DEALING WITH CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN INTERNATIONAL EVENT MANAGEMENT

Case: Exchange Student Events at TAMK

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ABSTRACT

Tampereen ammattikorkeakoulu
Tampere University of Applied Sciences
Degree Programme in Tourism

ANNIKA DILLENBURGER:
Dealing with cultural differences in international event management
Case: Exchange student events at TAMK

Bachelor's thesis 52 pages, appendices 6 pages
November 2013

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The purpose of this thesis was to find out how to successfully implement international event management nowadays, by the example of events for international exchange students at TAMK. The target audience in this context consists of event organizers who deal with organizing events for exchange students or international events in general and the goal of the research was to find out what mistakes are made most commonly and give suggestions for how to avoid them.

In order to achieve these goals, data was collected by reading literature of professionals in this topic and by distributing a customer questionnaire to those who have attended international student events in the past. The questionnaire aimed to find out how satisfied the participants were with the planning and execution of the event and what cultural problems could be noticed. The results of the questionnaire were analyzed by using the quantitative analysis method. Several theories from event management and intercultural communication studies will be applied in order to analyze the results of the research, e.g. Communication Resourcefulness Theory, the ABCs of event management and Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

The key results of the questionnaire were, that the attendees of the events are mostly satisfied with the event as such, but less with the behavior of the organizers when it comes to availability for questions and solving problems and the chance to give feedback. When looking at the cultural problems it could be seen that language barriers and the formation of groups from people of the same nationality were the factors that caused most arguments and misunderstandings.

In conclusion it is important for the event organizers to be available and collect feedback, in order to learn from possible mistakes and improve their events in the future. They also have to have a certain level of cross-cultural understanding, to be able to solve difficult situations that can occur during the execution of the event.

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CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

The growing globalisation and people's interest in different countries and cultures also has an effect on modern events, bringing people of different backgrounds together. This can be a great possibility to enrich one's knowledge of other cultures and the experience is interesting and extraordinary. However, when different cultures and nationalities meet there is always a great chance for conflicts and misunderstandings induced by the various values and ways of thinking.

This thesis concentrates on just those difficulties in the so called international event management, with the example of events for exchange students. This involves researching the roots of the conflicts and finding out what are the most common reasons for them to arise. By finding out about the origin of the conflicts it is possible to get a deeper insight in the problem, thus also getting the possibility of coming up with ways of avoiding these conflicts right from the beginning and suggesting solutions that could decrease the problems in the long run in order to keep them to a minimum and improve the execution of international events in the future.

The author is going to research different backgrounds and theories connected to this complex topic and also use the experience of directly involved employees and customers in order to get an authentic image of the current situation in the event management field of expertise.

Chapter 2 of the thesis will explain those approaches and strategies in greater detail.

2   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter has the purpose of presenting the plan of the research on which the thesis is based. It will explain the idea and the significance and social relevance of the topic more closely and introduce the research questions that are supposed to be answered as a result of this thesis. Furthermore the main theories and concepts that are used as a frame will be introduced and explained by the author.

2.1   Research topic

The topic chosen by the author is "dealing with cultural differences in international event management". As this is a very wide topic with a great variety of different aspects, the author narrowed it down by specifying on the case of events organized for exchange students at Tampere University of Applied Sciences. It is a very prevailing topic to research, as through globalisation the international aspect can't be ignored anymore in most situations nowadays. By offering degree programmes to international students and taking part in exchange programmes like ERASMUS many universities have students from all over the world nowadays. This concerns also the event management within the universities. In school festivals and special events that are offered to the visiting exchange students and usually also include local degree students, people from many different backgrounds and cultures are meeting each other to spend time that is supposed to be entertaining and relaxing for everyone involved. (ESN 2013.)

Thus it is extremely important that the harmonic execution of the event is assured already in the planning and organizing process of it. It has to be noted, that there are different kinds of events that can be organized for exchange students. However, as the main part of the exchange students does not take part in any academic events, such as intensive courses or seminars, the focus in this research is on free-time activities and entertaining events like parties or leisure trips. The topic is of big relevance and interest for all university staff and students that are involved with planning international student events, as it is their duty to plan the event in a way that guarantees trouble-free run of the event as a result.

In order to assure this to the guests of the event and to reach the goal of a successful happening, specific aspects must be taken into consideration already from the start. Those will be researched and explained more closely and practically with the help of the research.

The overall objective of this research is to show the different university event planners what are the mistakes that are most commonly made by them, that cause conflicts or troubles during the execution of the event. Possible solutions and ideas will be given in order to support them in their decision making in the future and helping them to improve the quality and group spirit during their international student events.

2.2 Research questions

Two main research questions stand behind the topic of the thesis and are going to be answered by collecting theories, data and information. Both of the questions concentrate on the cultural differences and are a crucial part of being able to give possible suggestions for event organizers in universities in the end.

1) *What are the most common mistakes made in international event management?*
   This question aims to find the biggest risks and factors that influence the problems to occur in the first place as well as the reason for these mistakes to be made.

2) *How can an event for international students be organized successfully?*
   This question aims to give suggestions to the event planners in order for them to know what the most important steps are that need to be taken in order to organize a successful international event for students. Finding out what are the necessary precautions to take in order to avoid a difficult situation to arise in the first place will be another goal of answering these questions.

2.3 Concepts and theories

The two main points the thesis is based on are event management, intercultural communication and cross-cultural understanding. In order to be able to evaluate the research

and analyse the results of the questionnaires in the most effective way, the author uses several different theories of these topics.

2.3.1 Communication Resourcefulness Theory (CRT)

Communication Resourcefulness Theory (CRT) (Spitzberg & Cupach 1984) states that people use three different kinds of resources when communicating with people from other cultures: cognitive, affective and behavioural resources. Cognitive resources are the knowledge of the person to make the decision what kind of behaviour and communication strategy is the best in a certain situation. Affective resources mean the motivation of the individual, making them want to be able to communicate in the right way with people from other cultures. Behavioural resources are the ability to apply the right behaviour or way of communication in a certain situation. In FIGURE 1 this can be seen more clearly. (Reisinger 2009, 50.)

FIGURE 1: Communication Resourcefulness Theory (CRT)

The figure shows how the different resources are used to help people from a certain culture to successfully interact with people from different cultures. However, there are not always all the resources used by one individual, some might have the motivation to talk to a different cultures, but they lack the skill of finding the right behaviour. Especially when people are inexperienced in intercultural encounters those resources might not be well developed, causing difficulties in the beginning. This figure and theory can help to see what mistakes are made by the participants of the research and what are the most common resources used.

Different individuals have different attitudes towards the encounter with a new culture. Some people see it as an interesting challenge that helps them to learn something new, while others are frightened of the new and unknown situation. Again others refuse completely to cooperate and are unwilling to learn to communicate. This can be closely linked with the cultural background of the individual. People from cultures with high-uncertainty avoidance are not willing to learn, while people from low-uncertainty avoidance are open towards new situations. (Reisinger 2009, 50.)

2.3.2 Expectations Theory (ET)

The communication skills and behaviour of an individual in intercultural communication depend on their knowledge and expectation about the other culture and what reaction they expect from the other person when talking to them (Miller & Steinberg 1975). Different aspects like stereotypes, knowledge, beliefs, social roles, etc. influence the expectations they have from their opponent (Berger & Zelditch 1985). Thus, the better they are informed about the culture of their opponent, the better their attitudes towards them is and the less they concentrate on stereotypes and prejudices.

Also self-definition of a person affects their behaviour in a group. If they see themselves as unique and individual people, their communication will be interpersonal, whereas people who see themselves as a part of a group show this in a way of communication called "inter-group" communication. The social status plays an important role as well. It is determined by external factors such as race, gender, attractiveness, etc., expressive factors such as dialect and eye-contact and indicative factors, depending on certain statements the opponent might make about their own background, family, etc. Problems often occur when the expectations of the involved people are not met. This can result in the creation of even more prejudices and stereotypes. (Reisinger 2009, 52-53.)

2.3.3   Cultural Identity Negotiation Theory (CINT)

Cultural Identity Negotiation Theory (CINT) (Collier & Thomas 1988) is built on the observation that people from different cultural backgrounds compare, judge, confirm and negotiate their cultural identities when having a conversation. It argues that individuals negotiate their different norms and values as well as prejudices and stereotypes during the process of intercultural communication. This form of identity negotiation can be helpful for them to learn more about the other culture and understand it better and find out about certain rules and symbols of the other culture by observing and talking rather than directly asking. It is assumed that one individual can have different cultural identities, showing in different aspects of behaviour and attitude. Through intercultural communication they are able to identify with a new cultural group which helps them to behave in an appropriate way towards the opponent and members of this specific cultural group. The Cultural Identity Negotiation Theory originates in the Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner 1978), which argues that every individual wants to face inter-group encounters in order to find positive social identities. (Reisinger 2009, 53-54.)

2.3.4   Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory (AUMT)

Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory (AUMT) (Gudykunst 1988) is based on the anxiety or uncertainty that individuals show when encountering people from other cultural backgrounds. This phenomenon is especially strong when the stage of communication is an early one, meaning the two parties just have met each other and started communicating and also is higher the bigger the differences between the meeting cultures are. It comes from the lack of knowledge about how the other cultures attitude is and what kind of reaction has to be expected. Often the anxiety of a person about meeting and communicating with a person from a different culture is so big, that they stop the conversation at an early stage or try to avoid it completely. However, this is not very supportive in gaining intercultural awareness, as it can cause the building of stereotypes and misunderstandings. In order to be able to communicate in an effective and beneficial way the individual has to overcome the uncertainty. (Reisinger 2009, 57.)

