

European Masters
in InterCultural Communication (EMICC)

Semiotics of culture

The notion of the “Eurocampus 2007 culture”

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Summary

This paper aims at exploring the characteristics of the group of participants who have attended the **European Masters in InterCultural Communication (EMICC)** Eurocampus program in 2007. The aim of this program is to bring together students and teachers from the partner universities for an intensive study period. Therefore, we are going to look at the structure and composition of the life world as well as at the language culture peculiar to this group. Also, the multi- and intercultural dimensions of this group and of its environment are going to be analyzed. This will be done primarily by using the theory provided by Prof. Peter Stockinger, which will help us to identify the relevant entities characterizing the life world of the group analyzed. Also, there are going to be used other relevant theories that could be interesting when conducting such a kind of analysis. These will then be combined with concrete observations regarding this group ending with considerations upon a broader context, namely that of globalization.

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Introduction

"I will let the winds of all cultures blow about my house; but I will refuse to be blown off my feet by any."

Mahatma Gandhi

This paper aims at exploring the characteristics of the group of participants who have attended the **European Masters in InterCultural Communication (EMICC)** Eurocampus program in 2007. The aim of this program is to bring together students and teachers from the partner universities for an intensive study period. As we shall see below, EMICC is a teaching and research network of nine European universities specialising in intercultural communication, proposing an interdisciplinary study programme designed to enhance academic and professional competence of participants preparing for careers with significant intercultural contact.

In our opinion, this group is interesting for such an analysis in that its multiculturalism is representative of trends happening in other contexts, on other levels – such as international student mobility. We shall in particular analyse the structure and composition of the life world, as well as at the language culture peculiar to this group, with a focus on multicultural contacts, exchanges and correlated aspects such as transformation and creation of new cultural realities through globalisation. The use of several concepts presented in Prof. Peter Stockinger's readings, such as "social actor" and "life world" and correlated concepts, as well as other conceptual insights we have found, will help us identify and explain relevant entities. These will then be combined with concrete observations regarding this group ending with considerations upon a broader context, namely that of globalization.

Our object of interest

EMICC is a teaching and research network of nine European universities specialising in intercultural communication, proposing an interdisciplinary study programme designed to enhance academic and professional competence of participants preparing for careers with significant intercultural contact. The universities involved in this study program are nine, namely Universität Bayreuth (Bayreuth, Germany), Anglia Ruskin University (Cambridge, Great Britain), Universitat Jaume I (Castelló, Spain), University of Jyväskylä (Jyväskylä, Finland), Universidade Aberta (Lisbon, Portugal), Università della Svizzera italiana (Lugano, Switzerland), Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (Paris, France), University of Tartu (Tartu, Estonia), The Netherlands University of Utrecht (Utrecht).

The core of EMICC is the yearly Eurocampus, a four-month intensive program taught by professors from the network universities and visiting lecturers, in which three to five students from each partner university can take part. Eurocampus 2007 took place at the University of Lugano (Università della Svizzera italiana – USI), in Lugano, Switzerland. Previous editions were held in Jyväskylä (2002), Bayreuth (2003), Brussels (2004), Cambridge (2005) and Lisbon (2006).

During this intensive program, which lasted 16 weeks, students learned about intercultural communication theories, looked at intercultural communication from the perspective of different academic disciplines, and had a chance to acquire advanced intercultural competencies and skills. The Eurocampus semester was organised in six modules, for a total of 15 courses and comprised additional learning and training activities. Each course have been assessed following ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) criteria. Methods of teaching and learning included individual pre-course preparation, direct teacher-student contact, class discussions, individual and group presentations, simulation exercises, digital assignments as well as final papers and exams. This variety meant to respond maximally to the expectations and needs of all participants. All courses were held in English, because of EMICC international framework.

It is remarkable that the host University of Lugano, USI, was among the first Swiss universities to implement the new European university system guidelines, according to the so-called Bologna System. Although Switzerland is not part of the E.U., benefiting from its unique geographic

location, USI has gained ample recognition as a multilingual and multicultural university, with a broad international outlook.

Structure and composition of the life world of the “Eurocampus 2007”

The life world, or also “Lebenswelt” is, according to Stockinger (2007), composed by a set of entities such as agents, objects, artifacts, territories and places, moments and periods as well as languages. Each agent, be that people, individuals, groups, organisations or other, play one or more roles in the life of a social actor, which is considered, among others, a group of persons or an organized group who possesses a common cognitive reference frame, whereas objects and artifacts have a specific function and role in the life of a social actor. As for the territories and places, they locate the different agitations of a social actor while moments and periods punctuate the agitations of it. Finally, languages are used for communicating and “speaking” appropriately with or within the social actor.

The social actor we are focusing on, the Eurocampus 2007 group, is constituted by a whole range of students, the agents, having different cultural backgrounds. It is a group sharing the access to some rare and/or valuable resources, such as the lectures by some very well known professors in the field of Intercultural Communication. Also, the Eurocampus group can be considered a social actor sharing more or less the same language resources: all agents, are at least bilingual, having as a common language English which they use as a lingua franca when interacting with each other or the professors.

Typical social networks, functions and status relevant for the “Eurocampus 2007”

One of the main goals of the Erasmus program “EMICC – European Masters in Intercultural Communication” is the increase of the social capital of each participant. Social capital is a concept coined by Pierre Bourdieu (1983) that indicates all the relationships to people someone can rely on. It describes therefore the social network of someone that operates by considering the abilities and possibilities of the network as resources. In the case of the Eurocampus, this is particularly seen in the fact that, since the beginning, there have been created different social networking tools such as a common blog or the social networking website Facebook¹ that has been used by all

¹ Facebook has been launched on February 4, 2004 and created by Mark Zuckerberg, a former Harvard student. Initially, the membership of Facebook was restricted to students of Harvard College. It was later expanded to some other universities and eventually, people with a university email address across the globe were allowed to access the network. Since September 11, 2006 everybody older than 13 may join.

the participants. In addition, personal data has also been exchanged by using a common sheet containing everybody's email address and phone number, in order to be able to keep in touch. Furthermore, a process of creating a Eurocampus Alumni and Alumnae association is going on, that aims at the same purpose, namely creating a network of people who have had the same experience and are generally interested in intercultural matters. The underlying idea is to bring together all Eurocampus participants, not only of the year 2007, but of all the previous and future years too. Also, the fact of keeping in touch with the professors holding the seminars per email allows to create an own network of professors one can address, also after the end of this Eurocampus exchange experience.

