

# **The dialogue 3 programm: Acts of mediation between cultural minority groups and socio- educational institutions in Europe**

**Period of the project: 01.01.2000 bis zum 31.12.2000**

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## **A. Introduction**

The project presented to you below is the result of a year's work by several associations in different countries and in different realities.

This project arose from transnational contacts between 4 partnership associations: BAGIV, CCPF, MLF and SER.GI. The meetings were held during activities such as the congress in Königswinter (January 1999), organised by the Central Coordinating Agency for the Cooperation with Foreigners of the PARITÄTISCHE in Bonn, within the framework of preliminary measures taken by the European Union in the battle against discrimination.

During this meeting we shared certain fears with our future partners about, for example in the context of addressing discrimination based on cultural heritage. Some of these fears had to do with the fields of formal education as well as social and political participation by cultural minority groups.

It has to be mentioned furthermore that every partnership association not only resides in a different country but is active in different areas of intervention. BAGIV in Germany and CCPF in France are two associations which - due to their membership structure - are the roof organisations of a considerable number of immigrant groups. Thus, they represent a direct participation of immigrant persons organised in clubs and/or organisations.

On the other hand, the Foundation SER.GI. de Catalunya (Spain) and the MLF from Belgium, two associations with technical character, are engaged in social and educational projects. These associations are therefore representing the professional dimension of work with persons of a cultural minority group.

Moreover, the diversity of the situations on the ground in each of the countries presented here is an important factor. For example, Spain, until a few years ago, was principally an emigration country while France, Belgium, and Germany have for many years been immigration countries. In addition, we see a difference in the legal and political frameworks as well as in the structures of responsibilities and education in every country represented here.

But as mentioned in the beginning we nevertheless found certain aspects of common concern which seemed interesting for our cooperation: for example promoting equal chances in the education system for children and teenagers belonging to cultural minorities without denying the role of their own cultural background i.e. the participation of these groups in the fields and institutions of education.

It was this common concern which motivated us to develop our project "Dialogue 3". This project therefore is the result of dialogue and considerations and the product of different social actors, different ideological visions, and different territorial realities.

**B. Who are we?  
BAGIV, MLF, CCPF, Ser.Gi**

We are practitioners , scientists and/or immigrant organisations from different countries.

The goal of our project is: To promote the peaceful togetherness and co-existence of target groups, populations, and institutions especially educational institutions of the host societies, to create a positive image of these minorities, to further develop the dialogue between the different ethnic groups to such a degree that equal participation within the European societies will be possible.

**Germany**

Stamatis Assimenios  
BAGIV - Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Immigrantenverbände in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland  
Baumschulallee 2a  
D-53115 Bonn  
Tel: 0049-228-22 46 10  
Mail: info::@bagiv.de  
Web site: [www.bagiv.de](http://www.bagiv.de)

**Belgium**

Carole Granjean  
Mission Locale Froest  
29, Bd. De la Ile Armee britannique  
B-1190 Bruxelles  
Tel: 0032-2-34 98 210  
Mail: [missionlocaleforest@yahoo.fr](mailto:missionlocaleforest@yahoo.fr)

**France**

Carlos Pereira  
CCPF - Coordination des Collectivites Portugaises de France  
156, rue deMenilmontant  
F-75020 Paris  
Tel: 0033-1-446 205 04  
Mail: [Ccpf1@aol.com](mailto:Ccpf1@aol.com)

**Spain**

Cristina Andreu i Displàs  
Fundacio Ser.Gi - Fundacio Servei Gironi de Pedagogia Social  
Placa Lluís Companys, 12  
E-17003 Girona  
Tel: 0034-972 213 050  
Mail: [sergi@eps.udg.es](mailto:sergi@eps.udg.es)

## C. Project Outline

### 1. The Mediation concept of the Project

Mediation, within intercultural communication, is usually applied during critical conflicts. Our project, however, wants to follow a different strategy: it wants to help prevent conflicts before they break out, in other words to remove their basis. Exposing latent conflicts and conflict situations is as much a part of this effort as the consistent crisis management with the help of mediators and mediative means.

It is easy enough to define the conflict parties if one takes a look at the situation of foreigners on the spot: the educational system shows discriminating elements which may have a hampering effect on the development of immigrant children. Concepts already existing and practised are trying to improve the situation assisted by teachers (as representatives of the school) and parents. Unfortunately, it has to be stated that such attempts are doomed to failure for different reasons. The teachers' job is made difficult by the fact that the parents of immigrant children show neither readiness to cooperate nor interest in educational achievements of their children. But the parents can see no merit in the educational advancement of their children because they may plan to remigrate or they are unable to appreciate education as cultural capital and investment in the future of their children. Hence, this short-term perspective holds no monetary advantage for themselves and their children.

