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## INTERCULTURAL LEARNING REGARDING EUROPEANISATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

### **Influence of University Cooperation in the Polish-German Border Area**

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In this research it is assumed that European border areas provide a context for learning processes between institutions of higher education with different cultural background and rule systems. Cross-border university cooperation in close neighbourhood in spatial proximity means that different national education systems with their different knowledge and epistemic cultures meet in direct contact. Through the clashes in their cultures of knowledge, the problems and options for creating joint European institutions of higher education become apparent. In this article the focus is especially on the social practices in everyday situations of university cross-border cooperation in the Polish-German border region. The questions of interest are the problems and challenges faced in the daily encounters within such collaboration as well as the solutions developed in a mutual intercultural learning process. Within these processes specific knowledge will emerge that is of high value for Europeanisation in higher education and beyond towards social and cultural cohesion in Europe in general.

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## INTRODUCTION

This research presented here is based on the hypothesis that European border areas provide a context for representing the learning processes between institutions of higher education with different cultural background and rule systems. It is assumed that the knowledge that is gained in these processes is of great importance, not only for creating the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as envisaged in the Bologna-process but also for the European integration process in general.

University partnerships in border areas can be considered as a particular form of regional cooperation between European institutions in the field of 'higher education', as these collaborations are, at the same time, also international. Being close neighbours in spatial proximity means different national education systems with their different knowledge and epistemic cultures meet in direct contact. Through the clashes in their cultures of knowledge, the problems and options for creating joint European institutions of higher education should become apparent. Wojciechowski (2005) considers it therefore a 'laboratory situation'. And Schreier (2005: 41) believes that a vision of the future will become clear from how best practice in the field of higher education develops, and thus cross-border universities are an important initiative in support of the creation of the EHEA within the framework of the Bologna process.

In this article the focus is especially on the social practices in everyday situations of university cross-border cooperation in the Polish-German border region. The questions of interest are the problems and challenges faced in the daily encounters within such collaboration as well as the solutions developed within a mutual intercultural learning process. It is assumed that in these processes specific knowledge will emerge that is of high value for Europeanisation in higher education on the one hand, and also beyond this towards social and cultural cohesion in Europe on the other hand.

In the first section two different ways of fostering a joint EHEA will be discussed. This will be followed by a description of two case-studies of university collaboration on the Polish-German border. The next chapter introduces various theoretical considerations of intercultural and institutional learning that underpin this article. With examples of empirical findings in the following chapters the process of learning towards Europeanisation in Higher Education will be exemplified and explained. The article concludes with the elaboration of key elements of intercultural learning towards Europeanisation in higher education.

### **DIFFERENT PATHWAYS TO FOSTER A JOINT EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA<sup>1</sup>**

The Lisbon agenda of the European Union has defined knowledge and innovation as core fields for guaranteeing future growth and has announced this as a joint strategy in the competition policy of the European Union. As universities are institutions of knowledge production 'sui

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<sup>1</sup> Note: Quotations from scientific articles as well as interview quotations in the German language have been translated by the author.

generis' they are allocated a prominent role in this process (cf. European Commission COM(97)563 final, 2003; European Commission 2005). As a response to these challenges and reforms the so called 'Bologna process' has been initiated by ministers of education in all European nation-states. This initiative seeks to strengthen the performance of European science and higher education systems by building a common "European Higher Education Area". The main goal of these reforms is to allow comparability of academic qualifications and their mutual recognition. The hope is to enhance the mobility of students and academics with the aim of increasing knowledge production and innovation processes by the mutual exchange of knowledge across nation states. The introduction of a two-stage (bachelor and master) or - including the PhD - a three-stage degree cycle is for providing the conditions for the exchange of academic employment and to foster mobility across national borders.

The Bologna reform process is being implemented in more than forty European nation states and they have triggered the most profound changes in the higher education systems of Europe in recent decades (Wolter 2006). Scientific research into the degree of reform in the various European nation states and how these goals have been implemented is immense. We take the view, following the arguments of Hettlage, that such reforms "with the focus on a narrow concept of education can hide the fact that the cultural self-comprehension of whole countries and regions is up for grabs. The concept ... can therefore only have a chance, if at the same time the dialectic of multiplicity and unity is taken into account. Only if pre-shared beliefs and values have been clarified the development of a knowledge society ... will have a realistic chance and will become accepted by the citizens" (Hettlage 2007: 292f.). As university cooperation in European border areas provide an arena where a multiplicity of cultures is encountered in everyday situations they could fill a gap that is mostly neglected in the Bologna-reforms. Cross-border universities often offer integrated study courses with jointly developed subjects and identical training objectives, and thus even go beyond the general strategies of the Bologna-Process. Such bilaterally designed courses are very demanding and require agreement between the cooperating partners, not only concerning the content of the lessons but also the rules of assessment and examination procedures. This requires not only an intensive exchange of practical professional issues, but also a mutual understanding of the institutional conditions in the education system of the cooperating partner, as well as its practices and traditions.

The integrative models of mutual intercultural learning that cross-border universities initiate will be considered here as a complementary and additional pathway for enhancing academic mobility and fostering interna-

tional knowledge exchange. Thus they provide the largest learning and innovation opportunity for the development of a common European Higher Education Area by also including the cultural dimension of European integration. Being much broader than other international academic cooperation, because exchanges of students and teachers with intercultural contacts also take place, it is not simply that the individuals are learning from each other but it also results in institutional learning throughout the university system on both sides of the border. Such ambitious projects, however, often fail due to the very high administrative costs and the barriers encountered due to having different national frameworks and internal university rules. Therefore the development of joint, bi- or multinational educational study courses is often hampered by existing national regulatory systems that do not take into account the requirements of cross-border projects.

Thus, the vision of 'borderless higher education' without manifest limitations, however, often stands in contradiction to the reality in Europe. National cultures of knowledge turn out to be (relatively) persistent structures and the differences that exist between cultures in knowledge and education systems are not solvable at the same time. Although the cross-border mobility of students and academics has increased enormously due to the developments of the Bologna Process as well as through the support of EU funding programmes (e.g. ERASMUS). Recent research on mobility developments in Germany, however, shows that most students stay for only a small part of their studies at other universities.<sup>2</sup> National groups often keep to themselves during their time abroad and it rarely results in more intensive contacts with the cross-cultural exchange of knowledge between students. Hiller (2007) in her empirical study of exchange processes on the Polish-German border comes to the conclusion that cross-cultural communication develops solely through contact frequency and intensity.<sup>3</sup> As reasons for these separate trends she identified the very different values and everyday life experiences of students from both countries. Similar results are found in the study of intercultural development processes in the wake of globalized higher education that Otten (2006) conducted. He concludes there is a "need for mediation, translation and exchange between different cultural orientation, interpretation and symbol systems" (ibid. p. 9).

In everyday practice within higher education cross-border cooperation, the problems and translation requirements between different European cultures become apparent. It is not only language problems that hamper

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<sup>2</sup> Almost half of the students who complete a study course abroad remain there no more than six months (45%) and only one in twenty studies abroad for more than a year. Also, approx. 80% of German scientists stay less than a year abroad (Sauer und Ette 2007).

