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PROFESSIONALIZATION OR AMATEURISM?

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Professionalization or amateurism? EU-funded projects in the domain of employment and the intercultural profession

This article explores to which extent the involvement in European transnational projects has contributed to the professionalization of the intercultural occupation in the social area. Through the transnationality principle, the European Commission supports economically transnational communities of practice and joint projects managed by voluntary associations and for-profit groups and sub-national authorities based in different European Union (EU) member states. This article shows that in the absence of set of clear-cut standards, practices and routines in the social area, the EU has not contributed to the professionalization of the intercultural profession. The analysis of basic intercultural skills such as intercultural communication and intercultural awareness, shows that intercultural project management has been characterized by a certain amateurism, taking different forms depending on the national and local contexts. In this qualitative comparative study, empirical evidence is drawn from document analysis and in-depth semi-structured interviews with project managers involved in transnational cooperation in France and in the Netherlands.

Professionnalisation ou amateurisme? Projets financés par UE dans le domaine d'emploi et la profession interculturelle

Cet article questionne comment l'implication dans des projets transnationaux européens a contribué à la professionnalisation de postes de chargé de formation ou management interculturels dans le secteur social. Au travers du principe de transnationalisme, la Commission soutient économiquement des communautés transnationales de pratiques et de projets communs organisés par des associations à but lucratif et non-lucratif, ou encore par des autorités infranationales dans différents États membres. Cet article montre qu'en l'absence d'un ensemble de règles et de normes, de pratiques et de routines dans le secteur social, l'Union européenne n'a pas contribué à la professionnalisation des postes de chargé de formation ou management en matière interculturelle. L'analyse des compétences interculturelles fondamentales comme la communication et la sensibilisation interculturelle montre que le management de projets interculturels se caractérise par un certain amateurisme qui peut prendre différentes formes en fonction des contextes nationaux et locaux. Dans cette analyse qualitative comparative, le développement empirique repose sur une analyse documentaire et sur des entretiens semi-directifs approfondis avec des managers de projets impliqués dans la coopération transnationale en France et aux Pays-Bas.

Professionalization or amateurism?

EU-funded projects in the domain of employment and the intercultural profession

Rosa Sanchez Salgado¹

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While the European Union (EU) is a well-developed multinational political system, little attention has been given to the implications of its multicultural dimension for the daily work of individuals in charge of the implementation of EU public policies. The EU introduced intercultural policy implementation in Europe in the early 1970s through its support to transnational projects. EU-funded transnational projects are joint projects managed by sub-national authorities and non-state actors based in at least two different member states. Despite the long-standing existence of EU-funded transnational projects, not much is known about who is actually implementing these projects and to which extent they can be considered as ‘professionals’ (introduction of this special issue).

While EU – funded transnational projects could have led to the emergence or the development of many professions, such as EU accountant, consultant or project manager, the focus of the present article is on the intercultural profession. Since EU-funded projects involve intercultural interactions, there are good reasons to expect that the management of transnational projects requires knowledge and expertise on intercultural management, which could have lead to the development of the intercultural profession including jobs such as intercultural consultant or trainer.

European studies seldom address the consequences of interculturality for policy-making. Since crossing cultural lines causes conflict, it is thus of utmost

1 My special thanks to all project managers that so kindly accepted to grant me an interview in spite of their busy schedules. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers, and my colleagues Jonathan Zeitlin and Geoffrey Underhill for their constructive and helpful comments that have considerably contributed to the improvement of this article. Support and guidance provided by the editors of this special issue was also greatly appreciated.

importance to deal with the many challenges raised by intercultural cooperation such as establishing trustful relationships and effective intercultural communication. The prolific literature on European identity addresses this topic indirectly, for example, while investigating to which extent mobility leads to the acquisition of an EU identity, mainly among Erasmus students (Sigalas, 2010; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). Little attention has been given to EU administrative officials, intermediary actors or opinion-makers such as project managers (Sanchez Salgado, 2008).

This article aims at investigating to which extent the participation in transnational projects has contributed to the emergence of the intercultural profession. To this purpose, the following research questions will be answered: Who is in charge of the implementation of transnational projects at the local level? Is it possible to identify a standard set of knowledge or intercultural skills common to project managers from different national settings? How can the professionalization of the intercultural occupation be explained?

The focus on the national and local level and on the managers of the Europeanization process is a specific elaboration of the move towards the integration of sociological approaches in EU studies (Guiraudon and Favell, 2009; Saurugger and Mérand, 2010; Pasquier and Weisbein, 2004). While an exclusively Brussels-centered approach tends to focus on similarities, leading to a monolithic understanding of the Europeanization process, a micro-sociological approach tends to show that dynamics of differentiation are as important, if not more important, than general trends. One of the most frequent critiques of sociological approaches to the study of the EU is that they attain a low degree of generalizability, and the fact that politics are understood as a macro-aggregate consequence of individual actions or as a mere reflection of society (March and Olsen, 2005). To avoid these critiques, this article proposes a pluralistic approach to causality and a specific focus on the link between European politics and individual agency.

After introducing the main concepts relevant for this study, the present article proposes an analytical framework combining research on professionalization and research on the effects of intercultural exchanges. The empirical part shows first to which extent there is a professionalization process regarding the intercultural profession. The final section illustrates the prevalence of amateurism in the field when it comes to two basic intercultural skills: intercultural communication and intercultural awareness. I argue that there is little evidence of a professionalization process regarding the intercultural

occupation. This is mainly explained by the lack of EU or market incentives, as well as for specific challenges directly related to the intercultural profession.