As for the function of the Eurocampus 2007, it is to say that it is clearly a learning program which aims at providing its participants with additional knowledge and competencies in the field of intercultural communication. This is acquired both through formal and in informal learning processes. The contributors to this learning process are the cooperative universities with their respective professors. This implies that this program is recognized by all collaborating universities, and also by the European Union, being it the main financial supporter. We can therefore deduct that as far as the status of this program is concerned, there is a high recognition on different stages. This might also rise the exclusivity of this program and therefore reinforce its status and prestige.

Specific and typical activities that characterize the life world of the "Eurocampus exchange experience"

As far as typical activities that characterize the life world of the Eurocampus group are concerned, there are certainly very different ones to mention. First of all, we would like to make a distinction between formal and informal activities that shape the culture of the Eurocampus group. The selection procedure for example has formed the Eurocampus group since the very beginning by choosing each of its members. There, it has been determined whether the applying students were holding the required characteristics. Even though this is a formal activity, it had some informal traits such as doing this interview in the cafeteria, having a cup of coffee. What is interesting to mention is though that this way, an elite is created to which not everyone belongs, which reinforces the quality and the exclusivity of the created social network.

If we look at the formal activities and practices present in the everyday life of the Eurocampus
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group, there are all sorts of activities tied to the activity of studying. First, the agents are asked to attend master's degree lectures that take place over a period of three days. These lectures, being the core of the formal aspect of the whole Eurocampus exchange program, are generally held on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. These lectures generally have the same structure: in the mornings, the agents are asked to contribute orally in a set context, namely the lecture hall, and the afternoons are usually used to prepare the following lectures. Tied to these regular encounters, participants are asked to produce a paper, due three weeks after the last day of the specific course, and which is meant to recollect the acquired knowledge. Also, the agents are asked, in the last day of each course, to fill out an evaluation sheet for the course they have just attended. The regularity of these activities show that they certainly shape, to a large extent, the social reality of the social actor and therefore configure its life form. Also, the skills required in order to follow the offered courses presuppose that the participants are able to solve (intellectual) problems by using the own knowledge and by combining it with practical (personal) experience. This has been particularly salient in some lectures, where we were explicitly asked for situations that we had experienced personally, and that could illustrate the mentioned theory. This procedure, in fact, has become a common procedure in class in order to make one's own thoughts explicit. Also, this exchange of personal information reinforced the familiarity among each other which, at the same time, reinforced the group cohesion and therefore the fostering of a shared culture. It can be questioned whether this culture is to be considered as one, since it will exist only for a limited period of time. However, Sarangi (Meierkord quotation, 1995) points out that the nature of culture is shifting in contemporary society. Thus the result of hybrid as well as transitory constructs. In addition, Casmir and Asuncion-Lande (Meierkord quotation, 1988: 289) regard culture as generally being a "product or result of interaction" and claims the existence of situational subcultures, which they refer to as "third cultures". In this sense, the Eurocampus 2007 group culture can be referred to as a third culture, and has therefore rights of its own to claim to have created an own culture.

By informal activities we intend social practices such as social events or leisure activities. The fact of getting lunch in a nearby shop and eating it afterwards in front of the university certainly constitutes an informal activity that shapes the culture of the Eurocampus 2007 group. Moreover, the organisation of common excursions reinforce common identity and work as a binding tool for the group cohesion. Also, the regular visits in bars as a leisure activity have got its function as a reinforcing group identity activity, and therefore the group culture.

In fact, according to diffusion theories of culture, a culture trait, in this case typical activities, must offer some advantage, some utility or pleasure, to be sought and accepted by a people (Kistler, 2007). Informal social practices offer indeed both utility, making it possible to get to know the other people on a more personal level and therefore permit the creation of a group identity and pleasure.

Most typical symbols, objects, products and realizations of this world

The symbols, objects, products and realizations of the Eurocampus 2007 group's life world can be divided into two categories: we can find material and immaterial ones. By material ones, we intend all the objects that the agents use in their every day life in order to participate in the above-mentioned formal activities. We refer to immaterial objects, products and realizations as constructs that have been created by the agents themselves as well as by the interaction among them, partly resulting from the informal activities, as explained in the previous section, but also being prerequisites in order to attend this program. This set of entities can be referred to as the social environment of the social actor studied, constructing its life world and therefore its culture.

As to the material objects that we encounter in the Eurocampus 2007 group, we can consider the use of the power point tool to present one's ideas in class as one of the typical objects applied. Further, the use of office equipment such as pens and paper constitute an important means for participating in the formal activities of the group. Finally, the awarded diploma can be considered an object, both material as well as immaterial, since it indeed is a piece of paper stating what has been done over the period of the last four months, but it also stands for acquired competencies that will widen the social (intellectual) capital of each participant.

One overall binding trait is the interest of each participant in the field of intercultural communication. After all, we have all signed up for this program out of our free will, since it was not compulsory for any of us. This constitutes an initial common characteristic, that has binded all the participants from the beginning onwards, even though for everyone, intercultural communication as such, as well as the reason for which we have gotten involved with it has a different meaning. This intercultural programme can be itself considered a symbol, an immaterial entity, having, for every participant, a different meaning (or "colour"), yet the object nonetheless remains unchanged, since we all value it as such. Tied to that, there is the transfer of knowledge, which has happened among the participants themselves, but also from the professors towards the

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participants. In fact, this has been the main reason why people have applied for this program, hoping that they could acquire more knowledge in their field of interest. At the same time, the professors themselves constitute important people when it comes to the environment of the life world of the Eurocampus group.

Additionally, friendship is to be considered an important value within the Eurocampus 2007 group. In fact, different subgroups have been created that are linked through friendship ties, that became a typical element in the life world of the Eurocampus 2007 group, since this has permitted to enjoy the stay abroad. In fact, the social environment is characterized, among others, by persons that constitute the environment of the life world of the social actor (Stockinger, 2007). The environment is seen from the perspective of the participants, describing it as the expected, desired, needed, feared or looked for environment. In this view, it becomes clear why friendship bonds become that important.

In terms of the products and realizations of the Eurocampus 2007 group, the produced collage can be mentioned. The idea has been, on one hand, to redesign the lecture hall in a more friendly and colorful way, and, on the other hand, it has been a good exercise in order to reinforce the already mentioned group cohesion and identity. In fact, we were asked to come up with symbols, objects or artifacts that represent ourselves. Interestingly, almost every participant used objects related to their country of origin, such as a picture of the Swiss Federal Council or of the Dutch Royal Family. This might show up to which extent we identify with our country of origin as soon as we leave our habitual environment. This might also have to do with stereotypes as well as with fact that we see ourselves through the eyes of the other, meaning that we apply the categories the other uses in order to describe ourselves and to us recognizable. This theme shall be explored in question 3.