<sup>3</sup> This finding was also confirmed by Mahlkow (2009).

cross-cultural understanding; it is often the differences in academic cultures and styles of science that need to be mutually understood. Questions of interest in this context are: How does the meaning of science and academic education differ in each country? What are the requirements for writing scientific texts? What constitutes an excellent academic paper from the perspective of different cultures? What are the requirements for hypothesis formation, literature selection, student mentoring, self-organization, and so on in different countries? How is the reflexivity of students valued in seminars? Is criticism from students appreciated or more of a taboo? The rules guiding these educational styles however are usually implicit. In general, the participants are not aware of how strongly they are influenced by the traditions and attitudes towards study and discipline in their home countries. This becomes obvious in the different learning styles and behaviour patterns of students.<sup>4</sup>

These issues are also of great practical value in order to establish the administrative requirements for fostering academic mobility and knowledge exchange. As an example the development of common performance criteria for the comparability of studies (credit points) can be cited. Scientific investigations of such a process (SECEB 2006) make clear that the individual universities can interpret the performance and evaluation criteria according to their own (national) educational traditions and control systems. Thus, the harmonization of curricula and examination requirements can be considered an extremely difficult task, because there is little willingness among the participating universities to move away from their respective national educational and scientific traditions. However, there appears to be considerable differences in terms of cross-cultural understanding between different disciplines. Certain expertise, such as mathematical and natural scientific knowledge, is easier to standardize and therefore is more readily transferable in international exchange processes than social and human sciences expertise (see e.g. Jöns 2003).

These explanations make clear that the development of a common European higher education area and a joint knowledge space is unlikely to be achieved solely by reducing the administrative and institutional barriers – or hard structures. The views on existing barriers need to be widened to include the field of soft structures (e.g. directed to different cultures of knowledge and science as well as the different mobility of knowledge). After all, ‘modern’ boundaries are mainly caused by ‘system boundaries’ that are related to functional areas as well as ‘symbol boundaries’ that are asso-

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<sup>4</sup> Some of these questions have been addressed in the empirical research of this project. Empirical examples in the following chapters of this article will illustrate how differences in the culture of knowledge influence cross border collaboration in higher education.

ciated with value-based spatial units (see Schmitt-Egner 2005). These soft boundaries are by no means to be equated “with ineffective barriers. On the contrary, these limits are only seemingly open” (ibid. p. 21).

Despite the differences that exist between European higher education systems and the cultures of knowledge encountered in the Polish-German border area, nevertheless there many similarities between Polish and German academic cultures also exist. As Marek Kwiek found in his research on higher education reforms that looked at the changing academic enterprise and the attitudes of academics towards changes in the scientific workplace that are interconnected with these reforms, there are a lot of parallels between Polish and German academic styles and attitudes compared to other European countries (Kwiek 2012).

The neighbourly cooperation of higher education in Polish-German border areas provides – this is the assumption – special conditions to investigate the challenges and opportunities for enhancing mobility and fostering fruitful knowledge production in a common European Higher Education Area. There are, on the one hand, different academic traditions and cultures in each nation-state; but on the other hand, there are a variety of common and unifying elements based on similar experiences in terms of research and knowledge-oriented professional practice in Polish and German academic milieus. The latter strongly influence both the professional life and everyday lifestyle of academics and students and it provides the basis for a shared knowledge environment. This shared knowledge base is thus probably an important common starting point regarding fruitful communication for Polish-German cross-border higher educational cooperation and for mutual learning processes towards Europeanisation.

#### **EXAMPLES OF UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION ON THE POLISH-GERMAN BORDER - EMPIRICAL CASE STUDIES**

There are a number of initiatives by higher education institutions on the Polish-German border that cooperate across it having various targets and also various demands regarding the scope of the collaboration. Below two case studies are presented that have been the focus of a joint research project funded by the German-Polish Research Foundation. The first case study presented is the joint German-Polish University, the Collegium Polonicum (CP), located in Słubice by the border near Frankfurt (Odra). The second example of cross-border cooperation is the tri-national Neisse-University. This institution exists as a virtual university located in the border triangle of Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany, and is a cooperation between higher education institutions from these countries.

### **(1) Collegium Polonicum and European University Viadrina - a German-Polish Bridge in Higher Education**

The Polish-German University “Collegium Polonicum” (CP) remains as an exception in Europe. It presents a form of cooperation between two universities that intensively coordinate two systems with their different institutions and cultural traditions.

#### **FOUNDATION AND EARLY STAGES**

The founding of the bi-national University, the Collegium Polonicum, is closely associated with the establishment in 1991 of the European University Viadrina on the German side of the border in Frankfurt (Odra). Right from the beginning the Viadrina was allocated the specific political function of bridging the contradictions between East and West. The idea of re-founding the Viadrina University<sup>5</sup> was especially for “improving German-Polish relations and publicly and effectively maintaining an understanding of Europe which includes East-Central Europe and the enlargement of the European Union” (Schwan 2009: 21)<sup>6</sup>; (Europa-Universität Viadrina 1993). All the founding members were aware of the fact that due to the competition from universities in Berlin, a new university on Germany’s periphery would only succeed if it was characterized by special features.<sup>7</sup> Thus it would not suffice “just to be ‘better’ than the outstanding universities of Berlin, most of all the Viadrina would have to be ‘different’” (Ipsen 2009: 50). Hence some particular conclusions were drawn: for the Viadrina as “probably the first new foundation by the state in Germany ... [and] consequently the idea of the topical profile of universities ... [with] a restricted range of social scientific and humanities subjects and within an expressively European field of reference” (Weiler 2009: 81) to be implemented. Its location on the German-Polish border was considered the core element of its

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<sup>5</sup> In 1506 a university with the name ‘Viadrina’ was founded in Frankfurt (Oder). In 1811 it was transferred to Wrocław / Breslau (Knefelkamp 2009).

<sup>6</sup> From 1999 to 2008 Prof. Gesine Schwan was the President of European University Viadrina.

<sup>7</sup> The public and expert reaction in Germany to the European orientation of the new university was characterized by a considerable degree of scepticism. E. g. some doubted “that given a university programme with a total of three universities the Federal State of Brandenburg would be able to provide sufficient funding for an internationally oriented university from which a considerable performance level would be demanded” Europa-Universität Viadrina 1993. Others referred to other new foundations with explicit European orientations which had not – or only insufficiently – met this demand.

profile, in the context of which “right from the beginning its location at the border [was supposed to be used] with all the possibilities resulting from being oriented towards Europe” (Ipsen 2009: 50). At the same time it was made clear that most of its teaching would have to be oriented accordingly, to meet the demands of this specific border location. For, in those days the Odra-Neisse-border was at the same time the EU’s outward border to the former Socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe, and probably this border would be “for a long time a border between differing economic prosperity and different levels of wealth” (Europa-Universität Viadrina 1993: 20). Given the change of systems and structures in Eastern Europe as well as the goal of including former Socialist states into the process of European integration, a definite need for teaching two scientific categories was identified. These were, firstly, the social sciences, among them most importantly jurisprudence and economics, both of which “structurally in the sense of an orientation towards Europe may contribute ... [to] structuring Europe at the national, international and supra-national levels” (ibid.). Secondly, the humanities, as they include orientation-providing sciences, which by their teaching and research may help the accompanying process of European integration and “will more and more change mono-cultural societies in the form of states into a multi-cultural federation tied together by the EC”, in the context of which especially “the creation of a European consciousness [should] be the goal of education” (ibid.). For European integration – this was the argument – is “not only an economic-social process but to a high degree a challenge for the spiritual-cultural foundations of hitherto mostly nation-oriented educational systems (ibid. p. 21). These demands were met at the Viadrina University by establishing the three faculties of jurisprudence, economics and cultural sciences.