Understanding the intercultural effects of transnational cooperation

This section introduces first the connections among the main concepts of the present article: transnational cooperation, interculturality and professionalization. An analytical framework is then proposed combining existing insights from studies on professionalization and professionalism and intercultural exchanges. This section ends with details on the methodology and the cases selected.

The intercultural dimension in transnational cooperation in the social area: a politics of avoidance?

• *Transnational cooperation in the social area as an intercultural experience*

Transnational cooperation has been part of the European Social Fund (ESF) since its foundation in 1957. Until the 1980s, transnational cooperation in the social area only concerned a few small pilot projects like the well-known Poverty programme or Eurotecnet (innovation in vocational training). In the domain of employment, transnational cooperation reached its peak during the late 1990s and 2000s with programmes such as ADAPT, EMPLOYMENT and EQUAL (see table 1). After these ambitious centralised EU programmes, transnational cooperation is now implemented by member states in a flexible way, including options to opt out (European Commission, 2015). In the domain of employment, the main objective of transnational cooperation is now mutual learning, defined as exchanging information, sharing, working together towards common solutions and assessing and adapting good practice. Transnational cooperation is valued for its contribution to 'quality and effectiveness of policies and delivering reforms (European Commission, 2015, 4).

EU transnational cooperation involves interactions among individuals from two or more cultures, and thus, it can be conceptualized as an intercultural experience (Koester and Lustig, 2015). In the social area, European institutions emphasize the economic and quantifiable outcomes of transnational cooperation, while the intercultural dimension is overlooked.

EU-funded programmes tend to endorse indeed a ‘culture for competitiveness approach’, in which intercultural contacts are used to support innovation and competitiveness aiming at economic growth and more jobs (Bodirsky, 2012). At the EU level, the intercultural dimension is more significant in topics such as education, citizenship and human rights. EU initiatives such as the Culture programme, the Europe for Citizens programmes, or even the Erasmus programme, give indeed some specific attention to intercultural experiences. The promotion of civic values or intercultural relations in these programmes is related to European citizenship. The connection between interculturality and mobility is inspired by regional integration theories arguing that mobility and exchanges lead to a we-feeling between different peoples, considered as a necessary condition for a successful integration process (Deutsch *et al.*, 1968).

Table 1. Programmes in the domain of fight against unemployment

	Name of the programme	Authority in charge of Implementation
Before 1999	Poverty Programme	Commission
1997-1999	ADAPT, EMPLOYMENT	Commission
2000-2006	EQUAL	Commission
2007-2014	ESF-transnational	Member states
2014-2020	ESF-transnational	Member states (derogations possible)

The emphasis on the economic dimension of transnational cooperation is also reflected in academic studies. Most of existing research on EU transnational programmes (in the cohesion and social area) does not directly discuss the intercultural dimension, let alone the emergence of intercultural skills (Hachmaan, 2011; Colomb, 2007). Current studies emphasize EU impact on national policies through mechanisms such as conditionality, leverage or mutual learning (Verschraegen *et al.*, 2011) or the link between individual and organizational learning and policy change (Gentner and Harding, 2015). While there is no specific emphasis on intercultural competences, it is noteworthy that some of the dynamics at work could be understood as the acquisition of intercultural skills, such as the so-called mirror effect², learning ahead of failure or cold-showering

2 The mirror effect refers to the fact that comparison requires presenting the national system to others, which gives a clearer vision of one’s policy practices.

(Hamel and Vanhercke, 2009). Thus, knowledge of the professionalizing effects of intercultural interactions can also help understanding more generally the EU impact on national public policies and politics.

• *The professionalization of the intercultural profession in Europe: why bother?*

The Intercultural industry has progressively been professionalized in the wake of a dramatic increase of people interacting with those that are culturally different. This professionalization process is reflected in the establishment of meta-organizations such as the Society for Intercultural Education (SIETAR), founded in 1974.

Despite some evidence of a professionalization process, there are still many challenges for the development of the intercultural profession. This profession is currently understood in very broad terms including activities such as cross-border acquisitions, expats relocation and academic research. It is quite challenging to put parameters on this profession and to organize those engaged in intercultural work (Berardo, 2008). An additional difficulty is related to the definition of intercultural knowledge or skills. Intercultural skills often involve an impression (an inference one makes) rather than a specific behaviour (an action one takes) (Koester and Lustig, 2015). In other words, intercultural skills are often understood as something that one is *perceived to have*, rather than something that *one does*. Definitions of intercultural skills are often criticised because they are vague or because they include a disjointed list of attributes (Dearnorff, 2006). These attributes include knowledge (eg. cultural awareness, culture-specific information, socio-linguistic awareness), skills (listen, observe, analyse), and attitudes (eg. respect, openness, curiosity). From a normative perspective, intercultural relations are a topic to be considered with caution since they are related to values and personal identity (Kyoung-Ah Nam *et al.*, 2015). Trainings and consultancy in intercultural skills can contribute to better management of intercultural relations but they also raise ethical questions and can lead to situations of misconduct. The main problems – as perceived by practitioners – are the perpetuation of stereotypes, cases of deceptive self-presentation, and the misuse of tools (Kyoung-Ah Nam *et al.*, 2015).

In spite of these difficulties, the field of intercultural relations is becoming a well-established discipline, while intercultural training and consulting are considered well-established professions (Kyoung-Ah Nam *et al.*, 2015).

