

## BIP proposal

**Title of BIP Project: Intercultural Competences and Communication Strategies for International Students.**

Organizer of BIP	
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Department and/or Program:	Department of Civil Engineering and Geology (DECG)
Number of students in module:	18

Partner of BIP	
Name:	Grzegorz Straż
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Number of students in module:	1

Partner of BIP	
Name:	Lenka Heczko
Institution, City, Country:	VSB – Technical University of Ostrava, Ostrava, The Czech Republic
Number of students in module:	2

Partner of BIP	
Name:	Tania Rus
Institution, City, Country:	Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Number of students in module:	3

Partner of BIP	
Name:	Mária Baková
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Number of students in module:	4

Partner of BIP	
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Number of students in module:	3

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Number of students in module:	1

Partner of BIP	
Name:	Katarzyna Jakubczyk
Institution, City, Country:	Wrocław University of Business and Economics, Wrocław, Poland

Number of students in module:	2
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<b>ECTS credits</b>
0

<b>3. Language(s) of instruction at each institution</b>
English, Portuguese
<b>4. Primary language(s) of most students in each course</b>
English
<b>5. Language of student collaboration</b>
English

<b>6. Structure of BIP (virtual activity was after or before physical activity)</b>
After
<b>Date of physical activity</b>
27/05/2024 to 31/05/2024
<b>Date of virtual activity</b>
06/06/2024
<b>8. BIP project internationalised learning outcomes (1-3 only)</b>

1. The learner can demonstrate an understanding of intercultural competence, recognizing the skills necessary to engage with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds effectively. This includes adapting communication styles and strategies based on cultural contexts to foster inclusive and respectful interactions in international environments.
2. The learner can identify both verbal and nonverbal cultural communication differences, acknowledging that such differences may lead to misunderstandings. However, they are equipped to navigate these challenges, applying communication strategies that facilitate mutual understanding and collaboration.
3. The learner can describe cultural biases and frameworks that impact communication in educational and international settings. They can reflect on their experiences working with international students, adjusting their communication strategies to promote effective cross-cultural engagement.

**9. BIP – online part. Short description of online part of BIP. How many meetings you planed? Was there any icebreaker/intercultural activities?**

1. Icebreaker/Intercultural Activities: To foster a sense of community and ease communication between students from different cultural backgrounds, we initiated the first session with an intercultural icebreaker activity. Students were divided into small groups and asked to share their experiences related to scientific research within their respective countries, allowing them to compare perspectives and build rapport.
2. During these meetings, we introduced students to the core platform used for communication and collaboration: Zoom. A brief tutorial was provided to ensure all participants were comfortable navigating the platform. Additionally, we utilized Padlet, where students could collaboratively post their reflections and research progress, fostering a continuous exchange of ideas between online sessions.
3. Finally, participants were given general information about the partner universities involved in the program, enhancing their understanding of the diverse academic environments they would engage with during the course.

**10. BIP – physical part. Short description of educational/intercultural/social activities.**

The physical part of the BIP on "Intercultural Competences and Communication Strategies for International Students" integrates a rich blend of educational, intercultural, and social activities, all set in the inspiring surroundings of Madeira. This program is designed to provide participants with the skills to effectively engage in intercultural communication, while also fostering collaboration between students, International Office staff, and academics.

#### **Educational Activities**

The educational aspect of the BIP includes lectures, presentations, and workshops led by experts from a range of international institutions. Topics such as "Communication Strategies" by professors from the VSB - Technical University of Ostrava, Czech Republic, and "Intercultural Competences" by the University of Madeira, highlight the diversity of the content. Other lectures focus on civil engineering topics, such as hydrological risk and life cycle assessments, bridging technical knowledge with communication strategies in an international context. Workshops provide a hands-on learning experience, encouraging participants to apply what they have learned in practical settings, further enhancing their academic and professional skills.

#### **Intercultural Activities**

The BIP places a strong emphasis on intercultural exchange, essential for fostering effective communication in international environments. Participants have the opportunity to interact with peers and academics from countries including Ukraine, Slovakia, Poland, and Romania, which promotes understanding of different cultural approaches to education and communication. Discussions during breaks and group work in workshops allow for informal exchanges that enhance intercultural awareness and the development of practical communication strategies.

#### **Social and Recreational Activities**

Social activities are an integral part of the BIP, designed to immerse participants in the local culture and facilitate informal interaction. A guided visit to the "Museu da Baleia da Madeira," along with a nature walk along the "Levada do Caniçal," offers participants a glimpse of Madeira's natural and cultural heritage. Meals at local restaurants, such as Restaurante Escondidinho, provide a relaxed setting for participants to bond and share experiences, fostering a sense of community within the group. These social interactions complement the formal educational sessions, making the BIP a holistic experience that blends learning with cultural appreciation.