To realize the intended function as a bridge for German-Polish relations, very soon the idea of founding a German-Polish university with its appropriate institutions on both banks of the river Odra, along with a common teaching staff and common courses, was brought up (Pfeiffer 2009). However, such an ambitious project of an independent, bi-national university proved to be impossible. It would have required international legal treaties between the two states of Germany and Poland on the one hand and with the Federal State of Brandenburg on the other. The result was therefore not an independent joint university but a common institution of higher education that is conjointly managed by the European University Viadrina (EUV) Frankfurt (Odra), and the Adam Mickiewicz University (AMU) in Poznań. An intergovernmental agreement between the State of Brandenburg and the Republic of Poland forms the legal basis for this community facility. However, the Collegium Polonicum, located on the Polish side of the river, has



neither an independent legal status nor budgetary sovereignty and is thus dependent on its two mother universities, European University Viadrina and Adam-Mickiewicz University, regarding all matters. Nevertheless, even in its reduced form this bi-national university is currently unique among European universities.

The laying of the first stone for the Collegium Polonicum happened on October 17<sup>th</sup> 1992; however, until the official opening on June 10<sup>th</sup> 1998, the German-Polish university institution was run from rented locations. The building is located in Ślubice, on the Polish side of the river bank, and is a symbolic representation concerning its political function bridging East and West Europe.

At many different levels it became clear how difficult it was to realize a common university institution. Considerable obstacles had to be mastered. Most of all the different legal structures with their different responsibilities for higher education in Germany and Poland turned out to be an obstacle to developing a treaty on university cooperation which seemed – right at the beginning – could hardly be overcome. In Poland the nation state is in charge of the higher education system but in Germany the federal states (Bundesländer) have responsibility for universities, so representatives from the various political levels were sent to the negotiations concerning the establishment of a joint university. This asymmetry, which was due to the German Federal Republic's political system, was perceived as a difference in 'status' by the Polish side, and consequently the representatives of the Federal State of Brandenburg were at first rejected as negotiating partners of equal rank. The Polish side demanded at least the presence of the Foreign Minister, but the representatives from the regional government of the Federal State of Brandenburg did not accept this request. It took another ten years until an intergovernmental agreement between Poland and the Federal State of Brandenburg was signed in 2002. This treaty now serves as the legal foundation for this common university institution.

#### **DEVELOPMENT AND ORIENTATION AFTER POLAND'S ACCESSION TO THE EU**

Right from the beginning bi-national study courses were developed as one of the core elements of the joint university. Currently, joint courses and qualifications are offered in the following fields: the combined Master's study course in German and Polish Law completed as a 'joint degree'; and the Master's course in Intercultural Communication Studies (MICS) completed as a 'double degree'. Also, the Master of European Studies (MES)

course may optionally be completed as a double degree. A new item on the programme is the joint 'Intercultural German Studies' course which is completed as a double BA degree. Another BA course 'Polish Studies for Foreigners', currently offered by the AMU at the CP, is under preparation.

Thus, the concept and its consequent implementation for the intended bridge function as a border university, along with its curriculum, resulted in an influx of Polish students at the Viadrina and the Collegium Polonicum even in their early years. Up to Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 their share was more than one third of all students at the Viadrina (see Fig. 1 and 2).

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
From PL One Term	167	216	197	194	193	254	286	287	337	318	349	334	179	250	243	223	231	183	154
All Polish Students	167	384	566	731	883	1053	1179	1252	1364	1445	1517	1547	1331	1245	1188	1053	960	897	800
Students from PL in %	35,8	39,2	39,1	40,5	38	37,4	37,3	36,1	35,9	34,5	33,2	30,4	26	24,4	23,8	20,3	17,2	14,5	12,4
Applicants from PL for Basic Courses					452	445	421	411	370	310	354	253	291	290	285	192	185	149	143
Other Foreigners	2	15	36	49	90	120	129	151	212	332	420	526	535	503	479	490	507	615	687

Fig. 1. Polish students at European University Viadrina

Source: (Nuyken 2011: 13)

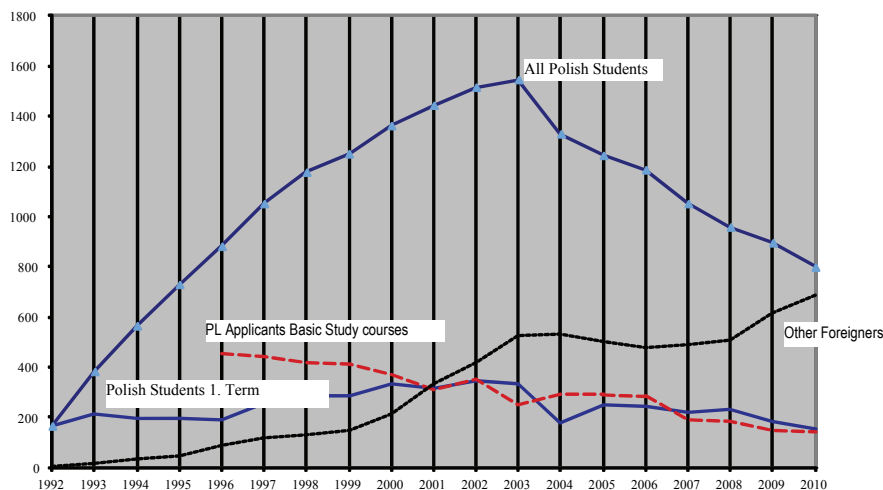


Fig. 2. Polish and international students at European University Viadrina

Source: (Nuyken 2011: 13)

Since 2004 the number of Polish students has been on the decline, both in per cent and in absolute numbers. There are a variety of reasons for this (Nuyken 2011). According to the Viadrina's original task, 30 per cent of university places were until 2004 reserved for students from Poland. However, according to the principle of equal treatment this was no longer possible after Poland's accession to the EU. Nowadays Polish applicants are subject to the generally approved selection process, like all other applicants, and it is no longer possible to admit all Polish students that apply. The termination of scholarship programmes which were available in the early years must be seen as another reason for the decline. For example, hitherto DAAD scholarships were almost exclusively provided to students from non-EU countries. Furthermore, the total number of Polish students in Germany has continuously been on the decline. On the one hand, this is due to universities in other EU countries also being open to Poles now; and on the other hand, in the past few years the university opportunities in Poland have been considerably extended and improved. The director of the Collegium Polonicum describes the situation as follows:

