Demands for Intercultural Communicative Competence in Working-Life: A Case Study of Swedish Higher Education Co-operation with Baltic Neighbour, Estonia

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12. DEMANDS FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN WORKING-LIFE.

SOME EXPERIENCES OF SWEDISH HIGHER EDUCATION CO-OPERATION WITH BALTIC NEIGHBOUR, ESTONIA

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher Education is one of the key motors of cultural change; scientists today stress the urgency of global awareness and co-operation. The Estonian educational scientist Kreitzberg concluded in 1994 that Estonia was in need for a new paradigm of educational thinking, "away from positivistic premises towards the hermeneutical and critical ones", and for the establishment of "democratic procedures of decision-making at every level of educational guidance" (Kreitzberg, 1994, p 106). Many efforts in this direction have been made. A brief introduction will highlight the difficulties that Estonia faced after the liberation in 1991 and the assistance offered through European and Swedish higher education programmes and grants, until becoming an EU candidate state. Then the scope will be narrowed to the interpersonal level to address some potential problems of intercultural communication, primarily based on experiences from co-operation between Swedes and Estonians in the context of higher education. In human affairs, we are just at the beginning, and if we are going to survive we must, according to Young (1996), create intercultural understanding and learn effective intercultural communication. Intercultural communicative competence implies, and this is emphasised here, competence on both sides. The achievement of intercultural competence is very much a learning process, formal or informal, and also an interactive process. It is even claimed here that the intercultural communicative competence is an important aspect of that potential that critical theorists often mention, but seldom approach. Thus, we need to look closer at difference, adopting a pluralist, and a relativist approach, difference being perceived as something mainly positive.

Examples of problematic aspects on intercultural communicative competence will be analysed and discussed with a point of departure in a number of ”critical incidents”. The situations referred to stem from encounters between members of the

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Swedish or other Western societies and members of the Estonian society, here exemplifying but one of the countries in Eastern Europe. The author will try to come close to an intercultural contextual evaluation, as recommended by Bennett (1986).

2. ESTONIA IN THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

Political change in Eastern Europe has, anew, put Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on the map. The developments in the Baltic Sea area during the last decade can be described through the concept of transition, i.e. planned economies are changing to market economies, and private ownership is reintroduced. Social systems and educational systems are involved in radical change processes. Political and legal frameworks are changing, and the traditional rights of democratic states are being recognised. From a Western European perspective it is easy to look at the Baltic area as one cultural, political and economic entity. But even if each one of these countries stresses common necessities, to develop a national identity, to modernise the higher educational system and teacher training in a democratic direction, they speak each one for themselves.

Since the Baltic countries expressed the wish to enter into the market economy, each country with its own currency, this meant a challenge to the total infrastructure of the three countries. There were needs for complex technological advancements, restructuring in working-life, improvements in the quality and mobility of human capital, creating and maintaining democratic relations at all levels in society. Western Europe and America were asked to help in this process. Direct, permanent and close relations to the Western world and to Western institutions are aimed at. Of the three countries, Candidate State Estonia is well advanced in the pre-accession, and will probably be the first one to join the EU. Estonia has also applied in 1999 for membership in the WTO.

Each one of the Baltic countries has its own language, with different roots. Even if English language knowledge is spreading among the young, only a small number of academicians had some knowledge of English or German in the beginning of the 90s. This became clear to the author when giving an intercultural communication course at Tartu University in 1996. Even though the course was announced in English language, half of the group didn't understand a single word of English, on the other hand they knew fairly good German. The course has since then been given yearly simultaneously in English and German**.** It seemed that persons from the bigger cities more often were trained in the English language. Exceptionally few knew both languages. Even if the Russian population has been somewhat reduced after the independence Russians constitute the biggest group of non-Estonians, today around 27 % of the total population of 1.5 million. Geographical concentration sometimes gives Russian population absolute majority, in the border city Narva more than 90 % of the total population. There were several Russian private universities and academies opened in Estonia during the last years, but they never gained acceptance and were closed down. The participation of Russians and Estonians is rather proportional, although Russians are more often

found in non-university higher education and private institutions that mainly recruit Russians. Some Russians add a year to their studies to take Estonian language courses, to be able to enter into university higher education.

The three Baltic countries have emphasised the need for concepts for national education, strengthening the national self-consciousness, and thus guaranteeing a "due place for national identity", and, on the other hand "education for Russians and other national minorities". From the Baltic perspective Russians are not looked upon as immigrants, but as former occupants. A special concern is the insufficient knowledge of Estonian language among the Russians, a problem that originates from the occupation period, when Estonians were forced to speak Russian. Since 1996 there is a special teacher profession for Estonian language skills training in Russian schools.

The situation in Estonia after the liberation was similar to that of other former SU states.