The origins of the AUM theory lie in the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) which says that people try to decrease uncertainty towards other cultures by gaining information about them. Also non-verbal communication methods such as smiling, facial expression, eye contact, etc. as well as liking and finding similarities are a part of this process of reducing uncertainty. (Reisinger 2009, 57.)

According to Berger (1979) there are three different ways in which a person can gain information and reduce uncertainty. The first one is the passive approach, in which information is gathered not by direct communication, but rather by observing the other party personally or by using the help of media sources. Sometimes people also choose to do nothing and wait for the situation to get clearer to them by itself. The second way is the strategy of active approach. The individual tries to get information by asking a third party or another stranger about the cultural group that information is needed about. The third and last approach is the interactive ones in which the people are addressed directly in order to find information about them. (Reisinger 2009, 57.)

2.3.5 Intercultural Adaption Theory (IAT)

Individuals tend to change their way of acting in order to more appropriately fit in to another culture group or background in order to make communication more easily and decrease the chance of encountering misunderstandings. This process is commonly known as adaption to the other culture. Adapting is more difficult if the cultures are very different from each other.

People are adapting to others, which they see as foreign to themselves, through the way they look or speak for example. If another individual is seen as foreign it is assumed that very little or no knowledge is shared between the two parties, which quickly leads to misunderstandings, making the intercultural communication much more difficult or even impossible. (Cai & Rodriguez 1997.)

The Intercultural Adaption Theory (IAT) (Ellingsworth 1988) explains the either adaptive or non-adaptive change in the behaviour of an individual when communicating on an intercultural level. The process in which this happens depends on the goal that was set beforehand or the purpose behind the communication and the desire for it to be suc-

cessful. The adaption can come from both sides, when both parties are motivated to have a successful conversation or be one-sided only. (Reisinger 2009, 59-61.)
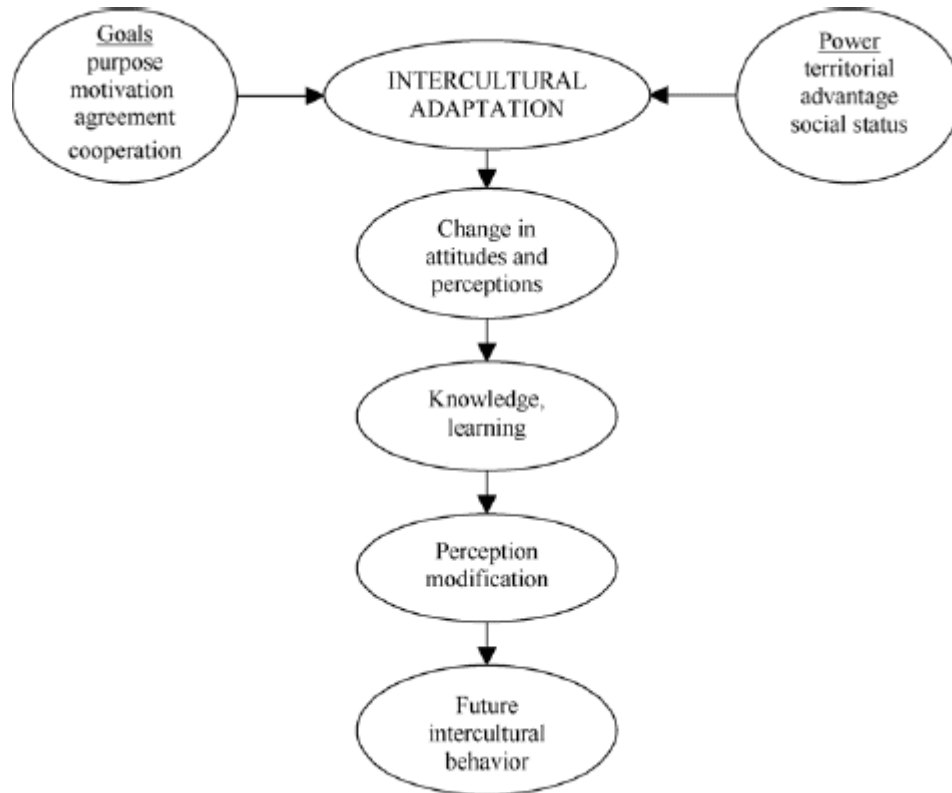
FIGURE 2: Intercultural Adaption Theory (Ellingsworth 1988)

In FIGURE 2 one can see how intercultural adaptation causes development within the individual, from a change in the attitude in the beginning up to a totally new behaviour in intercultural encounters in the future. (Reisinger 2009, 59-61.)

2.3.6   Cultural Dimensions

According to a study of Geert Hofstede (1980) behavioural treats of different cultures can be measured and compared through a model of different dimensions. These dimensions can help to understand certain ways of behaviour that are common in a culture and that makes it differ from others. The cultural dimensions also give an idea about similarities between different countries and cultures. (Jandt 2001.)

The first dimension introduced by Hofstede (1980) is individualism versus collectivism. This dimension illustrates the attitude of people from a certain culture towards working

or acting in a group or alone. For individualistic cultures it is more important what one person accomplished alone and this is what is valued in a person, also when meeting somebody new. In collectivistic cultures on the other hand, there are strong ties between the people in one group, the group counts as most important and accomplishments are seen as a whole. Examples of highly individualistic cultures are the USA, Australia and Great Britain, while countries like Guatemala, Equador and Panama are very low in individualism. (Jandt 2001, 200-201.)

The second dimension is masculinity versus femininity. In many countries and cultures, women are still seen as less important than men, for example when it comes to working life. Certain tasks are seen as men's duty, others as women's duty. However, the masculinity of a country does not necessarily mean that women are treated worse. Masculinity in a culture according to Hofstede mostly concentrates on values, like strength and success, while feminine cultures put a higher value on relationships between humans and helping other people. Countries that are high in the masculinity ranking are Japan, Austria and Venezuela and low-masculinity countries are Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands. (Jandt 2001, 209-212.)

The third of Hofstede's dimensions is power distance. This dimension explains how certain cultures deal with differences between their individuals. In high power distance cultures, those who have a higher status in job or life are to be respected and seen to be above the average by everyone else. This can also be noticed in child education and schools. In high power distance cultures children are not seen as equal human beings, but stand below the adults and have to be very obedient. This is the case in countries like Malaysia or the Philippines. Low power distance countries are for example Austria and Israel. (Jandt 2001, 210-213.)

The fourth dimension is uncertainty avoidance and one of the most relevant ones for this specific research. Countries with a high level of uncertainty avoidance are afraid of change and new circumstances. Things are done the way it has always been and nobody questions this way. This includes the aspect of working life, in which the employees work very hard, even if there might not be so much hurry or a lot of work to do. However, it is important for them, as working hard is how it is supposed to be and they feel uncomfortable scrutinizing this fact. In cultures with low uncertainty avoidance, people do not feel the urge to stick to certain rules and habits as much. Greece, Portugal and

Guatemala are highest in the uncertainty avoidance index of Hofstede (1997), Singapore, Jamaica and Denmark are at the lowest end. (Jandt 2001, 214-216.)

2.3.7 ABCs of event planning crisis management

Although the goal of every event is a satisfied guest, the planner must always be aware that things can go differently than they were planned and know how to behave in such a situation. There can be various crises happening during the planning or execution of an event. In most cases they are rather harmless and minor problems, such as a sudden change in weather, loss of electricity or the similar. But also the possibility of a fire, a medical emergency or even the death of a guest or a staff member has to be considered already in the planning process. (Allen 2003, 176.)

There is a theory helping event managers to know what to do in case of an unexpected and unpleasant event. It is called the ABCs of event planning crisis management. The crises management mode in this case includes three stages:

- **A**nticipation

  Anticipation describes the awareness of the event planner that anything can happen and they have to be prepared for any situation that could possibly arise. It is important to know the most possible risks that exist and have an idea on what precautions to take in order to avoid them already beforehand. If all precautions fail and the crisis sets in, the planner needs to know what steps to take next to keep the problem on a minimum.

- **B**ackup

  Backup is the plan B that should have been made beforehand and that is taken out if some problem or crisis occurs despite all tries of averting. This means knowing what to do in case the weather is too bad for a certain open air event to be taken out for example. Safety signs, enough staff members, tested fire extinguishers and first aid kits should be available in order to keep a potential risky event as safe as possible. Also the preparations for the worst case scenario are part of plan B: who to call for help? How long will it take the auxiliaries to reach the site? How to proceed with the event afterwards?

- **C**risis Management Mode

When something unexpected happens and the crisis management mode actually sets in, it is crucial that all involved staff members are informed about the so called code of conduct, the plan how to behave and what to do in order to avoid chaos or even bigger problems. It is helpful to have one or more crisis teams trained beforehand, that exactly know what their responsibilities are, what to do and who to call without causing alarm within the crowd of other guests. If the site has to be evacuated this should be done by trained personnel as well, to avoid an outburst of panic. (Allen 2003, 176-182.)

2.3.8 Evaluating events

The evaluation of the event is a crucial point of event management, which should be seen as one main priority of the organizers and not be neglected. By evaluating events, the organizers can see what are the strengths and weaknesses and what to improve. If the evaluation is done in the right way, thoroughly and honest, it allows constant improvement from one event to the other. (Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris & McDonnell 2006, 412.)

There are different methods of evaluating an event. Already during the planning phase, the event can be evaluated by carrying out a feasibility study, to see if the goals of the events are reasonable and achievable. In the worst case it can happen already during this stage, that the organizers realize that there is no use in carrying out the event. During the different stages of the implementation of the event, details such as ticket sales can be used as a method of evaluation. Fast sales of the tickets indicate, that the event is successful at least to the extend, that people are interested and drawn to it by the idea itself or the used marketing strategies. Observation during the execution of the event can help to see mistakes right when they happen. The most used way of evaluation is the evaluation after the event has taken place. This is likely to include a survey within the participants in order to collect feedback and find out what can be improved in the customers point of view. (Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris & McDonnell 2006, 414-419.)