Finally, an important trait of the social environment of the Eurocampus 2007 group certainly is the fact of having represented a whole range of different natural languages next to lingua franca English (c.f. next section).

Common history, traditions, original myths that characterize the historical destiny of this world.

The creation of a common history and also of the destiny of the Eurocampus exchange program as such is of high importance for the people organizing it. In fact, one of the strengths in terms of differentiation from other programs is that this program is held in a different place each year, and this is certainly due to the attractiveness of such a program. Also, this represents an attempt to raise the exclusivity of this program, since it constitutes a resource that is not open to everyone. In summary, this strengthens its identity, its specificity and its difference, according to which one can determine the history as well as the contemporaneous evolution of a social actor (Stockinger, 2007).

Another important feature of the Eurocampus 2007 group's timescale is the coffee break. In fact, this feature has been taken over from the local culture, since having coffee in company is a very common leisure activity in the Italian speaking region of Switzerland. This process can be reconnected to the concept of "Inter-Culture", where different elements of different cultures start to create a specific culture. The Eurocampus 2007 group has adopted this tradition and incorporated it in its own social activities. It is to note that it has become very important that the professor would respect this break, also in terms of length, because otherwise the Eurocampus 2007 participants would have perceived this as a violation of their commonly shared customs.

As far as other common practices of the local culture are concerned, it is to note that few people have adopted them. It might be worth to mention that at the Università della Svizzera Italiana, it is a common praxis to be late to class a few minutes. This is generally not perceived as disrespectful, since both students and professors do that. Also, the rigid compliance of the breaks is not a cultural standard². It happens in fact regularly that the break starts a little bit later than planned by the schedule, and also ends a little bit later than this. The fact that the Eurocampus 2007 group did not adopt this might show that they implicitly agreed upon a general rule, in this case being always on time, which might be the most effective solution when people from very different cultural contexts and therefore different behavioral standards come together.

When we speak about specific timescales that characterize the life world of the social actor studied, it is unavoidable to talk about the regularity with which the weeks were organized. With

² This concept has been coined by Alexander Thomas.

only few exceptions, every course was held from Wednesdays to Fridays, using the mornings for direct contact teaching and the afternoons for some possible additional group work. It is interesting to note that when this pattern was not adopted, the participants felt in difficulty, since they had planned their week according to this timescale pattern. Also, the regularity according to which the participants were asked to hand in their written work is remarkable: every piece of work was due three weeks after the last day of the course. This might be a previously constituted rule that every professor adopts. It therefore became some sort of commonly agreed timescale pattern, and therefore shaped the culture of the Eurocampus 2007 group to a large extent.

Most typical, symbolic places occupied by this actor

The symbolic places occupied by a social actor can be referred to as its social spatiality (Stockinger, 2007).

The most important physical places that are important for the social spatiality of the social actor studied are certainly the university building and therefore also the lecture hall, as well as the study room and the forecourt in front of the university, where the Eurocampus 2007 participants often meet to have lunch together and socialize. Also, a nearby bar called "Oops" became a highly frequented place for spending some time together, getting to know each other on a more personal basis and therefore reinforce the group identity and with this the created culture.

It is interesting to note that the phenomenon of multiculturalism, being one of the core characteristics of the Eurocampus 2007 group, constitutes a structuring element of its life world. This is seen on two different levels: on one hand, all the participants are interested in intercultural communication, which is a result of the interaction of different people belonging to different cultures. On the other hand, the Eurocampus 2007 program itself offers a setting of intercultural encounter due to the high degree of multiculturalism among the participants. Also, when considering some participants on their own, we encounter cases in which the dimension of multiculturalism is present, either because they have grown up in a multicultural environment, or because they have very often moved from one place to another and have therefore got to know different social realities. This dimension might be characteristic for our society nowadays to a large extent: the high degree of migration flows and therefore, the encounter of different cultural groups concentrated on one specific place, but also the high mobility of students, supported by the Erasmus programs of the European Union, are distinctive for our present.

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The language culture peculiar to "Eurocampus 2007"

What is the specific language (are the specific languages) of this culture, in which sense it is specific (lexical, genre)?

Firstly, we can say that there are several natural languages which are used within this context. Natural languages are those languages that are acquired in a first socialization process by every speaker of a given linguistic community, previous to any formal or institutionalized education, and that constitute the basic and necessary communication and exchange means of any other social actor. Since the Eurocampus 2007 group is composed of a multicultural group, we have a variety of natural languages to which the participants are linked to because of their specific cultural origins. Namely English (Canadian girl and Finno-American boy), German, Dutch, Finnish (Finno-American boy and Finnish girl), Russian (Estonian girl), Portuguese, Ukrainian, Danish, Spanish, Swiss-German, French (Swiss-French) and Italian.

Nonetheless, in order to be able to speak of the languages of this specific culture, namely that of Eurocampus 2007 group, we should see which languages enable communication between the participants of a social actor. We can first of all say that the Eurocampus 2007 community as a whole entails several different micro-communities within its structure. These are namely distinguished upon the basis of their culture, but, more accurately, upon the basis of their common language which they will be linked to out of personal reasons. For instance, Russian will be the communication means of the Estonian and Ukrainian students, the last one of which nonetheless has learnt Russian as a foreign language, Ukrainian being his first language. Then again, we can speak of the case of the Finnish and Thai girls, both studying in Finland, who speak Finnish together. A less striking but still valid case is that of the German speakers of German origin, and of the Dutch speakers of Dutch origin, who all share a common culture and language, therefore possibly creating their own linguistic community (see below).

But we shall now take a look at the larger community of Eurocampus 2007, in which English is the language which allows communication across all micro-communities, for instance when making an intervention within lectures. We can therefore speak of English as lingua franca: lingua franca has been defined as "*a language which is used habitually by people whose mother tongues are different in order to facilitate communication between them*" (UNESCO: 1953). Indeed, according to House (2004), English as a lingua franca (ELF) is a particular case of intercultural discourse

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where talk between non-native speakers of English who use English is a means and a medium of making themselves understood to their interlocutors. Therefore, the fact that a Danish, a Portuguese and a Ukrainian use English to communicate is determined by their shared interest in making themselves understood by each other, and by the fact that they are aware and enact this linguistic convention.