*"Joining the EU was like a dream coming true, and at the same time it meant a new reality ... which has proven to be not really favourable in every respect for the CP. That is, opening the European Union has resulted in powerful competition for the Viadrina and our location. Those young people for whom the Viadrina was before so to speak the one Western European university, ... now it isn't the only one anymore. Now they [the Polish students] have access to the Sorbonne, to the London School of Economics, to the University of Heidelberg and anywhere else. ... A great number of students who wanted to study in a foreign country looked elsewhere for their opportunities and possibilities. The number of Polish students at the Viadrina declined drastically, from more than 30 per cent ... then to 8 per cent. Thank God we have already hit the bottom and are now working our way out of it here, but it was a very disturbing experience" (interview 2011/5).*

The Viadrina's reaction to the decline in the number of Polish students was the development of new advertising strategies. Among these were, among others things, the development of new offers, e.g. providing the possibility of graduating with double degrees. Most importantly advertisements at Polish schools, the establishment of personal contacts and networks, the use of information days and participation in Polish university fairs have all proved to be successful. Often the Polish students themselves work as 'Viadrina ambassadors' who authentically share their experiences to attract future applicants.

On the whole, Poland's accession to the EU put the Viadrina's identity as a border region university to the test, for now the German-Polish border had changed from being an EU external border to being a border within the EU.

“For the border was an important point of reference, it was a factor on which we were dependent the most. ... As now this border doesn’t exist [anymore], for us a completely new world opened up, where no longer may we say: we are a cross-border institution. ... The accession to the EU has had very ambivalent effects on us. ... Of course, we reacted flexibly. First there was a short period of panic, then of course we were laboriously working on the new profile, ... new offers for the students and so on ...” (interview 2011/5).

The EU accession of Poland has placed the borderland university in a new situation: from national periphery to the midst of Europe. This has resulted in new framework conditions. Poland as a new and prospering EU country has now become attractive for students from other Central and East European countries. This not only results in increased recruiting efforts aiming at such countries but it also changes the awareness at the Europe-University Viadrina in respect of the intended bridge function which now has increasingly been shifted to the East and also results in a spatial reorientation:

“Well, now we are aware that e.g. not only the German-Polish border [is significant] but [Poland’s] location in Central Europe, ... a country which does not have such a high status as Germany but a status which is comparably high e.g. for Ukrainians and White Russians and Azerbaijanis. Polish as a language of the civilized world; Poland as a country with an established democracy with a long tradition of freedom, a very successful new EU country ... [so that] the candidates do not [consider] this border an obstacle but an enrichment. ... For them it’s great to study on the German border. (Interview 2011/5)

Accordingly, the administrative director of the Collegium Polonicum speaks of a slippery slope running from the East towards the West: “All the young people between Kiev and Berlin are interested in studying somewhere in the West, nobody so to speak looks ‘down’ east” (Wojciechowski 2009: 75). Thus it is logical that a university on the German-Polish border, which is now in the midst of Europe,

“... [serves as] this central place, this central location in Central Europe ... [and] looks for further points of reference or areas on this vast slippery slope. ... This is a new place, now ... from completely different points of view, and we will extend this further. ... Indeed this change of paradigm is our opportunity” (interview 2011/5).

Consequently new offers such as ‘Polish Studies for Foreigners’ meet these new demands. This strategy has proved to be very successful. Meanwhile there are three to five applicants from the Ukraine, White Russia and some other Eastern European states for each university place (see fig. 1, 2), so that even restrictions on admission for this study course had to be established.

## **(2) Neisse University – a Virtual Tri-national University in the Polish-German-Czech Triangle**

### **OBJECTIVES AND FEATURES**

Neisse University was founded in 2000 and exists as an alliance between Wrocław University of Technology (PL), the Technical University of Liberec (CZ) and the University of Applied Sciences Zittau/Görlitz (D). The founding idea was to use the special features of the site in the Polish-German-Czech triangle with the goal “of bringing Europe together ... [by] building bridges among students, lectures and institutions” (Neisse University: 2). The goals are to contribute to European integration and the building of a European Higher Education Area as envisaged in the Bologna documents and to qualify for the specific requirements of the European labour market by providing career-oriented training and cross-cultural competences (see: <http://www.neisse-uni.org/>).

Unlike the creation of the joint Polish-German institution ‘Collegium Polonicum’, no political significance has been attributed to the Neisse-University. The creation of this tri-national institution was initiated by members of the participating universities and was largely based on the commitment of individual university players. The initiative was based on contacts that already existed during GDR times (interview 2012/4b).

Neisse University neither exists as an independent institution nor has his own building. It is rather a virtual campus and its specific feature is a joint study course “Information and Communication Management” that leads to a triple composite degree of Bachelor of Science. The outstanding profile of this joint Polish-Czech-German degree programme is studying in each of the three countries for one year. The students start in the first year at the Technical University of Liberec, study in the second year at Jelenia Gora (a branch of Wrocław University of Technology) and attend the third year at the University of Applied Sciences in Zittau/Görlitz where they also have their final exam. The joint degree programme is integrated at the three participating universities. This means that the students use the facilities of the partners involved and are taught by the same lecturers who are on the teaching staff of these universities. The leading subject in the three-year study course is mainly Computer Science, but in combination with other subjects such as Economics, Communication and Psychology, as well as language skills and courses on intercultural education. The objective is to train practically orientated specialists for interdisciplinary jobs in the fields of economics, the media and public administration. Due to the requirements of the labour market there has been a shift in recent years to strengthen eco-

nomics in the study course. English is the language of teaching but the students also have to attend courses in the language of each country involved. Consequently the advertising slogan is: 1 degree - 3 countries - 4 languages (<http://www.neisse-uni.org/start/history.php>).

The tri-national cooperation is managed by a steering committee consisting of members from the participating universities with a rotating presidency. This administrative committee functions as an advisory board but has no decision making competences. Decisions are made by the authorities of the three universities. Official committee meetings are held two or three times a year besides informal meetings if necessary. For coordination and daily work there is one permanent position financed by the University of Applied Science in Zittau/Görlitz. In the beginning donations from several foundations and political administrations could be received, but overall there is no fixed external financial funding for the NU. Therefore, the costs of teaching as well as for administration are paid by each university in the triangle where the study course is being held.

### STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND ASSESSMENT

In the beginning the Neisse-University started with the aim of enrolling a total of 30 students, ten students from each country of the triangle. Due to a demographic decline in the border area and the changing conditions of Poland and the Czech Republic after EU accession the number of students enrolled each year did not always reach 30.

Since the beginning 166 students have graduated successfully with a Bachelor of Science degree in Information and Communication Management. Poles had the highest number with 46 per cent of students, followed by German students with 29 per cent and with 23 per cent of students on this study course coming from the Czech Republic. There are a very few students from Non-EU states: one from Nigeria and two from Vietnam (see Fig. 3). Later developments show similar trends. In 2010 one student from Egypt enrolled and in 2012 one student from Venezuela. (Neisse University: 5).

