



**LAUREA**  
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

*Prime Mover*

Intercultural Communication from the Perspective of Staff Member:  
Case study of Promoting Intercultural Management 2010

---

Taimitarha, Alexandra

2012 Laurea Leppävaara

Laurea University of Applied Sciences  
Leppävaara

Intercultural Communication from the Perspective of a  
Project Staff Member: Case study of  
Promoting Intercultural Management 2010

Alexandra Taimitarha  
Degree Programme in  
Business Management  
Bachelor's Thesis  
May, 2012

Taimitarha, Alexandra

**Intercultural Communication from the Perspective of a Project Staff Member: Case Study of Promoting Intercultural Management 2010**

Year	2012	Pages	41
------	------	-------	----

---

In the spring of 2010, over 25 students and ten teachers participated in a two-week intensive study programme funded by the European Union known as Promoting Intercultural Management, or PIM. The trip had a substantial impact on all its stakeholders, which is why even two years later after PIM took place, students and other stakeholders involved are still referring to it in publications and keeping in touch with each other all over Europe. The participating teachers and students came from educational institutions in different countries in Europe with little or no experience of working and living with people of different cultures. When a group of people from different cultures are placed together in a foreign country and forced to work and study together in an intensive programme, it becomes a very interesting subject of study from an educational and intercultural perspective.

This thesis investigates and analyzes the intercultural communication that took place during PIM in 2010. Furthermore, it contrasts and compares relevant theory from the past 50 years. As culture is a set of human-made objective and subjective elements, the research method was carefully chosen, successfully capturing the experiences of a panel of teachers, students and staff members who took part in the program.

The conclusions reached include why students from different cultures may have behaved the way they did and also why the focus group discussion reacted the way it did to the behavior. The main findings were that the theory is still relevant but is not helpful in predicting future scenarios of intercultural communication. National stereotypes were both clearly observed and defied by the behavior of students during PIM. Lastly, a further discussion on how cultures seem to be changing is also explained using the theory.

Even though the research question was answered, the work raised many new questions, thoughts and ideas. It also shows why intercultural communication is so important in working life and for future cooperation among European countries.

Key words     Culture Intercultural Communication, Focus Group Discussion, Promoting Intercultural Management, Baltic Sea Region, PIM 2010, European Union, Intensive Study Programme, EU, Poland, Laurea University of Applied Sciences

## Table of Contents

1	Introduction .....	5
1.1	Research Question .....	6
1.2	Background Information.....	6
1.3	Promoting Intercultural Communication in the Baltic Sea Region: PIM 2010....	7
2	Methodologies and Data Collection .....	9
2.1	A Focus Group Discussion as a Research Method .....	10
2.2	Research Strategy Evaluation .....	11
2.3	Data Collection .....	13
2.4	Planning the Focus Group Discussion .....	14
3	Culture .....	15
3.1	Definitions .....	15
3.2	Poland as the Host Culture .....	17
3.3	Finnish Culture as the Coordinating Institution.....	18
4	Theme 1: Power Distance .....	18
4.1	Focus Group Observations on Power Distance .....	19
4.2	Analysis of Power Distance Observations .....	24
5	Theme 2: Punctuality as Part of Uncertainty Avoidance.....	25
5.1	Observations of Uncertainty Avoidance and Punctuality.....	26
5.2	Analysis of Uncertainty Avoidance Observations .....	29
6	Theme 3: Individualism vs. Collectivism .....	30
6.1	Observations on Individualism and Collectivism .....	31
6.2	Analysis of Individualism vs. Collectivism.....	33
7	A Further Discussion on Culture .....	34
8	Conclusion .....	34
8.1	Implications of the Findings .....	35
8.2	Major Findings .....	36
8.3	Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research .....	38
8.4	PIM 2010 from the Perspective of a Staff Member .....	39
	References .....	41

## 1 Introduction

In the spring of 2010, over 25 students and ten teachers all participated in a two-week intensive study programme, and came from different educational institutions from different countries in Europe. At the end of the study programme and its evaluation, a few different representatives came together in a focus group discussion to discuss observations and experiences from an intercultural point of view. When a group of students and teachers from different cultures are placed together in a foreign country and forced to work and study together in an intensive way, it becomes a very interesting subject of study from an intercultural and psychological perspective. As a business management degree student who has lived, studied and worked in different Scandinavian and European countries, intercultural issues are a natural personal choice of focus for a thesis. Even though intercultural awareness and communication skills are becoming increasingly more crucial in today's global milieu, cultural differences are not always taken into account both inside and outside business settings, or even offered as part of the curriculum of higher-level institutions. The study programme was designed to help promote the awareness of intercultural communication, as does the subject area and findings of this thesis.

The target audience for this thesis can be of any age, professional background or nationality interested in intercultural communication. It has been written from a Business Degree student's point of view with a lot of personal insight to interculturalism of living, working and studying in over five countries. The research question will be answered with the help of both theory and a focus group discussion, based on a few participant's own experiences and impressions. More specifically, this thesis will compare theory on culture and intercultural communication with the results of a focus group discussion about the intensive study programme known as 'PIM'. The main aim is to refer to some older, existing theory on culture, behavior and cross-cultural communication when discussing first hand observations by teachers, staff members and students during PIM 2010. The study programme involved European Bachelor degree students and university level teachers, and took place in the spring of 2010 in the Bygdoszcz area of Poland. The intercultural communication that took place during these two weeks will be discussed from a professor, teacher, PIM student, external member and a project assistant's perspective. Participants of the discussion include opinions of a Bachelor degree student who participated in the study programme as a student, both founders of the PIM study programme, another PIM teacher from a University of Applied Sciences, and one of the two PIM project assistants.

## 1.1 Research Question

The study programme was designed especially for students to develop their own intercultural skills and become more culturally aware of differences. This made it even more relevant to observe their actual intercultural communication and compare it with some of the theory they were required to study during the intensive weeks. It was interesting to see whether the theory taught during the study programme was applied by the students in real life or if it could be helpful for them in communicating with students from different cultural backgrounds in such a study programme. More specifically, is it possible to draw a comparison between the theory often taught to Bachelor level students and the cultural behavior of the students? The research question is for that reason whether or not it is possible to apply and use the existing theory on culture by known authors, to the actual intercultural communication that took place during the study programme PIM of 2010. This research problem helps define the quality of the findings by comparing inductive experiences with theory, using a qualitative research approaches and methods.

The thesis will investigate and analyze the Intercultural Communication that took place in the implementation of the study programme known as PIM 2010. It will use theory by authors such as Geert Hofstede, Fons Trompenaars and Richard Gesteland that have already collected and compared works available by cultural anthropologists and psychologists over the past 50 years. The reason why a case study research approach was used within the qualitative approach is because of "its ability to capture the unique characters of people and groups", which gives the researcher more detailed holistic data. It is also one of the only research methods for business students that have the potential to make "surprising discoveries" and even produce new theories. (Bloor & Wood 2006, 29)

## 1.2 Background Information

Before revealing the outcome of the focus group discussion, it is vital to provide some background information on PIM, and what intensive study programs aim to do. The complete title of PIM is Promoting Intercultural Management for Working Life in the Baltic Sea Region 2010 and is classified as an Intensive Erasmus Programme. The overall aim of Erasmus is to improve the quality and relevance of education by improving cooperation amongst universities within the European Union. The higher Education Section of the European community action programme in the field of education Long Life Learning (LLL) is named after Erasmus the philosopher. This Rotterdam philosopher travelled and lived in different European countries for the purpose of expanding his knowledge and gaining new insights. With the help of the Erasmus scheme, European students are given the opportunity to do the same as Erasmus, by studying at a foreign partner institution in a vast range of subject areas. The placements last from

three to a year and make up a part of the exchange students own degree programme. (European Union 2010)

When the students are located in a foreign country, students are able to gain knowledge about the country's culture, everyday life, their language, and the country's academic work. Thereby, the study placement enhances personal growth and development. Not only does the Erasmus Programme offer mobility for students but also for teachers, professors and other members of the university staff. The teaching staff's role is crucial in acting as a connection between the institutions and the rest of Europe, providing a gateway for Europe to their own home institution. The Erasmus Programme provides students with efficient and multinational teaching that may not otherwise be possible for the students to be exposed to in their home country. However, not all students are able to take part in a longer Erasmus exchange programmes of several months. This is why shorter intensive study programmes are ideal and last for only a few weeks providing these students with an opportunity for mobility and some intercultural experience.

During an IP, students and teachers work together in multinational groups with special learning and teaching conditions where the student is able to gain new insights to the studied topics. The teaching staff is able to exchange opinions on teaching content, material and curricula approaches, as well as experiment with different methods in an international classroom setting. The criteria for an IP such as PIM is that the duration of the programme is at least ten continuous working days, separated with no more than a weekend, and does not last more than six weeks. The IP must involve both students and teaching staff from universities situated in a minimum of three participating countries. This number includes the coordinating institution. At least ten students from these countries should participate, not including the local students from the country where the IP takes place. Finally an IP should not be confused with research work or a conference. Depending on the Intensive Programme's themes, universities are encouraged to involve any external specialists or experts in the respective fields of activity. (European Union 2010)

### 1.3 Promoting Intercultural Communication in the Baltic Sea Region: PIM 2010

PIM was designed to promote the participating students' skills in intercultural management with a multidisciplinary approach, providing the students with a theoretical and practical knowledge of intercultural communication. The two weeks of studies in May of 2010 included cultural theories, interpersonal skills, teamwork, negotiations, corporate ethics, conflict resolution, event management and intercultural expertise. The PIM idea was generated in 2005 when members of the Baltic Sea Network (BSN) wished to provide an intensive study programme that would include different higher education institutions in the Baltic Sea region.