Coming back to linguistic communities, we can say that a "language culture" is created in that participants in lingua franca communication are representatives of their mother cultures and have their individual cultural backgrounds regarding communicative norms and standards, wherefore, interferences from the different mother tongues are expected. Indeed, "the resulting level of insecurity experienced by the participants has the effect of making them establish a unique set of rules for interaction that may be referred to as an inter-culture, *a culture constructed in cultural contact*" (Meiekord quotation of Koole and ten Thije 1994:69). Within this perspective, we can say that both the Eurocampus 2007 community, as well as the different micro-communities within it can be called "language cultures" (Stockinger: 2007): here, if enough time is given to the formation of an inter-culture, i.e. a culture constructed in cultural contact (here a language), a linguistic community is born.

We have in particular noticed that these "language cultures", be they "micro" (ex. Italian between the Swiss and the Italian) but especially "macro" (ex. English as a lingua franca) may develop a specific form of language, in terms of linguistic and social competencies, accessible to all, whatever be their expertise in English. In particular, regarding the social competencies, native speakers may make an effort in speaking more slowly. In terms of linguistic competencies *strictu sensu*, they might equally make sure that their lexicon be understood to all. Nonetheless, we have equally seen that a specific scientific jargon has developed amongst participants of the group due to the lectures: when meta-communicating about the different cultures within our group or about intercultural communication, we have more frequently used terms such as "lingua franca", "interculture", "cultural traits", "communicative apparatus", etc. This is namely due to our new knowledge of these terms (and to the meta-knowledge that our colleagues equally know them), as well as to the opportunity to apply them within the multicultural context of the Eurocampus 2007.

How it differs from a common language (such as a given natural language)?

As previously hinted, the English lingua franca specific to the Eurocampus 2007 differs to common

English in that it focuses upon certain scientific terms specific to our intercultural training semester, at the same time leaving out or "bending around" other concepts proper to common English: in this sense, it is at the same time a specialized as well as a simplified version of English.

But we can equally hypothesize that it contains inferences from the mother tongues of participants, at the level of the grammatical structure, the lexicon and of paraverbal elements. For instance, the Portuguese, usually speaking louder in her language, may equally transfer this characteristic when speaking English lingua franca. Another example is that of the lexicon which is sometimes incorrectly used: for instance, French speakers often from time to time referred to "competences" as being the plural of the word "competence". In fact this was just a transfer from French language ("competences" at the plural), being the actual plural form of the word. But we equally believe that, as said before, "the resulting level of insecurity experienced by "competencies" in English. Such "*faux amis*" were clearly the result of a mixture between two languages, the English language and the native language of the speakers.

In our multicultural group, several different cultures are involved and because the speakers are not familiar with the others' mother tongues, we acknowledge and agree that "the amount of different cultures interacting in these situations demand the speakers cope with the unexpected, by having to apply imperfect knowledge of and competence in the language they use (Meierkord quotation of Knapp 1991:43)". Therefore, "the resulting level of insecurity experienced by the participants has the effect of making them establish a unique set of rules for interaction (Meierkord quotation of Koole and ten Thije 1994:69). This set of rules can be seen in terms of cooperation and tolerance: indeed, it has namely been demonstrated that "ELF participants have a remarkable ability and willingness to tolerate anomalous usage and marked linguistic behaviour, even in the face of what appears to be usage that is at times acutely opaque (House's quotation of Firth 1996a: 247)".

Wherefore the English spoken within the classroom, instead of being very divided in terms of knowledge and competence (native and non-native speakers of English), although possibly being simplified in terms of lexicon and grammar, remains fairly leveled amongst speakers.

Is it possible to determine a diglossic schema within this culture?

Charles Ferguson is credited with first using the term diglossia in an article which he wrote in 1959 called *Diglossia*. Four languages – Arabic, Greek, Haitian Creole and Swiss German – were by him
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identified as being prime examples of languages which fit into his definition of diglossia: he indeed made a difference between the High and Low variety used by diglossic speech communities, where the High variety is very prestigious and the Low variety has no official status. Both varieties are believed to be complementary to each other, for instance with the High variety being used for literary discourse and the Low variety for ordinary conversation. In this perspective, we believe that with regards to Eurocampus 2007, a distinction can be made between a High and a Low variety of verbal communication, depending on the use that is made of the respective varieties. In the case of Low variety, we can for instance think of the informal conversations between classmates (including jokes), whereas High variety will rather tend to occur in class conversation and presentations (even though intermingled with Low variety) and in written text productions, for instance in writing our assignments. This language tend to be of a scientific type, with the professor playing a role in the supervision of our productions, and therefore probably providing us a good incentive to speak "well", i.e. in High variety.

Considering that a diglossic pattern represents a specific linguistic culture of a social actor that is a part of its semiotic culture, we can say, with regards to Eurocampus 2007, that the extent to which the diglossia can usually unfold will probably be limited considering that most of us are using a language that is not ours, that is lingua franca English: it is possible, for instance, that our lack of vocabulary impedes us in making constructions usually pertaining to the High variety; nonetheless, this might be different when transposing language and expressions from our mother cultures: even though the language might not always be entirely correct, our intention is to produce some form of High variety language and therefore it is likely that the intention and the register of this language be understood as pertaining to High variety.

According to Andrew Freeman (1996), the original definition of diglossia by Charles Ferguson was that "the two varieties which are in a diglossic relationship with each other are closely related, and therefore diglossia is not bilingualism". One can therefore differentiate bi-/multilingualism from diglossia in saying that a diglossic pattern refers to *one specific linguistic culture* of a social actor that is a part of its semiotic culture (Stockinger: 2007). In the case of bi-/multilingualism, several linguistic cultures come into play, with their different "semiospheres". Passing from a specific language to another therefore means passing from the realm of a particular sign system to another. The social actor that possesses two or more languages assigns to each one of these languages typical roles and communicative functions, wherefore one cannot speak of diglossia.

How multilingualism is managed in this culture?

In the culture which has been constituted within the Eurocampus 2007, we can make a distinction between the "formal" and "informal" groups which have been constituted. As we have mentioned before, the Eurocampus 2007 community as a whole entails several different "micro-communities" within its structure. These are namely distinguished upon the basis of their culture, but, more accurately, upon the basis of their common language which they will be linked to out of personal reasons. We can therefore speak of social actors bound by their social activities and practices and by their languages.