2.4   Data and methods

In order to get an appropriate picture of the topic both primary and secondary data will be used and analyzed. The primary data consists of a questionnaire that is used to collect the required data and to get an overview about the situation from the point of view of the people concerned. Questionnaires are often mistakenly called surveys, however, a questionnaire is by the definition of Martin Brett Davies (2007) a way of conducting a survey. Other methods would be for example interviews or the observation of the subject. The author decided to use a questionnaire as it is an effective way of finding out about the opinions, attitudes and behavior of a big group of people, by giving them a variety of questions, that apply to all participants and are easy to understand. (Altinay & Paraskevas 2008, 120-121.)

The questionnaire will be distributed with the help of social media platforms in order to reach many people in a short period of time and ensure their anonymity. The easiest customer group to reach for the purpose of this research is the exchange students coming to Tampere in order to complete a part of their studies here. In Tampere University of Applied Sciences as well as most other universities around Finland different events and happenings are offered to those foreign students and the students attending such events are direct witnesses of what is done wrong and what points could be improved. However, also international students from other universities in and around Tampere will be included in the research, as well as degree students, who are often a part of the events as well and see the problems in a different light. By asking the opinions of international students from different universities it is also possible to see the differences and similarities in the outcomes amongst the schools, making the overall results more multifarious and accurate.

By using primary data the author is able to get a very recent view on things and the chance of analyzing data that is not valid anymore is not given. Also by distributing the questionnaires to the chosen target groups it is assured that only the opinions of people directly involved with international and intercultural events and event management are addressed and no deflected results are arising.

Secondary data is used in form of different articles and other publications of professionals from both event management and tourism enterprise. This helps the author to ana-

lyze the topic from a more professional and advanced kind of view, opening new ways and giving ideas that cannot be achieved by using and analyzing only primary data.

In order to process the collected data the author is planning to use the data processing computer programme Tixel. The analysis method is going to be quantitative, as also indicated by the closed structure of the questionnaires. Quantitative analysis gives a clear statistical picture of the situation which can be logically evaluated by comparing the different numbers and applying the theories that have been introduced earlier in this paper.

2.5   Structure of the thesis

Chapter 3 is dealing with the phenomenon of international event management as such, to give an idea about the whole topic and purpose of the research. The topic will be defined and various aspects connected to it will be explained. It will also give examples of international events to make it picturesque for people who are confronted with the topic for the first time.

Chapter 4 concerns intercultural communication and cross-cultural understanding, which is a crucial point and base to build an international event on. Intercultural communication and its norms in different cultures will be explained more closely.

Chapter 5 is about the questionnaire, which will be distributed amongst the international exchange students coming to Tampere area, as well as Finnish and international degree students. It shows the problems and advantages of the topic from the most important point of view – the one of the customers for whom the events are created in the first place and whose satisfaction is the most important aim in any tourism related procedure.

Chapter 6 contains suggestions about what to improve according to the results of the research that will be shown and analysed in the previous chapters. It will list the main conflict sources and also suggest possible solutions that can be used in order to avoid the conflicts to occur.

Chapter 7 is the final chapter and builds the conclusion, in which all outcomes and results of the research done for the thesis will be shortly explained and the topic brought to a final ending point.

3 INTERNATIONAL EVENT MANAGEMENT

There are many different types and purposes of events and each of them has a different definition. In order to give an overview about the events that are in the main focus of this research, the author has chosen the definition according to Getz (2005): 'To the customer or guest, a special event is an opportunity for a leisure, social or cultural experience outside the normal range of choices or beyond everyday experience.' (Shone & Parry 2010, 4.)

3.1 The process of event planning

Different models and theories can explain the process of event management. However, all of them are very similar in their main points. In the beginning of every event stands the development of an idea. The event planner has to come up with the type of event that he or she wants to plan and figure out the concept and purpose of it. Once the idea of the mission is clear, the second step is to do a feasibility study. During the feasibility study it is important to research points like the profitability of the event and to check if the various requirements of the event can be met. If it is the second time that a similar event is planned and executed, this step can be neglected, as experience will tell if the plan is realistic. (Getz 2005.)

In cases where the event has been held before there is the possibility of proposing new ideas to improve and develop the event in the future. Under certain circumstances these so called bids also have to be taken under a feasibility study to see if they are realistic. If the new event or the bids prove to be feasible the organizer or organizing committee can proceed with developing a more detailed plan for the execution, called the strategic plan. The strategic plan includes for example the mission statement, the aims and objectives of the event, a detailed situation analysis, operational plans for finances, marketing, human resources, etc. The last step in the event planning is the implementation of both the strategic plan and the operational plans it includes. (Allen 2002.)

It is very important not to neglect the evaluation and feedback of the event, even though it is still often forgotten in modern event management. By evaluating and collecting

feedback the event organizers are always informed about what went well and what are possible points for improvement. This can help them to establish a better event in the future. (Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris & McDonnell 2006, 118-134.)

3.2 Study exchange

There are uncountable different kinds of international events that can be organized, all with different themes and purposes. To narrow down the topic and make the research more efficient, the international events that are concerned in this thesis are events for students who are abroad on study exchange.

The urge to learn something new and see other parts of the world, meeting new friends, is a great motivation for many students to go abroad for a longer or shorter period of time during their studies. According to a published study of ERASMUS in the academic year 2011/2012 252.827 students went on a training or study exchange to another country within Europe, which shows an increase of 9% compared to the previous year (European Commission 2013, 6). Additional to that, there are many more students every year that do exchanges outside of Europe or from non-European countries to Europe and the other way around.

Tampere University of Applied Sciences hosted 272 exchange students from all over the world in the academic year 2012/2013 as was stated by one of the university's international coordinators, Kaisa Merilahti (2013).

3.3 Exchange student events at TAMK

While being abroad on exchange is already a great and exciting new experience, this is deepened by the various offers of programme, events, trips and happenings outside the university hours. To give an overview about what kind of different events can be organized for exchange students, the author chose to give examples about what kind of happenings there are at Tampere University of Applied Sciences for the various exchange students every semester.

The responsible organizations for the exchange student events in TAMK are the student union Tamko and its sub-organization Club International Tampere, CLINT. Both Tamko and CLINT arrange events for the exchange students, starting from student parties, over one-day events up to trips that take several days. There is also a close cooperation between the Erasmus Student Networks (ESN) of the other two universities in Tampere: Tampere University of Technology (ESN INTO) and University of Tampere (ESN FINT).

There are 5 big events at TAMK every semester that are organized mainly for the exchange students. The first one to be organized is the city tour in the centre of Tampere. Its purpose is to get to know Tampere and the other exchange student and tutors by walking around the centre in groups and solving different tasks, that require team work. It is free of charge for the participants and includes an after party in the evening where the winners of the tour are announced and rewarded with a price. (CLINT 2013.)

The second event is a two day ferry trip to Sweden's capital Stockholm. The participants spend two nights on the ferry and have additionally about 6 hours in the center of Stockholm to go sightseeing. (CLINT 2013.)

In the middle of the semester the longest trip is organized in cooperation with Aikamatkat travel agency. It is a visa free trip to St. Petersburg, usually by ferry with two nights in a hotel in St. Petersburg which is filled with different activities like a limousine tour through the city, a typical Russian dinner or a boat tour on the many canals of St. Petersburg. (CLINT 2013.)

After the exchange student have seen and got to know the culture of two of the neighbouring countries of Finland, they can also choose to attend an event that is very typical for Finnish people, but a great experience for foreigners: a survival weekend in the forest. The participants get to spend a weekend in a cottage without running water, electricity, internet, computer or other modern comforts in Seitseminen national park. This event is very popular, as the experience is so different from modern life and it requires a lot of teamwork when getting supplies such as water, which binds the participants closely together and creates a lasting common experience. (CLINT 2013.)

To finish the semester there is a farewell party organized to bring the exchange students together for one last time before their departures back to their home countries. During the farewell party there is an election of the best tutor and best exchange student of the semester. (CLINT 2013.)

Apart from that, it is very popular amongst the exchange students to go on trips to Lapland in their free time. Travel agency Aikamatkat organizes those events that last several days and include a lot of programme like reindeer sledge rides and visits to Husky farms, to give the exchange student a great experience in the north of Finland. (Aikamatkat Oy 2012.)

4   INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Since the early beginnings of humanity, communication between humans has played an important role. Countless different definitions can be found for the phenomenon of communication, but there is one famous one about the way of communication between human beings.

> *"The uniqueness of men – the superiority of men in the world of animals – lies not in his ability to perceive ideas, but to perceive that he perceives, and to transfer his perceptions to other's minds through words."*
>
> -Albert Einstein

To put this quote of Albert Einstein into more simple words one can state that communication is the way in which people gain and exchange information in order to reach a shared comprehension of a certain topic. In our daily lives communication plays a role that is much bigger than most people succeed to understand. In fact, it is so common and taken for granted, that its importance is often not noticed. (Rogers & Steinfatt 1999, 113.)

In the intercultural form of communication two or more individuals from different countries and cultural backgrounds are meeting and going through this process of exchanging information. However, due to the differences between cultures there are many ways in which intercultural communication can fail or cause problems. Therefore it is helpful to inform oneself beforehand and be careful with what words are used. Some of the things that should be kept in mind are stated in the explanations below.

4.1   Culture-specific communication

In any form of intercultural encounters it is important to remember different behaviours that might be tied to the different cultures involved, however, it is easily forgotten that different forms of culture-specific behaviour can also occur during intercultural communication. People from different countries have different forms and norms, dos and don'ts when communicating, verbally and non-verbally, and those have to be taken into

consideration at all times in order to avoid misunderstandings or arguments. In the following some of these norms are presented for countries that are likely to meet in an international student event.