Kristina Henriksson, Senior Lecturer at Laurea University of Applied Sciences became coordinator of this project in cooperation with Professor Bernd Waldeck of Kiel University of Applied Sciences. (PIM2010)

The first PIM was held in Latvia in 2006, and proved to be successful event from all aspects. PIM continued for the next 4 years, each held in a different country in the Baltic Sea Region. The PIM students are purposely placed into multicultural teams in order to ensure communication on an intercultural level. Lectures, report writing, authentic case studies, role-plays and arranging multicultural events are some of the diverse study methods incorporated in the programme. From a student's point of view, the study programme offers a very unique experience both academically and as a memorable event in one's academic career in general. With the help of social media, students create long-term friendships and even valuable contacts for future career or traveling purposes. It is rare to meet so many young people from different countries, work with them and attend lectures with teachers, each skilled in their own area of multicultural communication. (PIM2010)

The starting point for the learning process in PIM was "cultural awareness". The participating teachers and students represent the PIM partner consortium that consisted of 11 higher education institutions from seven countries in the Baltic Sea region. Laurea University of Applied Sciences (UAS) has always been the coordinating institution, whereas the country in which PIM takes place, along with the host institution, changes every year. In 2010 it was decided that PIM should take place in Poland. PIM has generated interest among higher education institutions in the Baltic Sea region as well as the local stakeholders and businesses surrounding the PIM venue location. The impact of PIM has also reached beyond academic purposes through the participating student teams' project assignments that are carried out in cooperation with real life local companies. Even organizations that are not directly related to the study programme, such as the Finnish Committee for European Security (STETE), have taken interest in its unique approach to creating international networks and improving the relationships between different countries. (Kähäri & Kotaviita 2011, 6-12)

All PIM teachers taking part in the study programme were given the task to choose suitable students from their own home institutions. Suitable students for a PIM programme are those that may not otherwise have the opportunity to travel or study abroad, and especially those that have not had much previous interaction with people of other cultures than their own. Ideally, the students should not have had previous Bachelor level studies within intercultural communication, often due to their own institutions not being able to offer these studies. The less experience a student has with intercultural communication and traveling, the more likely they are to benefit from the study programme and be invested in the subject of Intercultural Communication. (Kähäri & Kotaviita 2011, 6-12)



## 2 Methodologies and Data Collection

Now that background information has been provided on the case study of the thesis, the research method for answering the research question will be introduced. The aim of the thesis is not to provide guidelines or instructions as to how to understand intercultural communication but to expose implicit knowledge and ideas on new intercultural scenarios that have never before been discussed previously in the same manner. Some of the evidence can be helpful when managing similar intercultural circumstances with a group of people from different cultural backgrounds. However, the observations are a form of inductive data and should not be used to make assumptions about other intercultural settings or populations. As the scope of the observations made are based on only a small number of participating individuals, the thesis is thus insufficient for the purpose of comparison. Theory will be used as a framework for analyzing the observations made during PIM 2010. Even though the observations are only relevant to the PIM study programme that took place in 2010 specifically, the theory will help readers to relate to the findings on a broader level. To ease comparison with the subjective observations and theory on intercultural communication, each section presenting a cultural observation will be followed by relevant theory, where useful in order to better understand the observations made.

Hofstede (2011, 14-17) discusses the difficulty in studying culture revealing that no matter how scientific and mathematical the research is, or how many variables are taken into account, there is always inadequate treatment of data, fallacy or at times the findings do not even "make much sense" when tested. Hence, by applying a case study approach to a focus group's opinions, these downfalls of objectivity and risks of making assumptions for large populations were avoided.

For students who have lived and studied within the same culture for their whole life, and who have not had much influence from media or technology, being aware and understanding other cultures is difficult. Hofstede (2011, 19) claims that it takes "a prolonged stay abroad" and interacting with people from different cultures to recognize that people behave in different ways and even appreciate this notion. One could say that PIM 2011 provided both these activities. Because society has programmed individuals to adapt to one's own surroundings, the experience was unfamiliar for students.

Another advantage that the focus group had was their ability to speak different languages. Hofstede describes the concept of ethnocentrism, which is the act of thinking that some characteristics of one group are superior to another group, as a risk in any research on culture. Multilingual Europeans are for example "better off" in the study of culture as they have a better understanding that their own values and norms are not superior to other people's values.

Like Hofstede himself, being raised and living or working in more than one cultural environment, can provide more insightful research than someone if a monoculture background.

## 2.1 A Focus Group Discussion as a Research Method

The purpose of this chapter is to defend why the findings obtained will be significant but also to evaluate potential limitations with the chosen research method for the thesis. The true meaning of the word research entails more than simply reading a handful of books or articles and speaking with a few people. Research means collecting data, in this case mostly from a group discussion, from different sources and then interpreting it. The interpreting of the data should follow a system of some sort, while having a clear purpose in mind, which in this case is the research question. The aspiration of this and any research is always to increase knowledge and furthermore be based on logical associations, and not only personal beliefs. This research conducted within the field of intercultural communication from a Business Management perspective should engage with both the world of "theory" and the world of "practice", according to Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2003, 2-5), during any research process, ethical issues should also be taken into account as well as access issues. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2003, 2-5)

A focus group discussion was used as a tool to analyze the two weeks of PIM in a deeper way, including opinions on issues to better understand different perspectives. The members of the focus group were chosen based on their experience in previous PIM projects, their own different nationalities and culture, their different roles in the programme, sometimes their complete lack of involvement in the study programme and their expertise in the topic of intercultural communication. The host culture of the PIM study programme was Polish, and so the environment also played a part in the behavior of the students discussed. This is why an outside member of the study programme was invited in the discussion, to help explain common Polish cultural attributes and experiences teaching foreign students in classroom settings in Poland. At least four completely different cultures were represented in the focus group, each member having lived, worked or studied in other cultures than their own.

The difference with a basic group interview and a focus group discussion lies in the aim of the researcher. A group interview is designed to save time and effort, where the interviewer is interested in the individual opinions of the members. In an interview, several topics can be covered but in a focus group the opinion of the group is valued as a result of interaction amongst participants. When collecting data from any group of people at the same time, however, it is important to organize the findings and manage the group dynamics efficiently. Bloor and Wood (2006, 25) state that sensitive topics may be more difficult to discuss as a group, and certain members may dominate over others. On the other hand, when the mem-

bers of a focus group are well acquainted with one and other, and have a high level of experience in the topic discussed, it also allows for a more interesting and interactive conversation than simply in an interview with preset questions.

A focus group discussion can be recognized by the role of the researcher who is a facilitator or moderator, the aim of the research conducted, and the content of the matters discussed. There is only one main topic discussed in a focus group but can be made up of a series of interlinking issues. The advantage of a group discussion is that the members can interact more freely with each other regarding beliefs, commenting on each other's opinions, or even forming new opinions as a group. Focus groups are not used to collect data in terms of quantity but to collect the norms of behavior with that particular group. According to an author studied by Bloor and Woord (2006. 88-90), when the members of a focus group have pre-existing friendships as colleagues or other relationships, it gives the researcher an advantage of the discussion proceeding in a more ambiguous and natural way. Smaller groups of five to seven people also provide more depth to discussions according to experts on focus groups.

There were six members of the group discussion. As a moderator and the researcher of the thesis, it is also an advantage to have worked as a project assistant for PIM as part of a recognized internship within the Business Management degree programme. There was a Finnish Bachelor student who took part as a participating student in PIM, three university level lecturers who taught during PIM, and finally a teacher from Poland who did not take part in PIM who was recruited for the purpose of having one outside perspective.

## 2.2 Research Strategy Evaluation

In every thesis, there is the need for a clear research strategy and also the need to defend why that particular strategy was chosen. If the observations made by focus group participants are to be accepted as somewhat valid for this thesis, the subjective observations should corroborate with other findings. The observations will therefore be compared to theory and ideas already observed by other noted authors on the topic of intercultural studies. Triandis (1994, 69) compares the different approaches of research used by anthropologists, psychologists, cross-cultural psychologists, scientists and humanists. Many anthropologists would not take cultural ethics into account for instance. Also a true scientist will use more than one method to test the validity of his or her work, comparing measurements with observations on a broader scale. Even though the educated observations made during PIM are insightful, they are humanistic and in no way objective and scientific. However, if the sights and opinions are compared to the results of many years of scientific research made by previous experts and distinguished authors, it adds more legitimacy and value to the data. The observations during PIM are only acceptable if they "converge" with other findings and they cannot remain

entirely subjective. This is why the "humanistic insight" in this thesis will be presented with the help of other objective findings from different scholars and sources.

