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**How to Analyze and Handle Cultural Gaps in German Everyday Life  
(from the Perspective of Exchange Students)**

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**Preface**

*This article comprises theoretical background, positioning within the framework of scientific research, methodology, examples in an empirical field with a regional focus, and applications.*

*The subject applies to exchange students and professionals working in multicultural working situations at home or abroad, any mediators between cultures. Typical for these situations is: we cannot limit them just to professional aspects or just to working place situations. Rather they embrace the total personality, and all manifestations of life, of everyday life.*

*I set out with some examples of cultural gaps in German everyday life from the perspective of Russian exchange students (see 1). I briefly mention different approaches of intercultural research - how to analyze these gaps (see 2). I introduce my approach of „lacuna analysis“ (see 3). After empirical data (see 4), systematics (see 5) and definitions (see 6) I describe the use of lacuna model in preparing intercultural encounters (see 7). I close with some general remarks on the terminology of culture, communication and intercultural communication.*

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## **1 Cultural Gaps in German Everyday Life**

Gaps or - using a Latin term - lacunas between cultures refer to something strange, unfamiliar, possibly awkward, possibly memorable. The Russian ethnopsycholinguists use this term as a description for all those incidences that, on one hand, provoke astonishment, perplexity, startling, irritation and annoyance and, on the other hand, may lead to curiosity and often even fascination when two cultures meet.

Here are just a few examples of lacunas that I encountered during my investigations into German-Russian student exchanges.

- Russian students go hungry while living in German families.
- A German girl and her mother get annoyed by the rude behavior of their guest (they call it „Machogehabe“) when he shakes hands only with the grandfather but not with the grandmother.
- A German girl, just calling her boyfriend on the phone, asks her exchange partner not to enter her room. Consequently the deeply offended guest never enters her room again.
- A Russian teacher sighs happily and contented to her German host: „You are simple people“ („Ihr seid einfache Menschen“). That host happens to be a senior mistress of secondary education („Oberstudienrätin“), her husband is a university professor of ancient philology. They live in a large mansion with stucco at the ceilings, walls covered by bookshelves, literature of Homer waiting to be read at the guest toilet, Art nouveau furniture, and pieces of art wherever there is a place to put them. Hardly the kind of people that in Germany we would call „simple“.

## **2 Different Scientific Approaches on Intercultural Communication lead to different Explanations**

We can name the cultural peculiarities underlying my examples in terms of different scientific approaches on intercultural communication.

One might quote the cultural psychologist Thomas: according to whom any culture consists of cultural standards („Kulturstandards“), that is systems of specific values and patterns of behavior, manifesting in respective acts. The German cultural standard aloofness („Distanz“) for example manifests in closed doors, reduced willingness to engage in conversation. (Thomas 1996; Krewer 1996)

Perhaps someone else may refer to Hofstede - with his social psychological research and would apply his classification of cultural types („Kulturtypen“). He calls cultures for example „community oriented“ („kollektivistisch“) or „individual oriented“ („individualistisch“). (Hofstede 1980)

A third person might possibly refer to linguistic research and for example to Günthner or Kotthoff: They classify customs of conversation („Diskurskonventionen“) concerning reason of conversation, theme, opening, performance and ending of conversation. (Günthner 1994 and 1995; Kotthoff 1994) So rather than naming different attitudes and psychological **SUBSTANCE** you would concentrate on the specific **FORM** of how for example different people enact the process of making contact.

Maybe a fourth person would express this in the terminology of Els Oksaar, another linguist, she calls universal phenomena such as making of contact „culturemes“ („Kultureme“) as opposed to their concrete and specific enactment. They are called „behavioremes“ („Behavioreme“). Such a behavioreme would be: on making contact, who is supposed to extend his or her hand to whom? (Oksaar 1989)

And a fifth person might resort on the older structuralists and semanticists which have been dealing with partial or complete „gaps“ in the meaning and inventory of words.

These and many more quite different scientific approaches constitute the new research field of intercultural communication. In Germany we date its first dawning in the eighties, its rise to the installment of first professorial chairs in the nineties of the twentieth century.