From this (very simplified) representation it is evident that a progressive concept in the field of conflict prevention cannot be carried out with these actors exclusively. Borrowing from models of political conflict management, elements which are hampering improvement<sup>1</sup> or are presently not feasible should be excluded to allow concentration on "doable" elements. To sum up, it can be said that the parents' lack of interest to cooperate with the institution school is a dilemma which cannot be solved. A short-term change or even a change of basic attitudes is not to be expected. Therefore, these two potentially conflicting parties cannot be major actors in a mediation process.

Instead, a new inter-cultural mediation concept is being developed which focuses on the immigrant children. This is the original target group of the project, and from here we can identify and name the potential centers of conflict as well as the mediation partners, for example the (structurally) discriminating education system, the ignorant parents, the host society, the racist-oriented youth groups in school, etc.

Starting from a conflict preventing mediation concept it is the task of the mediators to encourage the child against possible obstacles and conflicts

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<sup>1</sup> An example is the Near East conflict where the final status of the city of Jerusalem will be treated at the end of negotiations since it bears the greatest potential for conflict. Still, in the preceding steps progress could be made by excluding this issue and deliberately limiting oneself to "easier" issues.

as well as develop with him strategies enabling him or her to master conflict situations on their own.

The mediator acts as "advocate of the child", he is his addressee in conflict situations and should be a companion during his time in school whereby the need for mediation should gradually lessen. The neutrality of the mediator demanded by classical mediation concepts naturally cannot be upheld here since he is supposed to adopt the position of the child, take sides with him or her, and act preventively by specific interventions.

## 2. Procedure

Conflict prevention by mediation works by strengthening the (ethnic) self-concept of immigrant children. The acceptance of one's own identity (especially before the background of immigration) is a long and difficult process. Nevertheless, it is indispensable in order to fight for one's own ways and means of self-assertiveness against discrimination and disadvantage. The idea is to have adequately trained mediators assist children on their way to developing their own identity.<sup>2</sup>

The program is intended to enable children to move on the controversial ground between school and home with their diverging ethnic concepts and to make them face latent conflicts resulting from this situation with courage and self-assurance. Thus children get a chance to act on their own. This helps to master inter-cultural conflicts and opens a possibility for the individual to achieve advancement within the existing structures, it counter-acts structural imbalance.

Both family and school system should, regardless of existing shortcomings, be included in this process because of obvious interdependencies. One could even go as far as admitting the civil society of the country of origin in certain cases to increase acceptance on the part of the parents and make it easier for them to agree to a mediator for their child.

A crucial demand of the immigrants is the acceptance of their "being different" and "foreign" in the host nation. A first step toward social acceptance is self-acceptance allowing the person to think positively of the existing difference rather than deny or ignore it. Mastering the negative connotations connected with being different and incorporating the difference into the self-concept are steps in the direction of a mediation process.<sup>3</sup> The idea is to emphasize the difference without seeming arrogant in paving the ground for an open(-minded) relationship without blinders. Such an open approach to existing differences will be a first step on a common road rather than the durable manifestation of separation.

Being different from "the others" must not be covered up but filled with life. Conveying the ethnic and cultural characteristics of the country of one's

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<sup>2</sup> Concepts of "sociogenesis of ethnicity", i.e. the acceptance of definition brought to the child from outside can be discarded vis-a-vis recent findings in the field of identity research.

<sup>3</sup> The acceptance and positive view of one's own background, or the parents' background respectively, may protect against so-called "group discrimination". Thus the statement "You Arab!" does not come as an insult when the child has incorporated his "being Arabic" or "looking Arabic" into his self-concept.

parents is therefore an instrument which - in addition to special tutoring, help with homework, or similar measures - helps prevent disparity of chances for these children and in this sense can be seen as a measure towards *positive discrimination*.

The conveyance of one's "own" culture can obviously only be accomplished in a selective manner. But which person or institution is to choose according to which criteria? If the bonds to the country of origin are to be set up it would be a good idea to have the choice made by the (ethnic) groups of the respective countries in their host nations. Yet, faced with the reproach of possible fundamentalism the (ethnic) groups and religious communities cannot be regarded as reliable institutions for such conveyance.

A possible solution perhaps might be the host country making the choice by picking out those elements which seem compatible with its own culture.

### 3. Project Target

The promotion of a self-concept for children with immigrant background by mediative means is to be applied to prevent conflicts in the host countries. Conveying "ethnic values" and positioning them in the host country are guarantees for adequate support and an improvement of integration within the individual countries in the long run.

Developing a curriculum for the training of mediators and guidelines for the implementation in the individual countries as well as setting up organisational prerequisites are the most important common tasks for the project partners.