There are many different ways to study communication or the essence of culture, depending on the extent and timeframe of the research. It would not be possible to conduct ethnographic research or establish shared cognitions for the short period of time that the students took part in PIM. However, it would have been possible to conduct interviews and surveys based on the students' social experiences and their learning experiences. According to Triandis, when studying intercultural communication or any cross-cultural work, it is resourceful to use focus groups. Culture is a set of "human-made objective and subjective elements", which is why it is impossible to avoid psychology when discussing the interaction between individuals. Hence, the people participating in PIM's own personalities also play a big part in terms of character and values that affect the way they communicate with people of different cultures. (Triandis 1994, 75)

When unique cross-cultural circumstances are created and observed, it is important to use a neutral point of view that is able to shift with experience. This is known as the "level of adaptation". The observations and opinions presented in this thesis will be based on the focus group's past experience, level of adaptation, and past exposure to similar intercultural situations. The participants of the focus group used for this study have a sufficient amount of experience to be able to make educated comments on the topic. Most focus group members teach and host lectures on the topic of intercultural management and communication, at university level institutions. (Triandis 1994, 14)

There are many different research strategies that can be employed, which can be either deductive or inductive. The main goal for the strategy in this thesis, is to be the most appropriate and strategic way of answering the research question. A case study attempts to investigate a current phenomenon "within its real life context" using more than one source of references. The collecting of the data can be done through interviews, discussions or observations. Even though the case study approach may have the least scientific characteristics, it is the most efficient when challenging existing theory or providing new knowledge regarding a new hypothesis. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2003, 91-93)

Another definition of a case study is to "understand social phenomena within a single or small number of naturally occurring settings". In other words, case studies aim to describe and interpret social groups in their natural setting. Case studies show their value the most when the context of the research is too complex for traditional experimental or survey research. (Bloor & Woord 2006, 27-28)

The ethics of the research also have to be considered in any work, already during the design phase of a project. As there are opinions of people involved in the chosen focus group, the ethics are even more relevant to keep in mind. All participants of the focus group discussion were informed of the purpose for the research and the aim of it. The participants of the focus group gave their consent based on full information on the participants' rights and the use of the data collected. Their names, positions and institutions remain anonymous in the focus group discussion, as well as their gender. This is also to keep a more objective approach for the reader of the work. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2003, 132)

### 2.3 Data Collection

Different methods of data collection can highlight different aspects of research, which is why case studies often use multiple methods of data collection. The most common methods are interviews, observations, documentaries, and audio or video recording. In addition to these, field notes are also a vital source of data. The main purpose of the recording of audio data in qualitative research is to replace it with written notes. Due to the technology available by for example built-in microphones in everyday mobile devices, the researcher is able to pick up the participants' voices from all areas of the room. The advantage with recording the discussion is that the researcher, who is also the moderator of a focus group discussion, can focus on making sure all topics are covered and that all participants take part equally. The moderator is also able to encourage the focus group to elaborate on opinions or observations when necessary. Another advantage with audio recording is that the data is not dependant on the researcher's memory or "selective attention". According to Bloor and Wood's (2006. 16-18) specific evaluation of audio recording for the purpose of data collection, it improves the reliability of the data collection. Recording people talking also allows for conversation analysis which is an additional method not otherwise possible from written notes.

As with all data collecting, there are limitations and ethical issues to consider. There is for example no anonymity anymore in the collection process as the participants' voices are recognizable and can be identified. In this case, all members of the research discussion were consented and informed of the purpose of the recording. It is also possible to switch off the recording at any time if the participants wish to do so. One positive part of the recording device is that the participants feel that their opinions and observations are valued and an important contribution to the thesis. During the focus group discussion, a few short, key words were noted by the moderator. Key words could be used when comparing the observations with theory later on in the research phase. This was also done to record the moderator's observations, reflections, and own emerging ideas during the focus group discussion. (Bloor & Wood 2006. 16-18)

Relations are also an important part of any research method involving people's observations and important during the actual focus group discussion. Even though the focus group discussion members cannot be revealed for the sake of anonymity, it is important to point out the strength of their relations. In order to ensure that the research is valid, good fieldwork relations are essential as they determine how open the discussion is and what thoughts and opinions the researcher is allowed access to. The focus group discussion lasted for about two hours and was held at a neutral location in Germany a year after the actual study programme in 2011. There was a lot of trust and openness among the group as they are all colleagues and friends, some of whom have known each other for more than five years. As all members had a role in the PIM study programme, there were strong friendships, which means personal thoughts were revealed during the discussion without any reservations. (Bloor & Wood 2006, 85)

In this case the focus group discussion members were various stakeholders of the PIM programme of 2010. The discussion was recorded by the moderator and researcher using a laptop computer with a built-in microphone. Despite the focus group discussion taking place almost one year after PIM, it was not a challenge to gather the members in one country again. After every PIM, it has become part of a tradition and process for staff members and teachers to meet somewhere in Europe to discuss the previous study programme in an official Evaluation meeting or a Planning Meeting of an upcoming study program. The official Planning Meeting for a new study programme was an ideal opportunity to collect the data, as half of the members present were also participants in PIM of 2010. A former student of PIM from Finland wished to complete an internship as a project assistant for this upcoming study programme, and so was also present. Conveniently, a Polish teacher was present and served as a very valuable external member with sufficient experience in Polish working culture.

#### 2.4 Planning the Focus Group Discussion

When you are able to collect a large amount of data in any research method, it increases the quality of the findings and facilitates the process of comparing it to theory. This makes it easier to draw conclusions sometimes leading to further questions. In a case study, the researcher chooses a few themes, categorizes the data into these themes and then compares the themes. The themes for this focus group discussion were chosen based on many reasons. They are recognizable to any observer whether it is a reader new to the topic of intercultural communication theory or lecturer with many years experience. Even though the themes chosen are based on cultural dimensions, they are not complex for a reader new to the topic. There is a lot of theory in the form of literature, articles or other publications written on these themes. Authors also continue to study and research these themes today, which shows they have proven to last many decades of study.

The intention was to have as interesting themes as possible that were easy to discuss and have opinions on, allowing for a natural discussion amongst a group. These themes are based on Fons Trompenaars and Geert Hofstede, who published work based on an array of sources ranging from own research and worldwide surveys. (Bloor & Wood 2006, 30)

Before starting the discussion, a few questions were presented by the mediator to stimulate the members of the discussion. All six members were placed at an equal distance around a round table, on which a laptop was placed to record the surrounding sound. The first guide to the discussion was a question asked by the researcher on how useful theory available is today when dealing with Intercultural Communication in everyday life. There were also a few other open questions asked to initiate the discussion. When all members of the group had discussed these themes, there was also the possibility to engage in a more open discussion and introduce new ideas or thoughts at the end of the group discussion. Thoughts relating to PIM and culture outside the three themes will be revealed after the focus discussion chapter and analyses.

### 3 Culture

The three themes that were chosen for the focus group discussion were Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Individualism vs. Collectivism. In order to analyze themes of cultural dimensions it is important to look into the national cultures represented during the study programme PIM. Polish, Finnish, German, Estonian, Russian, Danish and Lithuanian cultural stereotypes will be presented using theory when relevant for every theme. This helps outline what behavior may have expected from the students being observed and helps compare theory with the reality experienced by the group discussion members.

#### 3.1 Definitions

Before analyzing the Intercultural Communication that took place during PIM2010, it is important to agree on a definition of the concept of culture. To define interculturalism, one must understand the complexity of culture. Over the years, many authors and experts in different fields have failed to agree on a single definition of the word. It is hence rational to assume that there is no single universal definition by one author that can be used to define culture. As Triandis (1994, 22) states in his writing on culture and social behavior, "there are many definitions of the concept, and they are all valid". Therefore, the definition of culture depends on what the researcher plans to focus on.

In this case, the aim of the research is to study the communication between individuals of different cultures, their intercultural behavior, and their interaction. The vague definition

given by a cultural anthropologist in 1955 was that it is "the human-made part of the environment" but this can be broken down into further aspects, attributes and sub-definitions. By applying a framework, the culture and people's personalities can be seen more easily. The ecology refers to a person's geographical environment and all physical resources available to them. The second level is the non-tangible culture including all subjective norms, customs, languages used, associations of categories, roles, values and other attributes shared within a particular group. The third in the hierarchy of the framework is socialization, which thereafter leads to personality traits and finally behavior. Each term in the framework becomes increasingly individual and personal after each level. How an individual is raised by his or her peers and how well they are accepted within their culture is the next step after the physical location. If personality is linked to behavior then how individuals communicate and how others interpret them is linked to the route, which is culture. (Triandis 1994. 22-25)

Culture should not be confused with other cultural attributes of people's character that also define who they are such as the language they speak, where they live, past experiences, their religion, their social class, their race, whether they have a rural or urban residence, and their nationality for instance. A person's nationality does not have anything to do with their culture, as culture is a subconscious product and result of all these afore mentioned personal categories or attributes. In addition to the idea of creating an own culture, people with similar cultures who share the same demographic circumstance can be in different stages of acculturation. This means that they have had different experiences or exposure to other cultures. According to Triandis, experience in travelling, seeing foreign countries, being exposed to other cultures and interacting with these cultures changes one's own culture. (Triandis 1994, 8)

On the subject of whether or not nature and phenomena like culture are constructed or discovered, Triandis discusses the difference between cultural etics and emics. Cultural etics are universal concepts that remain quite general to cultures. For example etics in cross-cultural research refer to ideas or behaviors that are recognized as universal. Emics, on the other hand, are very specific, representing a unique concept that is only familiar to the particular culture. Emic concepts can even be invented when a new sub culture is formed, such as a phrase with a meaning only understood by the students taking part in PIM for example. (Triandis, 1994. 67)

According to Schneider and Barsoux (1997, 87), who question how culture influences the way people behave in organizations of today's society, there are some limitations in the way which authors like Hofstede defines culture by just nationalities. It is difficult to apply available theory published almost 40 years ago when understanding cross-cultural communication of today. Some have tried to replicate Hofstede's research by collecting data from a larger



amount of employees from more nationalities without finding many internal consistencies even though there were significant differences from country to country.

### 3.2 Poland as the Host Culture

Polish culture played a role in the study programme as the host country and the first foreign culture exposed to the students. The environment and atmosphere created by local Polish people interacting with students, such as where the students lived, restaurants and places they visited and the University or facilities where lectures were held influenced the students of PIM. During PIM, there was a student from Poland and a German student studying in Poland as part of her exchange programme. According to Richard Gesteland (2005, 237-238), a more recent author on cross-cultural business behavior, Polish people are quite reserved and formal in an initial face-to-face business meeting. In the academic world, similar to that of a corporate environment, Poles tend to be more formal than Scandinavians. In Poland relations are important to create strong business ties and in the same way, PIM staff members got to know the local hosts, even though it was a gradual process.

