:269).

This manner, of cultural adaptation, is not always adequate, as the mission period of time is limited and the cultural adaptation may provide answers regarding the adequacy of cultural behavior without explicit understanding of the necessity of adopting that particular behavior. The easiest way is that of adequate selection and training the personnel that is to participate in a mission. An adequate selection and training may assure a higher efficiency level concerning the mission accomplishment, given that „*Humans embedded in the complex military systems must possess the knowledge, skills, abilities, aptitudes, and temperament to perform their roles effectively in a reliable and predictable manner, and effective military management*

*requires understanding of how these qualities can be best provided and assessed*” (Blascovitch, Hartel, 2008:7). So, the military system needs professionals who, besides the requirements related to adequate use of technology, to stress resistance, to behavioral flexibility, to the ability of acquisition in the field of using a foreign language, must have a proper level of cultural consciousness. Thus, the requirement of forming/developing the intercultural competence is imperative as long as the mission accomplishment depends on the understanding of a certain intercultural context. On the other hand, once leadership is based on communication, efficient communication means to understand the others. From this perspective, the communication competence must be formed. Additionally, considering Wen’s model, for an adequate response in the theatres of operations, the servicemen need the forming/developing of intercultural communication competence.

Even if projects developed regarding forming/developing the intercultural communication competence for the military personnel that joins peace keeping missions do not exist, the committee for opportunities in basic research in social and behavioral sciences for the American army draws attention on two major aspects related to forming the intercultural communication competence for military personnel:

- firstly, they recommend research and development of projects in this reference field: „*The Committee recommends six areas of research on the basis of their relevance, potential impact, and timeless for military needs: intercultural competence, including second-language learning; teams in complex environments; technology-based training; nonverbal behavior; emotion; and behavioral neuropsychology*” (Blascovitch, Hartel, 2008:2);

- Secondly, the way forward for developing the intercultural communication competence is recommended: „*The ability to navigate and adapt to different cultures is known as intercultural competence or cultural intelligence. The latter term includes cognitive (knowledge of language, customs, beliefs),*



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*psychical (body language, gestures), and emotional (confidence, adaptability, openness) components. Thus, a key issue for the military is to select, train, and develop individual who possess these qualities and to be able to function in multiple cultures"* (Blascovitch, Hartel, 2008:15)

Although the necessity of forming/developing the intercultural communication competence has been reported, The U.S. doctrine does not contain elements concerning the way in which cultural consciousness may be activated. More, despite the interest to form the cultural consciousness at political and diplomatic levels, the culture role (language, religion, values etc.) is also neglected when it comes to training, to learning a foreign language, but especially, when it comes to training for international missions: *"Cultural awareness is not currently included as part of foreign language training, and the cultural training provided to soldiers prior to deployment trends to be overly simplistic, typically focusing on lists of do's and don'ts without providing a context for cultural understanding. Current US joint doctrine does not stress consideration of any type of cultural awareness and competence factors during the deliberate planning process. Intelligence gathering also neglects culture"* (Wunderle, 2008:1). But, if the problem of the lack of adequate training is raised in what the U.S. army is concerned, then it can be easily recorded in the case of other armies. Researchers in the field of military sciences of other western armies have also remarked the necessity of a proper lesson, of an adequate training, in line with international mission requirements. Regarding the German army, Maren Tomforde draws the attention on developing intercultural abilities: *"Besides their military skills soldiers, especially officers, also need political, diplomatic as well*

*as intercultural abilities in order to meet the various demands the missions"* (Tomforde, 2009:40). The Dutch army trains cadets to form their intercultural communication abilities, and the training is done as a result of accumulated intercultural experience, in a certain order and with emphasis on some aspects considered important: *"(...) cadets also receive, prior to their academic education, training in Intercultural communication and Negotiation. During this training, cadets' cultural competences (such as openness, respectfulness and cultural empathy) are first assessed, and hopefully subsequently enhanced by, amongst other things role-play exercises"* (Olsthoorn, 2009:155). Canadian researchers in military sciences field operate with the term *"cultural intelligence"* (*cultural intelligence, CQ*), similar to that of intercultural communication competence. CQ becomes a compulsory requirement for adapting to contemporary operational environment, being necessary to be integrated *"into education, training, planning, and operations"*. Starting from general Robert H. Scales's assertion, dr. Emily Spece (2010:115) underlies the need to develop a high level of cultural intelligence (Spence, 2010:119-120)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> *"(...) officers and soldiers need to learn how best to use information and hand to afford the most desired results when dealing in intercultural situations. Essentially, they need to know how to demonstrate high CQ. In order to demonstrate high CQ, individuals must be capable of critical thinking, understanding basic human behaviour and the human rationality, appreciating the basics of cultural groupings, as well as understanding and appreciating the role that perspective plays in people's configuration of the world, their place in it, and their view of your place in it. Learning these four foundational skill sets will enable soldiers to apply specific regional/cultural information about a particular group of people in order to further their cause and achieve their aim."*;



The phrase „cultural intelligence”, used mainly in the specialized literature of North America, hasn’t been defined with the same methodological rigor as the intercultural communication competence. Emily Spence (2009:125-126) remarks that there are distinct terminologies used for advantageous exploitation of cultural knowledge<sup>3</sup>, by „cultural intelligence” meaning the intercultural communication competence. On the other hand, William D. Wunderle (2008:53) subordinates cultural understanding and intelligence to cultural consciousness, whose maximum stage is represented by cultural competence<sup>4</sup>.