A survey that was conducted in 2011 among graduate students aimed at understanding the motivation for studying at Neisse University and to evaluate its performance through student assessment (Gasiórowska 2011). The most important factors for students in choosing the tri-national study course were the possibility of studying in English in three countries and to improve their language ability. Much appreciated by the students were also the chance to study in three countries and to start international friendship (*ibid.* p. 5). Student assessment relating to the skills gained during the

course at NU was mainly positive, but the participants appreciated most “knowledge about the specific nature of foreign environments, language skills, as well as personal and social skills like independence, flexibility, and responsibility in team-work” (ibid. p. 8).

Study Year	Polish	Czech	German	Non EU	TOTAL
2001 - 2004	10	3	10		23
2002 - 2005	12	4	9		25
2003 - 2006	12	4	9		25
2004 - 2007	10	6	7		23
2005 - 2008	12	7	3		22
2006 - 2009	7	4	4	1 (Nigeria)	16
2007 - 2010	6	6	3		15
2008 - 2011	5	3	1	1 (Vietnam)	10
2009 - 2012	2	2	2	1 (Vietnam)	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>166</b>
Share in %	46%	23%	29%	2%	100%

Fig. 3. Neisse University graduates

Source: Data from Neisse University administration (2012)

Despite the generally positive reviews of the tri-national courses the number of students who enrol for this course is declining. The reasons are mainly due the structural weakness of the entire border region as well as declining financial support on the political front. Recently efforts have been undertaken, such as new PR strategies with better information about the special characteristics of the course and new methods of outreach, to enhance the attractiveness of Neisse University (interview 2012/1; 2012/6).

#### INTERCULTURAL MISFITS: POTENTIALS FOR INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND DRIVING FORCES FOR INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION - SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the empirical investigation of case studies, special attention will be paid to areas of higher education systems in which an incompatibility between the participating national educational institutions and cultures of knowledge were encountered. Referring to Young (2002) we call them ‘misfits’. These institutional misfits may provoke conflicts, but also contain the potential for mutual learning between different cultures of knowledge and educational systems and give the chance for institutional innovations to develop.

In this study a distinction is made between formal and informal institutions in order to collate the empirical findings with these heuristic terms. However, in reality, formal and informal institutions only represent interactions in the respective national university system as a whole.

The following table (see Fig. 4) presents a list of potential misfits encountered in cross-border university collaboration. Some of these misfits will be explained in detail and illustrated by empirical findings in the following sections of this article.

<b>Examples of 'misfits' within formal (codified) institutions in Higher Education</b>	<b>'misfits' within informal (non-codified) institutions in Higher Education</b>
National educational systems	Meaning of academic reputation and rituals
University laws	Learning cultures and teaching styles
Labour laws	Academic dispute cultures
Organisational structures	Academic writing styles
Social security systems	Examination routines / modes of evaluation / administrative routines
Curricular arrangements	Forms of communication
Examination procedures	Behaviour in conflict situations
Rules of assessment	Mentalities
Grading requirements	etc.
etc.	

**Fig. 4.** Institutional 'misfits' - triggers for conflict and potentials for mutual learning

Source: own representation

An institution can be understood as representing the "rules of the game for human interaction" (North 1990, 1992). Thus, every action at universities follows the specific underlying (game) rules of higher education. However, these rules can - depending on the time and place - vary, so that specific institutional arrangements in different locations emerge as variations of the university system. Consequently formal (codified) educational institutions (e.g. university laws, curricula, examination rules) are governed by different cultures of knowledge and value systems such as informal (non-codified) institutions. The various individual universities therefore relate on the one hand to the national (or regional or federal) institutions that regulate research, teaching and working conditions; and on the other hand interactions are guided by specific national and regional cultures of knowledge - the informal institutions - that have developed in different locations. It is assumed here that strong interdependencies exist between institutions regarding these guiding rules and cultures of knowledge.



In the context of a social-constructivist perspective – that is the underlying research approach in this article<sup>8</sup> – cultures are understood as ‘knowledge orderings’. This perception refers to a “meaning-, knowledge- and symbol-oriented understanding of culture” (see among others Reckwitz 2001, 2005), according to which cultures “develop against the background of symbolic orders, of specific ways of interpreting the world ... [and] are reproduced by systems of meaning and cultural codes” (Reckwitz 2005). But culture is not simply reduced to the cognitive phenomena of meaning or mental structures, cultures are also interpreted and understood “as know-how dependent everyday routines, as collectively intelligible social practices” (ibid. p. 97). Thus, a culture’s ordering of knowledge also includes practical knowledge, including among other things “the practice of bureaucratic administration, of physical hygiene or of risky business, [the] complex of the practices of scientific research, of middle class marriage or of the reception of pop music etc.” (ibid. p. 98).

Thus, every interaction is guided by implicit rule systems, where informal rules (values, norms) play an especially prominent role. Neither formal nor informal Institutions, however, affect human actions in a deterministic sense. There is always a choice for individual actors regarding concrete behaviour in specific cases. In which direction a reaction in respect to a given situation will develop, e.g. in the event of conflict, depends a great deal on the particular knowledge each actor has about the rules and knowledge structures of the other party. Conflicts in cross-border higher education cooperation, therefore, may arise firstly due to existing misfits of different national and regional institutions, and secondly because mutual understanding is missing, due to a lack of knowledge about the (formal and informal) institutions of the other party.

## **INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING IN THE SOCIAL PRACTICES OF CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

### **Different Legal Systems – Learning Processes in the Field of Formal Institutions**

Differences in the legal systems between Germany and Poland continually cause considerable challenges for the management of the joint univer-

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<sup>8</sup> The theoretical background to this research will be specified in another article in this journal. See Heidi Fichter-Wolf: Towards Europeanisation as a Cultural Spatial Change. Some Theory Based Considerations on the Role of Intercultural Learning and Institution Building for Social (Re)Construction of Border Areas

sity Collegium Polonicum. Right from the beginning solutions for the differential that existed between German and Polish wages, the lack of clear regulations in the labour and social security legislation as well as unclear tax regulations, had to be found. The first Principal of Viadrina (between 1993 - 1999), Hans N. Weiler, complained "that despite all the university-political lip service by state authorities it was not at all easy to establish an international university in Germany" (Weiler 2009). For many reasons the creation of an international teaching staff was a failure because of problems in service law and salary law: "And when finally one had been successful with appointing a foreign scientist, in the end there happened perfidious injustices - such as ... in the case of the family holidays of the colleague from Warsaw who in contrast to his German colleague, whose travels to Munich every weekend were paid by the state, was not paid his travel costs to Warsaw but only to 'the next German border station' - that is from Frankfurt (Oder) to Frankfurt (Oder)" (ibid.). Thus, concerning cross-border cooperation it became necessary even in the early years - that is before Poland's accession to the EU - to find unconventional solutions in many fields to make such university cooperation workable at all. For example, one attempt was made in the beginning to create balancing systems for German and Polish staff members. German staff members working at the CP - that is on Polish territory - were on the one hand granted the same status as their Polish colleagues. At the same time, however, they kept all their entitlements according to German labour and social security laws. For Polish employees a complicated system of wage subsidies was developed, which serves in compensating for the large wage differential between staff members employed under German or Polish conditions. In the early years, employees working in the context of state-funded job-creation measures and officially being employed in Frankfurt (Oder) though actually contributing to the establishment of the CP, crossed the border on a daily basis - illegally. "All authorities knew about this and tacitly accepted this way of proceeding" (Wojciechowski 2005: 24). In this context the participants speak of 'passive cooperation' which made cross-border cooperation considerably easier even before Poland's official accession to the EU, which even led to the following judgement:

"We reached Europe earlier than the rest of the country, i.e. if you try hard and have a good idea and so to speak find allies, you may overcome even political obstacles" (interview 2005/1).