The language of the country of origin is of great importance in conveying cultural identity. Therefore, the promotion of language instruction by way of bi- or multilingual school types or classes is an essential component in the context of integration and conflict prevention.<sup>4</sup> The conveyance of common elements of both cultures (both the country of origin and the host country) can be achieved much more effectively by the language of the country of origin.

### 4. Expected Results

The mediation of cultural identity serves to prevent conflicts before they turn into a critical or even chronic state. Obstruction on the side of institutions or responsible officials should be eased by the kind of approach which allows children to gain easy access to the institutional resources, thus contributing to efforts against discrimination and racism of minorities in Europe.

### 5. The further procedure looks as follows:

The smallest common denominator for all partners is "acceptance" in the respective country. But the roads to this goal differ with the very divergent

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<sup>4</sup> The strengthening of an ethnic self-concept by promoting multi-lingualism can be achieved in schools with a nationally homogenous student body as "minority/majority" though there is a possible danger of overcompensation of the (minority) language.

situations in the respective countries. It is important here to identify and name the few items they have in common.

Acceptance is to be reached by "mediation" on different levels; and the project partners agree that the modes of the procedure may differ but must be accomplished under the common denominator of the theoretic project concept. After than, the results of the participants are compiled and, as the last step of the project, the "European surplus value" is determined. This way, the cumulative experience can flow into demands and suggestions for improvements on the European level.

## C. Project Development

The one-year time frame for the project has imposed limitations on the partner organisations both in area of substance and organisation so that the cooperation in the given time was marked by intensive talks during the respective meetings and exchange of information by electronic media in the time between the meetings. A total of five meetings and a European forum (as described in D.5.) have taken place in the partner countries.

The meetings in detail:

1. The preparatory, first meeting was held on 7 and 8 February 2000 in Bonn, Germany. After welcoming and introducing the participants and their organisations the first topics "General Remarks on the Situation of Immigrants in Belgium, Germany, France, and Spain" and "Situation of Foreign Male and Female Students" were explained. Then the issue of "Discrimination and Disadvantage in School" was typologically differentiated and discussed. Then the participants discussed how the project should be carried out and agreed preliminarily on assigning the respective tasks to the partner organisations.

The second day was reserved for definitions and potential convergencies of the theses on "mediation". It was stated that the process of mediation in the context of "discrimination" consists of four constitutive elements: 1. Problem awareness by those concerned, 2. Voluntary participation, 3. Neutrality of the mediator, 4. Joint development of success criteria.

Furthermore, one can distinguish between two different forms of mediation: regulative mediation (the mediator takes care of a smooth development of the process) and the interventive mediation (the mediator, together with the participants, develops strategies for a solution, reaching beyond the latter), both of which can be brought to bear in different phases (preventively or during critical conflict management) .

As far as this project is concerned, the goal of the mediation process is to reduce prejudice and discrimination by correct conveyance of information on foreign students at and within the educational institutes in the host country. This can be achieved for example by creating a problem awareness with measures such as "supporting a change of perspective". Depending on the degree of xenophobia (prejudice-disadvantage-discrimination-racism) it becomes increasingly difficult to effect a change of awareness or attitude in the responsible institutions and persons. Consequently, different strategies and measures of mediation, depending on the degree and nature (structural, socio-categorical, personal, etc.) of xenophobia, have to be developed.

A medium-term schedule was determined and suggestions for the assignments were made: on the local level, problems (of those concerned ) are to be brought to the attention of institutions and – if mediation is necessary - acted on. Emancipation of those concerned is an aspect here. On the national level, a general overview is to be created and a transnational network, functioning at all echelons, to be reached. In the light of the newly won findings, the final theoretical basis and the essential differentiation of the project outline was established.

2. The second, orientation meeting took place from 29 to 31 March 2000 in Bruxelles, Belgium. The first topic on the agenda was the presentation of the project outline and the evaluation of the scientific or theoretical coordination of project measures on the national level by Mme. Prof. Dr. Dietzel-Papakyriakou of Essen University (Germany) who is responsible for the evaluation of the project. Inter-cultural mediation concepts in general as well as the innovative mediation concept as the theoretical guideline of the pilot project were introduced. A discussion developed around the further procedure, the concrete objective of the project, and expected results. The basic concept was confirmed after thorough illustration by the participant organisations. As a further step, questions were asked about the realization in the partner countries and the steps to be taken jointly over the coming months. National requirements and limitations, experience by individual partners and feasibility checks in the available time frame were the main topics of this discussion. Furthermore, individual, national mediation assignments and concrete steps to be taken before the next meeting were determined.