Overall, the combination of educational, intercultural, and social activities creates a dynamic and enriching environment for participants, enhancing their skills in intercultural communication and laying the foundation for future collaborations across borders.

## **11. Description of the group project/tasks for participants.**

As part of the Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) on "Intercultural Competences and Communication Strategies for International Students," participants were tasked with a collaborative project aimed at developing practical intercultural communication strategies. The group project was designed to apply the knowledge gained from lectures, workshops, and discussions, enhancing participants' intercultural competence and communication abilities.

### **Project Structure**

Participants were divided into multicultural groups, with each group including members from different partner universities such as the Rzeszów University of Technology (Poland), the Technical University of Ostrava (Czech Republic), and the University of Madeira (Portugal), among others. This setup encouraged participants to actively engage with colleagues from various cultural and academic backgrounds, fostering cross-cultural communication and collaboration.

The primary task for each group was to create a comprehensive communication strategy that would address common challenges faced by international students, academic staff, and International Office personnel. Groups were required to focus on topics related to intercultural competence, such as overcoming language barriers, navigating cultural differences, and developing inclusive communication practices.

### **Key Responsibilities**

1. **Research and Strategy Development:** Groups first identified specific intercultural challenges encountered in higher education settings. They researched best practices in intercultural communication, drawing from lectures such as Professor Marta Fernandes' session on "Intercultural Competences" and the insights from various experts throughout the program.
2. **Collaborative Planning:** Each group worked on formulating a communication strategy that included solutions to common challenges. They focused on creating a practical guide for improving communication between international students and university staff, tailoring their strategies to the diverse needs of different institutions.
3. **Presentation and Peer Review:** Groups presented their strategies during the workshops, receiving feedback from their peers and academic mentors. This peer-review process allowed for refining the strategies and ensuring they addressed real-world intercultural communication challenges.

### **Outcome and Reflection**

By the end of the program, participants had developed detailed and actionable communication strategies that could be implemented in university settings to support international students and staff. The project not only strengthened the participants' intercultural competences but also enhanced their ability to work collaboratively in a multicultural environment, preparing them for future interactions in academic and professional contexts.

In the context of the Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) focused on "Intercultural Competences and Communication Strategies for International Students," participants will utilize a variety of resources to develop their intercultural skills and enhance communication strategies. The following resources, both academic and practical, are crucial to the successful completion of the programme.

1. **Lecture Materials and Presentations** During the BIP, students will attend multiple lectures from academics and professionals from partner universities. These lectures, such as those presented by Professor Marta Fernandes on intercultural competences and Professor Lenka Heczkova on communication strategies, provide foundational knowledge on how to effectively interact in culturally diverse environments. The presentations will be available to students for review after the sessions, ensuring that participants can reflect on the topics discussed.
2. **Workshops and Collaborative Sessions** A series of workshops led by Dr. Fabiano Côrte, Dr. Paula Canada, and Professor Sérgio Lousada will offer hands-on learning experiences. These workshops are designed to provide students with practical tools and strategies for effective communication in intercultural settings. They include real-world scenarios, case studies, and role-playing exercises that simulate interactions with international students. These sessions allow participants to practice and refine their communication approaches, fostering a deeper understanding of intercultural dynamics.
3. **Digital Platforms and Communication Tools** Throughout the BIP, students will utilize Zoom for both online meetings and follow-up activities. These digital tools enable international collaboration and foster a sense of community among participants. The recordings of virtual lectures and discussions will be made available for future reference, allowing students to revisit key topics at their own pace. In addition, students will be encouraged to use online platforms like Moodle or Google Classroom for accessing course materials, submitting assignments, and engaging in group discussions.
4. **Networking and Peer Collaboration** The BIP provides opportunities for students to collaborate with peers from diverse cultural and academic backgrounds. Networking with colleagues from institutions such as the Technical University of Ostrava, Rzeszów University of Technology, and the University of Madeira, among others, will be a key resource. Through these interactions, students will gain firsthand experience in navigating intercultural communication and developing strategies for effective teamwork in international contexts.

By leveraging these resources, students will be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to enhance their intercultural competence and communication strategies, preparing them to engage successfully in diverse academic and professional environments.

### 13. Technology choices for online part and for pre- or post-collaboration

The Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) on “Intercultural Competences and Communication Strategies for International Students” involved participants from various universities across Europe. This course aimed to develop intercultural communication skills and create effective communication strategies tailored for international students, as well as for International Office staff and academics. The program used a combination of online and in-person sessions, making technology a crucial component in facilitating cross-border collaboration.