There was in general a lack of comprehensive higher education development and reform policies. The inheritance from the Soviet higher education system did not go along with the national development requirements. The prevailing system was instead characterised by centralised management, low efficiency, and poor links between education, research, and industry. The former Soviet curricula, had aimed at preparing labour force and loyal citizens, and was characterised by a heavy load of politics and ideology, hierarchical relations between teachers and students, lacking philosophy, ignoring psychology and sociology, isolating theory from practice, using only Russian educational theory. Study aims were remote from life, atomistic, academic, causing lack of motivation, integration and holism. Memorisation of facts instead of reflection, questioning and decision-making was the rule.

Already in 1987 Kreitzberg strongly criticised the Estonian educational system for its overcentralisation of educational steering, indifferential curriculum and overinstitutionalisation of schools. His critics at the Education Congress made waves in the other Baltic countries (Priimägi, 1995). At times, the situation in Estonia could be described in terms of participative democracy and a bottom-up revolution (Kreitzberg & Priimägi, 1998). "In the Main principles of Public Education in Estonia (1989) the Estonian curriculum was criticised for a reverse logic - the achievements of science had been enumerated, whereas the broader social and meaning context of scientific activities as well as the ways of resolving scientific problems were not explained or opened to the learner" (ibid. p 168). Decentralisation was thus discussed in public already before the opening and has since been striven for. Training for democratic leadership and democratic mechanisms of decision-making, clear descriptions of steering functions for every level of management are necessary steps to take if to succeed in building a communicative network within the educational field. The need for restructuring, democratisation and modernisation was enormous and has made progress, even if there is still much to do.

Kreitzberg (1994, p 98) doesn't believe that countries of former Eastern Europe represent any specific way of educational thinking compared to that of the

West. "In Estonia, the dominant style of educational theorising and thinking reflects much of what we could classify under positivism, with its aspirations for value neutrality and scientific objectivity, with all its basic difficulties and invalidity popular in Western thinking". He warns for "simple-minded and total criticism of the Estonian educational past" and rather seems to mean that we have common problems of paradigmatic character. He even sees a crisis of legitimisation of education. "Positivistic or any other possible foundational approaches to the legitimation of education has a totalistic, globalistic character, emphasising at the same time expertism, scientism, and the naturalness of educational phenomena, competency; silencing and disqualifying any local or "abnormal" discourses, which inevitably serves the goal of exclusion...rejecting the need and possibility of a democratic way of decision-making. From another side, different postpositivistic discourses such as critical approach, hermeneutics, poststructuralism, postmodernism, critical pragmatism, which all can be called antifoundational, legitimate a multiplicity of understanding, describing and planning of education giving hope for many voices, and in many cases linking truth claims, professionalism and knowledge to the power games aiming at domination. The main critique of dominant foundational educational discourses is addressed against their totality, against the supposed naturalness of educational phenomena. Totality is substituted with relativity and locality; objectivity with subjectivity etc. Few authors, however, convincingly argue against the Either/Or type of thinking. The task now seems to get beyond that. We need to preserve a notion of totality that privileges forms of analysis in which it is possible to make visible those mediations, interrelations, and interdependencies that give shape and power to the larger political and social systems" (Kreitzberg, 1996).

During the first decade of independence a huge number of projects aimed at teacher training, and in-service training, preparing teachers for new subjects, for the teaching of integrated subjects, and for an interdisciplinary integration of the curriculum were launched. Many teachers were trained as one-subject teachers. Foreign language studies were motivated by the opening up of the three countries, and are in the development of new teaching methods using modern technical devices.

The libraries were filled with Soviet educational literature in Russian language, but contained very few books on contemporary Western education. Textbooks were of low quality, saturated with facts, not addressing whether students nor teachers. There were very few books in foreign language (English and German), and too few copies, which made them more or less unavailable for students. On top of that very few books were translated from foreign languages into Estonian. As a result, teachers for long times were forced to use their lecturing time reading the books to the students, or giving them their own summaries of the books.

All kinds of modern technical facilities for teachers and students were lacking, and access to databases was not possible for years. Today, Estonia has made a "tiger jump" in computerisation of schools, ranging somewhere between France and the UK. Adult education was practically unknown, and there was great interest

in this field. Already in 1989 there was an increasing interest in adult education, primarily focusing on further training. Juceviciene (1994) describes how Estonian scientists were the first to discuss the notion of andragogy during the conference Methods of Further Training in 1986. "They particularly stressed the importance of adult education in the science and practice of education. Andragogy, assumed to be a branch of pedagogy, forced scholars to think about a broader understanding of educational science…The necessity of the term, to include a new broader notion became clear. It was also important that adult education denied the authoritarian approach in education and required non-traditional means and forms of instruction. The need to consider methods of interactive teaching and educational technologies emerged" (ibid. p 44).