3. The third meeting took place from 07 to 09 June 2000 in Paris, France. During this meeting, agreement was reached regarding the basic project concept as it is documented in Part B of this report. The discussions thereon, initiated during the Brussels meeting, were continued here.

Further, a lively conversation took place about the difficulties already existing or to be envisioned during the implementation of the concept into the existing national conditions. From this, the partners gained a better understanding of the obstacles existing in the individual countries, above all in institutional areas.

The discussions on the European dimension of the project focused, aside from touching general theoretical questions, on the practical questions of mediation as well as its perception in different countries and situations. Different levels of mediation were pointed out, and the participants in Paris determined two areas on the European level which are important for the project. The first is directed at the local level and concerns the strengthening of the self-concept. The second, directed at the European level, concerns the increase of participation of children and parents in all areas of society.

Final topics of the agenda were the preparations for the Girona Forum which had mostly organisational character, and the determination of further assignments.

4. The fourth meeting took place from 05 to 07 July 2000 in Bonn, Germany. This meeting was dedicated to the organisation of the Girona Forum and the subject matters of cooperation there. Assignment of tasks within the team, guest list, goals, results to be expected on the national and transnational levels, etc. were discussed.

5. Girona Forum

The forum in Girona (Spain) took place from 06 to 08 September 2000.

## Results of the Evaluation on 08 September 2000 in Girona

Participants and partner organisations agreed that material progress had been made and the organisation of the forum had been very successful on the whole. Findings were reviewed and confirmed and new insights were won. In the following, the topics of evaluation are to be listed in brief outlines. Not in every case was it possible to distinguish clearly between form and content.

### 1. About the Organisation of the Forum

- The forum largely met the expectations of the arranging organisation.
- There were a few minor difficulties (like the strike near Perpignan) causing delays which, however, did not disrupt the agenda.
- The premature departure of a large number of participants (mostly of the Belgian group) on the morning of the second day was generally not seen as helpful.
- The program was ideally designed, except that flight schedules determined the time frame for the Belgian delegation so that it had to depart early.
- There was no time to develop texts for use within the group.
- Another workday would have been necessary for the discussion and continuation of concepts.
- The evening at Celra was very successful in that it created nearness on an informal level.
- The very poor attendance by the Spanish representatives, despite a simultaneous summer camp, was noted with regret.
- The high quality of interpreting was praised by many participants.
- From the guests' point of view the mix of participants in the individual groups was very successful as it provided a good balance between "practitioners" and "scholars".

### 2. Aspects of Contents at the Forum

- The Forum has confirmed the scheme as developed.
- The first day produced good results whereas the second turned out extremely unproductive.
- In view of the short time available for cooperation and the limited time frame (one work day) during the Forum, the day, on the whole, was regarded as satisfactory as several important aspects were discussed from the pedagogical point of view.
- The lack of an extended discussion in the individual groups was not helpful in developing a relevant instrumentarium.
- Maria's early departure and her absence from the evaluation were noted with disappointment as her judgement and her view of the overall project would have been helpful.
- The perception of the work at the Forum was ambivalent. On the one hand, the 1.5 days were regarded as extremely restricting, on the other hand, participants were very motivated and eager to work.
- On the level of contents, the Forum was very successful. This was evident when talking to persons from all the groups who had taken a keen interest in the concept.

- The expectations connected with the Forum were met. Moreover, the partners have a clearer view now of the overall objective of the project.
- The concept gives orientation and offers an outline for further interventions.
- The partners are not sure as to what exactly should be mentioned in the report to the commission.
- The Forum has raised more questions, though of a constructive nature, which can lead to progress on the national levels.
- A "direct surplus value" of the Forum can be stated as can be seen from the persons participating.
- The Forum and the project have set developments in motion in the partner countries, yet it is unrealistic to expect great change within one year. Deeply rooted ideas cannot be changed ad hoc - our positions have largely remained unchanged, but everything else would have been a surprise.
- A change of perception regarding the importance of self-organisation for immigrants can be stated among the partners. Before the Forum, the value of such organisations was not realized while now it is accepted that the organisations are useful in certain situations and their tasks cannot be taken over by others.
- The project, on the whole, has generated a better perception and mutual understanding.
- The European promotion policy works on the principle of practical exchange of experience but it can be stated that this will take time and we can only lay the base with a one-year project.
- Compared with other projects, the "European surplus value" is evident here - the introduction of the triangle of terms "participation-mediation-recognition" with all its implications and conclusions can be called innovative whereas other European projects suffer from lack of theoretic Underpinning.
- The discussion of the scheme evaluated here could lead to a different approach in education policy.
- It is up to us in which way we are going to present our findings, one way would be to emphasize their practical applicability. We should be flexible here to facilitate acceptance by the commission and other European organisations.
- The practical applicability of the results is a decisive criterium for their acceptance.
- Common positions were developed during this meeting but only describing them without explaining their practical applicability will be difficult to argue before the commission.
- We need a new definition of "integration" in the context of mediation-participation-acceptance.

