

## The EU-CAB Project: Notes from a project management perspective

EU-CAB is a project under the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships programme, co-funded by the European Union. The project originally ran from October 2018 to September 2021; it was extended until December 2021 due to the Covid pandemic. EU-CAB is an acronym for „Comparative Analyses of European Identities in Business and Every-Day Behaviour“. We also like the idea of the "cab" - let's imagine a taxi that takes people from one place to another in Europe, thereby bringing them into contact and spreading their ideas and knowledge. Our nearly 20 academics and almost 100 students involved in the project come from a wide variety of study courses: Economics, Management, International Business, Communication, Languages, Social and Youth Sciences, Information Technology.

Our team of academics met for the first time in January 2019 in Karlsruhe, unusually chilly these days, as Karlsruhe is more known for its rather mild winters (and hot summers) due to its location on the Rhine plain. A Portuguese colleague had armed herself against the cold with a long coat and an impressive fur hat, an evening sightseeing tour of the city ended a little early with mulled wine in a tavern. During five extensive workshop days, room A167 at the DHBW Karlsruhe became our domicile. Project coordinator Angela Diehl-Becker introduced us to the scientific methods of the project, a combination of tools that can be used to depict behaviour on the one hand and identity or self-concept on the other. As a specialist in group psychology, she herself has been familiar with these methods for decades, but for us it was challenging and sometimes difficult terrain. In the end, our first real understanding came from observing the crowd of people in the galleries of Karlsruhe's largest shopping centre using the SYMLOG system, and self-knowledge through the creation of our own self-concept sheet. There was also a lot of organisational work to be done: like scheduling the one-week study programmes over the course of the three project years in coordination with the semester phases of all nine universities (which was achieved surprisingly quickly), and creating a rough grid for the content of these study programme weeks. The focused, structured minds of the Portuguese colleagues from ISCAP, Alexandra Albuquerque and Sandra Ribeiro, are to thank for much of this. The discussion about the collection and presentation of the collected data also took up a lot of space. Jaime Fins from Porto, with his great programming expertise, asked the right questions and probably had a first database draft in mind still during the conference, Didier Wehrli from Strasburg jumped in soon afterwards. The colleagues from Hungary and

Poland contributed constructively to all topics and brought the discussion forward with good ideas, comments and questions, and the latter generously spoiled us with delicious "Czekoladki" (chocolates) during the long workshop days. It was a motivating workshop that foreshadowed good teamwork during the project.

In May 2019, the first study programme (ISP) for students from all countries participating in the project took place in France. The Cergy Paris Université had invited, colleague Werner Zettelmeier created the programme in close coordination with the project management. There were still many factors that we could only estimate approximately such as: the stability of nationally mixed working groups. The sustainability of the WiFi in the lecture hall in the basement of the university. The receptivity of the students for the quite complicated methods, and the support required for entering the data into the database. And finally, the time required to get a group of 60 people from point A to B by Parisian public transport (hint: about twice as long as planned).

The second ISP followed in June 2019 in beautiful, stately Budapest. It was an impressive week, not least because of the intense heat in the city. It was bearable, though, in the airy atrium of the Budapest Business School. Hungary presented a multi-layered picture, EU-wise. On the one hand, there was the courageous lecture by Hungarian scientist and journalist Péter Bajomi-Lázár on the difficult situation of the free press in the country. On the other hand, the blue and yellow flag of the EU was clearly visible on all public buildings and made a clear statement. The topic of „behaviour“ was a content focus of the week, the students created video clips and sharpened their perception of the categories of the SYMLOG system. They also complained about the long working days. In fact, we reduced the hourly load somewhat in subsequent ISPs, mainly to give more space to the very important informal exchange. It was gratifying to see the natural, flowing interaction and the good atmosphere in the mixed working groups. The Finnish students missed the explicit coffee break in the timetable. We only found out much later that the "fika" is a social institution in Finland, where work is interrupted for a cup of coffee, by everyone and at the same time. We teachers also spread out at work tables in the large, high-ceilinged room, for briefings and de-briefings, and completed the steps necessary for the data collection of our students on the data tool. Katalin Kollath from the BBS calmly held the reins of the programme.

A week in Porto followed in October 2019. Some students were participating for the third time, it was now important to make the programme accessible and interesting for both newcomers and the experienced repeaters. In Porto, we had two partner universities sharing the programme. A panel discussion at ISMAI with top-class participants opened the week, host Tereza Rebelo was in her element. In terms of content, we had a closer look at the topic of identity, trying to get to the bottom of this difficult concept. Joanna Sosnicka from Lodz gave us insights from the perspective of philosophy, e.g. through the very impressive paradox from antiquity about the ship of Theseus. It touches on the question of whether an object loses its identity when many or even all of its individual parts are replaced one after the other. In a "World Café", a dynamic form of workshop, held in the wide round of the modern stadium of ISMAI, the students reflected on their national identities. In the framework programme, the boat trip on the Douro river was unforgettable. The country's modern infrastructure, the uncomplicated command of English everywhere, the quality of the food (including the vending machine coffee) at the universities were impressive. What remained was the memory of a country that is geographically on the edge of Europe but is actually right in the middle of it.