3. INTERNATIONALISATION

The Academic Co-operation Association (ACA), an independent European organisation launched in 1996 a project aiming at the investigation of different national policies regarding the internationalisation of higher education in a number of European countries and with some limited perspectives on Eastern and Central Europe. The study was co-ordinated by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (HSV) who also published the results (National Policies, 1997). Astonishingly they found that internationalisation was not part of the mainstream higher education policy making, it was playing a minor role in governmental policies for higher education for a long time. The authors talk about a missing link between internationalisation and higher education policy.

The term internationalisation is a very recent aspect of higher education. It is often referred to ”in terms of international co-operation, mobility and exchange (with related issues such as recognition), or in terms of supra-national, policies and programmes for stimulating such co-operation and exchange (e.g. the EC programmes)” (Van der Wende, 1997, p.15). Rationales for internationalisation include political, educational, cultural and economic categories and vary between countries as suggested by van der Wende (ibid. p.37) and developed by Knight and de Wit in 1995. The relative importance of each of the rationales is indicated on a respective axis in a model. The cultural and the academic rationales have been emphasised in Sweden, more than political and economical (Kälvemark, 1997a, p.178).

Internationalisation tendencies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and Russia are discussed by Bremer (1997, p.213) with the help of the same set of rationales as for the Western European countries. ”Before the changes of 1987, the limited degree of international co-operation of the CEE countries and Russia was based mainly on political and cultural motives, and only to a very modest extent on educational or economic rationales. In particular, of course, the then Soviet policy of co-operation with the CEE countries and developing countries was politically and partly culturally based. The current basic concept can be defined as a wish to re-join the European (CEE) or world (Russia) educational community. This is in CEE

countries very closely related to the general foreign policy strategy for joining the European union adopted by most of these countries. Nowadays, the economic motive for international co-operation, as a source of funding for higher education reform, has become very strong: aid for restructuring the higher education systems, including rebuilding international contacts, is provided by EU funds. Internationalisation as a means for strengthening political links with the EU is also playing an increasingly important role. With regards to the educational rationale, the impression is that at least at the institutional level and the level of individual academics, there is a widely felt interest in re-joining the international higher education community after years of relative isolation by sharing experiences in teaching and research: internationalisation as a means for improving the quality of education... (Ibid. p. 214-215.)

4. EUROPEAN AND SWEDISH CO-OPERATION IN THE TRANSFORMATION PERIOD

European integration is supported by education and training activities and there are binding legislative rules concerning a number of areas. For a critical analysis of the integration process and the significance of education and training, see Moschonas (1998).

In the following some mobility programmes and activities promoting mobility will be presented. The reason is that mobility is one of the key concepts of the EU educational policy. The definition of mobility in this regard is discussed by Zemke (1998, p. 193) as a capability covering a combination of movability, adaptability, and versatility. The quantitative goal for student mobility was set to a minimum of 10%. Sweden has reached that goal both regarding inward and outward mobility. The Swedish policy for the recognition of foreign degrees or courses has changed in order to facilitate mobility. "The overall concept when evaluating foreign qualifications has changed over the years, and with European co-operation, from *equivalence* – with the requirement of an almost exact correspondence between the courses - to *recognition* – despite minor differences in content – and *acceptance* of the foreign course, despite minor differences in content *and* scope" (Evaluation…1998, Summary). Mehdi Sedig (Effects...1999) investigated effects of studies abroad and found that intercultural understanding was a very important outcome of the study period, specifically recognised and appreciated by the later employers. Broomé & Bäcklund (1998) have, in an attempt to enhance knowledge about mechanisms, which hinder immigrants from getting jobs, shown that Swedish employers chose Swedes rather than foreigners when these are otherwise equally qualified.

As a direct impact of the events of 1989 and 1990 in Eastern and Central Europe the European Commission submitted in the beginning of the year 1990 a proposal for a new programme, the Tempus Scheme (the Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies), specifically designed to meet the needs of the new independent countries, drawing on the experiences from already existing

programmes such as Erasmus, Comett, Lingua, as well as, for the youth exchange element, Youth for Europe and the Young Worker's Exchange Programme. The Tempus Scheme formed part of the Phare Programme, the overall Programme of the Community to assist the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, adopted in 1989. The main aim of the Phare Programme is to establish priorities and provide the funding for the assistance to the economic restructuring of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe designated as eligible for aid. Its work has grown to encompass a wide range of activities. Throughout the 1989-1996 period, Phare has striven to adapt to the changing priorities and character of the reform process in each of its partner countries. Since 1994, there has been an increase in support for the legislative framework and administrative structures, as well as for projects promoting democratisation and civil society, and for investment in infrastructure, including cross-border co-operation. The Phare programme has also mirrored the political developments, in particular with regard to the future enlargement of the European Union.