However, again and again there are new challenges, resulting from incompatibilities in the legal systems, which might even endanger cooperation as such, as is illustrated by the following event (Hans 2007). At the end of

January 2007, the entire MBA course 'Management for Central and Eastern Europe' had to be withdrawn from Collegium Polonicum. The background for this was an intervention by the new head of the course, a tax expert, who demanded clarification on how the German staff members of the Collegium Polonicum were to be taxed because this MBA course, which could be attended parallel to working, was run by a non-profit limited liability company. The idea behind this was to be able to use the fees more freely. However, for this to succeed the staff members had to be considered private economy employees who, according to the double-tax agreement between Germany and Poland from 2007, had to pay their taxes in Poland if they were working on Polish territory for more than 183 days. In everyday practice, however, this regulation has proved to be virtually non-implementable because members of the teaching staff are often cross-border commuters on a daily basis – sometimes several times a day. Indeed, for this there exists an additional regulation in the agreement, stipulating that taxes must be paid where the concerned person's main place of residence is. Nevertheless, this regulation still does not cover the situation of those who work during the week on both sides of the border and also commute between their home town and their place of residence on working days. The problem was solved in the following way:

“Well, the Polish board took this point of view: the main place of residence is the place defined by oneself. ... And this is what we announced to the university community. ... But none of the tax boards was willing to give a (written) interpretation of the tax law. However, it was declared that the matter was understood this way. This is what we spread around, and thus the course could be transferred back to Słubice” (interview 2011/5).

This is one example among many others of how problems of cross-border cooperation are solved by way of unorthodox proceedings and the exploitation of legal grey areas. This is also the case at Neisse University. Different legal systems also presented a major obstacle to the creation of this joint institution. Even though this cross border cooperation does not have to cope with the challenges of a jointly managed organisation, like Collegium Polonicum in Słubice, many obstacles due to the differences in legal systems were encountered during cooperation that have continued to cause new challenges for the actors involved. In the early years, even before getting the tri-national study course running, some crucial problems had to be solved. A major problem was how to supply the award of a tri-national composite degree. The mutual recognition of qualifications acquired in the joint study course was one of the obstacles to be overcome. Thus, the founding director lamented that cross-border cooperation of educational institutions had not

been foreseen in the legal systems of nation states. He stated, that such collaboration in higher education represents a novelty, therefore, not only for Saxony but also for Europe (Chemnitz 2001). According to existing legislation at that time students would have to receive three certificates, a German, Polish and Czech degree. "This is ridiculous. But there is no transnational university legal agreement yet that would regulate this matter" (ibid.). As the content of the tri-national study course had been prepared in partnership with the participating universities a joint diploma was regarded as crucial:

"We agreed that a joint diploma should be signed by the three rectors [of the participating universities]. ... But this was very difficult to arrange because each of these countries have their own regulation of who and which political level is responsible for signing" (interview 2012/2)." "... And there is no legal basis for this yet on the European level ... therefore we decided to go ahead of European law ... and this is certainly unique" (interview 2012/4b).

The joint certificate that has been handed to the alumni since then is not an official document as other diploma certificates in the three countries. It is based on an official agreement between the three universities.

"We have always stated, this is illegal. ... Now, we award this document for more than seven years. All employers of our alumni have accepted the document as it shows the symbol of the TU Wroclaw, TU Liberec and Hochschule Zittau/Görlitz and the signatures of their rectors. These institutions are well known and that is why it is well accepted. ... In practice we never had inquiries" (interview 2012/5).

This is why the above stated uniqueness could be claimed. Due to the support of official authorities who do not intervene and also the general recognition by potential employers this informal practice is generally accepted.

As this tri-national cooperation started before the EU-accession of Poland and the Czech Republic there was also the problem of getting visas for the students studying in the three countries that had to be overcome before the joint study course could begin.

"To obtain a visa for a longer time than 90 days was very difficult and that is why we had in fact to violate the law. We solved this by the regulation that after or during the first 90 days of stay the students had to travel back to their mother university for checking their study and after that they could go abroad for another 90 days" (interview 2012/2).

Another problem to be solved at the beginning was the regulation for student loans in Germany (Bafög). These loans are officially only for students who study in German institutions of higher education and not for their

study in other countries. This regulation represented a great barrier for attracting students from Germany to the program. After many informal discussions, and with the advocacy of the ministries, solutions were found. This was again by discovering and using grey zones in the official regulations.

“We have found something by browsing through the law” (Interview 2012/4a).  
“This has led to the regulation that also Germans studying in the Czech Republic and in Poland have received the student loans. ... We solved this problem in the end, but it has cost us a lot of energy” (interview 2012/4b).

As these examples from the Neisse University also underline, it seems to be crucial to discover grey zones in official regulations, to go to the edge of legal systems and sometimes even break the law in order to get cross-border collaborations running. The statement of a member of the steering committee confirmed this impression:

“If we will wait till all these formalities will be OK and ready, we will never start. So we decided: OK, we are starting now also in a situation where we break the law. And that was a good decision because we have created facts: we have a joint programme, we have students ... ” (interview 2012/3).

But it is not only the discovery and exploitation of grey areas of law systems that seem to be of importance, it is also the acceptance and the support of official authorities and tolerance of ambiguity by the stakeholders that is of great importance in overcoming the barriers of institutional misfits. Several statements in our interviews confirmed this appraisal:

“I have to underline that a lot of people from this local governments and ministries helped us. A lot of them visited us and were present during negotiations and discussions” (interview 2012/2); “Yes, if the three ministries want to, then everything is easy ... ” (interview 2012/5).

These examples from university cooperation at the Polish-German-Czech border may serve as an illustration of how institutional learning processes may develop in the area of transnational legal systems. By way of negotiations and based on communicative processes of understanding solutions can be developed – at first in the form of informal regulations – which are then accepted and practiced by the participants without any written basis. In this way new social practices develop by exploiting those legal grey areas which make cooperation in border regions possible. At the same time these informal regulations indicate a possible direction for a solution to cross-border conflicts which is significant for the development of European rule systems. However, cooperation based on such informal legal regulations

will again and again be endangered. It also needs the acceptance and tolerance of ambiguity and – this is crucial too – the support and willingness of officials and decision makers towards these solutions.

### **Different Orders of Knowledge – Intercultural Learning Processes in the Field of Informal Institutions**

Cultures of knowledge – as explained above – being ‘knowledge orderings’ guide human behaviour and social practices. Knowledge orderings, as informal institutions, consist of values and norms which comprise the shared knowledge stock of a society. This knowledge is often tacit, but it characterizes to a great extent a society’s distinctive worldview and its social systems of meaning. Thus, it also applies to the behaviour and meaning of students and academics. Different culturally related meaning systems are often a source of irritations and misunderstandings in intercultural negotiations.