For the online segment of the BIP, **Zoom** was the primary tool used to conduct meetings, presentations, and lectures. Zoom provided a flexible platform for real-time interaction among participants from different locations, enabling the coordination of group activities and the exchange of knowledge across the international community. The introductory session and subsequent follow-up activities, held on May 24 and June 3-5, 2024, were conducted via Zoom. This ensured that all participants, regardless of their location, could actively engage in discussions and collaborative activities.

In addition to Zoom, the BIP encouraged the use of **Google Docs** and **Microsoft Word** for collaborative writing and sharing of documents. These tools were particularly useful during the pre-collaborative phase, where participants were asked to prepare materials, review content, and engage with course materials before the in-person sessions. Google Docs allowed multiple users to edit and comment on documents in real time, making it ideal for joint projects and collaborative work.

The post-collaboration phase also relied on these digital platforms. After the in-person activities concluded, participants continued to engage in follow-up work, such as finalizing group presentations, peer reviews, and feedback sessions. Both Zoom and Google Docs facilitated the continuous exchange of ideas, ensuring that participants could refine their outputs and meet the course’s objectives.

Furthermore, the BIP participants were introduced to **Zotero**, a reference management tool that allowed them to efficiently organize citations and manage research sources, particularly for academic and intercultural communication projects.

By leveraging these digital tools, the BIP successfully integrated online learning, cross-cultural collaboration, and the development of communication strategies, ensuring that all participants could benefit from a seamless, well-coordinated experience across different technological platforms.

#### 14. Description of how the collaboration task(s) are graded (common rubric/ formative or summative assessment)

In the Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) Erasmus+ on "Intercultural Competences and Communication Strategies for International Students," collaboration tasks were designed to be graded using a common rubric that integrates both formative and summative assessments. This structure aimed to foster the development of intercultural skills and communication strategies among students and academic staff.

##### **Grading Methodology for Collaboration Tasks**

The rubric employed during the BIP focused on key competencies relevant to intercultural communication and collaboration, emphasizing:

1. **Intercultural Competence:** Participants were graded on their ability to effectively engage with peers from different cultural backgrounds. This aspect included the use of appropriate communication strategies, respect for cultural diversity, and the ability to navigate intercultural challenges.
2. **Collaboration and Communication:** Group collaboration was an essential aspect of the assessment. The rubric evaluated how well participants worked together across different cultures, sharing responsibilities, and ensuring clear communication. Formative feedback was provided throughout the process to help improve group dynamics and ensure successful task completion.
3. **Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking:** Participants were assessed on their ability to apply critical thinking in addressing communication barriers and creating strategies that enhance



intercultural interactions.

4. **Effective Use of Tools:** The use of communication tools and strategies, particularly in managing group discussions and presentations, was also a critical part of the grading. Participants were expected to demonstrate proficiency in leveraging digital platforms like Zoom, which were central to the online components of the program.

#### **Formative and Summative Assessment**

- **Formative Assessment:** Throughout the program, participants received regular feedback from coordinators such as Doctor Fabiano Côte, Doctor Paula Canada, and Professor Sérgio Lousada. Formative assessments included participation in discussions, cultural workshops, and group tasks. These assessments helped guide participants in refining their communication strategies and intercultural skills.
- **Summative Assessment:** A final evaluation was conducted at the end of the BIP, assessing the participants' completed projects and presentations. The summative assessment focused on how well participants integrated the skills and knowledge gained from the workshops into their final presentations, along with their ability to collaborate effectively.

#### **Conclusion**

The BIP employed a well-rounded approach to assessment, utilizing both formative and summative methods. The common rubric provided a structured and transparent way to evaluate participants' development of intercultural competences and communication strategies. Through this process, participants were able to grow their skills while benefiting from continuous feedback and final assessments to measure their overall performance in the program.

## **15. Description of student reflection**

The BIP provided an enriching platform for students from various universities to explore and develop their intercultural competences and communication strategies. With participants from institutions across Europe, including Rzeszów University of Technology (Poland), the Technical University of Ostrava (Czech Republic), the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca (Romania), and the University of Madeira (Portugal), the program offered a unique blend of cultural exchange and academic enrichment. The diversity of the group fostered an environment that encouraged openness, collaboration, and learning.