The difference with the larger community of Eurocampus 2007 is the fact that the group reassembles less out of common language and culture than out of the desire to achieve a specific goal, i.e. the pedagogical goal of becoming interculturally competent. Because of the multiculturalism in the group, it has been chosen that English would be the language of communication, since it is the language which allows communication across all "micro-communities". Considering that it is, furthermore, the *only* language which allows one to be understood by all in the classroom considering the multiculturalism of the group, even though certain "micro-communities" may have their own languages, the use of English as a lingua franca is logical and therefore autoregulated.

May we detect in this culture kinds of (formal or non-formal, implicit or explicit) language policies?

The language policies that can be detected within this culture are mainly implicit though formal: namely the fact of speaking English, as mentioned above, is related to the multiculturalism of the group. Considering that it is, furthermore, the *only* language which allows one to be understood by all in the classroom, and therefore a "functional language" (Stockinger: 2007). Indeed, even though certain "micro-communities" may have their own languages, the use of English as a lingua franca is logical and therefore equally implicit. Having analysed the Eurocampus handbook, we have found that there are only a few rare instances (2 courses out of 15) in which the use of language is regulated. In the following example, we can namely see that the essays are required to be written in English – which, in reality is not exactly the case, since the professor told us in class that the paper could be written in Italian and French in addition to English.

Extract of the programme for the Eurocampus 2007:

Assessment	Essay of around 12 pages not including appendices, to be written in English and submitted by e-mail and on paper three weeks after the last day of the course.
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We can therefore say that in some cases the implicit policies extend further than what is indicated explicitly: several professors have allowed students to write in another language as long as they could themselves understand it.

The Merriam Webster (2007) defines something "formal" as being done *"following or according with established form, custom, or rule"*. We believe that there is something going beyond the functionality of the language, in that English is nowadays a worldwide communication language. According to House (2002), *"Lingua franca English can today be used both internationally – most typically in business and political meetings which involve participants from many different linguistic and national backgrounds who are not communicatively competent in one another's native language – and intranationally – most typically in interactions between members of different migrant populations in an officially English speaking country"*.

Therefore, beyond the fact that English enables communication between the participants of the social actor Eurocampus 2007, therefore serving as a functional language, participants equally observe the nowadays international rule which is that of speaking English. This phenomenon can even be seen, in our opinion, as kind of "fashion".

Is it possible to detect in this culture a kind of creolized language form?

It has been recognised that lingua franca can be divided into three varieties: namely i) existing languages which have achieved some position of power in a region (or globally) – languages which are referred to as "languages of wider communication"; ii) restricted or limited forms of existing languages, whose diminished scope is at once easy to master and sufficient for communicative purposes which are, themselves, quite circumscribed; iii) constructed or "artificial languages" meant, again, to be easy to learn" (Edwards: 1995). Here, the restricted or simplified language mixture corresponding to the second major type of lingua franca is referred to as *pidgin*. According to Edwards, pidgin is a mixture of languages which is no one's maternal variety. The grammar and vocabulary of these languages are restricted, yet they allow simple communication as well as

linguistic creativity. Moreover, and what is interesting to our present purpose, *"a pidgin may evolve into a creole; this happens when a pidgin becomes a mother tongue, when children born in pidgin-speaking communities begin to develop (or "creolise") their linguistic inheritance"*.

In the case of the Eurocampus 2007 social actor, we personally doubt that the English lingua franca, though sometimes being a simplified version of English with regards to the native lexicon (see above), can be called a *pidgin* language. Pidgins are indeed very limited with regards to the vocabulary and to the grammar too. For instance, in Cameroon Pidgin English, which apparently is an important variety retaining lingua franca status, one can work out the following sentences for ourselves – even though the language is clearly limited, with regards to our form of lingua franca spoken in class:

"Dis smol swain I bin go fo maket" (this apparently has something to do with going to the market)

It is therefore interesting to reaffirm our case of Eurocampus 2007 lingua franca as being not a creolized language form - 2nd variety of lingua franca, according to Edwards (1995) – but as corresponding to the first variety of lingua franca, i.e. i) existing languages which have achieved some position of power in a region (or globally) – languages which are referred to as "languages of wider communication".

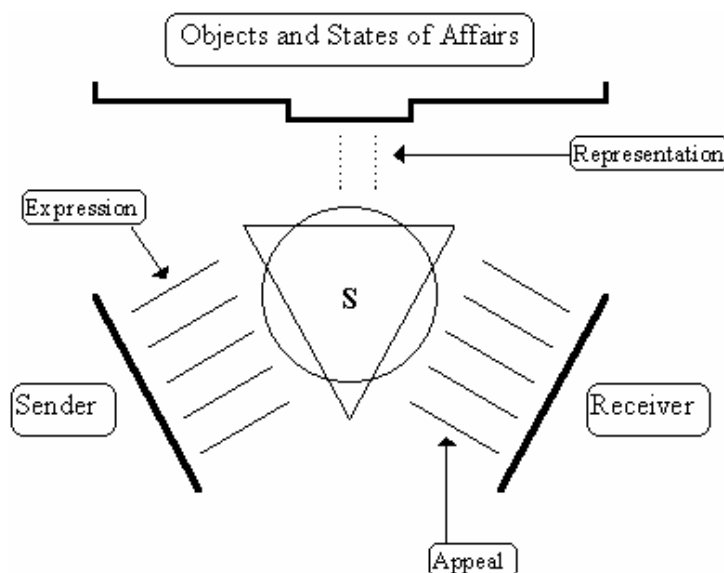
What is the relationship between written and oral language?

As we have already said before, a distinction can be made between written and oral language in terms of High and Low varieties: indeed, spoken language (informal conversations between classmates (including jokes)) will rather tend to be of a Low variety, whereas written text productions, for instance in writing our assignments, will rather tend to be of High variety. But there are equally cases in which class conversation and presentations will tend to be of a High variety, because of the professor's presence in the supervision of our productions, and therefore probably providing us a good incentive to speak "well", i.e. in High variety. We nonetheless believe that the language might sometimes be intermingled with Low variety English (especially in the last cases).

This distinction between spoken and written language in terms of Low and High varieties can equally be understood in terms of the communicative sign. Using Karl Bühler's model of

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communication can prove useful to us in that it allows to explain verbal and non-verbal communicative acts in terms of a limited number of components, namely as in the following scheme:



<http://www.uni-kassel.de/fb8/misc/lfb/html/text/6-3.html>

"Bühler's model describes the communication between a sender and a receiver by including a third party, the objects or states of affairs. A communicative function is then attributed to each act of communication, depending on which of the three parties involved was focused on most heavily."