As Gesteland (2005, 239-240) states, even though Polish people tend to be more reserved at the first meeting, they gradually become more expressive after each time. He also believes that they are becoming more influenced by the German, Scandinavian and American culture and way of doing business today. Another noticeable trait is that, similar to Germans, a presentation in a meeting or classroom, is often very informative, loaded with a lot of data and background information. There were a few Polish teachers that took part in PIM and the teaching methods were different from the other Scandinavian teachers.

As mentioned earlier, a Polish lecturer was also invited to the focus group discussion, and was given a more neutral role as an external member. Even though this lecturer did not take part in PIM, it was useful to have an unbiased member. The knowledge on typical Polish culture was from first-hand experiences that PIM teachers and staff member who took part in the programme could not have provided. Without this Polish teacher, there would be no Polish student or teacher in the focus group discussion. Comments will be included in the work when relevant to the three main focus themes, without being a main part of the discussion. These comments should not be interpreted as a member of the focus group or someone with experience in PIM or valid knowledge of PIM. Their contribution to the discussion serves as a supplement to the other observations made on cultural differences, especially when a Polish benchmark was necessary. The importance of Polish culture for this study will be explained further into the focus group discussion.

### 3.3 Finnish Culture as the Coordinating Institution

As mentioned in the observations of focus group members, the second culture that played an important part in the research was the culture of the host institution, Laurea University of Applied Sciences, of Finland. PIM assistants were responsible for the practical arrangements of the study programme and always in close communication with students, local providers and teachers. Two of the focus group members were Finnish, one of them being the founder and designer of the entire study programme. Since both staff members were from Finland and represented a Finnish institution, many of their own cultural values and norms influenced the group of students.

How people treat each other will be defined in the focus group discussion but like its neighboring Scandinavian countries, Finnish behavior towards people of authority is relatively indifferent compared to other European cultures. In classrooms and working environments, all students or employees call their teachers or supervisors by their first name and have a more open relationship with their managers or superiors. In Finland status is most often earned through achievements and not inherited through family name. Elders are respected but are not part of daily life and are often put in homes when they are too old to care for themselves. In contrast, punctuality is extremely important in Finnish culture. The society also focuses strongly on the individual and not the group, which means it is rare for most Finns to think collectively beyond their nearest family members or spouses. Keeping in mind Finnish culture, PIM members organized and coordinated the programme very much according to Finnish culture as this was what they were used to, in their home institution. All students were therefore treated equally, and were expected to attend all lectures, and on time. The PIM students were able to keep an open and friendly relationship with most lecturers as in Finland, depending on the culture of the teacher. (Gesteland 2002, 309)

## 4 Theme 1: Power Distance

Power is distributed differently among institutions or organizations within cultures. All cultures give certain people a higher status than others, and power distance refers to what extent other members of society accept this distribution. The criteria for the level of status can either be purely based on who the people are such as family name or titles, or what they have achieved, or a combination of both. As noted by Trompenaars in the early 90s, some societies focus more on the actual past achievements of the person while others focus on less ascribed traits such as age, class, gender or education. Other examples why individuals of a society are treated differently can be traits such as a higher education, age, experience or other qualities. Power distance can be easily observed in the way people behave in their verbal or non-verbal communication. (Trompenaars 1993, 92)

Power distance is used as a theme in the group discussion as it refers to how people react towards hierarchies and how they show their respect towards peers or superiors. In some cultures, there is a more noticeable hierarchy. Elders, managers of corporations, parents, teachers or anyone with more experience can be treated with more respect in verbal and non-verbal communication. The actual 'distance' of power distance can be stated as high or low, or large or small, where a high power distance refers to a very distinct and somewhat vertical hierarchy. Hofstede claimed that organizations from countries where the power distance is known to be low, have less formal rules, regulations and procedures. In countries with a low power distance, hierarchy is rarely a concept considered by members of the society. In this case all decisions are decentralized even though there can be clear roles and procedures. (Schneider & Barsoux 1997, 87-90)

#### 4.1 Focus Group Observations on Power Distance

Power distance was observed by how a PIM student behaved towards his or her PIM teacher or any PIM staff member during the study programme. It is interesting to compare the level of power distance by observing the verbal communication in a formal classroom setting, and a less formal setting, outside the classroom. As a PIM assistant, it was easy to observe the students both inside and outside the classroom, as the responsibility of a PIM assistant was to be available at all times for students and teachers. Power distance also existed between teachers and not only between staff members and students. All members agree that there was a type of organizational hierarchy based on how long and how much experience each teacher had with previous PIM programmes. The founders and main organizers of PIM could almost be seen as the supervisors or 'employers' of the teachers recruited at a later stage. The teachers that had taken part in PIM before definitely had an advantage to the newer teachers in status. Teachers from countries that have a typically large power distance treated the older teachers with more power distance. This could be seen with verbal communication and in the way the newer teachers behaved.

From a student's perspective cultural differences and power distance was visible in the teaching methods. The idea behind PIM was not to have similar teaching methods, so that the students could see the differences in cultures. The teaching methods varied from a more one way presentation with informative slides shown, to a very interactive discussion activating the entire classroom. During PIM, students were taught to work, live and learn in different situations to what they were used to at home. They were outside their own cultural comfort zone and were therefore forced to question their own norms.

The general opinion of the focus group was that more formal cultures respect status, hierarchies and power and therefore are said to have a high power distance. The students belonging

to a culture used to such a large power distance did not all behave as expected. The stereotype for these countries would be that the students would be at the bottom of the hierarchy in a classroom setting. Above them would be the project assistants, then the teachers ranked by age and experience, and finally the founders of the study program at the top. When looking at stereotypes and theory, the countries that belong to these more vertical hierarchies should be Lithuania, Russia, Poland, Germany and Estonia. The reasons for a high power distance may be historical, geographical, economic or political. One example can be 'younger' countries, once part of the Soviet Union, which have been influenced by Russian culture.

The way people show respect varies in different cultures, in most of the Nordic countries represented at PIM, the power distance is relatively low in most hierarchies. The students belonging to the more informal cultures such as Finland and Denmark, behaved differently, valuing equality and seeing themselves as more clients of the study programme. From the point of view of a Finnish project assistant of PIM, a healthy teaching environment would be a balance between listening to lectures and also participating in more interactive discussions. In cultures with lower power distance, a student shows respect for a teacher by paying attention to what the teacher has to say and perhaps showing interest by asking questions related to the topics. In countries with higher power distance, interrupting the teacher would be showing a lack of respect.

The focus group agreed that the power distance experienced in the classrooms by the students and project assistants was quite low. The other general observation was that the power distance observed during the lectures, also depended on the home culture of the teacher. The level of power distance was almost a compromise between all cultures represented in the room, and the culture of the teacher responsible at the time. The majority of the students and teachers were from Nordic countries used to a lower power distance, which may result in the level of power distance being quite low during PIM.

The PIM culture was that the students were generally expected to be silent during lectures but also to share their own opinions or ask questions when given permission, which is common in most Finnish or Danish Universities of Applied Sciences. The observation is that the students addressed the teachers by their first names in most cases during PIM, as they do in Finland and Denmark. According to one member of the focus group discussion, students seemed to adapt to every teacher's personality and culture when attending their lecture or session. For example, the Northern European teachers were quite open with students and discussions were more frequent where students used their first name when speaking to the teacher. The Danish teachers instilled a very open and free atmosphere with more intensive debates. The reason for this Nordic teaching culture can also be explained by the nature of the subject taught by the Danish teachers, which allowed for different opinions.

Another focus group member reminded the group that the older writings on power distance refer to power distance based on national culture and geographical regions. The root of power distance lies in the values of cultures, also when comparing male or female dominant cultures. One member feels that there is a correlation between women and their right to vote, with power distance of a particular country. They claimed that power distance is a cultural factor that evolves over time, along with a society's development. They mentioned that a set hierarchy in daily life could still be seen in some countries today, even in Europe.

After steering the discussion back to the power distance experienced at PIM, all members agreed that there were some unexpected observations made during PIM 2011 in Poland in terms of power distance. The concept of respect came up, which is a strong indicator of the level of power distance. It is one way power distance is shown in behavior and communication. It was agreed that respect has to do with values, and the group discussed whether or not it is something taught at home in all cultures. One suggestion was that the way students behaved during PIM can also be a result of the way they are taught and expected to behave in their own home cultures amongst their peers.

The nationality which displayed the lowest level of power distance was the Danish. The observation was shared by many teachers, and was noticed by how one Danish student communicated with the teachers. For example, evidence for a low level of power distance was in the verbal communication and could be observed in the tone of voice, and the tendency to interrupt people during lectures or conversations with questions. The group pointed out that the display of low power distance from some students affected the atmosphere in the entire group. However, the power distance of the Finnish students did not become lower as a result of spending time with the Danish. The Danish only seemed to help the Lithuanian, German and Estonian become more relaxed in their behavior towards the teachers. One experienced focus group member who had taken part in several PIM programmes thought that the Danish low power distance is a result of the non-authoritarian education system where students are not forced or taught to respect others.

Non-verbal communication that reveals the level of power distance is body language. Students can for example place their feet on a chair during a lecture. In many contexts where power distance is high, this gesture is completely unacceptable as it suggests a lack of respect. There can be many reasons why some PIM students show more respect towards teachers than others but it is not possible to list them all without going into the psychology of the student. However, the focus group attempted to list a few reasons why they believed some students had different attitudes compared to others. The first reason can be the students' own home culture and values that have been a part of their upbringing. In Denmark, the power distance is at a minimum compared with other European countries, which also means in

educational institutions. Another reason can be previous experience of exposure to other cultures before attending PIM. Past experience has to do with someone being able to adjust to a surrounding intercultural group and keeping in mind the cultures of other people.