4.1.1 Finland

The ways of communication in Finland are very important for this research, as it revolves around exchange students and events based on the example of Finland and many of the participants in the questionnaire are expected to be Finnish.

It is a widely known stereotype, often joked about, that Finns do not like to talk. However, this is not a plain cliché. Finnish people are, in fact, more quiet than people in other parts of Europe or the world. As stated by Ann Seppänen and Mauri Grönroos the concept of small talk is not very popular, which has to be taken into consideration when encountering a meeting with a Finn for the first time. Talking too much, loudly or about things which are not relevant for the situation might not give a good image to the Finnish opponent, especially if both parties have not known each other for a long time or well enough. (Nützi 2011, 58-59.)

4.1.2 Germany

When communicating with other Germans or people from other countries, Germans are often very direct in the way they say things. They do not like to talk around something or embellish what they say. The German communication is also very honest. People rather say the truth than hiding it, even though it might cause difficulties with other people.

When talking, especially in business environment and when the topic concerns something important, Germans usually are very serious and do not like to joke. This often causes people from other nationalities to think that Germans do not have any sense of humour. However this assumption, as are many stereotypes, is just originating from the missing understanding of German communicational pattern. Nevertheless it often causes troubles or misunderstandings, as does the direct communication and honesty, espe-

cially when the other party in communication has a different cultural background with a different style of communication. (Lewis 2006, 225.)

4.1.3 Spain

Spanish people often talk very loudly and enthusiastically and they use their hands a lot to stress what they are saying with gestures. In conversations they tend to chat for a while first, before they get to the actual topic. Spain's importance as a tourist country, its rich history and also cultural aspects are popular topics for this small talk, especially when the opponent does not come from Spain themselves. Personal interests, hobbies and religious beliefs should not be discussed when not knowing each other well, as it can easily insult the other person. In Spain it is seen as an important part of communication to use humour in order to mellow the atmosphere, however it should be avoided to make jokes about someone else, especially if it is one of the parties taking part in the conversation. It is common and accepted to interrupt another person when speaking. (Mikluha 1998, 62-64.)

Another important aspect of Spanish communication is physical closeness. Unlike in many other countries like Finland or Germany, it is seen as being open-hearted and friendly. Spanish people might hug others enthusiastically as a greeting, even if they meet for the first time. This can cause misunderstandings and uncomfortable situations, if the other party does not expect or understand that kind of behaviour. (Mikluha 1998, 64-65.)

4.1.4 Asia

In Asia it is very common to talk around the actual topic for a while before coming to the point. Small talk is often used to soften the atmosphere, for example by talking about music, painting or other forms of arts. Furthermore for Asians it is acceptable to take lies as the truth, if it seems the better option for the harmony of the situation at that point. Honesty is not the most important value during a conversation. This can be seen especially in the habit of not saying "no" straight to the opponents face. It is seen as

rude and impolite. Instead one is expected to talk around the topic as good as possible in order not to offend the person you talk to. (Mikluha 1998, 176-177.)

Also non-verbal communication plays an important role and can cause problems if people are not informed about the norms of Asian communication beforehand. In almost all parts of Asia it can be seen as irritating or even offensive if someone moves their hands to vividly during a conversation or touches their opponent in the face, especially when both parties do not know each other well enough. (Mikluha 1998, 177.)

4.2   The concept of time

Concept of time and the different approaches to it in different cultures is an important part of non-verbal communication. As do words, also this aspect is very likely to cause misunderstandings, if not taken into consideration by both parties. In many countries, like for example Japan or Germany, time and appointments are seen as very important and something that must never be neglected. Especially in Japan this topic is handled very strictly. It is said, that a big amount of Japanese students has never missed the beginning of a class in during their time in school or university, because it is not accepted in Japanese culture. This plays a role also in business life, as people from countries where appointments are very important, can be easily offended by a business partner being late, even if it is only for few minutes. (Rogers & Steinfatt 1999, 181.)

In many countries in southern Europe, as well as in Latin America or the Middle East, people have a different attitude towards time. Appointments are not seen strictly there and it can happen, that somebody comes to a meeting even 1 hour after the time that was agreed one.

5   INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EVENTS IN PRACTICE

The author designed a questionnaire in order to get reliable research results, which are aimed to answer the specific questions that stand behind the research topic. To ensure the relevance of the questionnaire, the questions were designed according to the different theories that were introduces earlier. The questionnaire can be separated in three different parts dealing with different aspects of the topic. In the first part the demographics of the participants, such as age, gender and nationality, were found out. The nationality plays an important role, as the topic is based on cultural issues and many answers can be analysed by using for example Hofstede's cultural dimension theory.

The second part dealt with the actual difficulties in the events in reference to the cultural aspect. The questions in this part were mainly based on theories such as the Communication Resoucefulness Theory (Spitzberg & Cupach 1984) to see what kind of approach people have in intercultural encounters and communication. Also the Expectations Theory (Miller & Steinberg 1975) and the stereotypes that many people have played a role in the questionnaire. The last part of the questionnaire aimed to find out about the organizational aspect of the events and how the organizers dealt with problems and feedback. These questions are based on the ABCs of event planning crisis management (Allen 2003) and the theories of how to evaluate an event successfully (Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris & McDonnell 2006).

The main target group were young adults, who are currently studying or just graduated and who were possibly involved in international student events during the time of their studies. In order to distribute the questionnaire successfully amongst members of the target group, the author used the help of social media platforms, as those are a modern and very effective way to reach many people in a short period of time. Another positive aspect of the online distribution is, that the participants are ensured to answer anonymously, which supports the authenticity of the results. In the following the results of the questionnaire will be presented.

5.1 Demographics of the participants

The questionnaire was answered by a total of 115 people, 41 of which were male, 73 female and one person did not state their gender at all (question 2). 67% of participants were 20-24 years old, which is the most typical age for students (question 1). Question 3 aimed to find out the very important aspect of the nationality. Due to the fact that exchange students played an important role in the research process and also in answering the questionnaire, the nationalities of the participants are various. All nationalities are illustrated in the following pie chart (FIGURE 3).
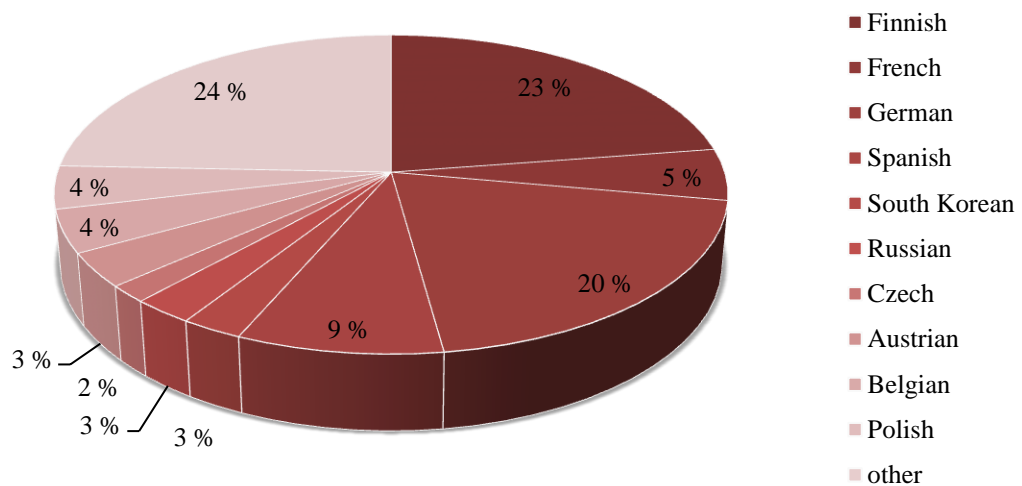
FIGURE 3: Question 3: Nationality of the participants

Even though the main target group was planned to be exchange students, the biggest part of the actual participants who were willing to answer the questionnaire, 23%, was Finnish. However this is easily explainable by the fact that the survey was distributed in Finland and the majority of degree students in Tampere are Finnish. It does not have a big influence on the research and its outcomes, as any nationality's point of view is valuable, as long as they have participated in international events for exchange students. The next bigger groups were German and Spanish, followed by French with 5% of which the biggest part are exchange students.

When looking at the different universities the participants come from (question 4) it can be seen that, as expected, the biggest part comes from TAMK (58%), meaning that they are either degree students of or exchange students at TAMK. The second biggest part, 28% of the participants has stated "other" universities as their home or host university. 9% were from Tampere University of Technology and 5% from the University of Tampere. It was surprising to see in the overall results, that the majority of people who answered were degree students and not exchange students as can be seen in the following table.