Therefore - and this is the main component which we would like to focus upon - the students of the Eurocampus 2007 address different communicative acts - verbal or non-verbal - to different receivers, depending on their communicative intentions and on the potential appeal to the receiver (as well as in the optic of representing a state of affairs, but this aspect is less relevant here). When communicating verbally (=oral language), students most often talk to their fellow colleagues, wherefore they act according to the rules of the group, for instance in order to express and recall for sympathy. Whereas in the case of written language (or spoken in High variety contexts, see above), we should consider that this language is destined to the teacher in order, sometimes, to gain a mark. Therefore the written language here can equally be seen as appealing to a receiver, but for different purposes – therefore relying upon the use of High variety language.

The Multi-/intercultural dimension in "Eurocampus 2007"

The way people are involved in the collective, or the extent of their organisational/cultural commitment, i.e. form representations, "visions" and stereotypes about the cultural "other", is composed of different underlying reasons. In this section of the analysis we will try to analyse the cultural form representations and the stereotypes, taking in account the interesting article of Jaakko Lehtonen (2005): "Stereotypes and collective identification".

Lehtonen affirms that a strong emotional commitment to the collective includes a deep feeling of dependence and loyalty. "The stronger the commitment is, the more firmly is a person immured in the collective's generalised and simplified perceptions of self and others" (Lehtonen: 2005). Such perceptions are called collective stereotypes.

In our specific cultural form, being participants of Eurocampus 2007, a little group of twenty students could have developed a deep identification in the field of the Intercultural communication. The acknowledgement of being the only ones attending the Eurocampus study program probably helped the participants to feel committed to this group. Furthermore, this attitude could have been fostered also under the pressure of the organisation, by stressing that the participants were part of an intercultural community which is founded upon the prestigious tradition of EMICC programs, with precursors and followers.

The concept of the stereotype was originally introduced by Walter Lippmann in his classic *Public Opinion*, published in 1922. He introduced the concept stereotype, loaned from the letter press technology, used in printing houses at that time, to describe "pictures in head". Today the term is known in everyday usage to mean a readily available image of a given social group, usually based on generalizations.

According to Lippmann, people resort to stereotypes because the world that we have to deal with is out of reach, out of sight and out of mind. Therefore, "thinking about group-relevant social issues often requires reliance on stereotypes because the actions and characteristics of the relevant social groups are too numerous and diffuse to be grasped directly by the senses". (Lippmann 1922:18; Gill 2003:323-324)

Stereotypical thinking is understood to be a fundamental property in the human inferential system: stereotypical generalizations are often inaccurate, misleading, deceptive, and sometimes irrational but people nonetheless apply stereotypes. McRae & al. (1994) refer to the explanation originally presented by Lippmann (1922) according to which "we draw on stereotypes because reality is too

complex for any person to represent accurately". According to McRae & al. (1994:45), stereotypes help perceivers to simplify social information and to preserve valuable processing resources. By applying stereotypes, perceivers are able to derive viable, although potentially erroneous, impressions about the social environment at very little cognitive cost. In this way they can reduce the complexity of the social environment to be perceived and thus preserve the limited capacity of the cognitive system for the processing of other information.

One general characteristic of stereotyping is the difference claimed with respect to the qualities associated with the members of in-group and out-group. In general, out-groups are seen as more homogeneous than one's own group and they are perceived as possessing less desirable traits than the in-group. Cultural stereotypes, such as comparisons between "us" and "others", are also intertwined with the concept of ethnocentricity. According to Lehtonen (2005), in cultural stereotypes "the other" is usually valued negatively in comparison with "us" and our culture, which we see as "normal", "natural" and "correct", and the customs and the ethical values of which we feel are universally valid.

In the case of the construction of Eurocampus identity, the generalised feeling of uniqueness of the Intercultural Communication group could as well bring the participants to develop stereotypes towards other students communities, like the faculties of Economics, or Information technologies, perceived as out-groups, therefore, as lacking of some peculiar characteristics belonging to the Eurocampus in-group. In the case of this particular group of Intercultural communication, because of the academically strong studying of stereotypes during many classes, the risk to fall into over-generalisations is reduced but still possible to arise individually, in many different situations and contexts.

According to Collin's Dictionary of Sociology (Jary and Jary, 1995), a stereotype is a set of inaccurate, simplistic generalisations about a group of individuals which enable others to categorise members of this group and treat them routinely according to these expectations. This definition is related to Jandt's statement which says that "psychologists have attempted to explain stereotyping as mistakes our brain makes in the perception of other people that are similar to those mistakes our brains make in the perception of visual illusions".

The reason why stereotypes exist in every culture can be explained within the psychological framework, which explains that when somebody makes inferences about a new person or a social event, he is using his existing knowledge to reduce uncertainty in that particular situation. The less we know about the new people or their culture the more we use stereotypical generalisations.

These produce expectations about what people in that culture group are like and how they will behave. Often one's perception of others are based solely on generalisations about characteristics of the group to which they belong. In every culture, to make generalisations about various groups, cultures, nations, is very common. Such generalisations assume that the members of a group share certain values, personality traits and behave in predictable way, which is in accordance with the group's expectations. For example, all university professors are expected to be absent-minded, all women are expected to be more sociable and men more active and individual, all Finns are expected to be silent, all Italians to be noisy, etc. These kinds of group labels are unlimited in number and often held unconsciously by members of a given cultural group. They can even influence the processes of inference and decision making on a subconscious level. In fact, very often we are unaware what role they play in our opinion formation of everyday situations. Such stereotypes cause the perceiver to erase individual differences among the members of the group: "All Italians love pasta", "All Germans are punctual and precise" etc. Such stereotypes are not abstract generalisations but rather particular, concrete exemplars associated with the group in question. One source of stereotypical generalisation is the unconscious generalisation of the behaviour of one member of a group to the other members of that group. For example, in our cultural framework of Eurocampus students, a Finn participant who has learned to know only one Estonian may assume that all Estonians share the characteristics of this particular person. According to this model, "the subject will unconsciously continue to strengthen such a stereotype if there is no more information available and even in the absence of any evidence which would support the generalisation" (Hilton & Hippel 1996:245).