6. The final evaluative meeting took place in Bonn, Germany on 22 and 23 November 2000.

The project was evaluated and critiqued, followed by a discussion and adoption of the final documents.

## D. External Evaluation (Prof. Dr. Maria Dietzel-Papakyriakou)

### 1. Introduction: Concerning the Evaluation Concept

The evaluation at hand departs from empirical sociological facts to estimate the output of the project. The evaluation is made with the help of the prism of interactions within the project team. Communicative events during the regular meetings of the project team are analysed.

Methodically, the evaluation is based on:

1. Active observation by the evaluator during the project. In some of the sessions where conceptual clarification was the major issue she relied on existing **action concepts**.
2. The transcript of contributions by the project partners during the sessions in the regular meeting. The complete course of discussion was tape-recorded. The tapes contained both the original contribution in the respective language (o-tone) and the translation by the interpreter. Since the evaluator speaks the two project languages - German and French - she could follow every original contribution directly. A transcript of discussion contributions regarding purely topical and organisational questions was not made. Here, the minutes can serve as reference.
3. The self-appraisal of the project by the participants (see quotes).  
The evaluation of the project should answer these questions:
  1. How was the definition of common goals achieved?
  2. Were these goals reached and, if so, to what degree?
  3. Which difficulties arose in the process of the project?
  4. What was the learning effect for the participants?

Interactions between individuals always have a quality of "symbolic interactions". The point is to reach understanding via anticipation, interpretation, and attribution and assignment of significance. Interactions performed within a defined framework of time, space, and theme, as in this project, result in common knowledge. This knowledge was intended and acquired in common. However, the production of common knowledge in transnational projects underlies specific conditions; there are specific chances as well as specific difficulties. The participants of the interaction refer to symbolic, significant third parties, the "generalised other person".

Without these reference categories interaction is not possible. Likewise, the reference categories are constituted in the interaction by modifying and enlarging them. The greater the cognitive proximity of the interaction partners the more numerous the references available from the beginning. Transnational cooperations are faced with the challenge of finding out such common reference categories beyond language barriers, individual characteristics, and national realities. If they approach this task reflectively they have a chance of constituting such new transnational reference categories. This results in innovative ways of thinking and syntheses of

experience which can ultimately be called elements of the transnational surplus value.

The present evaluation is trying to reflect this process with a critical appraisal, whereby not only the external, distanced look is of importance but also the direct and indirect self-evaluation taken by the project partners concerned. After all, what has been objectively defined as the transnational surplus value and is being transferred back into the national partner organisations depends on the participating persons. What they have achieved is contained in the learning processes and the experiences they have gained from the project.

## **2. Steps in the Course of the Project**

### **2.1. Agreement on the starting situation**

Of necessity, the reflection departed from the existing practical experience of the national partners. They entered into the project with different experience and ways of thinking. In a first step, they naturally referred to their national situations. The point was to filter from this differing store of knowledge whatever was important for all.

A twofold translation had to be accomplished:

1. From one's own practice to a reflection others could understand
2. From this reflection plus contributions of the others to a new synthesis
3. The translation of the results of the common reflection back to the national practice.

This last step served also as validation, as a moment of examining the results achieved as to their importance for the national applicability. This aspect of feasibility was necessary because most of the project partners were reflecting practitioners.

The project started with a stock-taking by the project partners and their work at the national level.

First, it was stated that the starting situations were very heterogeneous. The differences in the institutional conditions, the background of the immigrant groups, the time of immigration, the circumstances of immigration (refugees or recruitment of workforce), the organisational structure of the project partners, their work concepts and goals were addressed. In addition, the experience of the partners regarding transnational projects and their work in the field of education immigrant children differed greatly.

After the descriptions and presentations by the individual partners the idea of a step-by-step approach to a theoretical outline of the experience made was quickly abandoned. The time management did not allow this approach. It would have tempted people to prove the merits of their own practice, to convince the other partners of the paradigmatic nature of the national experience, and moreover, to arrive at a general experience from a particular experience.

Naturally, the first step is the most difficult. Leaving one's own point of view, fixed as it is on national particularities, the change from the particular practice to a level inbetween, where the essentials can be discussed,

takes time and self-reflection. This first phase of the presentation of specific national conditions and the specifics of local activities, this irritating heterogeneity resulted in helplessness.