Despite the cultural norm that the power distance is low or almost non-existent in Denmark, most of the Danish students participating in PIM were very polite and behaved very well according to the focus group. When one member of the focus group was asked how they experienced the power distance during PIM, they stated that they could see a very visible difference with both Estonians and Lithuanians compared to the rest of the students. This means that the difference could be seen in both verbal and non-verbal communication. One example of this visible difference was the Russian students. The Russian girls taking part in PIM were extremely reserved, spent a long time in the mornings preparing themselves and dressing in much more formal clothing than the other female students. They would seldom take part in any discussions during lectures but when asked to present their work in front of the group as part of an assignment, they took this very seriously with a strong sense of duty. The focus group agreed that the Russian students that took part in PIM were a good example of stereotypical Russian culture, displaying behavior which is expected from a country with a high power distance.

The focus group member from Germany moves to the topic of the German students. Germany is known for its structure, hierarchy, and high power distance. However, all agreed that many parts are gradually becoming more influenced by surrounding Southern and Northern European countries. For example long titles in front of names are becoming less common. During the last ten years there have been many changes in power distance but it depends entirely on the company and type of organization.

The focus group believes that in the next 20 years the power distance will disappear slowly as it has in other European countries. Some teachers and students were from the same country and even same university of applied sciences. The teachers mentioned that they allowed the students from lower power distance cultures to address them with their first name but did not allow the students from their own culture to do the same if it was not done in their home institution. The teachers did not wish the low power distance behavior to influence the students who would have to go home to a higher power distance environment. It was interesting to see that some teachers enjoyed a power distance between themselves and students, while other teachers avoided it as much as possible.

Students' relationships to power distance were also visible in the way the students behaved towards the project assistants, not only teachers. The project assistants are not older than the students but are a part of the staff, as any other PIM teacher. Their responsibility was to

ensure that the study programme was successful and met its goals. All the students from countries typically low in power distance treated the assistants as they would to a classmate with almost no evidence of power distance. The students from Lithuania, Russia and some Estonians were reserved, polite and at times quite distant towards the assistants as if they were following a PIM hierarchy with themselves at the lowest level. When looking at theory available on large power distance cultures, the oldest and most experienced teachers would be at the highest level of a vertical hierarchy, and then the other younger teachers. The project assistants or staff members would be somewhere in the middle receiving orders from teachers, and then finally the students at the bottom. In countries like Finland with little power distance, the hierarchy would be flat with organizational arrows leading everywhere to represent free flow of communication. These students feel they have full access to confront all staff members and teachers no matter if they were the project managers of PIM or newer teachers to the project.

According to one focus group member there was a huge difference in power distance compared to when they were a student themselves in the 1980s and now as a teacher in the 21st century. Students usually ask permission from lecturers whether they can use 'you' in the impolite form when addressing them. After permission has been granted, the students can use the more impolite form of speaking, therefore reducing the initial power distance. One example given is the idea of students and teachers being able to spend time with each other outside the classroom in a more social environment. As a student in the early 80s of a high power distance culture, it was completely unacceptable and unthinkable but being able to spend time with students outside the classroom is becoming more common today.

30 years ago some of the countries participating in PIM belonged to the Soviet Union and were very different due to political and economic situations. For example, in Estonia about 60% of the population of the capital city Tallinn spoke Russian, and this had a strong influence over the culture and power distance at educational institutions. Students in other parts of Europe of low power distance were also different 20 years ago. Students would for example not confront a professor or a teacher if there was no agreed appointment or if it was not during the consultation hours. In addition, written communication would never be sent to teachers unless they were of very high importance. Ever since the year 2000, Finnish students seem to be able to visit teachers' offices at any hours and send emails freely.

According to the Polish informant, there is a strong link between the power distance and language, especially in Poland. The power distance can be heard in the language with the way the students address their teachers, elderly people or professors. Power distance exists very prominently in the academic environment in Poland. Working in a Polish corporate environment and for the Polish government revealed that power distance truly depends on what

department in the company a worker is employed in, sometimes within the same company. Some departments may have no power distance while others are much stricter. A factor that has had an impact on the power distance in Poland's academic environment is that about 20 years ago only 10% of young people studied which made them almost a so-called 'elite' group of society. Young men wore suits, as they were part of the few who had the opportunity and resources to study. The change in power distance is therefore also visible in the way people dress, and not only in the language and behavior. Students are rarely expected to wear suits in Poland today although in many other European universities it is still expected today. Dressing well, is also another way to show respect according to the focus group. As mentioned earlier, the focus group saw this visual sign of respect with how the Russian students dressed.

#### 4.2 Analysis of Power Distance Observations

Hofstede (2001, 100-101) discusses power distance in educational systems and institutions. Teachers and students are a very clear indicator of values honored in the culture. He states that countries with high power distance show respect towards teachers, with the older teachers having the most authority. Furthermore, the knowledge of teachers at university level is considered as true and never questioned. On the contrary, the younger the teacher in countries with little power distance, the more popular they are amongst students. As in many Nordic countries, the educational system is centered on the needs of the students, in terms of the individualism of finding one's own "intellectual path". These low power distance cultures show especially little respect for teachers outside a classroom setting, which makes an interesting subject of study for PIM when students and teachers often shared leisure time outside the classroom.

As Hofstede (2001, 99-100) found in his earlier work of measuring power distance in many countries using an index, in the countries with a large power distance, students are expected to be obedient toward their peers. Independent behavior in a classroom setting is therefore not encouraged in countries with a higher power distance. In these countries, Hofstede notes that authority of elders such as parents and grandparents "are treated with formal defense", meaning that this respect lasts even though younger people become old enough to care for themselves in society and formulate own opinions on issues. On the other hand, with countries very low in power distance, children are already used to contradicting their parents from a very early age. In the same way, students questioning teachers in institutions with these cultures are completely acceptable. Hofstede's research confirms that upbringing has a lot to do with how one behaves in other organizations in life as an adult. "The impact of the family on our mental programming is extremely strong, and programs set in childhood are very difficult to change". Family is not the same as cultural context but it does play a strong role in differences between power distances.



People also express themselves "paralinguistically", meaning not only using language and words. For example the tone of voice they use when speaking, the gestures they make with their hands, how intensely they look at the person or people they are speaking to, the orientation of their body, or the level of voice they use. In many parts of the world such as the Middle East, the non-verbal communication is just as important as the verbal. Triandis (1994, 30) refers to this type of communication as content versus context in his findings on cross-cultural social psychology. Another aspect is how extreme the linguistic statement is, whether it is mild or exaggerated. Some cultures will expect people to exaggerate when speaking about a topic or idea they feel strongly about. It is almost considered impolite to express these thoughts without passion in the tone of voice. The other extreme can be cultures that consider it offensive to express language too forcefully, and polite to keep linguistic statements very mild and calm.

This compromise between the mixtures of different cultures represented at PIM created a culture of its own, which can be classified as the 'PIM' culture. There are two major ways cultures influence each other known as acculturation and diffusion. An author on Cultural Anthropology, Conrad Kottak (2005, 209) describes acculturation as the process of a group of individuals of different cultures interacting with each other for a certain period of time. This means that they are in continuous first hand contact leading to their own cultural patterns being altered. When individuals are in continuous contact, not only are their own cultures shaped or formed but also a brand new sub-culture is formed with own values and ways of behaving and communicating within the group. When people share a common circumstance, such as working and living together during an IP like PIM, it encourages them to interact socially. Triandis states that shared fates or interests such as social movements or occupational groups become the bases for positive interaction, which results in the forming of new subcultures.

Triandis (1994, 19) explains that there can also be "diffusion of one culture to another". Diffusion often occurs when people move to new cultures and adopt the local culture. However, the more noticeable changes in culture rarely happen faster than after one or two generations. The reasons for major changes include people experiencing major events such as wars, changes in commerce because of globalization, a sudden increase in contact with tourists of other cultures, results of migration, influences from religious or other missionaries, being exposed to media showing foreign culture, or other factors.

## 5 Theme 2: Punctuality as Part of Uncertainty Avoidance

The authority of a person is not the same as the authority of rules. Behavior towards rules and timetables has to do with uncertainty avoidance. The authority of people was described in

the previous theme of power distance. Hofstede (2001, 145) links the concept of time and punctuality with the dimension, Uncertainty Avoidance. It refers to how people respond to law, religion or technology through rules and rituals. The uncertainty comes from the concept of an unknown future and the three elements of law, technology and religion are ways Hofstede defines how humans deal with this uncertainty. For example, predicting the weather with the use of technology against the uncertain forces of nature. If time is something that cannot be controlled and what happens in the future cannot be predicted, then time is also part of the uncertainty.

According to Hofstede (2001, 160-162) there are countries with high and low uncertainty avoidance, which do not always correlate with levels of power distance. Norms exist in every cultural dimension, and a typical norm is a way of behaving that is expected from everyone in that particular culture. On one hand, norms are the result of rules or traditions. On the other hand, norms are also a branch of values, just as any other behavior.

### 5.1 Observations of Uncertainty Avoidance and Punctuality

When considering how punctual students of different cultures were during the PIM study programme, it does not only have to do with culture. The students are expected to attend all parts of the study programme including lectures provided by teachers at PIM. The lectures have been planned in a timetable beforehand, which the students receive on arrival. PIM staff members also assist students by showing them exactly where each lecture is held. If a student wished to attend a lecture, he or she would have to look at the timetable or ask a staff member, and be present at the time of when the lecture starts. The students were expected to apply knowledge or theory they had acquired throughout the study programme in a final report and presentation. In a lower power distance classroom, a student wishing to learn more about intercultural communication and have successful teamwork results will naturally attend lectures and be present when they start. This is what the PIM staff members had hoped for. However, being late to a lecture may have very little to do with the interest of the student in other cultures where punctuality is not a form of showing respect.