It is not by chance that I talk about intercultural communication in terms of a research field. In Germany this is just starting to become a clearly delineated teaching subject and in many places far from being a fully developed and recognized scientific discipline which has a singular research subject, specific methods, unique theories and a record of results. Much research of intercultural communication takes place in the time-tested framework of traditional disciplines.

Nonetheless these given frames are being transcended.

In Jena for example they have actually instituted a new teaching subject „Intercultural economic communication“ (Interkulturelle Wirtschaftskommunikation), which defines its specific target area and integrates and advances methods and theories of different disciplines. (Bolten 1998a, 1998b)

In other places the topicality and acceptance of the new research area of intercultural communication at least gives the unanswered questions and unsatisfactory situations higher urgency. Thus for example in the discipline of linguistics it has been accepted for quite some time that „world knowledge“ („Weltwissen“) next to „language knowledge“ („Sprachwissen“) is an important precondition for communication. Yet for methodological and theoretical reasons it frequently has been excluded from linguistic research.

### **3 The Lacuna Model: A Model for Discovery, Analysis and Handling of Cultural Gaps**

While doing research in Moscow in the mid-eighties I was introduced into ethnopsycholinguistics at the Institute of Linguistics in the Academy of Sciences of the then Soviet Union. Here Jurij A. Sorokin took a closer look at a phenomenon that had been widely described in the scientific community of Translation and Literature as “the gap in the text” (“die Textlücke”). He took the term “lacuna” that had already been used in Russia and transformed it into an instrument of intercultural research. (Antipov, Donskich, Markovina, Sorokin 1989; Sorokin 1977 and 1993)

In doing so Sorokin and Markovina adhered to the premise of receptional esthetic, that text (in its broadest sense) is always constituted between two sides, the author and the reader. (Markovina 1993)

Let me now introduce to you my modification (Ertelt-Vieth 1990b, 1999b, 2000b, 2001, 2003a, 2003b) of the lacuna model (Markovina 1982). This is a part of my research that might contribute to the future development of an independent discipline of “Intercultural Communication”.

I started out, trying to find out what and how German students of Russian learn, when living in Moscow. I wanted to lay an empirical foundation to what at that time was codified in curricula of foreign language didactics of German “Landeskunde”. And the lacuna model proved suitable for this purpose.

Characteristics of my theoretical and methodological approach to research of intercultural communication in general and in application of lacuna theory and of lacuna model in particular are

- The lacuna theory closes the old gap between “world knowledge” and “language knowledge”.
- Analysing lacunas provides an integrated procedure instead of the hotchpotch of geographical, historic, literary, sociologic and other data of the German teaching subject of “Landeskunde”.

- Field objects of research are inductively found and defined: Any phenomena that in the encounter of different cultures might gain significance for at least one side. They could be phenomena of language, clothing, and architecture, even style of management, just to name a few.
- High degree of systemic work.
- Vividness and practicability.
- High integrating capacity for many different empirical results from varying disciplines.
- Integration of very differing, even “geographically” very distant theories such as the Soviet respectively Russian ethnopsycholinguistics and the activity theory (“Tätigkeitstheorie”) of Leont’ev (A.A. Leont’ev 1982) and the US-American cultural anthropology of Geertz (Geertz 1992, 1995).
- Open for research are phenomena in student exchange, in foreign language learning, in international management, in international politics, in multicultural societies living together.

You might call the lacuna-model a store of categories that enables us to scientifically register, classify, and analyze the immense diversity of cultural peculiarities. Inductively many different aspects of a conflict situation or even of the whole genesis of a conflict can be analyzed.

Opposite to many “guides” and “cultural assimilators” that often are at risk of propagating magic formulas, the aim of lacuna analysis is to observe

- subtleties
- overlappings
- contradictions
- individual characteristics
- developments.

Classification into four superior classes of lacunas and their manifold division into subgroups is not meant to be just a system of drawers and boxes but rather a dynamic instrument. These four superior classes of lacunas are:

- mental lacunas
- lacunas of activity
- lacunas of objects  
and as a special class
- axiologic lacunas.

#### **4 Illustration of the Lacuna Model and first Definitions**

As the first class of lacunas let me now introduce the large group of **MENTAL LACUNAS**. And in doing so I ask you to observe two principles:

- the naming of the respective perspective or the respective intercultural constellation is crucial
- frequently different lacunas coincide.