This can be underlined by the empirical findings:

Especially in the early years of establishing Collegium Polonicum differences in the informal institutional systems were a source of misunderstandings and problems. Accordingly, during negotiations, the representatives of the mixed university authorities perceived a very different negotiating and conflict culture among Germans and Poles (interviews 2005/1 and 2005/2). Whereas the German representatives usually made problems occurring within the negotiations a direct topic of discussion at the table, this behaviour often irritated their Polish partners. The custom in Poland, according to current culture, is to address conflicts not during official negotiations but in a more discreet way and mostly in the context of informal communications (e.g. in the hall, the café, in the refectory etc.). Also, there are culture-related differences regarding the understanding of time, of hierarchy, the respective ways of teaching and working, as well as the ways in which the respective knowledge cultures are communicated. Therefore, the way in which fixed dates and the time factor are understood also often causes irritation. A member of the steering group describes his observations:

“That what Germans considers ‘on time’ is ridiculously early for the Polish, and that what Germans consider already scandalously late or impossible, is just the right time for the Polish” (interview 2011/5).

Particularly in the early years of the CP such problems in understanding made negotiations difficult, as culture-related differences of interpretation

and any resulting patterns of behaviour were not taken into consideration. Thus, apart from understanding at the language level, an understanding between cultures also requires a translation of cultural codes. The necessity became clear on starting to solve the problems right from processing structures and organizing them, if possible, in ways which would minimize misunderstandings. Accordingly, the steering committee of the CP agreed to only make decisions consensually and not as majority decisions, i.e. debates last until there are no more objections. These processes in mutual understanding have resulted in an essentially improvement in the atmosphere over the past few years, so that currently it is characterized by trustful cooperation<sup>9</sup>.

Differences in the cultures of knowledge in higher education also occur in the field of teaching and learning and become obvious in different attitudes and perceptions. Thus, students experience the challenges of coping with intercultural differences every day.<sup>10</sup> This is conspicuous for example during seminars and lectures where the quieter and rather reserved behaviour of Polish students in contrast to the more open manner of students who have been socialized in the German educational system is encountered. A Polish female student expressed her perceptions as follows:

“In Germany you may be late for lectures; you may eat or drink during seminars also, whereas in Poland you have to be absolutely calm and quiet. For example, if [at a Polish university] you are 15 minutes late for a seminar, sometimes you are not allowed to participate because the Professor considers this a lack of respect. ... In Poland it may be that you don't understand a lecture but still pass the exam, because you may learn everything by heart. In Germany you will not pass the exam if you don't understand something. In Poland it is very important how many facts you know, in Germany it is your skills” (interview 2007/1).

The reasons for these patterns of behaviour are found in the two countries' different educational structures and learning cultures: The Polish educational system is more school-like, the curriculum is clearly structured and mostly prescribed, whereas at German universities there are hardly any guidelines of how objectives might be achieved and there is generally more leeway. The German university system expects students to be highly capable of self-organization and independence.

Also, the Neisse University has to cope with differences between learning cultures in its everyday life and practices. One may recognize typical differences between Czechs and Germans on the one hand and Polish stu-

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<sup>9</sup> This was once again confirmed by the 2011 interviews.

<sup>10</sup> On this see Hiller (2007) who in the context of her dissertation thesis analysed intercultural communication processes among German and Polish students.

dents on the other that are encountered, for example, during tests and exams: "The typical Polish student studies their course notes for at least 2 to 3 days before a test, and they learn easily and quickly by heart and from memory. For the test itself everything will be repeated ... and actually everything that is in their notes. ... Now we come to the Czech-German point of view. Common in this group is the magic word 'understand'. ... What the professor in class could not make you understand will now have to be examined in one's own mind. Learning by heart is unacceptable; it is a banned-word and almost mocked. ... One needs to understand, and retain knowledge that can be applied at some point" (Weßels 2005).

These different cultures of teaching and learning clash directly in combined study courses where students can earn a joint degree. As the joint study course "Information and Communication Management" offered by the Neisse-University is held in each of the three participating countries for one year, the students attending the course have to adopt the regulations of the different educational systems in each country. This approach to learning is regarded as a key element of this initiative with the aim of enhancing "the development of multicultural competence is marked by the acceptance of things that are different and by tolerance" (<http://www.neisse-uni.org/start/history.php>). Gaining intercultural competences over the entire study course through the experience of living in different countries and acquiring a deep insight into three significantly different academic systems, along with the professional qualifications themselves, represent the core of the studies. Members of the steering committee and teaching staff have stated their observations as follows:

"Yes, there are quite different styles of education. But I don't think that causes any problems for students. It is even a benefit for them to become familiar with all these differences" (interview 2012/1). "In my opinion students have no problem with it; students adapt to these differences ... they can recognize different attitudes, different cultures, different forms of relations ... and this is some kind of adventure compared with other studies ... and this is good" (interview 2012/3).

Another example where students as well as lecturers are confronted in everyday circumstances by this clash of different education cultures is the joint German-Polish course "Master of German and Polish Law", offered at the Viadrina University. This joint degree study course consists of a combination of modules from the German and the Polish legal systems, which are accordingly taught by teachers from institutions in both systems. On this, a representative from the teaching staff explains:

" ... what is a problem for students with this course right at the start ... is the method of legal education, as it is completely different in both Germany and Poland. As



a matter of fact, the German model is very much practice-oriented, that is right from the beginning abstract concepts are communicated by the example of actual cases, that is actual problems being solved, real-life cases, and the abstract knowledge is communicated by these examples, and of course for this the law is already at hand to be applied. The law is always at hand, it is there to be used, ... most of all [you have] to learn how to apply the law, how to interpret it, how to take it. That is the prevailing model in Germany, practice-oriented education. But in Poland, on the other hand, there is an educational system which is rather similar to France, insofar one could not say that it is better or worse than the other ... . Rather, Polish learning is based on learning by heart. Thus you learn the law by heart, and this will be examined later. ... and you may not even use the texts of the law in your examination, this is not allowed, you must learn everything by heart ... and also in the written test you must write down what you have learned" (interview 2011/7b).

Thus, students of this course are not only confronted with the different contents of the two legal systems, but they must also adjust to the different ways of teaching as well as to different examination demands. This means students are examined according to Polish law and conditions at the AMU, and if the examination is about the contents of the German legal system, it happens according to the regulations of the Viadrina. This is a considerable challenge for students who must be ready to cope with the demands of different national systems, thus having to organize also their preparations for examinations very flexibly.

"... yes, they are confronted with this and must get along with it. For this is a skill they must acquire right from the beginning, to adopt the completely different ways of thinking they are confronted with according to the examiner. Certainly this is a challenge, and certainly this is something which might be standardized. Either by way of a compromise or in favour of one of the two systems" (interview 2011/7b).