After more than 30 years of EU transnational cooperation in Europe, the number of individuals interacting with individuals from other cultures has substantially increased in many policy areas, including social policy. One could assume that there is a potential space for the development of the intercultural profession among social workers engaged in intra-european transnational cooperation. This article analyses to which extent there has been a professionalization of the intercultural occupation in this domain.

Academic lenses for studying the impact of Europe in terms of inter-cultural skills

A process of professionalization has traditionally been seen as a way of legitimizing particular services and of 'safe-guarding' them from the realms of market competition through the establishment of a body of registered and regulated practitioners (Beaverstock *et al.*, 2010). If the notion of professionalization is defined strictly, as a process through which certain occupational groups establish some degree of formal autonomy and power to define and control the major rules and standards of their activities, there are little chances to identify clear professionalization processes initiated at the EU level (introduction, this issue). The EU has indeed not engaged in a process of legal harmonization of professional regulations across member states. However, a professionalization process can also only entail non-compulsory professionalization strategies based on closure through knowledge or expertise, or even through discourses of professionalism at the individual level (Buttner *et al.*, 2015; Beaverstock *et al.*, 2010).

A professionalization process involves specific dimensions such as the existence of a specific group of professionals sharing a few characteristics, a coherent and unique body of knowledge, or/and set of standardized intercultural skills (see table 2). This article shows to which extent these dimensions have developed in Europe regarding the intercultural occupation in the EU. Is there a recognized body of intercultural trainers or consultants or a specific set of recognized qualifications? In line with the main argument of this special issue, I expect that there is little professionalization of the intercultural industry in the social area. The intercultural profession is indeed not widespread in Europe. The number of SIETAR members based in the EU (12,6%) is significantly lower than the number of SIETAR members in the US (42,41%).

Table 2. Study of professionalization applied to the intercultural industry in Europe

	Professionalization (general)	Professionalization applied to the Intercultural industry Research Questions
Dimensions	Specific group of professionals Coherent body of knowledge Standardised set of skills	Intercultural trainer/consultant Intercultural master degree <i>Standardized skills:</i> - intercultural communication - intercultural awareness
Process	Economic incentives (developing markets) State-orchestrated process	EU programmes EU specific guidelines
Factors affecting development of specific skills	Institutional factors Agency Socio-cultural factors	Guidelines/rules on type and quality of contact Facilitators or entrepreneurs Attitudes towards EU and previous experience

The EU promotion of transnational cooperation for more than 30 years could have led to a state-inspired professionalization process. The long-term development of intercultural exchanges could also have created the necessary conditions for the development of a market-inspired professionalization process. According to the sociology of professions, a professionalization process may indeed be initiated by the state (top-down process) or by the market (bottom-up) (Buttner *et al.*, 2015; Beaverstock *et al.*, 2010).

Does the EU promote directly the professionalization of the intercultural profession through EU-funded transnational cooperation? Is there a profitable market for the development of an intercultural industry? The detailed analysis of EU programmes on transnational cooperation in the area of employment helps answering these questions. While a EU-induced professionalization can be motivated by the promotion of positive feelings towards European integration, the specific objectives of a market-induced professionalization may be more dependent on supply and demand factors.

The third part of this article focuses on the two most frequently reported intercultural skills according to intercultural professionals: intercultural communication and intercultural awareness (Berardo, 2008). The analysis of these two specific intercultural skills illustrates to which extent professionalization (or amateurism) prevails during the implementation of EU-funded projects in the social area.

Existing research on intercultural interactions offers the possibility to explore further the type and quality of intercultural interactions, contributing to the understanding of the directions that could have taken an eventual professionalization of the intercultural occupation.

Within European studies, intercultural interactions have primarily been investigated in relation to the topic of European identity. The most frequent research question consists on examining to which extent mobility and intercultural interactions lead to the development of positive attitudes towards European integration or a sense of attachment to the EU (Kuhn, 2005; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Sigalas, 2010; Souto Otero *et al.*, 2005). These studies use different definitions of European identity and employ hardly comparable methodologies, leading to non-cumulative conclusions. Mobility experiences have contributed to the acquisition of inter-cultural skills, but not all authors agree on whether individuals involved in intercultural interaction feel more European following these interactions.

While there is no consensus on the final outcomes of the interactions, there have been interesting developments. Existing studies about the quality of contact have, for example, developed the contact hypothesis, claiming that direct intergroup contacts are much more successful in bringing about change in a positive direction (Stangor *et al.*, 1996). In sharp contrast, when people involved in transnational cooperation do not interact with the host population, changes in attitudes may be negative (Budke, 2008). Changes in a positive direction are also promoted by incentives such as direct encouragement and by inter-cultural trainings (Stangor *et al.*, 1996). Existing research also points to the relevance of socio-cultural factors. For example, studies on a mobility-Erasmus experience showed that the effects of intercultural interactions depended on the origin of the students (Souto Otero *et al.*, 2006). There are also different cultural usages of intercultural experiences, since individuals tend to shape their intercultural experiences following their own cultural background (Ballatore and Bloss, 2008). For example, the Erasmus programme showed that Italian and French students tended to go to Spain while British students do not consider Erasmus to be very important for their professional career. Intercultural exchanges such as the Erasmus programme have also been criticised because it could contribute to develop European elitism instead of democratising higher education (Ballatore and Bloss, 2008). Most students investigated already had a positive attitude towards Europe and a strong sense of belonging to Europe before the Erasmus experience (Sigalas, 2010).