Mental lacunas denote **differences in all cognitive or affective states or models, differences in the state of knowledge in its broadest sense**, such as

- conscious and subconscious
- so-called common sense and reflected knowledge
- rules derived from experience or ethics
- expectations and fears.

A subgroup of mental lacunas are the **culture emotive lacunas**. In the above mentioned example of Russian students going hungry while living in affluent German families it is insufficient just to explain that in Germany meals are offered casually and only once. In Russia it is considered polite to repeatedly talk somebody into eating (this is a lacuna of etiquette). It is essential to know that even an adult Russian teacher would feel deeply ashamed, if she were to ask German host parents to please provide the children with larger lunch packets. This is what I call a culture emotive lacuna.



Another subgroup of mental lacunas are the **lacunas of fond or of knowledge**. This subgroup may be further subdivided into the following groups:

- conceptual lacunas. For example: For the German “Gemütlichkeit” in some other languages there exists neither a concept nor the corresponding word (which for itself just would be a lexical lacuna).
- role related lacunas. They denote differing views of what, for example, a “guest” or a “friend” is supposed to do or not to do.
- spatial lacunas. They denote differing ideas of distance for example for people living in Sibiria or Canada on one hand and for people living in Thüringen on the other hand.
- time related lacunas. In the mid-nineties for a Russian student staying away from home for fourteen days was a long time. For their much traveled German counterparts this was hardly worth mentioning. Additionally, the Russian word “dom” has much larger connotations than its German equivalent “Zuhause”.
- mnemonic lacunas emerge for example, when in one country people quite vividly remember who started World War Two, while in others this is not the case.
- a third subgroup of mental lacunas are lacunas related to the language knowledge.
- partial and complete lexical lacunas refer to the inventory and meaning of words. Above I mentioned already some examples in the Russian German perspective, namely “Zuhause”, “einfacher Mensch”, “Gemütlichkeit”. The word “Kehrwoche” as used in Schwaben may be a lexical lacuna. The corresponding behavior to sweep the road in a certain time schedule and in a certain way may be a lacuna of routine. This also shows that **intracultural** lacunas exist for example between Swabians and Hessians, from the Perspective of German culture.
- grammatical lacunas are familiar to all of us. Two examples: In German we have many nominal compound words. Also, we have three definite articles, while the English language has only one and the Russian none.

Above I hinted at interrelations and overlappings of different kinds of lacunas even while explaining their theoretical system of classification. This is even truer in the practical analysis of critical incidents in exchange programmes.

Take one of the first mentioned examples. How is it that a German exchange partner and her mother get annoyed by the “macho” behavior of their 17-year-old guest who himself thinks he is being very polite.

Here the differentiation between explicit and implicit lacunas is very helpful. Implicit lacunas go unnoticed for people involved in the concrete situation. They are not talked about. It is exactly because of this that they frequently lead to the biggest problems in cultural exchange. In this example we also may realize that each side considers the other to behave somehow awkwardly. There is no dispassionate neutral stating of something just unusual. Rather the situation is interpreted as “macho” behavior from one perspective and “low hospitality” from the other. That kind of gap I call axiological lacuna. You might also call it semantic lacuna or lacuna of meanings. Some cultural psychologists in instances like these would talk about wrong attribution that needs correcting. Contrary to that, Lacuna analysis sets out to first accept the different perspectives and then to compare and to try to explain them.

Furthermore the lacuna-model is open for regional and historic differences: The German mother had forgotten that in earlier times in Germany we also had the etiquette that a lady extends her hand to a man and not the other way around. And this student was from southern Russia, where this kind of etiquette is more vivid than in Moscow and much more so than in Germany.

From a Russian perspective the talk about “macho” behavior is even more offending as a good host in Russia is supposed to never make any negative comment about a guest. In this instance this is opposed by a contemporary German understanding of sexual equality (Gleichberechtigung), a conceptual mental lacuna. It also is a lacuna of activity, here in the subgroup as lacuna of behavior: Political correctness in Germany allows that anything that could be interpreted as male dominant behavior can be criticized in public.

This is a good example to explain why in the lacuna concept we make a distinction between mental lacunas and lacunas of activity. Thus we can adequately clarify the difference between mental concepts of equality on one side and observable behavior at the working place, in the family or elsewhere on the other side. Both sides rarely coincide.