As uncertainty avoidance relates to rules and regulations, one can say that PIM followed very strict guidelines from the European Union and a tight schedule in order to achieve the goals in the set period of time. Students were provided with very clear boundaries and criteria was also presented to receive a PIM certificate at the end of the programme. All official instructions for Intensive programmes have been set by the European Union. PIM's classroom culture is a working culture and therefore equivalent to any European workplace culture. PIM did not differ much from a working culture as there were deadlines, assignments and clear daily objectives. One focus group member declares that all workplaces have two cultures, the one

that the organization wishes to instill, and the actual culture employees implement themselves. Once again, the idea of a sub culture being formed is introduced to the dimension once again. Teachers therefore formed an own level of uncertainty avoidance during PIM in their classrooms and a new bar of tolerance for being late was set during PIM. It would be possible to record and study classroom culture in each teaching session of PIM. However, this study would demand an entire separate research approach in itself of keeping a record.

Teachers were given the task of hosting lectures and teaching students in a set period of time. During PIM there were at least three to five lectures daily with a set starting time. When the staff members discuss the observations, lateness is considered any later than the exact starting time. In the first week of PIM all students and teachers were under the same roof and so punctuality of lectures was easy to monitor. In the second week the students had to travel much further to attend the lectures but were also expected to take on the task of making sure they were on time on their own.

German, Finnish, and Estonians are according to theory and experience of the focus group very punctual, where one minute late means late. In Poland, the power distance is evident in punctuality. When meeting an individual higher in hierarchy, it is respectful to arrive early. However, in looser social settings people are not as punctual. One focus group member decides that it is important to weigh the consequences of being late in PIM and to define what late was during PIM. The latest any student attended a session was from five to ten minutes. This is perhaps not considered late at all in many Southern European countries.

The interesting cultural differences are the consequence of being late and what significance it has amongst different cultures. Finns would feel slightly ashamed to be late, or a certain feeling of guilt. It shows that lateness is a negative occurrence that they try to avoid. Some lecturers express that the feeling of being ashamed when arriving late to a session in academic circumstances is becoming more rare today. The group wonders if the feeling of being ashamed when arriving late is becoming rarer in the younger generation. It was agreed that respecting times and feeling guilty to arrive late has definitely changed over the last 20 years. It also seems that it has a lot to do with uncertainty avoidance and power distance as many lecturers have less power and status than they did 20 years ago.

All members who had been teaching 10 years ago agreed that students and all individuals in academic settings were more punctual a decade ago. Similar to power distance, the focus group once again think that time orientation is a value that comes from upbringing and is often instilled as a value by the parents or role models at a young age. The group argues that in most Western cultures, being punctual is a form of politeness, along with simple gestures such as saying hello, goodbye and thank you. As proven by Hofstede, parents' values are often

visible in the behavior of their children. There are high and low authoritarian upbringings, which means a lot depends on the relationship children have towards their parents and how much they apply the norms of their parents to their own culture when put in other groups.

A focus group member who is well informed on the topic of culture suggests culture should be seen as a science and people can be thought of as hybrids. Meaning that people can be the products of several cultures. Elements from different cultures can arise in the values of one individual. They point out that this phenomenon is seen very often in the younger generation where the different traits and values from other cultures are implemented and integrated in the individual's own culture. Another member is quick to question how these individuals are exposed to the other cultures. The exposure comes from the media such as television, which in fact are simply the products of globalization and Popularizm. A third focus group member joins the debate and agrees that globalization is a reason behind it but feels that it is also a combination of older values and newer values. Recognizing that the newer values and ways of behaving are much more appealing and exciting for younger people compared to the older values. According to the first member, even though parents strongly attempt to instill the older values such as punctuality at home, the media and the younger individuals in the child's life are a very strong influence.

One member concludes that the reason why other external factors have such a strong influence is that during the last 10 to 15 years, family is no longer as important for children. Role models exist in other forms when looking to for guidance and building own values. The example is drawn that friends of young people nowadays play a major part and more important, is the group these friends belong to, sometimes referred to as gangs or clicks. Daily culture no longer comes from the parents but more from the friends and social groups surrounding the individual according to the focus group.

One focus group member shares an experience relating to time orientation. When PIM as organized in 2009 there was a Spanish student participating who started arriving earlier than any other Northern European student. When this student was asked why she preferred to be very punctual she explained that she felt that she had somehow become more Finnish during PIM. The question was raised whether students adjusted to one and other and behaved according to what other students did. According to the teacher, students' punctuality had little to do with other students' punctuality. However, according to the student, when students noticed that other students were not as punctual it gave them a sense of relief and they seemed to worry less about being punctual.

Finally, the external focus group member tells about more personal beliefs relating to Polish culture, which seem to interest the other members of the group. In Western societies people

live faster and have much more activities and commitments these days. To some extent there is a lot of pressure in all areas of life, which becomes a source of stress. In the old days, there seemed to be more time to plan and people could come earlier to their appointments.

## 5.2 Analysis of Uncertainty Avoidance Observations

The idea of culture changing or shifting should be addressed as it was a recurring theme in the focus group discussion, without it being a part of the themes. On the topic of cultures changing or being influenced, Hofstede's (2001, 255) own personal opinion as a result of his research is that "cultures shift, but they shift in formation, so that the differences between them remain intact". This means that as one culture develops, its neighboring culture does not necessarily remain the same.

In cultures with weak uncertainty avoidance, norms are not forced upon people as there are few rules and codes of conduct to follow. Low uncertainty avoidance children are raised to be polite and honest, although behavior depends on the personal interpretation of the context of each situation. In a low uncertainty avoidance society, people are encouraged to treat others equally regardless of how they look, with few strict guidelines on how to dress or speak. People from countries with high uncertainty avoidance have much stronger rules and norms to follow. These countries, such as France or Germany have languages that often have a polite form that is used, according to what status the person one is talking to, holds. In the same way, countries with high uncertainty avoidance follow stricter timetables. There are precise learning objectives in educational systems and high uncertainty avoidance cultures favor a more structured framework in all institutions. (Hofstede 2001, 160-162)

Even though uncertainty avoidance and punctuality have to do with innate norms, habits or other cultural traits, the context and environment also plays a part. When there is a larger group of people at any gathering, a group culture and atmosphere is created. With a set program and timetable, students often follow other students, especially when a group moves together. Most students from medium or high level uncertainty avoidance feel uncomfortable entering a room full other students and a teacher, as this would interrupt the lecture and upset the group atmosphere. The challenge with the concept of time is whether or not punctuality derives from pure cultural differences, or if in fact it depends more on the personality of the student and group expectations of the other students. In the next chapter, collectivism and thinking as a group will be discussed and this may also play a part in punctuality. According to Hofstede (2011, 154), group decisions and actions are a way to avoid "risk for the individual". Perhaps the students from countries with a high level of uncertainty avoidance mirrored what the group did to avoid facing any potential confrontation as an individual. Confrontation or consequences as an individual will be discussed in the next chapter. Neverthe-

less, uncertainty avoidance combined with power distance and whether the student thinks collectively, all have an impact on punctuality. It is therefore a more challenging dimension to analyze than the other two themes.

Hofstede's (2001, 145) results show Denmark with very low uncertainty avoidance, combined with a low power distance as mentioned in the previous chapter. He also mentions that as found in lower power distance countries, it is completely normal to have intellectual disagreement and it is considered stimulating for students to disagree with teachers. On the contrary, Finland is quite different from Denmark in terms of Uncertainty Avoidance. In Hofstede's research, Finland is shown to have a medium value, as in not high or low, based on the other 50 countries researched from all around the world. In a higher uncertainty Avoidance country, time rules are essential, a sign of respect and sometimes a source of personal stress.

The seven German students who participated in the intensive course were as late as any other student, and did not follow what the cultural presumption suggests of most Germans being punctual. According to one focus group member, the Finnish students were often the latest to arrive to the lectures. Finns, being the most Northern of all participating countries completely defied the assumption for Nordic culture of being punctual. Even the Finnish PIM student part of the focus group agreed that it seemed as though the Finnish students of PIM were late the most out of all the other students. Speculations were expressed that the younger generation, meaning those students born within the decade of 1980 to 1990 do not fit well with the theory provided by the authors regarding time orientation. For example, Finns are thought to be at least 10 minutes too early according to most theory available.

## 6 Theme 3: Individualism vs. Collectivism

The third of Hofstede's (2001, 209) dimensions and the third theme that was discussed in the focus group is Individualism compared to Collectivism. This theme relates to how the students are with each other and is the most fascinating when observing the communication of intercultural interaction. It is also a dimension that displays people's behavior and values quite clearly. The differences in this dimension are also very distinct with individual behavior considered very negative, and in other cultures it is encouraged.

Collective societies depend more on members of their organizations both financially and emotionally. This is why the group takes on a lot of responsibility for their own members. Hofstede (2001, 229) points out that many collectivist societies are often linked to a large power distance. It is important for them to maintain a harmony within the social environment and this virtue can be seen when they interact with new groups. For example, people from collectivist societies are used to being in a group of people at all times and immediately seek

interaction with others in the new group. This is a contrast to people of individualist cultures who feel the need for privacy and to be alone. In addition, collectivist cultures see confronting people by themselves as impolite. Children or students are never encouraged to form personal opinions without consulting with the group first. As countries with high uncertainty avoidance, people belonging to collectivist cultures have family related obligations and rituals that they are expected to follow. Individualist cultures expect young adults to be self-sufficient and are often expected to earn their own living from the age when they are able to work.