While most of existing studies focus on mobility of students, most of these findings could be applicable to EU-funded transnational projects, since in both cases intercultural relations are central. Are intercultural projects in the social area shaped by professional understanding of intercultural skills or by a diversity of social and cultural backgrounds? Is there a specific body of professionals with a positive attitude towards the EU that regularly engages in transnational cooperation? Is this contributing to European elitism?

Studying the diversity of Europe: a pluralistic approach to causality

The main purpose of the present article is not *a priori* the identification of similarities or general trends valid in any context. Within a pluralistic approach to causality (Saurugger, 2009), different pieces of evidence are combined in such a way that they can show relevant casual paths and render alternative explanations less plausible. While studying complex causality and causal paths, the question *what causes what* cannot be answered in a one-size-fits-all way. The dimensions and factors included in the analytical framework are expected to be relevant but to what extent they are relevant and their relative importance depends on how they are combined within a specific context. This fine-grained understanding can serve as a conceptual basis for quantitative research on the professionalization of inter-cultural occupation.

The analysis focuses on cases of transnational cooperation in the domain of employment, including the current transnational European Social Fund (ESF) and the Community initiatives that preceded it, especially the EQUAL programme. Given the economic focus of these programmes – the culture for competitiveness approach – the development of a profession specifically focused on the intercultural dimension is considered to be less likely. The units of analysis are locally-based project managers engaged in transnational cooperation in the social area, and more specifically employment and vocational training. While the focus is on individuals, it is worth mentioning that these individuals are embedded in organizations and for this reason, the attention needs to be given to the interrelation between individual and organizational dynamics.

To better grasp the role of the national and local contexts, the project managers investigated were working for organizations based in two different EU member states: the Netherlands and France. Both countries share similar (level of socio-economic development, centralized system) and

distinct characteristics (type of relationships between state and society; attitudes towards the EU). The choice of two member states with similar degrees of economic development helps bringing forward the role of socio-cultural factors. A more detailed account of the approach of each one of these countries to transnational cooperation within the ESF is presented later in this article.

Data has been drawn from 23 semi-structured interviews with project managers (see table 3), and has been complemented with a document analysis including policy documents, organizational websites and reports. Interviews were conducted in 2010 with key national officials and project managers (16 in France and 7 in the Netherlands). All project managers involved in transnational cooperation in Ile de France (transnational ESF first round) and Amsterdam (EQUAL & Leonardo) were contacted and 14 (out of 24) in France and 6 (out of 12) in the Netherlands responded positively.³ Key players often interpreted differently the same concepts. For all these reasons, data concerning facts was systematically triangulated with information from the websites of the EU-funded projects and from the websites of the organizations concerned.

Table 3. Qualitative interviews carried out with project managers in France and in the Netherlands

	Interviews	Public authorities	Business / consultants	Voluntary organizations
Île de France	14	2	2	10
Amsterdam	6	2	2	2
Total	20	4	4	12

Source: Elaborated by the author.

3 According to the existing database on ESF transnationality in France, 48 projects were implemented in France (24 in Ile de France and 24 in the rest of the country). This database was consulted on the 7th and 8th June 2010 and may have evolved meanwhile: <www.annuaire-transnat.fr/Resultats_recherche.aspx>. As for the Netherlands, the EQUAL database has been consulted in the First place (9 projects in Amsterdam), <<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/equal/jsp/index.jsp>>. The Leonardo projects were found in the Partnership Projects. Call 2009 (3 projects in Amsterdam): <www.leonardodavinci.nl/nl/Publicaties/2499/Publicaties.html>.

Professionalization in the wake of transnational cooperation

Despite more than 30 years of transnational cooperation, there is not much evidence of the emergence of an intercultural profession in the EU. As data show, there is little evidence of the existence of a specific group of professionals with similar characteristics and of a set of standardized intercultural knowledge or skills. The first part of this section illustrates the absence of professionalization while the second discusses the inhibiting factors that have contributed to the absence of professionalization in this domain.

EU-funded projects in the social area: a diversity of project managers

There is no well-defined, homogeneous group of individuals in charge of transnational cooperation in the EU that would fit the description of intercultural/transnational consultant or trainer. While there is a group of individuals regularly involved in transnational cooperation, the characteristics and the number of individuals involved in transnational cooperation depends on the availability of funds and on the specific characteristics of EU-funded programmes; that in the cases under analysis are defined at the national (or even sometimes at the local) level. Thus, the size and characteristics of the group of individuals involved in transnational cooperation in the social area depends on member states.

While in both countries under analysis there is a relatively significant group of individuals involved regularly in transnational cooperation in the social area, this has not led to the development of the intercultural profession. A French official interviewed in France referred to the group of individuals involved in transnational cooperation as *'les Equaliens'* meaning all those with transnational experience within the EQUAL programme (2000-2006). After EQUAL, the French authorities in charge of ESF implementation decided to create a specific programme to fund transnational cooperation to ensure that organizations involved in transnational activities could continue their work (Interview 8). The French ESF-transnational cooperation 2007-2014 was very flexible and thus, it was not surprising to find many small structures and newcomers. This programme, placing the emphasis on inclusiveness, left less room for closure around a homogeneous group of individuals (one of the main characteristics of professions).

The Dutch government was much less enthusiastic regarding the promotion of transnational cooperation than the French (Interview 1). After EQUAL, the Dutch government decided not to allocate funds to transnational projects during the ESF programming period 2007-2014. While we could have expected less people involved in transnational activities, Dutch project managers interviewed (involved in EQUAL) found other means to continue their activities in the social area, for example within the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme. That the discontinuity in EU-funding did not lead to the end of transnational cooperation in the social area points to the existence of a group of individuals regularly involved in transnational cooperation. The trend towards transnational cooperation was well established and project managers (willing to do so) could find ways to continue their transnational cooperation by other means.