And for scientific research they constitute quite distinct fields of objects. They need different ways of treatment. Take the mental concepts. No scientific discipline, not even psychology, offers direct access into the heads of other people.

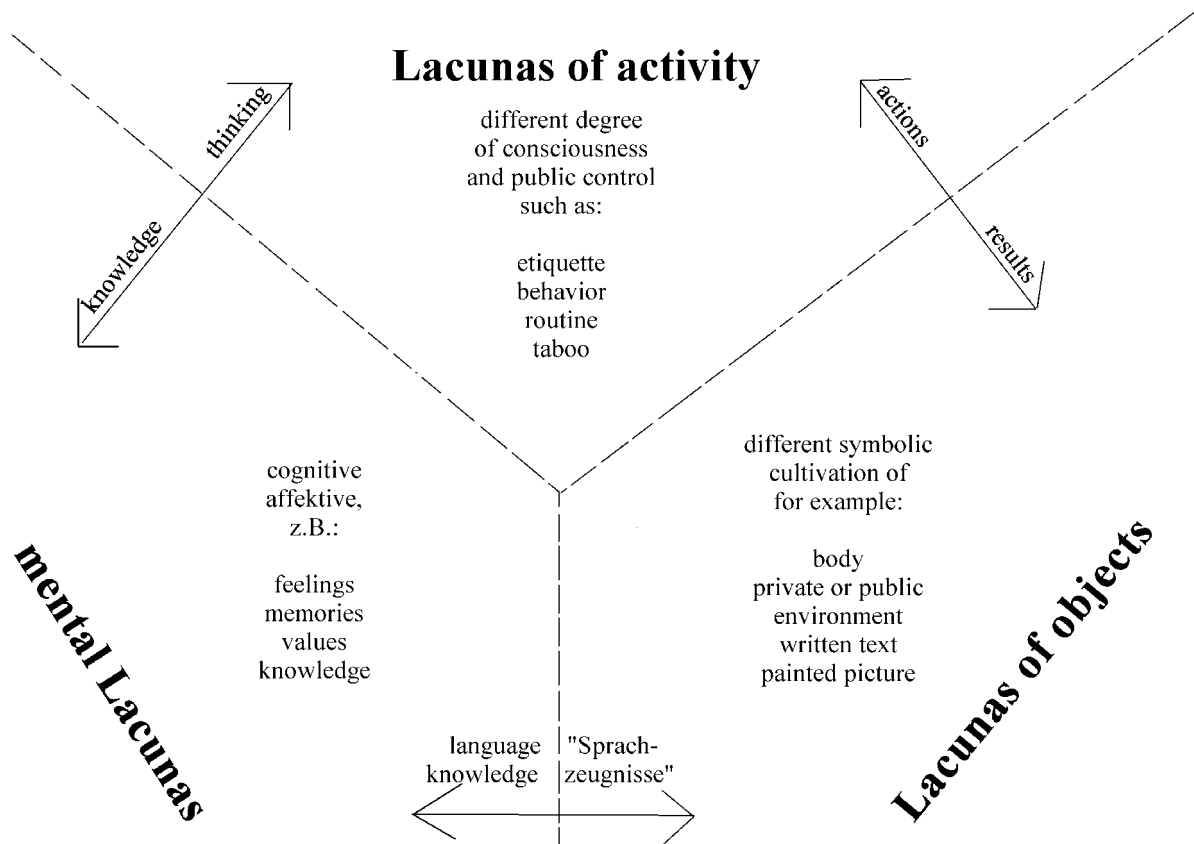
The only head directly open for the scientist's inspection is his own by way of introspection. Among the indirect ways of access to mental concepts are analysis of activities of literary texts or psychological tests. For the description and analysis of activities we can rely on audio or video tapes or field notes. A **multimethodological** approach is advisable for example for Americans, who want to find out what German "Gemütlichkeit" is all about.