"The thing started with different partners, goals, etc, and in the beginning it was difficult to find a common denominator (...). Like Carlos, I asked myself in the beginning: What am I doing here?"  
(Carole Grandjean - MLF)

The starting conditions of the project partners proved too divergent, and it would have proved too laborious to extract from these disparate experiences what was common to all. It soon became clear that this would go beyond the time frame of the project and lead to frustration of all concerned.

The lack of time made it necessary to abandon the inductive method, i.e. setting out from the individual starting positions. Instead, the deductive method was chosen, i.e. moving to an abstract level in a first step. This meant operating from a neutral ground without being forced to contrast and compare the respective national practices. It was decided to "take the plunge", switch to an abstract level, and agree on a theoretic scheme. The developed concept consisting of the common reference categories was to serve as background on which the respective national practice was to be scrutinized.

## 2.2 Development of Common Reference Categories: the Triangle of Terms: Mediation - Acceptance- Participation

After a suggestion by BAGIV the work of the project partners concentrated on the theoretical discussion of the question:

Which strategies of mediation must be developed to achieve the participation of immigration-related minorities in the area of education at all levels, both school and vocational.

During the ensuing meetings the participants were engaged in a struggle over these strategies until they arrived at a conceptualisation of a three-step model, the triangle of terms "Mediation- Acceptance-Participation". This model was shaped from a combination of existing concepts and knowledge of the project partners: mediation from the project description, acceptance from the theoretical preparation by MLF, and participation from a previous approach by BAGIV. The project partners describe their work as follows:

"On our common road with the project we have compared our practice with the analysis of this practice and together have established a programmatic hypothesis based on the following three concepts."  
(Quote from a jointly produced statement of the project partners)

These three concepts were seen as three steps of one process. *Acceptance* is to be promoted in order to arrive at *participation* by way of *mediation*. From the participation achieved, qualified mediation may again result, winding spirally up into a higher quality. In detail, the steps were understood as follows:

**Participation:** The goal is the *participation* of the immigrant groups in the host society. This can only be achieved by participation in the educational system on all its levels and fields and is at the same time its result.

This participation (prerequisite for success in school and work) must meet the standards of the host society (as well as the standards of the society of origin for those immigrants who want to or have to go back to their country of origin).

**Mediation:** Mediation wants to reach all social actors concerned, i.e. school (institutions of the host country), parents (and their organisations), and the children themselves. These actors involved in the process of schooling depart from unequal positions in the multiple interactions and necessary negotiations deciding a school career. The factual conflicts leading to an unequal access to education cannot be ignored but have to be structured by mediation.

**Acceptance:** Conflicts can be expressed in non-acceptance of the other person: non-acceptance of parents as serious addressees for schools, of children as culturally rejected persons who stigmatise themselves and others. The most important of these groups of actors are the children of underprivileged immigrant families.

Therefore, it is important to apply those strategies of mediation which may lead to acceptance and to develop a common code. With this code the status of immigrant children in their cultural affiliations shall be upgraded and at the same time their competence strengthened which they need to express themselves in the multifold social interactions.

The assumption is made that greater **acceptance** by the strategies of **mediation** will promote **participation**.

This common goal of the project rests on the diagnostics and particular local measures by the cooperating organisations.

This "great plunge" into theoretical reflection must - in retrospect - be seen as a successful move.

"The group members were sensible enough not to insist on their respective practice and in this way found a common ground in the hypothesis of the triangle as a common denominator. In turn, everyone interpreted the triangle for himself (finding his own geometry in it), and so we were lumping ourselves together (...)"  
(Carole Grandjean - MLF)

With this the deadlock of the initial situation had been overcome.

### 2.3. The Triangle of Terms: Work on the Concept and Application Within

To the same degree as the concept was formulated and shaped in its different aspects it became increasingly evident that the concept

developed for the external application was increasingly applicable as working concept within. The chosen concept turned the project itself into a challenge. The meetings were basically about mediation among the project partners, about mutual recognition of their practice and concepts in the past, and about equal participation in the project. The project partners became increasingly aware of imbalances and the differences between their theoretical claims and real life.

The project shifted into a comprehending phase, leaving the unilaterally descriptive level behind. The participants drafted a concept, subjecting it to the collective scrutiny of the group. They learned to discover anew their own practice before this background, to see their own doings under different aspects, and to reflect on self-evident matters long familiar to them:

"(...) there was a direct transfer of the theory of the triangle (...), in other words with the new theoretical concept on an old project which resulted in a new point of view and the revision of the old concept(...)".

(Carlos Pereira - CCPF).

### **3. Transfers: From National Practice to Transnationality - Transfer Back to Practice**

The project was supposed to oscillate between the two levels national/transnational. What has been achieved on the transnational level was to be transferred, examined, and transferred back to the national level. This, however, could only be partly accomplished within the available time.