Irrespective of the used terminology, the issue of developing the intercultural communication competence applies only theoretically, the mission cultural training being done by providing a set of prescriptions (of „yes” and „no”) that do not give also the possibility to properly understand the cultural fund.

The same issue of an insufficient mission training from the cultural point of view was remarked in the case of the Romanian Army. Călin Hentea (2006:33) shows that „*This peace-keeper connection to the culture and reality of a theatre of operations is kept in*

<sup>3</sup> „Ces termes includent, notamment, la connaissance culturelle, l’astuce culturelle, la littérature culturelle, l’appréciation culturelle, la compétence culturelle et la compétence interculturelle; il y a aussi de nombreux acronymes proposés pour désigner l’intelligence culturelle, par exemple IC, CULTINT, CQ, etc.(...) le terme IC ne limite pas le concept à un strict calcul mathématique d’une compétence statique, De plus, quelle que soit la manière de désigner le concept, en bout de ligne, l’objectif est de déterminer ce qui permet aux gens de fonctionner efficacement dans les contextes culturels.”;

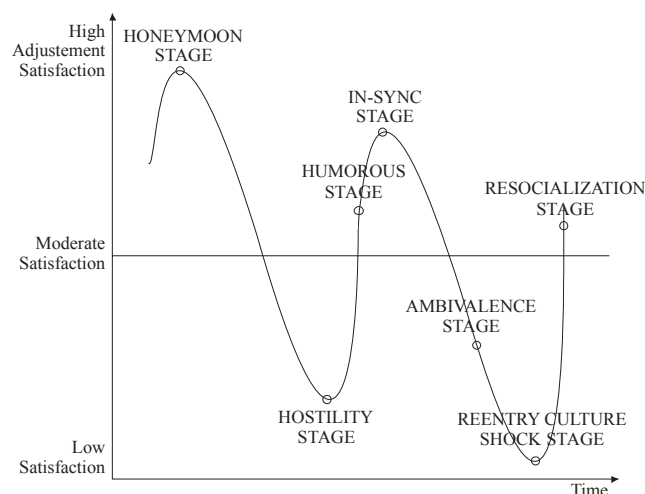
<sup>4</sup> „Cultural competence is the highest level of cultural awareness, representing the fusion of cultural understanding with cultural intelligence to allow for focused insight into planning and decision-making for current and future military operations. Cultural competence can be achieved only with adequate cultural intelligence – intelligence gathering that actively seeks information on the adversary’s culture and the influences of this culture on decision making”;

*most cases at a superficial level that is not enough to realize a more profound intercultural dialogue. One of the causes of this situation is principle of military staff rotation once in six months, period considered as being optimal from their psychic affordability, but insufficient from the its mission effectiveness point of view”<sup>5</sup>.*

To underline how the low level of cultural consciousness can affect the success of a mission, William Wunderle (2008:54) appeals to an adaptation of Gullahorn & Gullahorn’s intercultural adjustment model (*apud* Spitzberg, Changnon, 2009:23)<sup>6</sup>. Cultural understanding may be realized not only as a result of an adequate training, but also as a needed adequacy to the intercultural environment (theatre of operations). In the first case, this final stage is a certain result, whereas, in the case of adaptation, depending on the profile of the military in mission, either the desired stage is reached, or there may be a failure in the mission accomplishment.

<sup>5</sup> Călin Hentea, „Aspecte ale comunicării interculturale în teatre de operații și zone de criză”, în Ioan Deac (coord.), *Securitatea și apărarea spațiului sud-est european, în contextul transformărilor de la începutul mileniului III*, Sesiunea anuală de comunicări științifice cu participare internațională „Strategii XXI/2006”, 13-14 aprilie 2006, secțiunea *Comunicare publică*, Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, 2006, p.33;

<sup>6</sup> *U-Curve Model of Intercultural Adjustment:*





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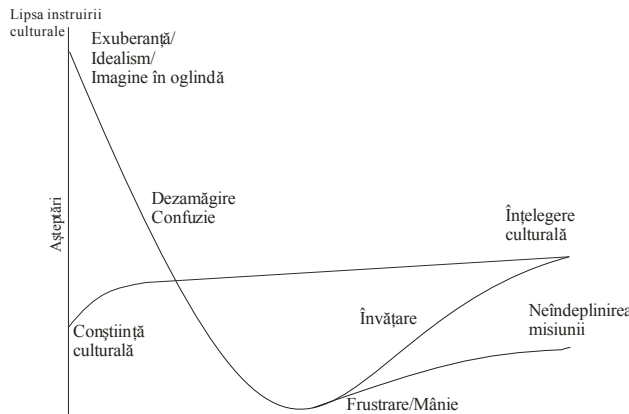