Table 1. The expansion of the Phare Programme to the partner countries

1989	**1990**	**1991**	**1992**	**1993**	**1996**
Poland	Bulgaria	Albania	Estonia	Czech R.	Bosnia
Hungary	CSFR	Romania	Latvia	Slovakia	fYROM
	Yugoslavia		Lithuania		
	E. Germany		Slovenia		

E.Germany was included in the Phare Programme until unification. The programme to Yugoslavia was suspended in 1991. Czech Slovak Federal Republic (CFSR) was replaced on 1 January 1993 by the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

The EU Tempus Phare programme, managed in Brussels under the DG XXII, and administrated by the European Training Foundation (ETF) in Torino, Italy is in operation since 1990, and includes at present 13 Phare partner countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Croatia, originally the 14th partner country, was suspended from the Phare Programme in August 1995).

The main goals of Tempus Phare are to promote the quality and support the development and renewal of higher education in the partner countries, and to encourage their growing interaction and as balanced a co-operation as possible with partners in the European Union, through joint activities and relevant mobility. The goals will be addressed through the reform of higher education structures and institutions and their management, issues of curriculum development and overhaul in priority areas, as well as the reform of national institutions through Institution Building. The orientations of Tempus Phare have been updated for the two-year period 1998-2000. In the associated partner countries, Tempus will focus on the

implementation of the pre-accession strategy, enable beneficiary institutions to develop their management policy and skills, in view of their active participation in European Union education programme such as Socrates-Erasmus. There is also a need for harmonisation between curricula in Member States partner countries, e.g. in the regulated professions, Public Administration, European Studies, etc;

Tempus Phare has become the programme mainly for the countries, which are expected to become members of the EU and aims at assisting the countries in the pre-accession process. The ten countries that have applied to become members of the EU are Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.The candidate countries, also called associated countries, have all signed Europe Agreements with the European Union, which provide the framework for closer co-operation. In the Agenda 2000 from mid 1997 the Commission noted that none of the countries fully satisfied all the criteria for accession. The Agenda 2000 proposed a reinforced pre-accession strategy supporting, within the Accession Partnership (AP) framework accompanied by a National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA), the specific needs of each candidate country. The basic principle is that all the applicant countries must accept existing EU law. The 'acquis communautaire' comprises the entire body of legislation of the European Communities, which has accumulated, and been revised, over the last 40 years. It includes the founding Treaty of Rome as revised by the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties, the Regulations and Directives passed by the Council of Ministers, most of which concern the single market, and the judgements of the European Court of Justice. It now also includes the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and justice and home affairs (JHA), as well as the objectives and realisation of political, economic and monetary union.

The Commission's Opinions came to the following conclusions in the case of Estonia: The political criteria were satisfying even if further progress with regard to protecting of minorities is expected. After Hungary and Poland, Estonia come closest to meeting the economic criteria, Estonia is doing well to develop a functioning market economy but has to make further progress regarding the capacity to withstand competitive pressure. Since spring 1998, accession negotiations with Estonia (and the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia) are going on. Phare activities in the candidate countries concentrate on two main types of support, namely institution building and investment support.

Estonia is in the last phase of Tempus, only approved projects are now being accomplished. Countries, which, as Estonia, have signed an Association Agreement with the EU, are no longer eligible for Tempus. One of the approved projects, an institution-building project, with participation of the author, bears the title "Intercultural Communication in EU Training Modules". The Western European partners are Finland and Sweden. The objective is to provide skills in intercultural competence as a part of continuing education on European integration and EU accession-related topics to educators, migration officers and to the business sector. Since the end of 1998 Estonia is also participating in the EU Community programmes, such as Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Youth for Europe.

The Tempus programme enters its third phase covering the period 2000-2006. Along with changing needs and obtained objectives in Central and Eastern Europe (former Phare), in the New Independent States and Mongolia (former Tacis) the programme is now more flexible and subject to modifications and adaptations. The new programme encourages a balanced interaction and co-operation between the partner countries and the EU member states supporting the transformation of the former to market economies and democratic societies.

The common European labour market is still closed for Baltic citizens. Fischer (1998, p 60) points at the sensitivity of the issue, due to high unemployment rates in the EU, and considers the rightfulness of the existence of fear for mass migration. "To stay is the rule, not to move. The recent economic transition in the Baltic countries opens up prospects that make the migration option for most people unattractive" (ibid. p 67).

Parallel to the Tempus Phare programme there has been, as an effect of an expansion, a Tempus Tacis programme, in operation since 1993, a considerably smaller programme, directed towards Mongolia and the New independent States (NIS) Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, Moldova, the Russian federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. In the non-associated partner countries, Tempus places more emphasis on the development of institutions as a whole, increasing their management capacities and adaptation to the local environment through curriculum development.

Sweden is one of the younger members of the EU, but already since the entrance in 1995 Sweden has actively supported the issue of enlargement of the Union to include the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and other countries in Eastern and Central Europe. The naming of the candidate countries, among them Estonia, was welcomed and the government has declared its willingness to share its experience as an EU member on request from the applicant countries. Swedish chairmanship in the year 2001 will hopefully strengthen these efforts.