And then came Corona. The "EU-CAB Day" at the DHBW Karlsruhe on 6 March 2020, where we presented the project to a broad professional audience with lectures and by experiencing the methods ourselves, was the last event before the DHBW went into a month-long closure. The EU-CAB project meetings now took place on conference platforms, and the unfamiliar way of communicating did not make the exchange any easier at first. We discussed how to deal with the outstanding ISPs in Mikkeli/Finland, Baden-Baden/Germany and Lodz/Poland. Their implementation had initially been planned until the end of the year 2020, which would have given us plenty of time for data evaluation and numerous publications until the end of the project in August 2021. Now it was a case of waiting, postponing, always readjusting to the pandemic situation, which dragged on and on. The EU and its national agency in Germany, the DAAD, granted options to meet the challenges of the pandemic, including an extension of the project time by four months. This gave us some breathing space, as a lot of time went by due to the uncertain planning. In June 2021, we organised a two-day mini-ISP on the part of the German project coordination to keep the EU-CAB spirit alive among the students. There were presentations on the project, exchange and discussion, lectures on related topics, including the notion of (national) borders. A - sadly - fitting topic, as the current situation was

disconcerting in view of the lowered barriers at the borders between Germany and France, mutual mistrust and sometimes overly strict regulations. It also showed that a one-week ISP that would take place entirely online could work.

For the German ISP in October 2020, we kept all options open for a long time – on-site, hybrid, online format? Gradually, the commitments to participate crumbled, finally also from the German students. We had already given up on splitting the ISP in two, with a weekend in French Strasbourg on the other side of the Rhine; holding it across national borders would not have been feasible. So the ISP included five whole days online, with lectures, presentations, group work, and data entry. The experienced Finnish students helped out as tutors. Each student and teacher, isolated at home at the computer screen, this required a lot of energy and commitment, both from the organising project management and from the participants.

The year 2021 began and there were still two ISPs and the Multiplier Event to be held until the end of the project. We pushed the date of the ISP in Mikkeli/Finland into May, hoping to be able to travel again in early summer. But things turned out differently, and a second ISP followed completely online. We had learned a lot from the first time, on top came the talent and commitment of the Finnish group to create a lively, interactive programme. (No telling how great it would have been on site.) The students were given more space for individual exchange, for all of this what normally would be discussed at the group working tables, in the corridors or over meals during the physical ISPs. The programme worked, with a few shortcomings in the collection of observation data. The insight into the Finnish (high) school system, which relies on individual support, was impressive. It is certainly a worthwhile investment in democracy and togetherness.

And the story repeated itself. We once more expected to be able to travel for the last ISP, which took place in Lodz/Poland in October 2021. The colleagues from the two universities involved, the University of Lodz and the University of Technology Lodz, geared their joint programme towards this and could hardly wait to finally see us again. Different regulations and assessments finally meant that only the students from Finland and France were allowed and willing to travel to Lodz. Portugal, Hungary and Germany stayed at home and were connected online whenever possible. Such a hybrid form is an enormous challenge for the design of the programme, and so it did not go off entirely without losses of content, but at least a good collection of data was achieved. A trip to the Auschwitz concentration camp

memorial left strong impressions on all participants and made them aware of how important values such as democracy and international understanding are. Consternation and sadness silenced the conversations during the long bus ride back to Lodz.

The final event of the project, the Multiplier Event, was planned for 10 December 2021 in Baden-Baden, combined with a team workshop to prepare the lectures and other parts of the programme. Here it was clear early on that we would also have to move this last event to an online format, and same went for the preparatory conferences. These were demanding, long meetings in which the results of the studies were compiled and interpreted. Special thanks are due to Didier Wehrli from Strasbourg and Eva Keresztes from Budapest, who had taken on the students' database with the greatest diligence and expertise. There is much more to think about, to revise, to tie up here than any of us can even imagine. For the final conference, some of the teachers as well as the students took over individual topics which they presented. Angela Diehl-Becker briefly outlined the methodologies, and she addressed the challenges of the project in terms of implementation and data collection, and also its limitations; other colleagues spoke about statistical analyses, or linked the results to existing cultural models. Students from Finland shared their views on the project and their experiences. What we can say is: Yes, there is a European identity, it is mildly friendly, mildly emotional, not particularly goal-oriented, rather passive, and above all: We share the ideal of being even more friends with each other, but we don't take much responsibility.

This report is not the place for sociological discussions, hence just this idea: Can we please start with this, now? Our thoughts determine our actions, and our world is as each one of us perceives it. Let us think – and be – positive, self-determined and courageous, aware of our own responsibility for our togetherness and for our world. We hope that our project has made a small contribution to this.

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