The strong-point of the common concept lies in the principal possibility of re-transferability (for the time being), its multi-purpose applicability, and the additional knowledge gained therefrom. The attainable results differ according to starting position, structural limitations, and local arrangements. As example for a successful application may serve the new definition of an "old" project of the CCPF by this theoretic concept. The objective was changed, resulting in a fresh look on their own work and achieving a new self-definition of the organisation as a whole.

The conception of innovative local projects into which the results of the transnational project could enter and, basically, the retransferability into the organisation on the ground were limited by time and were therefore a source of frustration.

"Especially so, since we are now in a phase where we could really give it a new boost. With this abrupt end of the work and a re-transfer not having been achieved, there is a danger of being confronted again with the same "undigested" problems in new projects. This is frustrating because the same questions are discussed over and over."

(Cristina Andreu i Displàs - Ser.Gi)

"I can imagine, as an idea, a (new) person being able to create this interactive dynamic, who will visit the individual organisations, encourage them to continue, and see to it that the transnational work can go on."

(Carole Grandjean - MLF)

As the results achieved are new for the national level and in part call into question the existing practice, opposition will always have to be expected. There was the danger of the representatives of national organisations uncoupling themselves from their basis during the work on the transnational project, or not being able to transfer the result adequately. Here, too, the time factor was decisive:

"Things went very well on the transnational level and results were achieved. But on the local level we are lagging behind (...), the point is the possibility of re-transfer on the local level."

(Cristina Andreu i Displàs - Ser.Gi)

Yet, despite all concerns and the diagnosed non-transferability for the near future, there is hope for long-term effects of the transnational project and the utilization of the results for the national and local work.

"Well, there are these examples for the immediate use of the results of the project for the current work but of course I have learned a lot of new things (...) which I may perhaps not be able to apply at once, but perhaps in a couple of years, in the long run."

(Carlos Pereira - CCPF)

#### **4. The Project as a World of Experience of Mediation-Acceptance-Participation: Misunderstandings, Understanding, Learning**

##### 4.1. The Problem of Language

The project partners spoke German or French in the discussions. Two representatives of the project partners and the evaluator were proficient in both languages of the project; the other project partners had knowledge of only one of the two languages. Hence, the communication during the project was largely made possible by interpreters. This is in itself not unusual in transnational projects. The project partners communicate either in their mother tongue or in the language of the country hosting the event (except for the partners from Spain - Ser.Gi). This allowed for a more authentic communication than resorting to a third language, for example English, which would have been a foreign language for all. Insofar, the language asymmetry was not great (except for the project partners from Spain).

"(...) I, too, had a language problem, having to think and speak French (...)."

(Cristina Andreu i Displàs - Ser.Gi)

Most of the project partners were able to use a language in which they did not have massive disadvantages. This probably added to the quality of the project, in other words, allowed for an in-depth discussion of ideas. Still, part of the time budget had to be spent on interpreting. Although the interpreter was well qualified for her job this indirect way of communication was hampering somewhat. Since there is never perfect equivalence of two languages it is obvious that part of the contents will always be lost in interpreting from one language into another. Connotations of terms may shift by interpretation. Here, translations followed the usual standards by giving the general meaning. If decisive theoretical terms had to be translated complementary and more detailed explanations were necessary which, obviously, took more time.

#### 4.2. The Non-coincidence of Experience

The diverging national work contexts inevitably lead to diverging approaches and ways of thinking. What sounds imaginable to one person, worth further contemplating and thinking, may sound like pure utopia to the other. It seems unrealistisch and every effort made in its direction a waste of time. One problem was the non-coincidence of the development of migration in the different countries of origin of the project partners. They have experience going back to diverging migration situations. Spain for example is confronted with immigration as a new phenomenon while the countries of the other project partners have had experience with immigration over many years. The question arises whether this non-coincidence of experience can be seen as a moment in a common evolution or as different, particular ways connected with the special situation of a country.

Looking at the experience from an evolutionary point of view the "newcomers, only recently confronted with immigration problems" could learn from the "old hands having been confronted with the immigration phenomenon for a long time". They are just more advanced. The experience made by the "newcomers" is discarded by "we have had this before", "we know this". So the "newcomers" are degraded to apprentices by the well-versed "old hands". If, however, too much importance is attached to the special situation of the respective countries the experience remains connected to its singularity and is therefore not transferable. A way had to be found which would lead to generalisations i.e. to a level where it was possible to meet halfway and learn from each other. This was the way of abstraction into the triangle of terms "mediation, acceptance, and participation".