Tempus Sweden offers since some years the course "Training of EU-Project Managers" to countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The author has been responsible for such courses in a number of countries, Estonia being her first one. The basic idea of these courses has been to use Swedish experiences from various EU programmes, and evaluations of the Tempus etc programmes to train a key cadre of professional project managers as multipliers in the implementation, realisation and transfer of outcomes of EU-supported, transnational projects, and in the training of further generations of project managers in the respective country. The main focus for the seminars were the following aspects of project management: the transfer of experiences/meta skills from the seminar team to the participants; the integration of activities planned by the participants into a context, e.g. university/school development plans, EU-programmes; the analysis of messages in documents, evaluation reports, etc by means of discussion/brainstorming.

The Swedish Institute (SI) has supported co-operation with the Baltic countries after their independence and since 1998 a Swedish-Baltic research

programme, the Visby Programme, is in operation in both directions. Additional to the programme there are also Scholarships for the Baltic Sea Area. The Baltic Countries are also addressed in the Nordic Grant Scheme for Network Co-operation, offered in co-operation with the Nordic Academy for Advanced Study (NorFA) and the Nordic student exchange programme, Nordplus. This programme results from an agreement on Cultural Co-operation between the Nordic countries concluded in 1971. To enhance possibilities for Nordic Student Exchange rules for Nordic recognition and evaluation of studies, transferable between the countries were developed, starting in 1991. Achievements from more than one Nordic country may be brought together into a summarised exam in one of the countries. In an interview at the Swedish Institute (SI) in 1999 the Nordplus model was considered regionally interesting and ideas to include the Baltic countries were aired. At the same time it was pointed out that the exchange was rather one-way, mainly from the Baltic States towards Sweden. It is still difficult to interest Swedish students, teachers or researchers for a study period in Estonia or in any of the Baltic countries. Fear of the loss of accustomed standards of living is a common argument, as well as a minimal belief in the individual output of studies or research. The SI expects that the number of Baltic students in Sweden will increase, through the EU Socrates programme and through EU membership. But there is also reason to believe that the interest among Swedish students and other nationalities will grow during the next years.

Besides the described activities, there have been, and still are, many actors contributing to the developments in the Baltic countries, not least local universities, but also many networks, organisations and foundations, in Sweden, in Europe and in the world. Worth mentioning is a project between the Nordic countries, Germany and the EU aiming at an upgrading of social sciences, law and economy at the universities in Tallinn, Tartu and Riga. The project, which implies guest teachers training of own teachers, and the updating and upgrading of libraries, is now in its sixth year halfway through.

Exchange is also depending on national policies and practices regarding admissions. In an ongoing research project, where the author participates, on Higher education admissions and student mobility within the EU (ADMIT, 1999) a background to the study conditions for foreign students in Sweden is given. An admission reform from 1977 resulted in liberalised entrance requirements, and the introduction of work experience as a selection criterion in addition to school grades. A scholastic aptitude test was introduced (for applicants older than 25 with a minimum of 4 years of work experience, or applicants lacking upper-secondary qualifications), and, finally, proportional quotas were introduced. Admissions are dimensioned, eligibility general and specific. There is no upper age limit for entrance. The National Admissions Office to Higher Education (VHS) and The National Agency for Higher Education (HSV) share responsibilities of admission and evaluation. The overall concept for comparison of foreign and Swedish education has changed over the years from equivalence (almost exact correspondence), to recognition (of minor differences in content) and acceptance (of minor differences in content and scope). Good contact with similar operations

around the world are necessary requirements for the evaluation work, the Swedish NARIC is thus a part of a network, which comes under the auspices of the European Commission. At the HSV there is also an ENIC office, part of a network co-ordinated by the Council of Europe and UNESCO. The ENIC network will have responsibility for promoting the implementation of the new convention for the European region.

A convention, recognising higher education qualifications in the academic field within Europe, was agreed on 1997 in Lisbon. In May 1998 the Sorbonne Declaration on harmonisation of the European higher education system was signed by France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, and followed by a meeting with all member states in June 1999 in Bologna. The introduction of the ECTS scheme, a European Credit Transfer System is supposed to facilitate recognition and access between the European universities. Conferences of European rectors, University presidents, experts and academics in the respective countries strive for international recognition through an overall framework of degrees and cycles and encouraging a common frame of reference. The EU, though, has no supremacy when it comes to harmonising educational policy and the Swedish attitude is not to harmonise just for the sake of it, but rather to guarantee full transparency between the systems.

5. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Many skills required at the workplace today are interdisciplinary and cannot be ascribed whether to a particular field or sector, nor to a specific profession or occupation (Transnational, 1998, p 38 ff.). Flexibility, social competence, creativity are but a few of these skills. Among the interdisciplinary competencies the intercultural communicative competence is not yet often recognised. New international “learning partnerships” are referred to by the Ashridge Partnership Study and held up by the European Training Foundation in their Management Training Report ”Re-designing Management Development in the New Europe (1997) in a framework for learning (p 110) consisting of four main elements: Idea generation, broadening perspectives, change acceleration, and organisation development. It seems obvious that intercultural communicative skills should be of importance to each one of the mentioned elements. Since the number of international partnerships is increasing strongly there are needs for the development of ”personally required skills, values and competencies, for developing the whole person, not just certain aspects of knowledge (Re-designing, 1997, p 111). To maintain a continuing friendship and trust the report recommends making sure the ”chemistry” is right. Important as chemistry may be, intercultural communicative competence suggests additional quality to such relations, involving awareness and skills on both sides to handle diversity, i.e. potential differences in behavior between representatives of different cultural groups, due to differences in the respective value-systems. Intercultural communicative competence is about optimising human communication.

Notions about a new multicultural person have been more or less optimistic. There are many definitions of intercultural competence, and many models explaining how to develop such a competence at the workplace. The more recent definitions tend to be more complex, including cognitive, affective and behavioral components.

Cultural differences tend to influence our value system, perception, thinking, and not least, our behavior. Our expectations are coloured by our experiences. We are born ethnocentric, our culture seems "natural" to us, it leaves its mark on us, and only gradually we will get the notion of other cultures. This process is complex and culture-specific, and as a result of this, class, race and gender aspects are more or less pronounced in different cultures. In the modern, Western, industrialised world, culture is claimed to be a question of choice, and identity a question of construction, each person searching for meaning and trying out different identities offered by subcultures or by the media, to an extent that largely outweighs both the family and the school (Ziehe, 1989; Bauman, 1995). Modern individuals, according to Freud, exchange some happiness for a little more security, but post-modern persons rather sacrifice some stability and security for a little more of happiness (Bauman, 1997). Young Estonians grow up in a still more complex and changing context. And young Russians in Estonia even more so.

According to Bennett (1986, p 27)), "intercultural sensitivity is not natural", we do not have any elaborated historical guidelines showing us how to treat each other with respect and how to maintain good relations. For the sake of survival, we have to learn to get across the cultural boundaries, that has brought us so many wars and conflicts, we have to "overcome the legacy of our history, or lose history itself for all time". Young (1996) is not less serious. The premise is then, that training is necessary, but it is not enough to train, training must aim at a lifelong learning process, which becomes rather a way of life.

Hofstede (1982) is the most famous scientist who has undertaken cross-cultural studies of differences at the workplace. He collected data from IBM managers in more than 50 countries and the results were presented in a model consisting of four dimensions of work-related values, though no countries belonging to the Soviet block were included. The dimensions are Individualism as opposed to Collectivism (in an anthropological sense). "Individualist cultures assume that any person looks primarily after his/her own interest" or the members of the nuclear family, whereas collectivist cultures protect and care for the extended family, the clan or the organisation, but requires their full loyalty. The latter is tightly integrated. Power Distance is the extent to which the less powerful persons in a society tolerate inequality in power. Uncertainty Avoidance means to which degree people take risks and are able to handle unstructured or unexpected situations without getting nervous or frustrated. Masculinity is the last characteristic and is opposed to Femininity. In feminine countries the social roles are less distinguished, there is less competition in the society, quality of life is more important than material success and career. In masculine cultures achievement, assertiveness and material success are highly valued.

Sweden is characterised as follows in Hofstede's 4 dimensions model: high degree of femininity, weak uncertainty avoidance, small power distance, and rather high individualism. Estonian scientists have also shown interest in Hofstede's model. Realo (1999) reacted upon S.H. Schwarz who in 1994 referred to Estonia as a collectivist country in his study on human values among 40 countries. She concludes in her dissertation work that Estonia is best described as an individualist culture with a certain degree of collectivism. Kant and Realo (1996) found in a more limited study that Russians residing in Estonia had significantly higher collectivism scores. It is therefore nothing but an assumption that Estonia differs significantly in the other three dimensions, due to a lasting impact of Soviet education.

Sjögren (1997) identifies three organisation principles typical for the Swedish society: a collectivist individualism, a scholastic tradition, and aspiration for homogeneity. These principles seem to be more comparable to Estonian ones. Collectivist individualism differs from collectivism, and brings the Swedes more near to the Estonians. During the last century the social democratic party mainly governed Sweden and the similarities in the both school systems were larger than between Sweden and West Germany only 20 years ago. Els Oksaar, exile Estonian Professor of General and Comparative Linguistics at the University of Hamburg, emphasised at a conference in Lund in 1986 that exile Estonians had succeeded very well in all the world, thanks to their high ambitions and interest in education. The aspiration for homogeneity has negative effects in both countries. While racist acts and xenophobian attitudes have become more common in Sweden, Estonians put a lot of efforts into the creation of a national identity. Not until recently have they been willing to include the remaining Russians. There is reason to believe that the relations between Estonians and Russians are changing to the better: "much better" was the most common comment from both sides during a recent visit.