## **5 The Systematics of the Lacuna Model**

Because of the many-sidedness of our field and the sophistication of our procedure, we need strict systematics in our „store of categories“, in our lacuna model (Ertelt-Vieth 2003a)

Regarding the three superior classes of **MENTAL LACUNAS**, **LACUNAS OF ACTIVITY**, and **LACUNAS OF OBJECTS**, you might remember the threeparted concept of culture widely used in Ethnology: The concept of mental, social and objective culture. (Posner 1992) However in my approach we do not talk about „social culture“ and much less so about exponents of culture in the sense of a restrictively definable group of people. Rather we talk about activity (Tarasov 1994) in the sense of learned processes, much of which are open to reflection and control. Any strict threepartition must appear somewhat arbitrary. Of course there is no activity without mental and physical aspects.

The graph may illustrate the transitions:



Differing processes of thinking might be called lacunas of activity, while their results, as inventory of knowledge, may be mental lacunas. Among these mental lacunas are lacunas of language knowledge, while hardcopy evidence of language "Sprachzeugnisse" such as books or letters might turn out to be lacunas of objects. And their production, if done in a peculiar way, might be a lacuna of activity.

So after having defined the superior class of mental lacunas, let me now give the definitions of the other superior classes, the lacunas of activity, the lacunas of objects, and as a special dimension the axiological lacunas.

## The LACUNAS OF ACTIVITY

They denote differing processes of thinking, talking, moving and other activities. They may be caused by peculiar mental and objective preconditions and their results in turn may constitute mental lacunas or lacunas of objects.

The following subgroups are an **open** list reflecting the current state of research. In the shortness of this article we cannot sufficiently explain all of them.

- Lacunas of use of language. An equivalent to the German word „Danke“ exists in many languages. But in the Russian language that word is used less frequent, in French it is used more often.
- Lacunas of paralinguistic and body language. Japanese smile more frequently than Germans when they want to signal respect and attention to the person they are talking or listening to. Russians to the contrary only smile at friends. And they never used to smile at work, where seriousness was expected. But as you might anticipate, this has been changing in recent years.
- Lacunas of etiquette, behavior, routine and taboo. They differ in the degree of consciousness and public control. Lacunas of routine for example denote differences in habits such as bathing. As opposed to etiquette or taboo, breaking of routines is socially not sanctioned but may nonetheless lead to practical problems. For example even if nobody is present to watch me, I prefer eating with a knife and a fork, I do not like spitting into a bowl, even if it is provided just for that purpose, and I do not sleep well under French blankets. Research into lacunas of everyday life routines such as these, are a novelty in comparison to linguistic research of intercultural communication which centers on verbal activities and most often in face-to-face situations.
- Lacunas of thinking, perception and orientation in space and time may be subdivided into syllogistic lacunas and perceptive lacunas.

- Lacunas of communicative means to constitute an identity. In scientific meetings Russian scientists frequently introduce themselves by giving their name and the number of their publications. Germans do not do this and they regard such a behavior to be embarrassing. On the other hand, in Germany, the title of Doctor is part of the name, and many professors even outside of University like to be called by their title, which in the setting of some other countries would be frowned upon.
- Lacunas of oral texts and of moving pictures. This comprises the whole area of conventions on non-literal kinds of texts: place, content and form of small talk; speed of speech and duration of clips in television programs, and so on.
- Lacunas of virtual texts and pictures. This subgroup was quite recently added. But the first research projects into culture specific ways of Internet communication such as in commercial advertising or in chatrooms look very promising.

## **LACUNAS OF OBJECTS**

They denote differences in objects and in human environments. Among their subgroups are

- lacunas of written or otherwise recorded texts and images. Just think of the differences in family photos or letters.
- lacunas of public environment. Examples are the central gloriettas in Spanish towns and villages or the decoration of Russian classrooms with flowers and curtains.
- lacunas of geographic infrastructure such as architecture, network and condition of roads, cultivated forests or virgin forests etcetera.
- lacunas of private environment. Floor plan and furnishing of flats and houses; gardens, „Datschas“ and „Schrebergärten“.
- lacunas of the human body such as hair color, weight, posture.
- attributive lacunas. Differing means used in order to set the stage for our body and character such as hairstyle, jewelry, clothing, make-up, briefcase.
- lacunas of food. White bread or pumpnickel, soybean or pork, stew or soljanka. Cooked or raw seafood.