5. Status

	Freq.	%
Exchange Student	42	37
Degree Student	73	63
Total	115	100

FIGURE 4: Question 5: Status

Nevertheless 98% of the participants have participated in international student events as was found out in question 6a of the questionnaire, so the status of the student shows to be independent from the event participation in this context. The second part of question 6 dealt with the kind of international student events that were attended by the participants. The answers can be seen in the chart below.
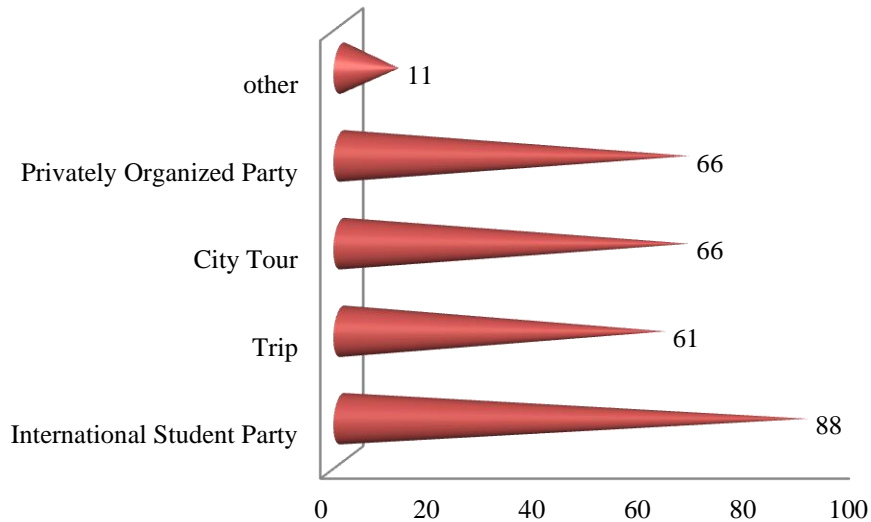
FIGURE 5: Question 6b: What kind of event was attended

The participants were allowed to choose more than one option as their answer and the results are very close to each other, as most of the participants attended all kinds of events that were offered to them. As mentioned earlier, the main focus in the given answer options was lying on the leisure aspect with parties and trips, which can also be seen in the answers. However, the participants were given the chance to mention other events that they attended, which varies from the given choices and nobody mentioned any academic events in this context.

Most of the events that the participants attended were organized by Club International Tampere (62%) or the student union Tamko (52%), as was found out in question 7. This can be explained with the outcome of question 4, showing that the majority of the participants were exchange or degree students from TAMK, so they mostly attend events organized by their own university.

Another important aspect was found out in question 8, asking if the participants of the survey have been involved in organizing international events themselves. This question was important, as it can be expected that the whole attitude and therefore the answers are very different if someone has themselves experienced the organization of an international event and might know the difficulties and troubles that can occur themselves, while people who have not been involved in organizing such events, might not see the risks and answer differently, especially in the answers about the organizational aspect of the events and its evaluation. The results of question 8 showed that almost half of the

participants, 46%, were involved in organizing international events themselves at some point in their life.

5.2   Difficulties and cultural aspect

When asked if they experienced any culture related problems or difficulties during the execution of the international event that they attended (question 9a), over half said that they did not notice any problems (FIGURE 6). However, as the question concentrates on cultural problems, this result does not mean that there have not possibly been other kinds of issues during the events, albeit less relevant for this specific research and therefore not further presented.
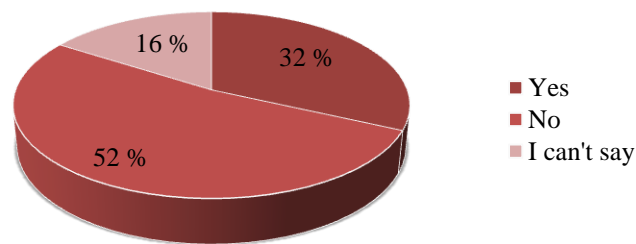
FIGURE 6: Question 9a: Culture-related problems experienced during an event

The deepening second part (9b) of the question was open, meaning that there were no possible choices given so that every participant could state their own opinion in own words. The question aimed to find out what kind of cultural problems had been noticed by the participants, in case the previous question was answered positively. 36 people, everyone who answered question 9a with yes, gave some statements in this question. There was an obvious trend to observe in the answers, even without the possibility of choosing given answers.

The most common problem seemed to have been the language barriers, which were mentioned by 19 people: people not being able to say what they thought or make their point clear due to missing skills of the English language. In this context people from Asian background were mentioned to have the biggest difficulties, as in many Asian countries English is not a big part of secondary education and therefore English skills are often more poorly developed in the Asian area than for example in Europe. For ex-

ample someone wrote to this question "Language barrier (some universities practice much lower level of English, especially Asia)", while others just gave the keywords "language barrier" as an answer.

Also the second significant group of answers dealt with the linguistic aspect, which was often described as the building of "language groups" as stated by 11 people. That means that people from the same country and/or with the same native language are bonding together in order to speak their own language, because it is much easier for them than having to think and express themselves in English, especially if they are not that good in it and are ashamed of making mistakes. However, this behaviour was seen as very negative by the people who brought it up. Especially in the presence of a small group or even only one person with another native language it is very impolite to stick together and speak the own language, as the others will feel excluded and are not able to participate in the conversation. The biggest problems with the bonding was said to occur with French, Spanish and German speaking people, which are again the three biggest groups of nationalities that can be found within the exchange students. For example someone said "[…] but also some "language groups". For instance, French people and Spanish speakers speak their own language. It creates two or three groups at the same party because no one else except them can understand."

One can furthermore notice, that Asians were never mentioned and seemingly, despite their difficulties with the English language, seem to try to speak English, even if other students from the same country are around. The Communication Resourcefulness Theory (CRT) explained in 2.3.1 can be a possible explanation for this observation. In application it shows, that according to the answers, Asians use affective resources in communication with others, meaning that they show great motivation in communication with people from other cultures.

French, Spanish and German people might be able to use behavioural and cognitive resources, by having the knowledge of how they should act in the encounter and how to apply the behaviour. However, they do not use affective resources as much, which is shown in the lacking motivation of intercultural encounters. Another theory applicable in this context is Geert Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions (2.3.6). When looking at Asian countries and the mentioned European countries and their uncertainty avoidance index, it can be seen that even though Japan has the highest one with 92, France

and Spain are not very far behind that with an uncertainty avoidance index of 86. South Korea lies under them with 85, Germany's index is 65 and only after that Thailand, China and other major Asian countries can be found. (Hofstede 1997)

Another problem that was mentioned 9 times was the aspect of time and the different attitude towards it in different cultures. Someone stated: "Problems with punctuality, could not start the sessions on time because some nations." It was furthermore said that Asians usually come to events way in advance, while for example Germans and Finns are very punctual and Spanish and other southern European people come way too late. This causes a variety of problems, from people being angry because they had to wait for "late comers", to more serious problems like the whole schedule of the event being altered due to the different understanding of the starting time. Especially if a certain appointment has to be met, like the departure of a bus for example, it can cause troubles if some of the people come way too late, because they are used to a different time concept from their culture and home country.

To solve this issue it would be of high importance that the people in question adapt their behaviour according to the standards of the culture that they are visiting, in this case Finnish. They would have to understand and realize that things go smoother in Finland, if they use the local concept of time. When looking at the Intercultural Adaption Theory (Ellingsworth, 1988) explained in chapter 2.3.5 one can see that applied to these results, people fail to adapt already in the first steps. This might have different reasons: for example it is possible that they do not see any purpose in adapting to the time concepts as they do not see the troubles caused by it or they lack the motivation and do not want to make any effort in adapting. Another possible reason is, that the exchange students are not here long enough to be able to fully adapt to the new culture. For some the process is even slower than for others, causing them to not adapt at all during their whole stay.

The fourth problem that was reported by 7 people to occur repeatedly was misunderstandings of different kinds, tied to the insufficient knowledge about other cultures. This lead for example to people being insulted because someone said or did something without knowing that it was absolutely inappropriate in the culture of the other party. This was stated for example by someone who said: "[…] misunderstanding, i.e. Spanish people wanted to kiss my Korean friend to say hello and she strongly refused due to her culture and education". The Expectations Theory (Miller & Steinberg 1975) can be ap-

plied to explain this phenomenon. People are not well enough informed about the norms of the other culture and therefore fail to find the right way to address them or behave in the encounters. The unexpected reaction of the other party, for example in the quote shown above, can cause stereotypes to grow. The Spanish in this case might have expected that it shouldn't be a problem to kiss someone as a greeting, as it is very polite and a sign of openness and friendliness in Spain, however they were not informed about the fact that Koreans are very different in this case, which might lead to the mistaken conclusion that Koreans are unfriendly or not social, even though this is not the actual reason for the behaviour.

The next part of the questionnaire aimed on finding connections between the problems that had been noticed and certain nationalities. The following pie chart (FIGURE 7) illustrates the answers to question 11a.
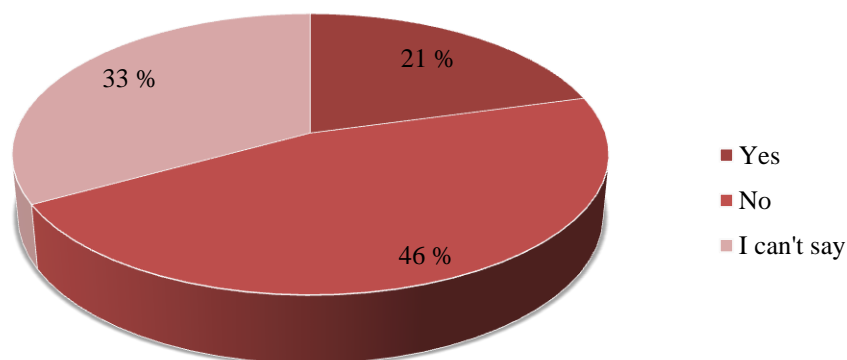
FIGURE 7: Question 11a: Problems tied to specific countries

As can be taken from the chart above, almost half of the people who answered didn't notice any specific countries being involved in occurring problems more than others. One third of the participants did not know for sure and 21% answered with yes. The outcome can be interpreted in that way, that most problems are independent from nationality and cultural background. However, it has to be taken into consideration that some people might have preferred not to answer or did not know how to specify their answer, so it can be assumed that the actual percentage of problems tied to certain nationalities is higher.