Intercultural communicative competence is about the handling of practical situations, between actors with different cultural background and requires knowledge, awareness, and skills (Lundberg, 1991). It must be emphasised that intercultural communicative competence always is a concern for both sides. Three terms are equally important: culture, communication and competence. Culture comprises the sum total of human production, both material and immaterial, i.e. the society and its members, but also the state and its institutions, and their values expressed in both verbal and non-verbal behavior. Margaret Mead has shown that culture is learnt and tradition has until recently guaranteed the transformation of the cultural heritage. Estonians might want to argue that their own culture was oppressed during the occupation, and they are surely right. Estonian students pointed at the importance to raise the voice of the grandparents in favour of the parents who were seen as lost through the ideological brainwash. Actually there was a time when many Estonians seemed to believe in a seamless connection between today and their cultural past, but soon it was clear that it would be impossible just to think away the last 50 years. Many of the Estonian customs and behaviors that are common today and have an impact in working life have partly been forced upon the Estonian people by the occupying power. Other traits stem from their own history and again other are

reactions to the occupation. How they relate to each other is an interesting topic for a research project. Nevertheless, Estonia is developing quickly towards a modern state, and, as such, may also be analysed in terms of modernity and post-modernity. Culture, as well as identity according to Ziehe (1993) and Bauman (1995) is a question of individual construction, when traditions are eroding. Instead media, as one of the new and important socialisation agents, provide the young generation with a variety of cultural choice, sometimes in subcultural packages. New and modern is the possibility of free choice and testing, which doesn't always work smoothly, but causes problems of decision and a feeling of meaninglessness. Middle-aged Estonians are already lamenting the loss of cultural and historical knowledge in the young generation.

A major factor in interpersonal intercultural communication is difference, and the way difference is perceived by the communicative actors. Bennett compares two approaches to difference: the ethnocentric and the ethnorelative. The ethnocentric approach denies difference from the view that one's own culture is the norm for all cultures. The ethnorelative assumption is that culture is relative, different and comparable and that this is positive. The bridge between the two is education and training. Curiosity and willingness to understand the differences encountered are basic and a measurement of degree of empathy. The ability to observe and analyse a culture begins with identification of the characteristics, patterns, and stereotypes that differ between home and other cultures, and recognising ones own biases. To understand culture and cultural change it is fundamental to interpret culture within its own context (Dodd, 1995).

Intercultural communicative competence implies enhanced knowledge and understanding of forms of cultural expressions and how the individual is formed by and transforming the cultural context. More specifically theoretical knowledge about the interaction process between individuals with different cultural background is required, as well as practical skills to observe and handle cultural differences in communication. Pedersen (1996) recommends attention not only to knowledge, but also to awareness and skills.

Intercultural communicative competence at the workplace will be needed when people with different cultural backgrounds work together and when working in international assignments. This means that there must be a sharing of or, at least understanding of motives, aims and objectives concerning the work situation. There must also be an understanding of differing roles, and the rights and duties attached to these. Knowledge and understanding is needed about differing management styles, organisation structures, and decision-making processes. A Swedish manager, representing a more informal leadership style, often visits the shop floor, something that would be impossible in a hierarchical structure where this would be the task of the foreman. An important issue for management is knowledge about motivational factors, for instance, how integrated is work with private life and how far do employers identify with their workplace. The most popular example concerns the Japanese who are said to consider their workplace as part of an extended family. On the other hand, many foreigners in Sweden have noticed that Swedes do not

socialise with colleagues. Communication skills include verbal and non-verbal communication, in the intercultural setting this implies knowing about how to start, take-turns and end a conversation, and to be aware about formalities and politeness rules, to recognise important gestures, to be aware of expectations, both in formal and informal settings.

6. SOME OBSTACLES IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

What are the hindrances and obstacles to fruitful communication? Language, which will not be an issue here, does play an important role, but difficulties lie in both verbal and non-verbal communication. Furthermore, Condon&Yousef (Lundberg, 1991) point at the cultural set of values that underlie behaviors and attitudes. Culture-specific behaviors are expressed both verbally and non-verbally. Perception is culture dependent, thus we select culturally what we see and what we do not see. Daun (1984), Allwood (1985), and Lundberg (1991) discuss Swedish mentality traits and patterns and their possible negative impact on the intercultural communication situation, most significant among the traits is the insecurity of the Swedes in social situations. Hofstede places Sweden high on the dimensions individualism, and feminism (although within the frames of a masculine dominance), and low on power distance and insecurity avoidance. It has not been possible to undertake a complete literature review about what is written on Estonian cultural traits. There is reason to believe that considerable research has been done, part of which has been published only in Estonian language. When discussing Swedes and Estonians, we should remember that we have some part of our history in common. As a matter of fact, it seems to the author that Estonians are more aware or better informed about this part of our history than the Swedes. Both countries are situated in the Northern part of Europe, sharing the same cold climate, belonging to the same "Vodka belt" with similar drinking habits. All other alcohol, wine included, is imported in both countries. What differences could be mentioned? Sjögren (1997) identifies three organisation principles typical for the Swedish society: a collectivist individualism, a scholastic tradition, aspiration for homogeneity. Following the suggestion of Realo above Estonians and Swedes would be similar in terms of type of individualism, both representing a collectivist individualism. Possibly these circumstances facilitate communication between them, but may constitute an obstacle in communication with others.