### **Part 1: Group Reflection**

The reflective process began with a group discussion where students shared personal stories about their favorite New Year celebrations. This initial icebreaker was a powerful tool to establish a relaxed atmosphere and break down cultural barriers, allowing participants to express their unique traditions and customs. For many, this activity helped build a deeper connection with fellow students, creating a sense of camaraderie that extended beyond the academic setting. Sharing such personal experiences highlighted the beauty of cultural diversity, fostering greater intercultural awareness among all participants.

### **Part 2: Academic and Intercultural Insights**

The second part of the reflection focused on the academic objectives of the BIP. Students were prompted to reflect on their journey in the program, using the metaphor of making "New Year resolutions" to guide the discussion. They were encouraged to think about what they had learned throughout the program and how they could apply these skills in the future (symbolizing what they would "take with them" into 2025), as well as the challenges they faced and areas for improvement (what they would "leave behind" in 2024).

This exercise helped students identify key takeaways from the BIP, such as the importance of effective communication strategies in intercultural settings, and how these strategies could be applied to real-world academic and professional contexts. The ability to navigate through different cultural lenses and adapt communication methods accordingly was a recurring theme during the reflections.

#### **Tools for Reflection: Padlet and Collaborative Learning**

The use of Padlet, a collaborative platform, allowed students to share their reflections and interact with their peers' thoughts. This online tool not only facilitated a continuous dialogue but also enabled students to take a more introspective approach to their learning experience. By reviewing others' contributions, participants gained new perspectives on how different cultural backgrounds shape both academic and social interactions.

#### **Individual Reflection and Personal Growth**

Apart from group reflections, students were also tasked with individual reflections. These reflections, tailored to their personal experiences in the BIP, allowed them to assess their own progress in developing intercultural competences. For many, this process helped to identify their strengths and areas for improvement, especially in terms of academic writing, collaboration, and communication. Each student was encouraged to reflect on how the skills they acquired during the BIP would influence their future academic and professional paths, enhancing their ability to work in diverse, multicultural environments.

#### **Conclusion: The Impact of the BIP**

The BIP "Intercultural Competences and Communication Strategies for International Students" went beyond mere academic instruction. It provided an opportunity for students to engage in meaningful cultural exchanges and personal reflection, solidifying the importance of intercultural competence in today's globalized world. Through group discussions, individual reflections, and the use of collaborative tools like Padlet, students not only gained new knowledge but also a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them. This reflective process played a crucial role in preparing participants for future academic and professional endeavors that demand strong intercultural communication skills.

#### **16. Was the grant sufficient for the students, for organizer?**

Based on the context of the Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) "Intercultural Competences and Communication Strategies for International Students," held in Madeira, it is apparent that the financial support provided by the Erasmus+ grant was insufficient for both students and the organizing team.

#### **Student Challenges:**

For students from participating universities such as Rzeszów University of Technology (Poland), the Technical University of Ostrava (Czech Republic), the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca (Romania), and others, the costs of attending the BIP on the island of Madeira were notably higher than on mainland Europe. As Madeira is a geographically isolated location, travel expenses were significantly elevated, particularly due to the limited direct flights, often requiring costly stopovers. This situation already posed a financial strain for students,

compounded by the high accommodation and food costs associated with Madeira's status as a popular tourist destination.

While the Erasmus+ grant covers basic expenses, it does not adequately account for the higher cost of living in Madeira, especially during tourist seasons when accommodation and food prices peak. As a result, students faced financial pressures despite the academic and intercultural value of the BIP. Meals, transportation, and even self-catering options in this tourist-driven environment added to the overall cost burden.

### **Organizer Challenges:**

From the organizer's perspective, similar financial constraints arose. Hosting an event of this nature in a high-cost location like Madeira required considerable resources. The detailed agenda of the BIP included academic lectures, workshops, and various cultural and social activities, such as visits to tourist sites, dinners at local restaurants, and guided nature walks. These elements were vital for fostering intercultural exchange, yet they significantly increased the overall budget.

For example, the program featured off-campus activities, including a lunch at the Clube de Golf Santo da Serra, tourist visits, and multiple meals at the Restaurante Escondidinho. These activities were key to providing students with a well-rounded experience, but they incurred substantial costs. Organizers had to balance these expenses with the limited grant, often resulting in financial strain.

Moreover, hosting international lecturers and experts added to the costs. With participants from countries such as Slovakia, the Netherlands, and Hungary, the travel and accommodation expenses for invited professionals further stretched the budget. The organizers faced the challenge of maintaining high standards for both academic content and intercultural activities within the limited financial support.