#### 4.3. The Absence of Direct Competition

Actors on the same national level can cooperate but also compete with each other. All project partners have to struggle for material resources on their respective national floors to be able to continue their work. Thus they are direct competitors for these resources. This is a problem which usually does not exist in transnational cooperation. The project partners had opted for cooperation; there were no objective reasons to compete with each other. Structurally, there were no tensions in this context.

Aside from this, the usual group dynamical tensions arose. But they did not lead to conflicts.

This is due to two factors: first, a positive constellation of compatible characteristics of the project partners had been reached by coincidence. Second, and this may be seen as the decisive factor, all partners had interaction competence because of their work. Above all, a principally tolerant, interested attitude vis-a-vis the other as a stranger did not have to be developed since it was the natural attitude of every partner entering into the work concept. This has to do with the sphere of work - immigration - of the project partners. They were fully aware of the difficulties of intercultural interaction and the respective approaches thereto. Both the immigrants among them and the autochthones from the project countries had the readiness and attitude necessary for intercultural relations.

Difficulties arose at a different level. From the onset of the project, a dichotomy between the project partners was noticed, namely between those representing self-organisations of immigrants (BAGIV and CCPF) and those representing autochthonous organisations (Ser.Gi and MLF). The division in two groups was attributed to the different perspectives derived from the respective approaches and spheres of work. Implicitly, it was a matter of different degrees of authenticity and moral legitimation claimed by the project partners. The view adopted by the immigrant self-organisations was, subliminally, accompanied by a strong assertiveness as to problem definition and approach. Without doubting the claim to a more authentic representation on the part of the self-organisation the other side rejected the over-simplifying dichotomy by claiming that immigrants were working in the autochthonous organisations as well. Still, the dichotomic angle was upheld until the final meeting at Girona.

In the further course of the project it turned out, however, that this bipartition was inadequate. BAGIV for example is a roof organisation of immigrant organisations in Germany, while CCPF is the organisation of one immigrant group. The increasing heterogeneity in the field of immigration becomes evident also in the multiple structures of the organisations. The difference, in the starting phase seen an impediment, was regarded as a bonus in the final evaluation in that it stood for the complexity of the immigration issue.

#### 4.4. Technical and Organisational Aspects

The project started with a framework imposed on it by the coordination. This vertical structure, however, was immediately questioned and consequently replaced by cooperative and horizontal approaches.

"The work style has basically changed from one of directions and orders to one of cooperation. I find it especially positive that everyone contributes his experience and so together a result is reached."  
(Carole Grandjean - MLF)

This positive inventory was due, on the one hand, to the existing intercultural competence of the national partners, on the other hand to their strong self-assertion which enabled them to articulate themselves candidly from the beginning. Added to this was the cumulative experience in transnational projects like in the case of MLF. All these factors acted as correctives. Moreover, the shortage of time indirectly resulted in avoiding conflict (conflict economy). The plunge into the theoretical concept spared the team a number of disputes which would have followed from being too concrete in the beginning.

Translations of the documents caused delays and therefore were a disadvantage. The overall time budget was very limited. Therefore, the time between the meetings was too short to thoroughly consider, discuss, and evaluate - on the national level - the issues treated during the meetings of the transnational project. Even more so since the national partners are also involved in other fields and have to work with a very low personnel ceiling.

"A small point of criticism for example would be the speedier production of the different documents. (...) This is true for all (...) A stumbling block on the road was certainly the language."  
(Carole Grandjean - MLF)

## **5. Critique and Perspective**

The gravest problem of the project was the time pressure. This resulted in difficulties not immanent to the project. It was not possible to reach the intended goals, i.e. to take the last step and apply the results at the respective practical level, thereby renewing the validation of the concept. If these projects are to initiate training and habituation of transnational communication processes they have to be allowed the necessary time.

It became clear that those involved in the management (coordination) of the projects need professional support in the sense of supplementary training. Too much energy is wasted on toilsome and timeconsuming familiarization with the work. Here, the enormous increase in professionalism and the transfer of qualification on the part of the project-coordinating BAGIV for example is striking. This organisation has taken over mediation tasks within the project; and the successful completion of the project itself is a tribute to their work and contributes to the promotion of their participation, to speak with the terms of the project.

If one compares the targets established in the beginning with what was actually achieved, one can say that the project, if seen as explorative pilot project, was successful. The lack of time was turned into a virtue. The long road of minutest coordination was abandoned. Time was too precious and the differences in starting conditions too great. Hence, the project partners chose the deductive method, the development of a theoretic concept. It remains a deficit that there was no time for a sufficient validation of the

concept in real terms. The transnational surplus value was transferred back to the national level only to a small extent:

"What the commission might be told for the future is: that there should be a possibility of re-transferability at the local level to implement the knowledge gained in the transnational area to the original level (...)."

(Cristina Andreu i Displàs - Ser.Gi)