As well, the stereotypical image of a Nation and its inhabitants can be based on one single experience or on dealings with one person only. "Such an experience or acquaintance, even if long forgotten, can exert a strong influence on how later contacts with representatives of that culture will be interpreted" (cf. Hilton & Hippel 1996:250). If for example one of the Eurocampus participants had a very positive or negative impression regarding the only Thai colleague, he or she will instinctively reproduce his positive or negative attitude and expectations towards another Thai person he could meet in future.

Stereotypes are social to the extent in which they are shared by members of a group, but the concept implies the assumption of some level of consensus: "stereotypes are shared perceptions among group members but it is not clear, however, what minimum degree of consensus is required to call a stereotype social" (see Krueger 1996). This ambiguity in the everyday use of the concept of the collective or cultural stereotype has its parallel in what different writers understand by the

word *image*. For some of them "the image of a particular collective is like a mirror image, something that is a part or a projection of the object itself, while others understand images of the object to be pictures in the head of each observer" (Sani & Thompson 2001). The former implies that the perceptions of most, if not all, observers are identical; the latter may use the term image even if the contents of the pictures in the minds of different observers may not have much in common. In this case, most of the times during our class debates, the colleagues of Eurocampus 2007 had both impressions: sometimes two Germans or Italians found themselves sharing the same stereotypes towards another culture, sharing the same expectations regarding the cultural behaviour of the "other"; sometimes the same persons had very different opinions and visions of life, depending of their own personal experiences and attitudes.

Another interesting aspect about stereotyping is that collective self-concept may "be descriptive or evaluative" (cf. Marsh and Hattie 1996). The descriptive self-concept comprises stereotypical perceptions of the general characteristics of members of the collective, such as "we are honest", "we drink too much", "we are hard-working", "we are envious", etc. Although such perceptions may implicitly value the in-group when compared to others, they could also be some evaluations against some absolute ideal or relative standard based on a more general understanding of the qualities of groups and individuals. As Lehtonen (2005) affirms, evaluative components of the collective self-concept are descriptions which compare some quality of one's reference group with the respective qualities of some significant group of others. The point of comparison in the case of the national or cultural self may be the neighbouring country, some belittled or admired country or cultural group, or "the international standard" in general. Typical evaluative constituents of self are perceptions such as "members of my collective are educated/ quiet/poor" etc., which imply a comparison to some significant other. Most often a characterisation will include both aspects: descriptive and evaluative. When, for instance, members of a community are described as honest, this refers to a general virtue but may at the same time be based on the conscious or subconscious comparison of the collective to an out-group which is known to be less honest in their behaviour.

This particular way of describing and evaluating has been very present also within the in-groups present in the group of Eurocampus 2007 students. While sharing experiences and knowledge about different cultural habits, the national in-group such as the Swiss, the Germans, the Finnish and the Dutch, worked actively in the construction of other positive stereotypes. In some cases, the over-generalization regarding German behaviour expectations (i.e. punctuality, rigidity,

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seriousness) has been replaced by others, more acceptable to the group (i.e. being funny, outgoing, positive and open minded persons). In general, the students tended to remove and destroy the less positive expected ones with others more socially appreciated, by showing and explaining to the colleagues that personally they were not a "typical" German, Italian, Swiss, Finn, Dutch, American etc.

A further reflection which came out from this kind of discussions is that finally everybody acknowledged that a "typical" representative of nationality, which resumes in oneself all the positive and negative stereotypes others (the in-group and out-group counterparts) expect from one, simply doesn't exist.

Within the cultural framework of intercultural communication, participants have learnt to use stereotypes only in order to simplify to the others the vastness of their cultural environment of origin, with many basic examples. If stereotypes have not been completely avoided, at least the different national in-groups have tried to demystify the most common and the most inappropriate stereotypes about their national in-groups also by making many questions and comparisons with the others, in order to achieve a positive exchange of information and knowledge on each others features and peculiar characteristics.

In the course of the Eurocampus 2007, every participant has also tried to explain his/her personal vision of the world by referring to his/her national or cultural framework too, sometimes confirming some features of it, sometimes doing exactly the opposite, stressing his/her personality and individual perspective. The national boundaries have finally been confined in a cultural framework, very important in order to define the participants identity and feeling of belonging, but at the same time the participants felt free to identify their personality also through experiences abroad, i.e. through the contact with other cultural frameworks and by the integration of certain features and values in their personality and their visions of the world.

Relationship to actual tendency of globalisation

The vision shared by Eurocampus organisers and participants is strictly related to student mobility, strictly bound to the actual tendency to globalisation, therefore to intercultural exchanges and communication worldwide.

First of all, we would like to quote the definition given by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2007), which affirms that "covering a wide range of distinct political, economic, and cultural
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trends, the term "globalisation" has quickly become one of the most fashionable buzzwords of contemporary political and academic debate". We agree with Stanford University's perspective, which affirms that in popular discourse, globalisation often functions as little more than a synonym for one or more phenomena, like: the pursuit of classical liberal (or "free market") policies in the world economy ("economic liberalisation"), the growing dominance of western (or even American) forms of political, economic, and cultural life ("westernisation" or "Americanisation"), the proliferation of new information technologies (the "Internet Revolution"), as well as the notion that humanity stands at the threshold of realising one single unified community in which major sources of social conflict have vanished ("global integration"). Stanford University affirms as well that recent social theory has formulated a more precise concept of globalisation. We agree that although sharp differences continue to separate participants in the ongoing debate, most contemporary social theorists endorse the view that globalisation refers to fundamental changes in the spatial and temporal contours of social existence, according to which the significance of space or territory undergoes shifts in the face of a no less dramatic acceleration in the temporal structure of crucial forms of human activity. Geographical distance is typically measured in time. As the time necessary to connect distinct geographical locations is reduced, distance or space undergoes compression or "annihilation." This is quite evident if we take as a meaningful example the reduced feeling of distance we are experiencing with the improving of the new technologies which connect people and knowledge world-wide by internet connections or the faster means of transportation, like high speed trains and aeroplanes. The human experience of space is intimately connected to the temporal structure of those activities by means of which we experience space. Changes in the temporality of human activity inevitably generate altered experiences of space or territory. Theorists of globalisation disagree about the precise sources of recent shifts in the spatial and temporal contours of human life. Nonetheless, they generally agree that alterations in humanity's experiences of space and time are working to undermine the importance of local and even national boundaries in many arenas of human endeavour.

Globalisation contains far-reaching implications for virtually every facet of human life, therefore, it strongly involves and influences educational systems as well. We acknowledge the sentence that affirms that "as universities are expected to perform as a movement factor of development in each sense, they should head the process of globalisation and international collaboration in the sense of convergence of scientific, research and educational activities behind borders" (Samolejová A.; Toman Z.: 2002). In this sense student mobility organised by universities guarantees a long-term and firm exchanges of knowledge and experiences on international level.