## AXIOLOGICAL LACUNAS

in some way add a special dimension to the lacuna model. They denote culture specific connotations and evaluations of differing phenomena. They are often the heart of misunderstanding and conflicts.

### **6 Definition of Lacunas**

Now after showing the phenomenology of lacunas, let me give you a comprehensive definition.

- 1) Lacunas are elements or aspects of a text that do not correspond to the experiences of subjects of another culture. They might hamper or prohibit understanding of that text, but they also may motivate towards intercultural communication. Lacunas arise between cultures and between cultural levels.
- 2) Understanding of texts in the broadest sense, including cultures, is an active, creative and perspective oriented process. This constitution of meaning unfolds on the basis of meaning potential of the text and of the preexisting experiences of the reader.
- 3) Lacunas do not describe stable meanings, but depend on the respective conditions of the actual encounter of exponents of at least two cultures or cultural levels at a given moment in time. They may vary from long-traded relatively stable meanings to Ad-hoc-meanings and may be complexly intertwined. They are subject to individual and subcultural differentiation as well as to historic change. Thus they may not be thought of as rigid classes but of a dynamic model that enables us to differentiate varying levels and aspects (such as verbal, psychological or geographical) of any situation or action.
- 4) According to their substance we have mental lacunas, lacunas of activity and lacunas of objects.
- 5) Culture specific connotations and evaluations we call axiologic lacunas (Ertelt-Vieth 1990a, p.309-310). For in any encounter between different cultures any object, any activity may gain significance independent of whatever significance is attributed to them in their own cultural context. In the graph axiologic lacunas really would have to be shown three-dimensionally as a mirror or second level to all lacunas.

In principle every result of intercultural research (for example in Ethnology or Psychology) that complies with the definition given in the first three points may be called a lacuna and could lead to classification of further subgroups of lacunas. And it is just these „translations“ between different scientific disciplines that warrant explication of the conceptual and theoretical basis of the lacunamodel.

## **7 A Means of Application of the Lacuna Model:**

### **Preparing Intercultural Encounter**

The lacuna model may be put to use in

- discovery and analysis of critical incidents in face-to-face situations or in medially mediated intercultural encounters
- reconstruction of problematic confrontations of even long-lasting exchange relations from student exchange to problems between east and west Europe
- preparing intercultural encounters.

Sometimes the time frame for preparation is restricted to just a few hours. Thus I once held a preparatory meeting with 17-year-old volleyball players, their teachers and parents before their journey to Moscow. They were not concerned about language. They thought that somehow they would get around with English.

In that situation I needed handy formulas that were easy to comprehend, easy to remember during the trip, and that also might be useful in drawing conclusions afterwards and in analysis of possible concrete conflicts.

For that purpose I designed a checklist for intercultural encounters (Ertelt-Vieth 2002). That checklist consists of two parts

- a structural aid towards cultural knowledge (From existing knowledge to new experience in six steps)
- normative goals (Principles for intercultural encounter of any of the above six headings).



In the beginning of the meeting we collected existing knowledge and open questions at a blackboard. I classified the results of this brainstorming by means of six different colors and introduced my audience to the six points of the structural aid part of the checklist. These six points are meant to orient the view at first towards similarities and then towards discovery and comprehension of differences.

A **structural aid** towards cultural knowledge:

**From existing knowledge to new experience in six steps.**

Remember: In (for example) Russia and elsewhere

- 1. many things are like they are here**
- 2. many things are like they are in many countries - only in Germany they are different**
- 3. many things are different indeed**
- 4. many things might have different relations and different meanings**
- 5. no two persons are alike (and yet many may be similar in many respects)**
- 6. hardly anything will remain the same.**

This part of the checklist covers in simple words the principles of lacuna analysis, such as perspective, axiological lacunas, individual differences, and processes etcetera.

Depending on age, interests and purposes of the group and the time frame of such meetings there are at least two ways of working with this part of the checklist. Either the moderator uses her results from lacuna research or she lets the participants get acquainted with this model. Any way work with these six points may promote

- expression, exchange and differentiation of an existing inventory of knowledge
- larger „cultural attentiveness“
- better targeted questioning
- better action and more adequate reaction.