While in both countries there was a well-defined group of project managers, they are far from being homogeneous. Individuals in charge of transnational cooperation did not share a similar profile, including similar education or trainings. Empirical data show the diversity of professional backgrounds and profiles of project managers involved in transnational cooperation. Individuals in charge of transnational projects included different generations and individuals with different levels of experience in the transnational field (table 4). While there are many experienced project managers engaged in transnational cooperation for more than 20 years, a few project managers were just in their first experience in transnational cooperation. There are also different types of engagement. In most cases, project managers were directly involved in transnational cooperation. However, in some occasions, project managers were only in contact with regional coordinators and thus, they did not deal directly with cultural differences (Interview 4).

The individuals interviewed also had different professional backgrounds and none did follow any specific training on intercultural activities. The diversity of professions is remarkable, including architects, filmmakers, school leaders or university professors. This is in sharp contrast with the average profile of interculturalists. According to the last survey of the SIETAR, the typical intercultural manager or trainer would hold a degree on psychology, anthropology or sociology and would hold some master in intercultural studies (Berardo, 2008).

Table 4. Interviews in France and in the Netherlands

FRANCE		
Organization	Language	Years of Experience
Amicale du Nid	English	+ 20
Academie Creteil	English	+ 20
AFIP	Spanish (Basic English)	4
PMC	Arabic	10
Chrysalis	(Basic English)	14
ARVHA	English	+ 20
ARETE	English, Spanish	9
INFREP	English, German, Portuguese	15
IMS	English, Italian, Arabic	4
Drogues Societes	Italian, Portuguese, English (Basic English)	+20
Habitat Cite	English, Rumanian	2
U. des couveuses	English,	2
ONISEP	English	1
Interafocg	English	6-7
Netherlands		
Cofora	English, German	10 years
Startwijwer	English, French, German	20 years
Loonwijzer	English	More than 20
Vhto	English, French, German	More than 20
University of Applied Sciences	English	-
Circus	English	around 5 years

The interviews revealed that the background of project managers depended more on the organization that hired them than on their expertise in project management or on their intercultural knowledge or skills. For example, project managers working with business organizations had studies in business or trade schools, while project managers working with children or young people had a background related to school or youth animation.

Factors inhibiting professionalization

This section shows that there has been little encouragement by different levels of government (EU & member states) and little market impulse for a professionalization process in this domain. The absence of certification bodies, a broad and vague conception of cultural differences and specific challenges related to the intercultural occupation have also inhibited the development of a professionalization process.

There is not much evidence that the EU (or EU member states), or the market have encouraged the development of the intercultural profession. There is no EU official certification body or equivalent officially acting as a source of knowledge, expertise or standards for transnational cooperation.⁴ The Transnational Cooperation Network (TCN), funded by the ESF technical assistance from 2009 to 2014 could have assumed this function. The TNC was one of the 13 learning networks supported by the Commission during this programming period. Its aim was to ‘stimulate learning and build capacity for transnational cooperation among ESF programme managers (Ecorys, 2014,15)’. The tasks of the TCN have since 2016 been assumed by the ESF transnational Platform, that has now a broader mandate. The TNC and the ESF transnational platform have produced a few manuals on transnational cooperation, leading to the production of common knowledge. Quite interestingly, no specific attention has ever been given to the intercultural dimension of transnationality. The central themes of transnational cooperation are project management, mutual learning based on exchange of good practices, peer reviews and benchmarking, and the establishment of compatibility mechanisms to coordinate calls for proposals in different member states (European Commission, 2016). At the national level, EU funds include the funding of technical assistance to support the implementation of transnational projects. With this economic support, member states could encourage the development of intercultural professionals in the social area, but there is little evidence that this has happened in any member state. France is one of the few member states that has supported a network for the support and capitalization of European innovations, (RACINE - *Reseau d'appui et de capitalisation des innovations européennes*). This network provided support and expertise for the development of transnational projects, but again, there

4 There are only regular meetings among national officials in charge of transnational cooperation. The topic of transnational cooperation is also discussed by national officials in meetings of the ESF Committee (Interview N1).

was little focus on the development of intercultural knowledge and skills, and the French government decided after a few years to put and end to its support to this network.

The contribution of the European Commission to developing knowledge, expertise and standards has also been very limited. Reviewing Commission documents regarding transnational cooperation, the place given to intercultural cooperation is small. The Commission does not give detailed instructions regarding how to deal with cultural differences or how to identify a specific well-defined set of inter-cultural skills that would allow for a standardized professionalization process. The Commission only incidentally recommends project managers involved in transnational teams to follow intercultural trainings (European Commission, 2005, 16).

The broad definition used by the Commission can also be an obstacle to the professionalization of the intercultural occupation. The Commission's definition of cultural differences includes many factors that are not usually considered to be the most relevant in intercultural relations. Culture is defined as including language, attitudes and behavior, business and work culture, jurisdictions and administrative rules, social and economic structures and the assumptions that lie behind them and concepts of time and time-keeping (European Commission, 2005). Thus, according to the Commission's understanding of culture, factors related to intercultural relations *strictu sensu* are not the only relevant factors to be taken into account, but also organizational differences and national administrative rules. This is explained by the type of partnerships promoted by the Commission in the social area. EU partnerships not only include intercultural relations, but also relations among individuals working for different types of organizations (*eg.* business, voluntary organizations and public administrations) and relations among individuals working in different institutional settings. Given this broad definition, the development of an intercultural profession in the EU would have been very different from the development of the intercultural profession in other contexts where intercultural differences are not so much intertwined with organizational and institutional differences.