In both collaborative cross-border universities it has been agreed that the test and examination regulations will be organized according to the respective national traditions. For the time being a standardization of the different teaching systems is not contemplated either at Collegium Polonicum or at Neisse University. Rather one can observe a practicality that might be called the 'coexistence' of different knowledge and teaching cultures.

#### **KEY-ELEMENTS OF INTERCULTURAL LEARNING TOWARDS EUROPEANISATION**

It is the conclusion of this research that the practicality of a coexistence of different knowledge and teaching cultures includes certain attitudes towards other cultures which function as a 'hidden agenda' and is highly

significant for cultural change. This coexistence of cultures can be considered as an important learning agenda that includes important essentials for fostering Europeanisation and creating a European Higher Education Area. It is not only that students acquire key competences in the sense of 'transcultural skills' by dealing with different culturally related rule systems, which are also of high value in their professional careers. They not only acquire the ability to understand other cultural systems, they also become capable of mediating between them if necessary. It also means that this practice of coexistence of cultures indicates a cultural change within these universities that can be assessed as being of high value for organisational learning towards Europeanisation. What counts first of all is the mutual recognition and acceptance of the fact that the university system of another country follows other rules, without judging them in the sense of 'better' or 'worse'. Thus it is recognized that the other culture is 'different'. Even if its rules are alien, there is no attempt at forcing one's own rule system onto the other culture and thus of colonizing it. Automatically such attitudes and practice result in making both negotiating partners equal, so that existing asymmetries in other fields as well as the resulting asymmetry of power structures are potentially minimized or balanced. In sum, the following learning factors can be identified which are regarded as key-elements that may support the Europeanisation processes in the sense of a 'bottom up' cultural-spatial change:

- The acceptance of cultural differences;
- Treating partners with fairness and respect;
- Acknowledgment and acceptance of other institutional systems;
- No judgement on other and alien rules.
- Respect towards the other culture, towards 'being different';
- No colonization of the other culture, as well as the recognition of its equal value;
- Acknowledgment and creation of equal footing;
- The creation of equality in the negotiation process.

Thus, from these conditions, as well as from an open attitude towards other 'alien' practices, a favourable learning atmosphere results, meaning further processes for bringing different cultures closer to each other become possible. Also, representatives at the executive level of these two collaborating universities came to similar conclusions. From the Neisse University it was stated:

"... because we are from various cultures ... the local law is quite different and also the perceptions, goals and thinking in each country is different. ... [coping with this] helped us to become Europeans" (interview 2012/2).

And the principal of the AMU concludes:

“That’s a question of time, we are EU members, we share common European practices which make differences become blurred. ... We adopt good ways of proceeding from each other, even in the organisational field. I am convinced that the creation of a common European University, which uses the best features of our two systems, will result in creating a common institution where the differences between the academic cultures will become blurred” (interview 2011/8)<sup>11</sup>.

Thus, the coexistence of knowledge cultures may be considered a social practice in higher education that is revealing a new potential for dealing with cultural diversity. Culture as such provides the medium for intercultural communication as it allows “the production of the others in a social relationship where one’s own peculiarity can be communicated relative to the other” (Eder 1999: 171). Accepting the coexistence of the social practices of different European cultures within the various social fields where intercultural cooperation takes place is here considered as a promising approach towards social and cultural cohesion because on an equal footing cultural characteristics can be communicated and made mutually intelligible. Accepting the coexistence of cultural attitudes and social practices is therefore considered as an important element of cultural-spatial change that is significant for any ‘bottom-up’ Europeanisation process. This is because at the same time an atmosphere of mutual trust and mutual appreciation is created, which provides the preconditions that bring cultures closer together.

## CONCLUSION

From the beginning it has been argued that the integrative models of mutual intercultural learning that cross-border universities institute provide learning and innovation opportunities for the development of a common European Higher Education Area. Thus university collaboration in higher education is considered a complementary and additional pathway for enhancing academic mobility and fostering international knowledge exchange. The research presented here aims at analysing social practices in everyday action situations regarding management as well as teaching and

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<sup>11</sup> The Polish original texts reads: „To kwestia czasu, jesteśmy w Unii Europejskiej, mamy wspólne, europejskie praktyki, które zacierają różnice. ... Podglądamy dobre praktyki, również w zakresie kultury organizacyjnej. Jestem przekonany, że utworzenie wspólnego uniwersytetu europejskiego, wykorzystującego najlepsze cechy naszych systemów spowoduje wytworzenie za kilkanaście wspólnego ośrodka, w którym różnice kultur akademickich będą się zacieraly” (translated by K. Zielinska, IRS).

learning in intercultural cross-border contexts in order to assess their potential for Europeanisation processes. For often these varied processes of cultural exchange are neglected because they happen below the horizon of official policies – “below the surface”, as explained by Fligstein (2009) – and mostly in remote corners as well as usually without being noticed.

Essential for such ‘Europeanisation processes’ becoming an additional pathway to foster the EHEA is most of all that kind of knowledge that is acquired by intercultural learning in the context of communication to develop cross-border relationships. Intercultural learning takes place during the negotiation process where members with different cultural background try to find solutions that are not officially covered by national law or intercultural practices. In this context it seems that the practise of a coexistence of knowledge cultures serves as an important intermediate step on the road towards a cultural approach in terms of Europeanisation. It is here where the actors involved learn how to deal with diversity, have access to ‘foreign’ orderings of knowledge, and learn to appreciate the other side’s interpretations. In the course of the evolving communication process it is possible for consideration to be given as to which practices might be taken over as one’s own. Such a process of cultural exchange will minimize power asymmetries and create an atmosphere of trust.

Thus, intercultural learning through university cross-border collaboration can be considered as a crucial additional pathway for enhancing mutual intercultural understanding between different cultures of knowledge and as such foster academic mobility. Creating the EHEA – as it is argued here – will not succeed and not be sustainable in respect of Europeanisation if intercultural learning among higher education systems and between academics is neglected.

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2005/1	19.05.2005	Administrative Director, Collegium Polonicum, Słubice	PL
2005/2	15.12.2005	Vice President Teaching and Collegium Polonicum, Europe-University Viadrina, Frankf./Odra	D
2007/1	12.11. 2007	Erasmus-Student at Europe-University Viadrina, Student from Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań	PL
2011/5	30.05.2011	Administrative Director, Collegium Polonicum, Słubice	PL

2011/7b	28.06.2011	University teacher, Professor at Collegium Polonicum, Słubice	PL
2011/8	29.12.2011	Rector Adam Mieckiewicz University, Poznań	PL
2012/1	20.03.2012	President Neisse-University, Liberec	CZ
2012/2	20.03.2012	Former president Neisse-Uni, Liberec,	CZ
2012/3	20.03.2012	Vice President Neisse-Uni, Jelenia Gora	PL
2012/4a	21.03.2012	Coordinator Neisse-University, Zittau	D
2012/4b	21.03.2012	Academic Administrator, University of Applied Science, Zittau	D
2012/5	25.04.2012	Former president, Neisse-University, Görlitz	D
2012/6	25.04.2012	University teacher, Professor at University of Applied Science, Commissioner for public relations at Neisse-University, Görlitz	D

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