In the second step (question 11b) the author's intention was to find out what nationalities were the ones involved in the difficulties, if the previous question was answered with yes. There were some similarities in the answers and the results can be seen in the following chart (FIGURE 8).
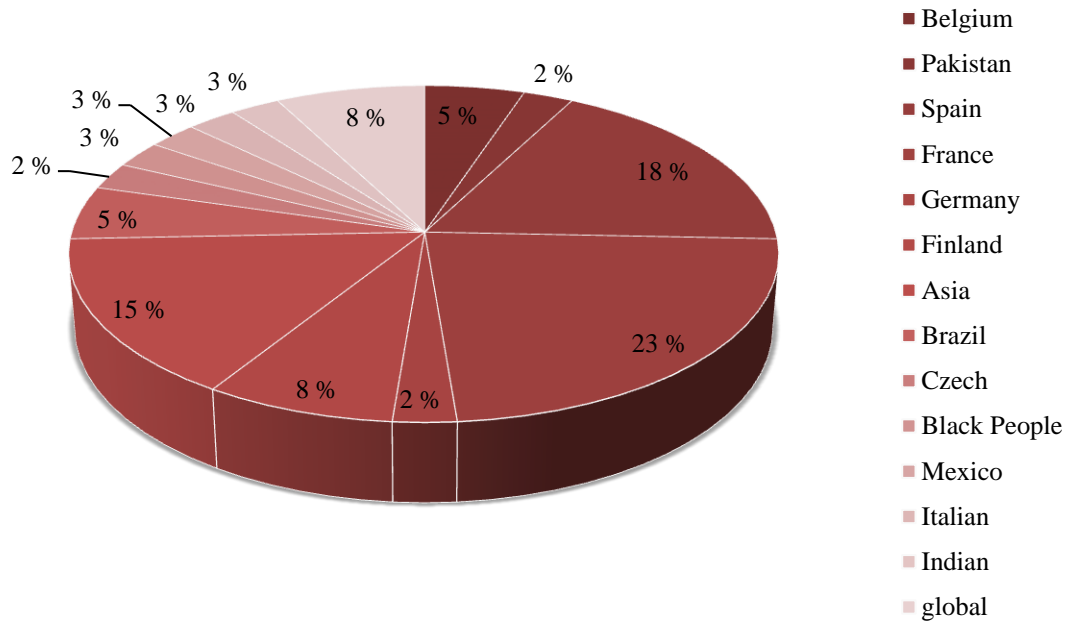
FIGURE 8: Question 11b: Countries tied to problems and difficulties

According to the people participating in the questionnaire used for this research, the biggest problems were observed in connection with people from France (23%), Spain (18%) and Asia (15%). Followed by Finland (8%) and "global" (8%), which means that the problems were not tied to one country in those cases, but to all countries without any noticeable differences.

Again it catches the eye, that the same countries were mentioned that came up already earlier during the questionnaire: French, Spain and Asian countries. The author had decided not to give any answer possibilities in combination with this question in order to not influence the answer of the people when reading the examples. As the answer possibility therefore was held open, some of the participants wrote explanations with their answers. This aspect helped to display the different understandings of problems, as there were very different problems explained. In combination with Asia it was to read

that the problem were the missing language skills, that were discussed already earlier, while French, Spanish and Finnish people were accused of sticking together and building groups, sometimes drinking too much, which leads to arguments and misunderstandings.

In order to find out similarities between the nationality of the answering participant and the nationality in the given answer, the author did a cross-tabulation of questions 3 (nationality of the participant) and question 11b (countries tied to the problems) to get a better overview over the trends in this specific case. The table below (FIGURE 9) shows which nationalities mentioned what countries to be the most connected to possible troubles.

%	FIN	F	DE	E	South Korean	RU	CZ	AU	B	PL	other	Total
Belgium	0	0	20	0	0	-	-	-	-	50	0	9
Pakistan	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	50	0	5
Spain	20	0	40	0	0	-	-	-	-	50	50	32
France	60	0	60	0	100	-	-	-	-	50	17	41
Germany	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	0	17	5
Finland	20	0	20	50	0	-	-	-	-	0	0	14
Asia	40	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	50	50	27
Brazil	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	0	33	9
Czech	0	0	20	0	0	-	-	-	-	0	0	5
Black People	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	0	17	5
Mexico	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	0	17	5
Italian	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	50	0	5
Indian	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	50	0	5
global	0	100	20	50	0	-	-	-	-	0	0	14
Total	140	100	180	100	100					350	200	177
N	5	1	5	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	6	22

FIGURE 9: Cross-tabulation: question 11b: problematic countries/question 3: nationality of participant

The most obvious to see in this table is that people from Russia, Czech Republic, Austria and Belgium did not answer anything, meaning they did not notice any country specific problems. Polish participants in the survey, even though only two answered this question, gave the biggest variety of countries as a source of problems.

In the next step (question 13) the author tried to find out which factors play the most important role and are most likely to lead to difficulties during an international event. The given factors to be evaluated by the participants were age, gender, nationality, language skills, cultural background, personal values, religion, sexual orientation, misunderstandings and influence of alcohol and/or drugs. When looking at the answers to those questions as a whole, one can see that the most problems in the participants' opinion do not come from given factors that the individual can't change like age, gender, nationality, etc.. Instead, factors that can be decided on or influenced directly seem to be more of a problem, for example personal values, misunderstandings and the misuse of alcohol and drugs. This coincides with some of the answers given to question 9b. Someone stated that "Different points of view about appropriate behaviour and different drinking habits" were a problem during events for example.

In the following table (FIGURE 10), one of those factors that are not possible to influence, the gender, was cross-referenced with the nationality of the participants. The clear tendency of the answers is that the gender does not play any role at all when it comes to problems during the events, as it was stated by a 41% of the participants. The only nationality of which all participants didn't see the gender as a problem at all was Russia. For 32% the gender has only a little influence on problems. Only a very small amount of people answered that the gender affected problems much (6%) or even very much (2%).

%	FIN	F	DE	E	South Korean	RU	CZ	AU	BE	PL	other	Total
Not at all	27	50	45	60	33	100	50	50	40	20	37	41
Little	50	0	23	30	67	0	0	25	20	20	37	32
Somewhat	8	33	23	0	0	0	50	25	20	40	15	16
Much	12	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	20	20	4	6
Very much	0	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	2
I can't say	4	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	26	6	22	10	3	3	2	4	5	5	27	113

FIGURE 10: Cross-tabulation: question 13: gender as a factor of problems/ question 3: nationality of participant

Another important part of the questionnaire was analysing the participants' personal attitude towards intercultural encounters (question 15). From the answers to the questions it could be seen, that the majority of people has a very positive and open attitude when it comes to meeting people of different cultures. For example only 13% said they feel uncomfortable when getting together with people from a very different cultural background for the first time (FIGURE 11). The Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory (Gudykunst 1988) can be applied to these results. Most people seem to have a good approach in order to manage the difficulties that can be caused by the lack of knowledge about the other culture. It is not clear if they don't experience any anxiety or uncertainty in the first place or if they just know how to apply the different approaches of the AUMT successfully. Either way it is a very good basis of intercultural communication if there is no uncertainty involved or it is dealt with in the correct way, helping the individual to feel comfortable about the encounter.
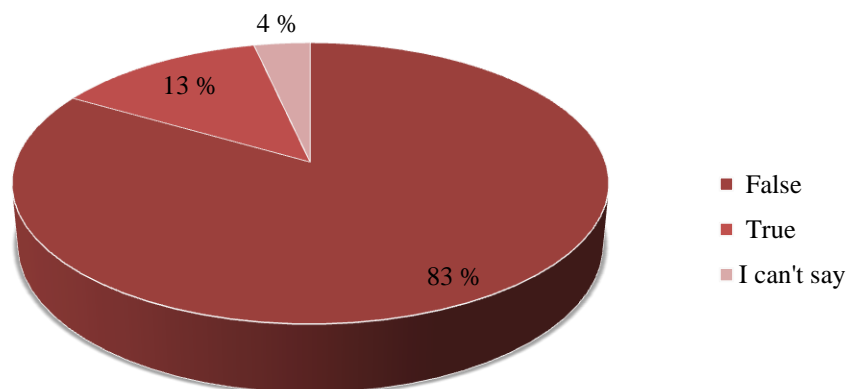

FIGURE 11: Question 15: "I feel uncomfortable when meeting people from a very different culture."

Furthermore 72% stated that they don't judge people from other cultures based on stereotypes before actually getting to know them. Not thinking in stereotypes means not having a fixed expectation of how the opponent will react during the encounter (Berger & Zelditch 1985) and it ensures a more successful intercultural communication, as the participants learn about their opponent by communicating, instead of expecting a certain reaction, as it is stated in Berger's and Zelditch's expectation theory. The chart below shows the clear division of answers to the question if the participants are open and in-

terested in learning about new cultures. As one can see, with 98% almost all of the participants answered positively, while only one person admitted to not be interested in learning about new cultures.
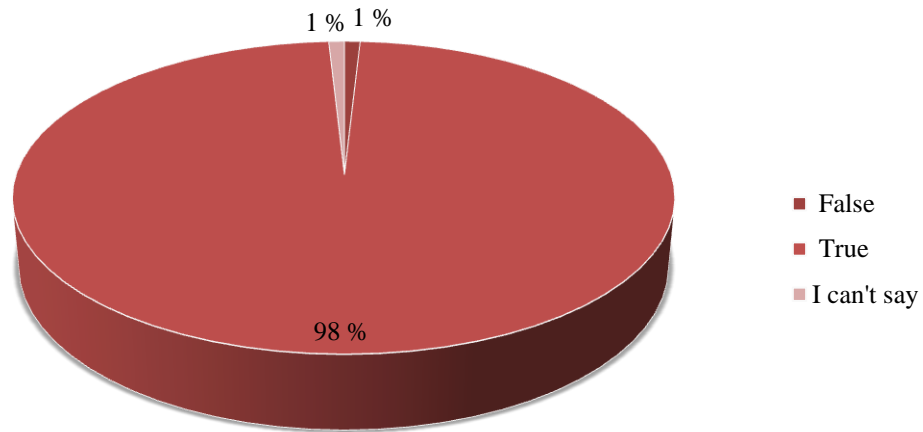
FIGURE 12: Question 15: "I am interested in learning about different cultures."