The Commission's approach to transnational cooperation also focuses on themes such as project management, mutual learning and the exchange of good practices, which may have lead to the amalgamation of project management and intercultural management. Thus, most of the project managers interviewed did not distinguish between intercultural skills and other central dimensions

of project management unrelated to intercultural interactions. Given the Commission's emphasis placed in project management, accountability and performance indicators, it is more likely that professionalism is identified with project management rather than with intercultural management. This narrow understanding of professionalism – identified in other domains (Evetts, 2003) – may have hindered the development of an intercultural profession. In any case, the amalgamation between intercultural and project management has raised criticism. A few project managers perceived tension between management requirements and the content of the project. For example, when confronted with the possibility to engage in an intercultural project, potential partners tend to focus on the budget and administrative issues, rather than on the intercultural dimension or on the content of the project itself (Interview 22).

While EU-funded transnational projects has dramatically increased the number of people interacting with those that are culturally different in the social area, there is also little evidence of a market-induced professionalization or of the emerge of a intercultural industry. A professionalization process could have been used by intercultural business entrepreneurs to overcome the lack of credibility of intercultural services, since many question the legitimacy and necessity of intercultural work. The intercultural profession is indeed challenged by the general lack of credibility of intercultural skills that are often perceived as a nice-to-have rather than must-have (Berardo, 2008). The absence of market-based professionalization may also be related to one of the most significant challenges for the professionalization of the intercultural industry: establishing a value of intercultural services, and more specifically, its return on investment (Berardo, 2008).

Last but not least, the type of organization and the type of individuals acting as project managers may have also played a role. EU-funded projects are frequently implemented by voluntary organizations that tend to emphasize the public purpose of their actions (instead of profit-making). However, interculturalists are much more present in the academic and the business sector, rather than in public and non-profit organizations (Berardo, 2008). Only a couple of project managers interviewed worked for consultancies and advisory bureaus involved in EU projects for commercial reasons, aiming at selling best practices for profit (Interview 20; Interview 6). In addition, these project managers were not very interested in the development of intercultural relations.

Considering professionalism as an ideology, it could also be argued that claims to professionalism are related to a specific historical and cultural construction of masculinity, which does not necessarily fit with feminized professions (Evetts, 2003). The interculturalist profession seems to be predominantly covered by woman: 79.01% of respondents of a survey on the interculturalist profession were indeed women (Berardo, 2008).

EU-funded transnational projects & Development of inter-cultural skills

In the absence of a professionalization process, there is little room for the development of common standards and knowledge regarding the basic skills of the intercultural profession, such as intercultural communication or intercultural awareness. The prevailing amateurism in this area has led to a diversity of transnational projects that seem to be shaped by the project manager's social and cultural background. If a quantitative study were carried out, it is likely that the most frequent type of partnership would be the one *de facto* promoted by the Commission, placing the emphasis on the transfer of best practices, mutual learning and effectiveness. This understanding of partnership is rather broad and can include a diversity of understandings of cooperation including partnerships that are superficial, with few developments in terms of intercultural communication and awareness skills. Quite interestingly, there are also partnerships that seem to differ substantially from the culture for competitiveness approach promoted by the Commission. For example, a few projects followed a second type of partnership that was French-inspired, using French as principal language, and emphasizing solidarity, public value, friendship and conviviality (see table 5).

Table 5. Ideal-types of partnership identified

	Professional	Idealistic
Language	English	French
Partners	Northern Europe	South/East Europe
Type of exchanges	Business-like Focus on effectiveness, networking	Voluntary world focus on Solidarity, <i>créer du lien</i>
Goal	Selling best practices	Public purpose
Openness	Superficial cooperation Stereotypes	Focus on friendship and conviviality

Intercultural communication: adaptation and resistances to English as *lingua franca*

While intercultural communication appears as a basic skill for the development of transnational projects, there is not much evidence that there has been any effort to develop this skill by European institutions, including the Commission. In line with EU law, the Commission has never officially proclaimed the supremacy of English for transnational cooperation. It just highlights the importance of selecting working languages, stating that there are many options such as selecting one single language, or selecting two or more working languages with or without interpretation (European Commission, 2005).

However, in practice, while the language regime of the European Parliament and Council adheres rigorously to the principle of language equality, it is well known that the Commission uses a more restrictive language regime (Anastasiou, 2006). Most European administrative working documents, such as the transnationality guide, are only published in English and eventual translations are left to the good will of the national technical assistance services. The promotion of multilingualism or of intercultural communication is just seen as topic of the domain of education and left for programmes such as Erasmus.

The absence of intercultural communication skills *implicitly* favours the use of English as *lingua franca*, at least up until now. While this question is often neglected in the analysis of the multi-national implementation of EU politics, language choice is a highly political issue since it can be considered as linguistic capital that affords its holders symbolic power (Loos, 2001). The next paragraphs illustrate the amateurism that predominates in transnational cooperation regarding intercultural communication skills. In the absence of communication skills, project managers tend to opt for the adoption of a *lingua franca* without much regard to the difficulties that this creates, such as resistances and superficial understanding.