Targeted on a group of youngsters we collected the following examples under the headings of **the first part of the checklist:**

**In Russia many things are like they are here**

- kids are also interested in music, in computers, in fashion, in hanging around with kids of the same age
- kids also have their secrets
- ....

**In Russia many things are like they are in many countries - only in Germany they are different**

- bread is served at all meals
- busses are not on schedule; when you have a date with somebody you disregard minutes
- ...

**In Russia many things indeed are different (from here)**

- apartments are smaller
- people do not sort their waste
- whenever they celebrate, it is a big celebration - with plenty of good food and drink
- ....

**In Russia many things might have different relations and different meanings**

- playing cards is considered obscene (so: try to refrain from playing cards at school!)
- some of us frequently utter „Scheiße“ (Engl.: shit); Russians nearly never use the corresponding word; and even to young Russians that word sounds terribly vulgar and by no means „cool“
- ....

**In Russia no two persons are alike (and yet many may be similar in many respects)**

- mothers and daughters, fathers and sons
- a lot of people believe in God, some others do not
- some are crazy about their grandmother's "Pel'meni", some others just die for McDonalds Hamburgers
- ....

**In Russia hardly anything remains the same**

- the former Soviet Union used to be hopelessly backward in terms of development and application of new media; meanwhile Russians have bypassed many of us
- ...

How to react to these cultural specificities is discussed by means of **the second part of the checklist:**

**Normative Goals:**

**Principles for intercultural encounter of any of the above six headings.**

You should:

- 1. try and gain much experience in common and in differing and in unusual situations and even in misunderstandings**
- 2. often put yourself into the other person's shoes in trying to understand them**
- 3. explain your customs and perspectives to the others**
- 4. in any unfamiliar situation look for the things that are in common, compromise but criticize only if necessary, and never in an offending way, make your own points clear but always stay open for further communication**
- 5. reflect what you would want to change for yourself or what you would want to keep - just for your time abroad or permanently at home.**
- 6. remember that understanding rises in spirals: You frequently arrive at similar points, feel like you are starting anew, and yet move on.**

## **8 Culture, Communication and Intercultural Communication**

I put these definitions at the end of my article because thus they are easier to understand and because I want to underline, that definitions in science are tools that must be selected, shaped or reshaped according to the goals and fines of that respective concrete research.

The empirical and inductive approach towards cultural gaps in student exchange results in a broad understanding of **CULTURE** and a many-sided methodological procedure, which

- centers on active, reflective and self-reflective human beings
- comprises the differing dimensions of their activities (prerequisites, processes and results), here called mental, activity related and object related.
- also does not give „objective“ descriptions, but rather tries to grasp and interpret them in their dynamics.
- wants to lay out means for their creative and responsible construction and reconstruction.

In **COMMUNICATION** we not only see the exchange of messages. Starting from the dialogical essence of process and content of communication, communication here is described as a constructing of meaning and an appeal to construct meaning. Reality is not only interpreted but also created. Signs in communication do not stand for things but represent concepts of or relations to them. Thus communication requires a minimum of mutual signs and mutual experiences.

Communication is a symbol-mediated process of mutual interaction. Communication not only happens face-to-face but also via media spanning distances of time and place. You cannot but communicate. There is no principal difference between intercultural and intracultural communication. Communication constitutes culture, as enculturation of the individual human being is brought about in communication with its peers. They consume and produce a specific culture. Content and form of these processes are culturally mediated, that is they either originate from a culture or from demarcation from a culture. In order to understand these specific contents and appearances a minimum of mutual signs and experiences is necessary. The specificity of these contents and forms and their way of interaction, this „style“, we call culture.

It is collectively valid and collectively traded on. These contents and forms that we call culture have three dimensions: a mental dimension, the dimension of activity and the dimension of objects. And in all these dimensions changes occur. If in this process exponents and dimensions of differing cultures meet, we talk of intercultural communication. As in intracultural communication a minimum of mutual signs and experiences is necessary. Otherwise intercultural communication cannot occur.

In intercultural communication strictly different signs or inventories of experience meet. Depending on how this „strict difference“ can be shown in the empirical material or is deduced and founded theoretically, intercultural communication will be defined in a more broad or more narrow sense. So intercultural communication may take place in student exchange or in a phone call between two branches of a bakery firm in North- and Southbavaria (Götz 1996).

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