In conclusion, the grant provided by the Erasmus+ program was not sufficient to fully cover the elevated costs associated with holding the BIP on the island of Madeira. Both students and the organizing team faced financial difficulties due to the high cost of living, travel, and accommodation in a tourist-heavy location. To ensure the future success and broader participation in such programs, it is recommended that the financial support for similar events be increased, or that additional local sponsorships be sought. Additionally, negotiating special rates for accommodation and meals with local businesses could help alleviate the financial pressures faced by students and organizers alike.

## **17. Lessons learned (feedback from teachers and administration staff)**

The Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) on "Intercultural Competences and Communication Strategies for International Students," hosted in Madeira, Portugal, brought together participants from various European universities. The course aimed to develop intercultural skills and effective communication strategies for both international students and academic staff involved in international education. The event provided an enriching platform for academic exchange and cultural understanding, but also revealed some key lessons that can be applied to future iterations of the programme.

### **Key Lessons and Feedback**

1. **Importance of Preparation for Online Sessions:** During the initial online introduction on May 24, 2024, using Zoom, some technical challenges arose, which created difficulties in

communication and participation. With participants from universities such as Rzeszów University of Technology (Poland), the Technical University of Ostrava (Czech Republic), and the University of Debrecen (Hungary), connectivity issues occasionally hindered the smooth flow of activities. Teachers noted that clearer instructions and pre-event technical checks could have mitigated these problems. In the future, it would be beneficial to ensure that participants have ample time to test the virtual platforms in advance to avoid disruptions during the actual sessions.

2. **Enhanced Collaboration through Intercultural Activities:** Throughout the in-person sessions, particularly on May 27-31, 2024, the programme effectively blended academic content with cultural exchanges. Participants were welcomed with local hospitality in Machico, Madeira, which included guided tours, nature walks, and cultural dinners. This informal setting encouraged participants to connect on a deeper, more personal level, which ultimately enhanced the learning experience. However, some feedback from staff suggested that there was still room to further integrate intercultural activities with the academic content. A more deliberate focus on drawing connections between cultural and academic perspectives could further enrich the learning outcomes.
3. **Opportunities for Cross-Cultural Collaboration:** One area for improvement lies in leveraging the diverse backgrounds of the participants for cross-cultural research projects. While the BIP successfully introduced topics such as communication strategies and intercultural competences, it was noted that more explicit guidance on how to incorporate participants' local contexts into these discussions would have been beneficial. For example, insights from the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca on sustainable engineering practices could have been shared more openly across the group. Encouraging students to bring specific cultural and academic insights from their home institutions could foster deeper, more collaborative learning experiences.
4. **Time Management and Activity Pacing:** While the programme was packed with lectures, workshops, and cultural activities, some participants found it challenging to absorb all the information within the given timeframe. The mix of academic and social activities was well-received, but the pacing occasionally left little room for reflection or group work. Feedback from participants, including staff from the University of Madeira, suggested that extending the duration of some sessions or incorporating more breaks for discussion and peer learning would allow for better assimilation of the content and foster stronger collaborative networks.

#### **Positive Aspects Highlighted by Teachers and Administration Staff**

1. **Strengthened Professional Networks:** One of the most significant positive outcomes was the strengthening of professional networks among participants from diverse institutions. Teachers from the Technical University of Ostrava and the University of Madeira emphasized that the program provided a unique opportunity to meet colleagues from other countries, which led to discussions on future collaborations in teaching and research.
2. **Cultural Exchange Beyond Academia:** The structured cultural activities, such as nature walks and visits to local historical sites, were not only engaging but also allowed participants to gain deeper insights into Madeira's rich cultural heritage. This enhanced the overall experience, giving participants a well-rounded understanding of both the academic content and the local culture.
3. **Interactive Workshops Encouraged Participation:** The practical workshops, held on May 28-31, allowed participants to actively engage with the course material in small group settings. Feedback from both students and teachers highlighted that these sessions provided an ideal platform for interactive learning, encouraging discussions, problem-solving, and the application of theories in real-world contexts.

#### **Feedback on Logistics and Financial Considerations**

One of the most common concerns raised by both teachers and administration staff was the high cost of participating in the event in Madeira. Being a popular tourist destination, Madeira's accommodation and dining options were costly, which placed a financial burden on students and faculty alike. Moreover, the cost of travel from various parts of Europe, including Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary, was significant. To ensure future participation, it is crucial that additional financial support be sought from Erasmus+ or other funding bodies. Such support would enable a wider range of students and staff to attend without facing economic hardship.

In conclusion, the BIP on "Intercultural Competences and Communication Strategies for International Students" was an engaging and educational experience, offering valuable insights into both academic and cultural exchanges. While the event was largely successful, future iterations could benefit from clearer communication regarding online participation, more integration of local expertise into collaborative projects, and improved financial planning to support all participants.