Interview data show that most project managers do not have specific trainings or skills in intercultural communication. Instead, many project managers considered that the basis for successful transnational cooperation is the mastery of languages, and more specifically the mastery of English. While communication in English is taken for granted, it is far from being simple. Many project managers have difficulties in communicating in English with project managers from other member states and tend to consider translation as a burden:

Language is a problem. In the Netherlands everyone can speak English but not everyone can speak good English in Europe. There are some difficulties because of language barriers. In CARAVAN, we speak everything but it takes a lot of time. You have to discuss the same topic in different languages so meetings are very long (Interview 7).

English-proficient project managers establish a difference between different types of English. There would be a 'basic English', sufficient to communicate on a non-professional basis, a 'project English', required to communicate successfully in a transnational partnership and finally, native English (Interview 20). While Dutch project managers tend to be fluent in English, English language was often an obstacle in France. A few French project managers admitted to have shifted from 'basic English' to 'project English' following their experience as transnational project manager. Even if most French project managers could master the English language, this was not often the case of their colleagues or of the leaders of their organization, limiting their possibilities for networking and cooperation (Interview 21). Dutch project managers, while often fluent in English, perceived that native speakers had more power in the conversations because of their mastery of language.

A second group of project managers interviewed (and by extension, many of the projects under analysis) did not work in English. Four out of the fourteen French project managers were not able to communicate in English effectively even if they had many years of experience in transnational cooperation (see table 2). More interestingly, there were situations of both active and passive resistance to the de facto imposition of English as *lingua franca*. First, there seems to be a trade-off between full expression of all members of the partnership and efficiency. A few project managers considered that when everyone is allowed to speak their own language everyone gets to participate more fully. However, full expression seems to be rather limited in the current situation since hardly any project used systematically multiple languages. Instead of multiple languages, French or Dutch were used as *lingua franca* in many partnerships where all participants could master these languages. French project managers considered themselves lucky because project managers from countries such as Portugal and Greece could speak French and thus, French was adopted as *lingua franca*.

The resistance to English in France was not only passive; in many cases it was also active. For example, a project manager categorically refused to involve British organizations in projects to avoid English becoming the single common language of the partnerships (Interview 23). Another project manager refused to get involved in an English-speaking partnership because he was the only one that did not master English well (Interview 12). These resistances and difficulties regarding the symbolic power of English could be minimized if English was promoted as a *lingua franca* for intercultural communication (aiming at mutual understanding and negotiating meaning) rather than encouraging a native-like proficiency, which includes acquiring a common framework of norms and culture (Dombi, 2011). This option requires that native speakers also adapt to intercultural communication using a form of simplified English.

The lack of intercultural communication skills also led to superficial understanding within the framework of transnational projects. Project managers affirmed that while there is often a superficial understanding of words, the speakers were not always able to convey the intended meaning. This can happen because the same words do not mean the same thing for people with different institutional and cultural backgrounds (Böhme, 2005). This challenge of meaning is obviously not specific to English, but to the use of any language from people from different cultural backgrounds (see examples below). In order to avoid talking past each other, project managers need first to establish a common vocabulary regardless of the common language they agree to use as working language (Interview 13). The next quotes are clear examples of the complexity of conveying meanings:

There is also a problem of how you call things. Someone may be talking about schools but he/she is referring to a completely different thing. It takes a lot of time to understand each other because a school in France is not the same as a school here. (Interview 7).

We find words that do not have the same meaning for each one of us. The same words in English do not mean the same thing. When we talk about taxes or social charges, it is not the same thing at all depending on the country. (Interview 14).

In our second EQUAL project, we had to translate from Dutch to Dutch. The questions in one text had to be translated if they were to be understood here in the Netherlands. We had an e-mail about survey questions

from Belgium. It was Dutch but the questions were written in such way that nobody here would be able to understand them. [...] They used words whose meaning we do not know. [...] So we had to translate from Dutch to Dutch in order to use the survey. The linguistic problems were more important with the Flemish than with other partners because we did not think there would be linguistic problems in the first place. It took some time to realize that we were not speaking the same language. (Interview 6).

Amateurism and Intercultural awareness

Intercultural awareness and openness towards foreigners are usually considered to be one of the most basic intercultural skills (Berardo, 2008). One of the main difficulties to develop research on this topic is the absence of clear-cut definition of concepts such as openness or intercultural awareness. In the interviews, different project managers emphasized different aspects of intercultural awareness such as contextual awareness (becoming aware of the cultural context affecting their work or becoming aware of their own practices) or relativisation (acknowledgment of the existence of multiple cultural truths). While intercultural awareness (along other intercultural skills) is not a specific objective of ESF transnational cooperation, the Commission itself has acknowledged that it may be an outcome of transnational projects:

Participation in transnational activities promotes mutual, or multi-cultural, understanding between participants and organisations. Having to explain to your project and its place in the national systems to visitors from another Member State often forces you to look at your situation in a new light, almost 'through foreign eyes': 'We had to, so to say, go 'outside' in order to know where we are 'inside' (European Commission, 1999, 15).

Most – if not all – project managers interviewed raised the topic of intercultural awareness. Since a few project managers had been living in a foreign country or had lived for a long period in foreign countries, it could be argued that they had – to a certain extent – already developed this skill. According to interculturalists, holding a degree in intercultural studies, while considered relevant, is not the most relevant experience to perform this profession, but rather to live and work in another culture (Berardo, 2008). A few managers did not have any prior inter-cultural experience, and thus, they had to develop this skill on the spot:

We are obliged to engage in decentering. We are obliged to ask ourselves every time the question about what the Spanish and the British are going to think. That's formidable. I understood something... (Interview 11).

We go beyond our national worlds. Normally we are in a framework and suddenly you are put out of the framework. That's exceptional! If you then say whatever happens I am French and I am right, then it does not work. You need to work together. You need to go out of the framework (Interview 9).