Fig. 1 Cultural awareness and expectation management

**4. DEVELOPING PROJECTS OF INTERPERSONAL/INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE OF ROMANIAN MILITARY PERSONNEL. DIRECTIONS AND LIMITATIONS.**

Thus, a method of forming/developing the intercultural communication competence is that of real intercultural dialogue within the process of forming, and it can have a place not only in a pre-established diplomatic framework, but also through the launch of some international projects about the intercultural dimension of the military training for peace-keeping missions. Even if this method is only a pioneering idea in the field, not only in Romania, but also in states with a rich tradition in applying intercultural projective instruments, such a project would be only a step to confine with only theoretically, but also one that easily allows implementation. To do this, military higher education institutions of Romania (the academies of the categories of armed forces, and, especially, The National Defense University), may take the initiative to sign partnerships with similar institutions to realize

joined training programs in order to form/develop the intercultural communication competence by adequate curricula projection to the new international mission requirements, that benefit of „good practice” guides and other similar tools in interpersonal/intercultural communication field. Such a program may target the development not only of cognitive competences, concerning knowledge deepening (and inter-knowledge) cultural and linguistic, of understanding the evolution of cultural and linguistic system from interrelation cultural perspective, of developing the ability to understand the intercultural phenomenon, of some instrumental-operational competences, about the ability to utter correctly, orally and in written form, to the ability to correlate and express the acquired knowledge, to the ability to correctly analyze the linguistic structures, but also of some relational competences, that aim at communication efficiency and its adaptation to distinct contexts and the introduction of relational competences among the military professional competences. Last, but not least, joint study programs may establish different methods of developing the intercultural/ interpersonal communication competence by bringing into discussion distinct international experiences, starting with projected indicators, that are easy to quantify (Van der Zee, van Oudenhoven, 2000:291-309), as cultural empathy, openness to new, social initiative, emotional stability or flexibility.

For a well-balanced planning of such a project of forming/developing the intercultural communication competence within the military higher educational system not only an initial adequate planning is necessary (the plan and the project proposal, the pre-project stage), but also the continuous review and improvement of it. Thus, it's necessary to

consider the update or even the project plan development that is, updating the planning tools. From this perspective, a rather rigid system according to the ability to adapt to the new requirements, such as the military system, will allow for much more strict limitations regarding development. The educational system and the military one, illustrative of two different ways of thinking, one of openness, the other of closeness, meet in the military system of education, that submits to some rigors seen as intrusions into the civil institutionalized educational environment. Even if, in Romania (Legea educației naționale, 2011), the national higher educational system is based on academic autonomy principle (art.110, letter a.), even if this academic autonomy and liberty are guaranteed by law (art.115, al.(1)), even if „*the university autonomy gives the right to university community to establish its own mission, its institutional strategy, structure, activities, its own organization and operation, its material and human resources management, with the strict observance of the legislation in force*” (art.115, al.(2)), even if „*the military higher education institutions, of information, of public order and national security benefit of university autonomy principle*” (art.171, al.(2)), higher education institutions of Romania are subject to some bureaucratic structures of force categories staff (education, culture and sport departments) or from the General Staff, that have as main activities to design and approve the educational programs and to supervise their accomplishment (Training and Doctrine Department of the General Staff, based on *Regulations applied to the military education management No. M6/1998*), to select eligible candidates for officers and NCOs’ training course following the indirect selection procedure (regional centers of selection and orientation, according to *Decision no.132/29 December 2009*<sup>7</sup>) or their admission (military institutions of education: the application schools belonging to all categories of the armed forces/ training centers, military schools for warrant and non-commissioned officers,

based on a curriculum and bibliography established by the *staff of the armed forces categories/ arm command/ structures incorporating educational institutions where courses take place*” and approved by the Human Resources Management Directorate, according to the same Decision), and designing educational plans for training officers selected from the civilian environment and which do not allow for academic autonomy manifestation.

#### 4.CONCLUSIONS

In this respect, the planning and implementation of transnational projects of forming/ developing the communication competence at the initiative of military higher educational institutions of Romania may be stopped, especially those regarding the continuous affiliation to the new requirements, the revision and its improvement. An example of university autonomy limitation concerns the European program of mobility „Military Erasmus”, that presupposes cooperation, at the education and research levels, organization of joint MA with bilateral university recognition, creating and applying some mobility programs, that can be accomplished only as a result of an action from outside the institution, more precise, from Human Resources Management Directorate.

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