However, as many of the questions concern the personal attitude, there is a good chance of the answers being distorted by the fact that someone might not have wanted to admit to be less open in intercultural situations, even though the questionnaire was taken out anonymously. Nevertheless the propensity in this case is obvious and shows that most people do in fact want to learn about new cultures, which gives them a very good attitude helping to decrease the chances of problems.

Another example for this is shown in the next table (FIGURE 13). In the columns there are the answers to the question if one would consider themselves judgemental due to stereotypes, the rows show the answers about the motivation to inform oneself about a different culture beforehand.

	[I often judge based on stereotypes before getting to know the person.]		
[I like to inform myself about a certain culture beforehand to avoid making mistakes.]	%	False	True	I can't say
	False	28	43	44
	True	60	52	56
	I can't say	12	4	0
	Total	100	100	100
	N	82	23	9

FIGURE 13: Question 15 cross-reference: Willingness to inform oneself about a culture/judging based on stereotypes

One can see that only 28% of the people who don't judge based on stereotypes answered, that they don't like to inform themselves beforehand, whereas a much bigger part (60%) states that they do. From the people that admitted to judge people based on stereotypes, a much bigger part said of themselves that they don't like to inform themselves beforehand. This is very logical, as stereotypes usually come from the fact that people are not well informed about the other culture, as stereotypes rarely are close to reality. The Expectation Theory (ET) applies also to these results very well as does the Cultural Identity Negotiation Theory (Collier & Thomas 1988), which states that individuals discuss their own culture specific norms as well as possible prejudices and stereotypes during intercultural communication, which plays a great role in learning about a new culture as well.

5.3   Organization and criticism

The third of the parts that the questionnaire can divided into, was designed to reveal possible mistakes that are made already during the organizational process of the event and that could be seen as a basis of the problems to appear during the execution.

The first question concerning this sub-topic, question 10, was closely connected to the question if any problems occurred, which was evaluated earlier in this paper, and had the purpose to find out how the organizers responsible for the events reacted in the case of a cultural problem and if they tried to solve it. The answers are shown in FIGURE 14 below.
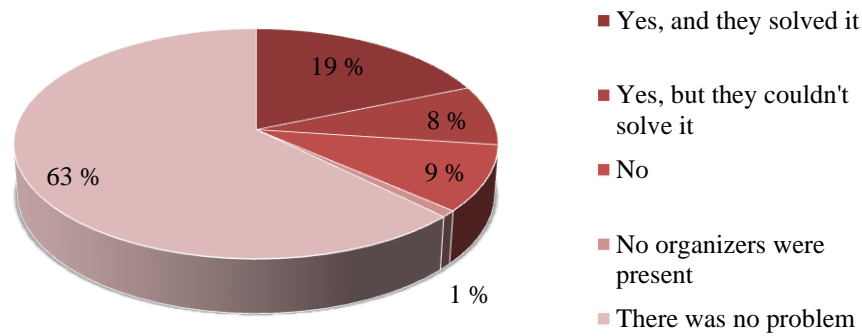
*FIGURE 14: Question 10: "Did the organizers try to solve the problem?"*

Despite the fact that 63% did not notice any problems, it is remarkable to see, that 27% stated that the organizers tried to solve the problem, even though 8% did not succeed in solving it. This suggests that the event organizers are familiar with the idea of the ABCs of event management (Allen 2003). This theory is not only applicable in the case of severe problems, but also smaller problems on a cultural basis can be solved, if the event organizers are prepared for something unexpected to happen and remember to have a plan B in order to solve the situation.

9% said that the organizers did not make any effort to solve the problem and only 1 person (1%) said that there weren't any organizers present during the event. However, the presence in the event is not necessarily enough. In the answers to question 9b, what kind of problems occurred, someone stated that there was "no interest shown by organizers to interact with students", which implies that the organizers were present, but unwilling to help when addressed.

The answers to the question if they were given the chance of giving feedback to the organizers after the event (question 12) were pretty even, with exactly half of the participants stating they could give feedback and the other half saying they were not able to. This is one of the most important aspects in trying to find a solution for successful event management, as the organizers can learn from made mistakes only by collecting feedback and learning what to do better in the future, as it is stated in the theories of event evaluation in chapter 2.3.8.

In question 14 the participants were asked to evaluate the organisation and execution of the international events they attended, in order to find out what the situation in modern international event management is and where the biggest starting points are when trying to improve it. To make it easier both for the participants and the evaluation, specific variables were given and asked to evaluate. Those variables were the type of the event (theme/topic), the information given by the organizers prior to the event, the marketing of the event, the pricing of the event (entry fees, prices for food and beverages, etc.), the transportation to and from the event, the location in which the event took place, the food that was offered, the availability of the organizers and the possibility of giving feed-back.

When analysing the participants evaluation of these variables it was salient to see, that most parts directly concerning the event, like location, theme, pricing, etc. were evaluated to be well organized. However, the aspects that had to do with the organizers, their availability and the chance for feedback, were evaluated to be poor or even very poorly organized by a much bigger amount of the participants. Below you can see charts illustrating the described phenomenon more vividly.
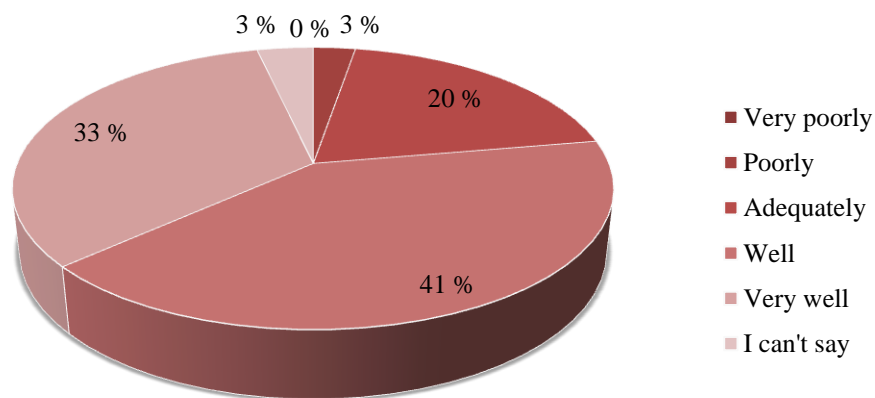
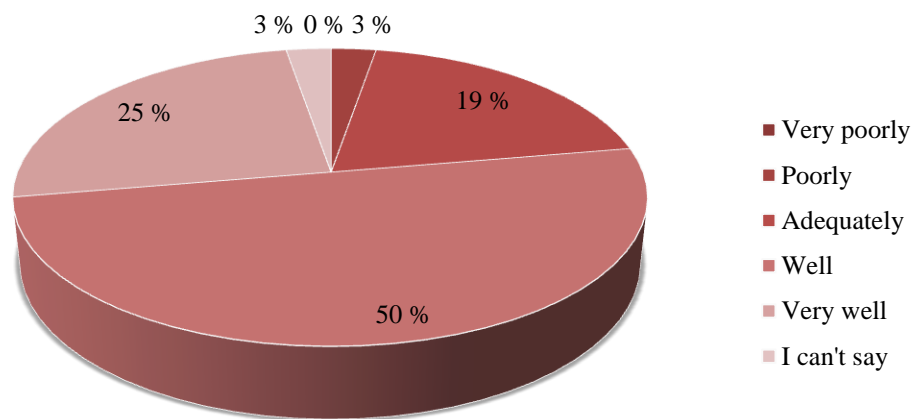*FIGURE 15: Question 14: Evaluation of the idea (theme/topic) of the attended event*

FIGURE 15 shows the evaluation of the idea behind the event. The tendency of the answers s clearly positive: 41% evaluated the idea behind the event as well, 33% even as very well organized. Only a very small part of the participants (3%) found it poorly organized and nobody claimed that it was very poorly organized. Therefore it can be as-

sumed, that the events itself and their topic are not the problem, as people from all different countries and cultural background seemed to be satisfied with this aspect.

The same is noticeable also when looking at the question about the information that was given by the organizers prior to the event (FIGURE 16). In this case half of the answers said that the information given was well and one quarter claimed it was very well. Again, 3% found it poorly and nobody very poorly organized.