Pajupuu (1995) compared Estonian and Finnish verbal language patterns. Estonians and Finns speak cognate languages and therefore tend to believe that there are no major differences in the communicative behavior between their countries. She found differences in the temporal structuring (time patterning) of their conversation. Estonians speak comparatively rapid, are more tolerant to interruptions, with relatively frequent double-speaking and frequent switching of turns. They do not just listen silently, but interrupt with comments, exclamations and questions. The Swedish communication patterns are described by Allwood (1981, 1985) as similar to Finnish regarding turn taking and interruption. Feedback in speech is not very

marked and when, often as a non-verbal gesture. Pajupuu points at a risk of misunderstanding, surprise and even bad feeling when neither will change the usual manner of speaking.

At a recent meeting aimed at the preparation of assessment of training needs concerning intercultural communicative competence for the target group found in export-oriented small and medium businesses or at the international workplace three aspects of activities having an intercultural component were suggested: Negotiations, marketing, and human resources (labor). In the group meeting several observations were made about Estonian businesspersons in the intercultural setting. These observations made by both Estonians and non-Estonians living since many years in the country must so far be called negative stereotypes. Since they might constitute obstacles in the intercultural encounter, some of them will be discussed: Estonians are considered to have an “overly mechanical and legalistic” approach to negotiating transactions and disputes compared to other cultures. It thereby follows that they are not oriented towards problem solving. If this is the case it could constitute problems when negotiating. It is important to understand and judge the negotiation process, having a sharp perception of what kind of adaptations and adjustments are required with respect to the cultural differences. The Estonian proverb "The favourite breakfast food of an Estonian is another Estonian" interpreted in the business situation indicates a tendency to aggressiveness and power demonstration. It was also held that Estonians might not be aware of the need to demonstrate trust and reliability in business negotiations. It is essential to try to understand why a certain trait exists, and it is not difficult to understand why trust and reliability has not been desirable qualities in Estonia until lately. Considering the Swedish stereotypes of the Baltic countries, the major threats consist of corruption and Mafia, which indicates an emphasis on trust and reliability from the Swedish side. The Swedes on the other hand are said not to show emotions in public, and to found their arguments on facts and figures. Pajupuu, above suggests that Estonian verbal communication is more lively and spontaneous, which in communication with Swedes, might lead to irritation on both sides.

To conclude, at the institutional level Estonia has made very quick progress, consolidating their higher education system through quality assurance based on international cooperation. A new university law was passed in 1995, including the degrees Diploma, Bachelor, Master, and Doctor. Universities and higher vocational education institutions also provide vocational higher education. Extensive investment in information technology for the whole education sector will help to make higher education in Estonia modern and competitive, and participation in the EU educational programmes will facilitate accession to the EU.

There is still a lot to be done, to effectivise the multicultural workplace, or to minimise obstacles and misunderstandings in intercultural settings. Many problems at the interpersonal level call for economic or political solutions and measures. Others may be addressed by improved intercultural communication. The examples given above should be considered only examples, they may not be the best, they may not even be as common, there may be others more important, they are used here

but to highlight the need for awareness and understanding of cultural differences and the importance of interpersonal intercultural communicative competence. Certainly, it would be an error to underestimate the Estonians, who, according to themselves are self-confident, ambitious and curious. This is also the opinion of the author, who has, in turn, profited tremendously from the rich and various contacts with Estonians, and also with Latvians and Lithuanians, as well as Russians in the three countries during the last decade. Latvia and Lithuania are advancing close behind Estonia. Considering the recent inclusion of Eastern Europe into the intercultural communication context several activities are proposed. The adequacy for the Baltic countries of theories and models developed within the field of intercultural communication should be probed. Certainly, there is a need also for culture-specific and context-specific studies in the whole, quickly changing, Baltic area. These studies should address the respective national cultures at personal, professional and organisational levels as well as their emerging international relations. The results of such studies are important for all involved, and necessary to challenge negative stereotyping. Irritations or conflicts are not always rooted in obvious differences in for instance organisational structure, management-staff relations, or other work-specific cultural skills, and seemingly subtle differences may produce discomfort. Intercultural communicative competence cannot be gained only through education and training. No one can become fully interculturally competent in general. But a good introduction to the field may open up for lifelong intercultural learning, an appropriate lifestyle in an international surrounding.

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