In an individualist culture, having own original opinions and ideas is considered as part of having a strong character, while collectivists find it weak and selfish. Hofstede (2001, 229) also reveals another very clear difference in communication. Individualist members of society feel the need to communicate verbally when they meet, while in more extreme collectivist cultures, silence is completely normal when meeting and spending time together. They value spending time with one and other so much that small talk is not necessary. Hofstede's theory helps separate the two stereotypical traits of the dimension, which helps identify them better in the focus group discussion that will follow.

#### 6.1 Observations on Individualism and Collectivism

Nowadays, teamwork is becoming more common both in classrooms and in business cultures. The working methods used in PIM2010 had to take the students into account depending on both the national culture and the educational culture. The observations made were mainly based on which students from which countries stayed together in their groups and which students integrated more into the entire group of students. All other observations were discussed relating to how students behaved within their multicultural teams and outside their teams. The focus group feels that individualism and collectivism has a lot to do with personality. It is important to distinguish a difference between personality and culture regarding the issue of collectivism versus individualism. There were clear differences amongst the students but the focus group members felt and assumed that it had more to do with personality than culture.

The best occasion to observe Individualism versus Collectivism was during any meal times. Some students would go alone to breakfast in the mornings while others felt they had to go with a friend, wait for someone else or even save food if someone came later. Those displaying typical individualist traits showed up to the meals alone and the others from more collectivist cultures would make sure they would have someone to eat with. The most noticeable observation was that the Lithuanian students seemed to place their own group, meaning other Lithuanian students, before any students of different nationalities. The Lithuanians clung

together as much as they were able to both inside and outside the classroom. The own more familiar group seemed more important than the group of new people.

With individualism, the shared observation of the focus group was that the Danish, Finnish and German students represented individualist culture the most. The nationality who displayed the most individualistic traits was the Danish students. Team cooperation and leadership was easy to see in the teams and their teamwork assignments. The focus group noted that one student in the team of about five to six students would always choose a more leading role. Two focus group members state that the students with the most experience in teamwork, naturally display a more collectivism way of thinking and working. Collectivism when working also has a lot to do with past experience in the home institution. One exception to this rule is that although the Danish students are very used to teamwork in their home institutions, their individualist personalities often took over the teamwork abilities.

A few focus group members had more experience with different students from teaching many years of PIM. They also share their observations from previous PIMs that relate to Individualism and Collectivism. They recall German PIM students in 2008 demanding that teamwork in the form of written work be individually assessed and credited. This would unfortunately go against the goal of learning to work and communicate on a multicultural team, the main purposes of the PIM study programme. More specifically, the German students wanted each paragraph in the final report of the PIM course to have a reference with which student was responsible for it. This is a clear example of individualism way of thinking and there were no such alarming observations during PIM of 2010. When working on a team, the focus group concludes that the written report should always be a team collaboration where each team member should feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for each part. According to many focus group members, work is more individualistic in most European institutions and students are rarely ever evaluated as a team. The grading system is set up per each individual student, which is perhaps why some German PIM students are shocked when faced with teamwork assignments.

The teachers had to work individually both before and during PIM 2010. The entire focus group agreed that the Finnish and Danish teachers were visibly more used to working in teams. The Finnish and Danish teachers also felt it was more challenging to work with the Lithuanian, Polish and other teachers or guest lecturers. According to the Polish external member, educational institutions in Poland seldom cooperate and work in teams. When they do cooperate with each other, it is only when they feel there is strong a need for it.

Even though all dimensions in this work are discussed relating to the students' intercultural communication, it is also important to include the interaction between teachers. The focus



group discussion members cannot comment on their own behavior without it being too subjective but the other teachers taking part in PIM were discussed. Teamwork within the teachers was also an important factor in determining the success of PIM 2010. There was a challenge with preparation before the study programme as all teachers were separated by distance, forced to communicate online using chatting tools or emails. Because they all represented different countries and cultures, they all came from backgrounds with different teaching methods. The goal of the PIM study programme was not for teachers to use a standard teaching method. However, some organizing and planning was necessary to coordinate the content of the sessions.

## 6.2 Analysis of Individualism vs. Collectivism

Hofstede (2001, 229-235) argues that individualist and collectivist cultures actually help form the personality characteristics and behavioral patterns of individuals. Even though collectivist and individualist behavior is due to personality as the focus group insisted, most likely it has rooted from the culture in which the student has grown up. Hofstede also compares typical classroom scenarios of each culture with how a teacher disciplines the students. As in any other social setting with family or friends, the teacher deals with the student on a group level in front of all others in collectivist cultures. The teacher prefers to deal with a student in a private and confrontational manner in the individualist culture.

Another difference is the purpose behind learning objectives in typical individualist and collectivist cultures. This becomes a key factor for PIM as it attempts to educate students with both individualist and collectivist approaches allowing for the student to take decisions individually and communicate and work better collectively. The PIM study programme, founded by people from Finland and Germany, is more individualist as it strives to prepare students for potential intercultural encounters in working life. It also offers guidance in dealing with new and unfamiliar situations where foreign cultures are involved. The collectivist society sees education as a more one-time process to teach young people how to do one particular task. On the contrary, PIM attempts to prepare students for any scenario in life when having to understand other cultures and new environments.

The key with student teams in such study programmes is that they have been formed in a very random way. The students are purposely mixed by nationality, age, area of study and gender. As in most European working environments people cannot choose their team members and a colleague of a higher position usually puts the team together. The students in PIM were faced with the challenge of trying to cope in mixed teams with people from foreign countries they did not know beforehand, and were all used to different ways of working and communicating.

If German or any other students felt uncomfortable working with teams, it only shows the strong need for skills in working and communicating on intercultural teams.

Cultural value systems have been proven to remain very stable over time by many authors studied by Hofstede (2001, 34). Once again it takes several external forces to influence national cultures over time such as economic changes, trade with other countries, or high developing technology. Some authors on culture believe countries will gradually become more similar over time, and their differences will decrease. Hofstede points out that "culture is learned and not inborn" and his recent work expresses that he does not find it likely that cultures will change or shift, in terms of power distance at least. He refers to the three dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance and individualism versus collectivism having historical reasoning dating back several centuries. However, he predicts that the overall global power distance and uncertainty avoidance may shift with an increase in formal rules as more economic organizations form.

## 7 A Further Discussion on Culture

PIM was very much about respecting people from different countries with different cultures. Unfortunately, the focus group felt that this mission of teaching the students to not only be aware of other cultures but to also respect them was not realized with some students as well as with others. PIM was a very intensive programme and after the two weeks the students were slightly overwhelmed with all the new information, due to both the academic and social psychological stimulation during the two weeks. According to the more experienced representatives of PIM, the true result of taking part in PIM is only visible afterwards, about half a year, when the brain has had the time to process everything learnt and experienced. The ideal time to collect feedback from PIM students would therefore be after six months. The more experienced teachers tell that the aim of PIM is not to give a student a ready package of knowledge but to "plant a seed" in the minds of the students that has the ability to grow continuously with further life experience. This was mentioned earlier in the individualist way of educating as opposed to the collectivist.

## 8 Conclusion

In retrospect, an appropriate research method was chosen for the research question and interest group. Even though the results are not found through a quantitative approach, interesting comparisons with real life experiences and theory are presented successfully. The most common weakness of a case study research is the risk of generalizing the findings for larger populations, as they are often narrow and not relevant for other phenomena. However, some authors indicate that even though case studies cannot be generalized to populations, they can

still be used to test the accuracy of theoretical propositions. By integrating theory through a comparative analysis, some general conclusions can be made. Whether or not there is the need to draw general conclusions from a case study, all authors seem to agree that the research method still provides a certain depth, having a general relevance that can generate new ideas and "produce theoretical conclusions". (Bloor & Wood 2006, 30)

### 8.1 Implications of the Findings

It may have been more scientific to conduct research during PIM and collect direct feedback from students. However, since the students did not amount to a large group, the scope of the findings may not have been sufficient enough to draw any conclusions from. When handing out questionnaires or interviewing people that a researcher has met for the first time, they may not provide truthful answers. Data provided by students themselves may have been biased or not given enough reliable data, as the students themselves cannot reflect on their own experiences while the programme is still ongoing.

The theory on intercultural communication published is still relevant today after the large impact of globalization and the advancement of technology and the media. However, the existing theory cannot always be successfully applied to help predict phenomena. It serves as an important framework for the observations made by staff members before and during PIM 2010. The interesting aspect of the thesis is hence to what extent and up to which point does it no longer represent reality experienced during PIM.

In today's world of globalization and fast developing technology, it becomes clear that national cultures can no longer be referred to or used as stereotypes to understand individuals. Authors after the 1940s already began to argue that national cultures do not help define the differences in behavior of individuals. However, according to the observations made by the focus group members during PIM, a lot of national stereotypical behavior was displayed more than once for all three themes.

After the 1950s, there was a new trend for anthropologists and authors on culture to define culture as something much more complex. This was also a response to societies becoming more complex. As Hofstede (2011, 14) goes through centuries of work written on culture, he talks of the observations of culture being subjective or depending on the "eye of the beholder". With help of the focus group discussion, the advantage in the chosen research method is that the members were all from different cultures and backgrounds. National stereotypes can help in understanding a statistical majority of a population but not all members. It should not be used in predicting the behavior of individuals. Similarly, the observations made during PIM will not help predict the behavior of students from the same country in future study pro-

grammes but they definitely help understand why students behave and communicate in certain ways.

The value of research is therefore reliant on the way the phenomena is observed, analyzed or interpreted. Hofstede (2011, 15) states that researchers should be careful when studying other cultures than their own. There is the risk of applying one's own norms to other individuals, groups or societies. When observing the student, a teacher from a different culture may make assumptions about the student based on their own norms and values. For example, the teacher may think that the student is being rude, showing a lack of respect or acting cold and distant, when in fact that student is acting according to their own values and being what is considered polite and confident in their own culture. In the same way, students from a low power distance country may feel a teacher is being strict, detached or showing a lack of motivation to teach when the teacher is doing what is simply considered appropriate in their own home institution.