In the absence of professional guidelines to guide this process, the acquisition of intercultural awareness was not always straightforward, and more interestingly, did not necessarily lead to the disappearance of stereotypes and prejudices. While change was more often observed in project managers than in other beneficiaries, not all individuals participating in mobilities or having the opportunity to do so, were equally open. Many individuals could simply not detach themselves from their cultural referents. While this can be explained by personal and socio-cultural factors (such as English proficiency or family situation); the absence of intercultural trainings before the mobility experience could have contributed to minimize this challenge:

Some people can simply not understand. We may tell them over and over again 'be open' but it does not always work. It's quite interesting. Once during an inter-cultural exchange [...] there were four participants that did not talk at all. They seemed really surprised to hear what the others were saying. After the experience, one woman came to me with the following question: what have they seen that I did not see? (Interview 16).

We hoped that this project would empower our assistants but they did not want to go abroad. They wanted to stay at home with their family and children and they do not speak good English. Only the advisors go abroad. We would like the assistants (secretary and so on...) to go abroad but they do not want. They have all high education but in the end we could not convince any of them to go. We did not manage (Interview 2).

Regarding stereotypes and prejudices, intercultural relations did not necessarily led to their relativisation or their disappearance. While the number of projects under analysis does not allow for the establishment of generalizations, English-language partnerships where contacts were limited are the ones that often led to negative perception of stereotypes and prejudices:

In Finland, I felt farther from the Finnish than in an African country from Africans. (... I was never in an African country). There is no pleasure to travel in these countries. You arrive into a workshop, into a Mercure hotel; you do not draw any personal satisfaction... Maybe just eating deer in Finland. (Interview 20).

For the Nordic people everything south of Denmark is not good. They have plenty of prejudices against people from southern European countries. They think that we do not work enough, that we are lazy and always cheating (Interview 14).

In these cases, a combination of both institutional and individual factors seems to explain this outcome. When negative stereotypes prevail, the transnational dimension of the projects is hasty and minimized or quickly arranged in a Mercure hotel two days before the deadline (Interview 20). This can also be related to big mega-projects with 20 or more partners in which superficial contacts are the norm.

In the smaller, convivial French-speaking partnerships, prejudices and stereotypes did not disappear either. Quite interestingly, they sometimes played a positive role in the sense that they helped establishing contact and openness:

Regarding stereotypes, we have plenty. This plays a role in the relationships. This can be used to create a relaxed atmosphere. It is something in the order of joking. We have different levels of English. We are always making a cartoon out of what we want to say. There are plenty of jokes in the meetings, for examples, we say that the Germans are always the first ones to arrive to the meetings. This helps people to be more open. (Interview 21).

Stereotypes help creating conviviality during lunch and dinner. They help us finding a topic of conversation, for laughing. The last time the Spanish and the Italians arrived 45 minutes late. This remains very informal. (Interview 15).

These last interview quotes reveal the importance of individual perceptions, often shaped by cultural backgrounds. Stereotypes seem to prevail within the context of transnational cooperation –at least in the absence of professionalization- but how individuals perceive stereotypes matters. When confronted with stereotypes, project managers can feel annoyed or amused, and the way they feel can make a difference in the whole atmosphere of the partnership. The partnerships where conviviality prevailed have different characteristics than the ones where contacts were superficial. Instead of trying to quickly find partners to secure funding, project managers involved in *convivial* projects only worked with organizations with which they had some affinity or close connection. They also made significant efforts to choose partners that they knew well and that they could trust. In other cases, the motivation (enthusiasm about the specific projet) of the partners played a relevant role to ensure conviviality. For example, IMS-Entreprendre pour la Cite was spontaneously contacted by some organizations that had known about their project and wanted to reproduce it in their respective countries (Interview 21).

While French project managers were often amused by stereotypes leading to situations of conviviality (with their southern European counterparts), how this amusement may be perceived in other European contexts remains to be seen.

Conclusion

In a political system characterized by national diversity, intercultural relations play a prominent role. Policy makers and administrators in a multinational setting deal daily with cultural misunderstandings and stereotypes. Failing to do so in an appropriate way can lead to lack of motivation, a tense working environment, frustration and ultimately failure.

This article shows that, in the absence of specific knowledge, practices and routines, there is no homogeneous group of intercultural professionals, and there is no set of developed intercultural skills. Thus, in the absence of professionalization in the domain of intercultural relations, *amateurism* prevailed. There was not much thought about intercultural communication and working languages were chosen without taking into account the implications in terms of symbolic power or without ensuring the full expression of all members of the partnership. Cultural awareness and openness towards foreigners occurred spontaneously, without any specific encouragement from intercultural trainers or advisors. Project managers did not dispose of tools to overcome the many cultural and individual obstacles hindering cultural awareness, and the resilience of stereotypes is the norm.

While guidance and professional standards are helpful, the absence of professionalization process also had a positive side. Without the involvement of a monopolizing elite of professionals, the involvement in transnational cooperation remained rather open. A few EU-funded projects were indeed managed by newcomers that engaged in a process of spontaneous self-transformation. With this flexibility and freedom, creative project managers found – often spontaneously – innovative solutions to intercultural challenges. A few project managers – using humour – gave existing stereotypes a productive function. Having said this, in absence of guidance and professional standards, the potential for transformation that transnational cooperation could have was far from being exploited. Thus, there is much room to find a better balance between professionalization and amateurism in the implementation of EU-transnational projects in the social area.

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