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In this cultural framework of globalisation of education, Intercultural learning is an improving area of research, study and application of knowledge about different cultures, their differences and similarities. On the one hand, it includes a theoretical and academic approach, i.e. "Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity" by Milton Bennett (1986) or "Culture and organizations" by Geert Hofstede (1994). On the other hand, it comprises practical applications such as:

- 1) learning to negotiate with people from different cultures;
- 2) living with people from different cultures;
- 3) living in a different culture and the prospect of peace between different cultures.

Currently, intercultural learning is a topic which receives much interest. This could be mainly due to the rise of cultural studies and globalisation. In this perspective, cultural diversity has become an instrument for social interpretation and communicative action.

Moreover, one of the main goals of intercultural learning is seen as the development of intercultural competence, which means the ability to act and to relate appropriately and effectively in various cultural contexts. Moreover, intercultural competence is generally believed to require three components on the learner's side: a certain skill set, culturally sensitive knowledge, and a motivated mindset.

This aspect is very much related to labour market and new possibilities of learning and working abroad, for the university students all over the world. Changes in all fields of the society and also in the labour market mean that students have to acquire new skills to be successful in relating with challenges in today's multicultural environment. "Mobility during the course of studies could be one of the most effective tool to acquire these competencies" (Szarka: 2003). It is as well very important to underline that through globalisation the international student market is changing. An increasing number of higher education opportunities for study at home and abroad are contributing to rising competition in the international student market. In an attempt to attract the growing number of students seeking higher education, individual institutions and national governments are looking to differentiate themselves from their competitors. In an attempt to do so," they are developing and implementing targeted recruitment strategies to grow new markets or expand in already established ones" (Verbik L.; Lasanowski V., 2007).

From a concrete point of view, motivational factors in the decision-making process for student application to an overseas destination include employment and residency opportunities, the quality of the "student experience", including accommodation and social activities, and the costs associated with an international education.

Within this cultural and formative trend, which stresses the importance for students to make experiences abroad in order to develop their intercultural communication skills and practices, we find our specific cultural form, namely in the Eurocampus 2007 study program, which forms part of EMICC (European Master in Intercultural Communication).

Within this intercultural dimension of International study programs, the facilitation for European students or extra E.U. students studying in European Universities, are explained by the presence of international agreements within E.U. states and Switzerland for the free mobility of University students, seeking for experiences abroad, highly motivated by the modern trends of globalisation of higher education knowledge and increasing world-wide employment.

Conclusion

The present research has had as an aim to explore the characteristics of the group of participants who have attended the **E**uropean **M**asters in **I**nter**C**ultural **C**ommunication (EMICC) Eurocampus program in 2007, a programme whose aim is to bring together students and teachers from the partner universities for an intensive study period. Within this perspective, we have looked at the structure and composition of the life world as well as at the language culture peculiar to this group, in order to enlighten the multi- and intercultural dimensions of this group and of its environment, combined with more concrete observations regarding the group. We have equally linked our considerations to the broader context of globalization.

One of the main questions which have arisen in the course of our analysis has been as to the specific culture of Eurocampus 2007, in its possible interpretation through the concepts of "interculture" (ten Thije: 1994). A further question has been as to whether the Eurocampus 2007 could be considered as a new and specific culture in itself, created in the course of constant interaction between culturally different persons. Since it has been possible to analyse the entity Eurocampus 2007 as a social actor, we have identified several elements specific to this context, which therefore can be considered as characteristic of this particular culture.

At the beginning, we have enquired upon whether, as theorized by Jan ten Thije (1994), people from different cultural backgrounds, when meeting produce a common culture, with rules established in the process of their interaction – for instance in being more tolerant towards their counterpart's linguistic failures and misunderstandings. We should nonetheless be aware that ten Thije's theory has been developed in terms of interpersonal interactions. It has therefore been interesting to see that this phenomenon can equally be explained on a broader level, that of an intercultural group such as Eurocampus 2007.

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Annex – the Erasmus programme

Erasmus is the acronym for **EuR**opean Community **A**ction **S**cheme for **M**obility of **U**niversity **S**tudents, approved by the European Community in 1987 to allow European students to carry out part of their studies at foreign universities and receive credit from their home university for course work completed abroad. At its founding, any university participating in the ERASMUS project belonged to either the European Union or to nations taking part in the European Association of Free Exchange (EAFE), that is to say, Austria, Iceland, Sweden, Switzerland and Liechtenstein. After a decision by the European Parliament and Council of the European Union in March 1995, the Socrates action programme was set up to foster international co-operation in education, as provided in various Chapters under the Socrates heading, with a progressive replacement of the Erasmus program. Socrates is based on provisions enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty on the European Union and contributes to the development of quality education through a range of programmes to be carried out in close co-operation with member states. Such actions – as established in Chapter 1 (Erasmus: higher education), Action 1 (encouragement of student mobility and financing Erasmus scholarships) involve the development of a European level of instruction, particularly encouraging language teaching improvements, support for student and instructor mobility, better recognition of studies carried out abroad, greater co-operation in distance education, and an intensive exchange of information and experience on educational systems in the whole European Union. To promote and support such international actions aimed at encouraging a European dimension in university education, Socrates provides that the university can seek financial support from the EU. Such funds in the early years of Erasmus were managed through international agreements known collectively as "Interuniversity Co-operation Programmes (ICP). In the realm of Socrates, the 1997/98 academic year gave the start to the Institutional Contract granted by European Commission approval and confirmed by each participating University. All applications made by universities for community support programmes must include both a declaration of intent to further European co-operation and the proposal for single co-operation as required by a specific questionnaire.

The host universities welcome the Socrates/Erasmus students as their own and, whenever existing, student housing, cafeteria, teaching and research facilities (laboratories, libraries, etc.) are made available without a fee. Students usually stay for a semester, but scholarships can be extended for up to twelve months in order for students to complete research studies, degree theses and doctorates. Short-term scholarships are available for three months, in particular for research, degree theses and doctorates. Scholarships begin on 1 October of any academic year and end on 30 September of the following academic year. Unless otherwise indicated, courses are held in the language of the host country. While abroad a student may attend one or more courses. Degree requirements towards a doctorate can also be completed. Attendance is compulsory. The European Union assigns scholarships with the aim of supplementing student travel and housing costs.