In a further discussion on whether or not culture changes, shifts or develops, theory is used extensively to help understand the process. It is mentioned both in the introducing definitions and in the analysis. The focus group refers to cultures changing although true anthropologists would call it shifting in line with the other cultures. One can conclude that cultures evolve and develop over a long period of time such as generations but influences of cultures have changed due to values changing. In some countries, power distance prevents outside influences affecting behavior and values. While in other countries, the lack of power distance allows for young people to form their own culture based on their own groups and experiences.

To conclude the results of the comparison of the observations and theory, the three themes often overlap when attempting to understand intercultural phenomena. It is difficult to make a distinction on which dimension rules the other. The themes were very relevant for the case study and good choices for an interesting focus group discussion. The amount of themes was also sufficient for the size of study.

## 8.2 Major Findings

The students participating in PIM had their own personal attributes as a result of their culture. They also showed their own culture with how they behaved in classroom settings. Even though an own PIM sub-culture was formed in each setting, the focus group members were still able to differentiate between one cultural norm and another.

The first foreign culture was the host country Poland, but also the culture being portrayed by the PIM staff members and teachers. The last foreign culture actually became the one

created within the participating PIM students, all diverse in personalities but all sharing the same fate of taking part in PIM. The tone of the PIM sub-culture had actually already been set through communication prior to the intensive weeks by emails or interviews by teachers.

Power distance is mostly shown through behavior from student to teacher and staff members. It goes hand in hand with respect, which has to do with values. All focus group members were in agreement about the observations made regarding power distance. Some members had different theories or opinions on the root of power distance. There were no extreme or unexpected cases in terms of power distance, although stereotypes were very clear with the observations made.

One of the fundamental aims of PIM 2010 was to make students more aware of other cultures and at the same time influence their behavior in respecting and understanding foreign cultures. By promoting intercultural awareness and improving intercultural communication skills, PIM aimed to alter the participants' own cultures in a way that they learn to understand other foreign cultures better both socially and in a working environment. Some of the participating students may not have the opportunity to have contact with other cultures, either indirectly through media or directly through travel. The intensive programme can be described as a catalyst for the otherwise slow process of "acculturation". (Triandis 1994. 8)

One Danish student was discussed in the focus group, as part of the most interesting observation made by the staff members during PIM. As mentioned in the observations, the teachers expected a certain amount of respect from the students, regardless of the level of power distance in their own home culture. The students were demanded to behave with respect towards both teachers and team members. This Danish student showed the strongest sign of lower power distance and the way of showing respect was different than the majority of students. The student showed enthusiasm through engaging in the lectures and being active in getting to know the teachers.

The focus group felt that power distance is a dimension part of culture that is shifting by decades, and has done so within the lifetime of most of the focus group members. Evidence from authors who have studied work on culture from many centuries suggest the opposite. As revealed in the analysis of power distance, it is a dimension that will shift the least out of the three themes discussed. Regardless of reality or arguments for or against, it is clear that lower power distance countries are the ones able to be more flexible. Differences ten years ago may seem very drastic for older generations, even though their total power distance many years ago remains much lower than most cultures when looking from a global perspective.

On the issue of punctuality, the members of the focus group observed that there were clear differences in values among the PIM students. Theory proves that the definition of punctuality can be interpreted very differently by societies and cultures. PIM lecturers and staff members followed the European Union guidelines for study programmes and what is common in Finnish institutions by expecting students to be on time for lectures. Anything later than one to two minutes was considered as late.

Unlike the previous theme of power distance, a lot of the stereotypes relating to punctuality were not found during PIM. Here the outcome of the discussion on uncertainty avoidance is that the younger generation seems to go against and defy theory written on stereotypes of being punctual. It was rather the countries one would expect to be punctual that disappointed expectations, rather than the other cultures being early. This phenomenon has less to do with national culture and perhaps more to do with the levels of uncertainty avoidance and power distance. As Finns are relatively low on both dimensions, this can be an explanation to their lack of being very punctual.

The Polish representative reminds the focus group of a much more stressed everyday life today compared with 50 years ago. When Hofstede compares values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations, uncertainty avoidance is a dimension which is exactly this. It is a main source of stress in countries with a high level of it.

Finally, the group discusses individualist and collectivist ways of behaving in terms of students working on teams and how they interacted with new people. The students had no influence over who was put on their team for the projects, which is why their cultures and personalities were an obstacle that had to be overcome with the use of intercultural communication. The actual result of the teamwork was not as fruitful to watch as the process of how they communicated or worked together and the teachers assessed their ability to work on teams.

### 8.3 Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

The theory of a new sub-culture being formed is mentioned throughout the focus group. PIM did not only represent a few different national cultures. It clearly had an impact in student's own cultural beliefs and values. The study programme was successful in creating more cultural awareness in the form of students actively considering their own cultures. Even more interesting is the fact that an own PIM classroom culture was created as a result of combining over seven nationalities in the same group.

Ideas for further development include combining a questionnaire sent to all past students that took part in PIM by asking their own lessons learned and observations. For example, a

focus group discussion could be included as an addition to a more quantitative study from over 60 former PIM students.

Another suggestion would be to write a diary during PIM and actively look for evidence from predetermined themes. A research diary or logbook of observations would have provided a lot of more accurate and specific observations for the collecting of data. The data could also be studied based on how the students develop, shift or change in terms of intercultural communication over time. For instance, perhaps reserved Russian students become more open to interacting with teachers or fellow students after a week of participating in PIM. This would increase reliability of observations as the notes could be compared to theory directly, without having to rely on a focus group discussion entirely. The challenge of creating a questionnaire would be deciding on scientific enough questions and the language of the questionnaire would be foreign to most students, which affects the results as questions are interpreted differently. If a student misunderstands a concept in English, for example, the answers to the questionnaires are not accurate and comparable with answers from other students. (Hofstede 2011, 21)

#### 8.4 PIM 2010 from the Perspective of a Staff Member

Working as a staff member to ensure the success of the intensive study programme PIM has provided an opportunity not only to do an internship or Bachelor's thesis on the programme but to also learn and develop one's own intercultural communication. A truly invested staff member or project assistant of PIM helps develop the quality and processes of the programme resulting in higher quality and more expertise. Organizing and coordinating practical arrangements in a foreign country also serves as learning experience within Business Management in an intercultural setting. The PIM study programme has helped many students to progress in their own studies and also benefit the PIM programme to improve each year it takes place. As new staff members have been recruited from different areas of studies, new expertise or skills have been injected into the project. At the same time, old knowledge and feedback has been retained each year through reporting, evaluating and collecting of feedback.

Some of the skills required to manage the role of a project assistant are very close to what is expected from most work places. These skills include finding creative solutions to problems, being able to tolerate daily stress, having problem solving skills in general for practical arrangements, strong self-motivation in sometimes independent tasks, commitment to the role and project by showing ownership of own work, having strong communication skills in English, being comfortable in using computers and Microsoft Office programs, having the ability to take initiatives and work well on teams, and finally the ability to work in multicultural envi-

ronments. In addition to the skills required to be a successful staff member, personality also plays an important part of the job description. It is an advantage if the person is comfortable in front of groups of people, easily makes acquaintances by being open to communication, and has a natural interest in organizing events and managing various activities, often at the same time. There are many diverse activities required by the project in addition to the administrative and organization of work.

The most rewarding part of being a staff member of PIM is observing both students and teachers learn and become more aware of intercultural communication in such a short period of time. Because of the intensive nature of the study programme, participants are drawn closer together, many leaving with contacts and bonds for life. With the help of social media and other communication tools, many PIM students still continue to meet, travel and keep in touch today, two years later.



## References

Bloor, M. & Wood, F. 2006. Sage Publications Ltd: London. Keywords in Qualitative Methods: A Vocabulary of Research Concepts.

Gesteland, R. 2005. Copenhagen Business School Press. Copenhagen: Cross-Cultural Business Behavior: Cross-cultural business behavior : negotiating, selling, sourcing and managing across cultures.

Gibbons, M., Limoges, C., Nowotny, H., Schwartzman, S., Scott, P. & Trow, M. 1994. Sage Publications Ltd: London. The New Production of Knowledge.

Hofstede, G. Sage Publications: USA. Culture's Consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations. 2nd Edition.

Kottak, C. 2005. McGraw Hill: New York. Windows on Humanity.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. 2009. Prentice Hall: New York. Research methods for business students.

Triandis, C. 1994. McGraw Hill: USA. Culture and Social Behavior.

## Publications and Theses

Kähäri, J. & Kotaviita, A. 2011. Laurea UAS Publications: Vantaa. Promoting Intercultural Management for Working Life in the Baltic Sea Region: A Five-Year Project. Thoughts, Experiences and Impact.

Bachelor Thesis: Kirjavainen, S, 2009. Laurea University of Applied Sciences: Kerava. Cultural Chameleons and Teamwork Terminators - Promoting Intercultural Management in the Baltic Sea Region PIM 2009 as Intercultural Teamwork.

Doctoral Thesis: Virtanen, T, 2007. Turun Kauppakorkeakoulu/ Esa Print Tampere: Tampere. Across and Beyond the Bounds of Taste - On Cultural Consumption Patterns in the European Union.

## Electronic Sources

European Union. 2010. Lifelong-Learning-Programme. [WWW document]  
[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm) (Accessed 2.11.10)

PIM. 2010. History. [WWW document].  
 <<http://pimstudies.com/History.html>> (Accessed 7.11.10)

## Focus Group Discussion

Focus Group Discussion with PIM teachers, staff members and student. 29 May 2011. Eck-enförde.