FIGURE 16: Question 14: Evaluation of the information given prior to the attended event

FIGURE 17, which is shown below, shows the evaluation of the availability of the organizers during the event. Also in this chart it can be seen, that many people still evaluated this aspect as well or even very well, however, compared to the previous charts a much bigger part evaluated it as adequately or poorly organized and 2% said it was very poorly organized. This is especially remarkable in comparison with the previous FIGURE 16 shown above. Both cases demand the availability and effort of the event organizers, but in FIGURE 16 this only applies for the time before the event is executed. One can guess from those evaluations that the motivation of the event organizers is bigger before the event, but during the event they are less willing to be available for questions or more information.
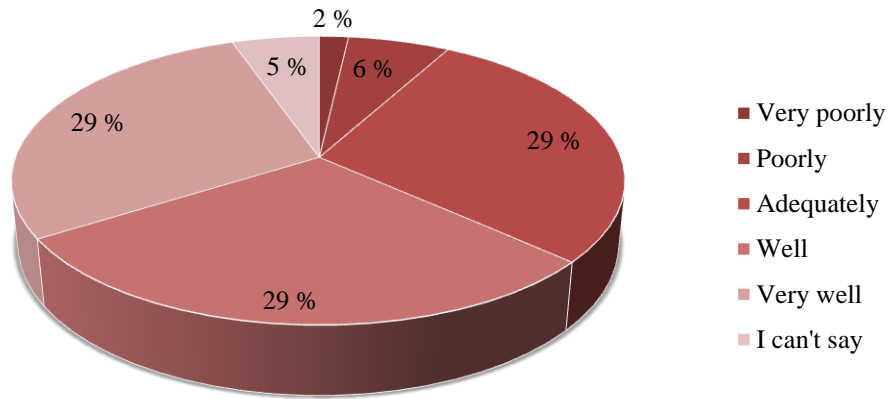
FIGURE 17: Question 14: Availability of the organizers for questions, wishes or problems

FIGURE 18 shows what has been evaluated as seemingly the biggest problem: the possibility of giving feedback. It is not closer determined whether the evaluated feedback possibilities were during or after the event. The changes into the negative are even bigger and more noticeable than in the previous chart. The amount of people evaluating this variable as "very poorly" executed tripled and almost a quarter said that the possibility of giving feedback was poor.
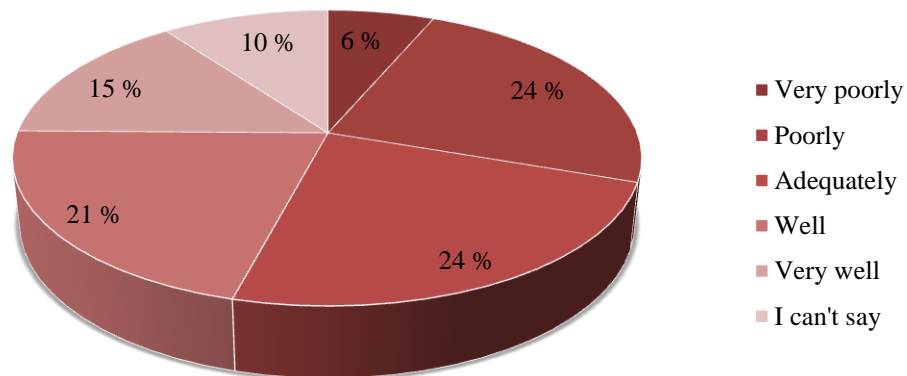
FIGURE 18: Question 14: Possibility of giving feedback

6 SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

With the help of the questionnaire it became clear what the most urgent problems are according to the customers, the participants of the event, and also according to people who have been involved in organizing events themselves (46%). When different cultures meet, there is a big risk of troubles due to misunderstanding. It is the duty of the event organizers to try to avoid such problems and to know how to solve them in case they cannot be prevented. Therefore in order to establish a successful event in an international environment and to ensure its smooth execution, there are some points that event organizers should keep in mind at all times. These suggestions are all based on the problems that were revealed by the questionnaire. To make them clearer, they are divided into different parts, according to the stage of the event.

6.1 Organizational process

One very important point to keep in mind already during the organization of an international event is learning from mistakes made in the past, especially if the organizers have been involved in organizing international events for a longer time. No matter how experienced one is in organizing events, there is almost always an unexpected situation and something going wrong. This should not be seen as failure, but as a starting point for improvement. Therefore, already when starting to plan the event, the organizers should remember what they recognized going wrong in the past, so for the upcoming event they can avoid the same mistake from happening right in the beginning. However, the results of the research showed, that this is not happening or not in a sufficient way, as many of the events are happening every semester for many years already, but there were still significant points that were not satisfactory.

Another problem revealed by the questionnaire was the occasions when misunderstandings occurred due to the big differences between the cultures. This is an aspect that event organizers can try to avoid as well as possible already from the beginning. As they deal with international events on a regular basis, they have to be culturally aware themselves, as they cannot expect all their participants to know about different cultures automatically, especially if they are being abroad for the first time. There are simple

points that can be forgotten, if the organizers haven't informed themselves about the different cultures that attend their events. For example when planning an event that lasts more than one day and participants sleep at the site. For many European or American people it is not a big deal, if they have to sleep in the same room with a person from the other sex for example, while for Asians, this can be a big problem and they might even refuse to do so, due to the values they have been taught from early age. Knowing this beforehand can help avoid an uncomfortable situation later on.

Another point that has to be kept in mind by the responsible people is the concept of time, that was discussed already earlier in this paper (chapter 4.2) and mentioned by many participants of the questionnaire in question 9b. This is relevant for example when planning the starting point of the event. If it is only stated that the event will start at a certain time, one can be sure that some of the people will be there one hour late, not because they don't care, but because it is normal in their own culture. Therefore, when informing the participants about the starting time of the event, it is important to mention to be there some time in advance. It also helps to explain, in a polite and not offensive way, that for the smooth running of the event punctuality is crucial and make clear what kind of norms exist in the country in which the event is organized, in order for people from other cultures to be able to understand better, that they have to come on time.

Information for the participants is an important aspect also in other context than time. There can be some ways of doing something in a certain country, that participants from other cultures are not familiar with. In the author's own observation, while working in the field, this could be seen very clearly during a survival weekend in the Finnish forest. There were only dry toilets available, which is a completely normal circumstance for Finnish people or people who lived in Finland for a longer period of time. However, for some of the participants of the event, this was new and strange, they did not know how to handle it, because they weren't told beforehand. This caused uncomfortable and embarrassing situations for everyone who was attending the event, most of all the organizers. It did not strike their mind that someone might not know and explanations might be needed, because for them it was normal. This example shows how important it is to always think twice when organizing an event, as things that are normal for oneself might be very unfamiliar for somebody else.

Another point to remember in order to avoid problems is food. If there is something served for all of the participants, the event organizers must make sure to ask the participants about what they can eat and what not. This is commonly done to find out about possible food allergies, but often it is forgotten that there also can be people present, whose religion or culture does not allow consuming a certain product. They might forget to mention that to the organizers, because they don't realize that someone might not know it. During the event this can cause uneasy situations, when somebody is left without food because there was no information about what they can eat and what not. This was also a point mentioned by one person in the open question 9b, about the problems they had noticed.

6.2 Execution of the event

During the execution of the event it is crucial that one or more of the organizers are available at any time. No matter how well the planning process went and how many aspects were considered during the process, there is always the risk for something unexpected to happen, that requires the presence of the event organizers to solve it. If they for some reason are not able to be present in person, it is to recommend that they make clear how they can be reached, via email or phone, and that nobody should be hesitating to contact them in case they are needed. The availability of the organizers is not just useful in case something happens, but also if everything goes smoothly. It shows the attendees that the organizers care and are interested in their own work and in how it is going. This creates a better connection between the organizers and participants and can be seen as an aspect of customer relationship management. The research showed, that the organizers are indeed mostly present, but the participants of the events were still not satisfied with their availability in form of the willingness to help.

It is indisputable that the plain presence of the event organizers does not help, if troubles occur, as the results of the questionnaire showed very clearly. They also need to be ready and willing to take the needed steps to solve the difficult situation, which is often easier said than done and did not seem to be the case most of the time according to the participants of the questionnaire. Especially in case of an argument between two or more people it can be difficult to find a way to solve it, without making it escalate even more or getting a part of the argument. It is therefore an important trait of an event or-

ganizer to keep a cool mind and don't let words or actions of others offend them, as they also function as a good example for the participants and therefore under no circumstances should get into an argument themselves. They should neither make the mistake of deliberately or unwittingly taking sides during the attempt of solving the argument. Instead they should use their experience and try to work as a mentor to those who are new and inexperienced in intercultural situations. As they have more experience in the field through planning previous events, they can share their own cultural knowledge with others, by for example explaining to the people why someone acted in a certain way during an argument.

Furthermore it could be seen in the research, that most common problems of the cultural aspect are the language barriers and people speaking the same language sticking together, resulting in an exclusion of the other people. Organizers can help also here, by trying to help finding words, if someone struggles with English language. It can also be helpful and gives a positive image and state of mind if they encourage them to use their English skills more in order to be able to improve them. When noticing a group of people who speak their own language, that others does not understand, the organizers can help by going there and pointing out in a friendly way, that it would be more polite and supportive for the group spirit if they could switch to English, so everyone can take part in their conversation and nobody feels excluded.

As mentioned in the ABCs of event management (Allen 2003) having a plan B is important as well. This does not just concern troubles during the execution like a drastic change of weather or a misplanned schedule, but also troubles of cultural origin. This also includes solving the situation in a way that as little of the uninvolved participants as possible will recognize anything.

6.3   After the event

In order to make sure that the mistakes made during the planning process and execution of the event won't occur again in the future, it is of crucial importance that the event organizers are open to feedback and criticism, as it is also said in the various theories of the event planning process. The questionnaire results showed that only half of the people who attended an international event were able to give feedback to the organizers

afterwards. This number has to increase, because getting feedback is the only way for the organizers to see problems, which are not noticeable from their point of view, but obvious for the participants. Every event is associated with different expectations from both participants and organizers. The organizers know if their own expectations were met when looking at the execution of the event afterwards. However, they cannot know if the expectations of the participants were met as well, unless they find out by collecting feedback from them (Vallo & Häyrinen 2008, 172-173). It is furthermore a very easy way of collecting the opinions of the participants and does not require much time or effort. One can prepare a readymade paper with given questions about the event that the participants can answer. As an even simpler way, also a piece of paper for every participant to note down what they noticed can be appropriate.

Asking for feedback, however, requires that the organizers are also open to it and accept it, even if it is not entirely positively, which is likely to happen. By just collecting, but ignoring it, nothing can improve. It might be hard to accept for event organizers that they made a mistake, especially if it is an obvious one. But as mentioned earlier, this is not a shame but an opportunity. Even though in their own opinion and experience there might be no sense behind a certain point, they have to remember that they organize the events for other people and it should be of the highest priority that the result pleases them.

7   CONCLUSION

The research that was taken out and presented in this paper gives some clear ideas of what the main problems are when dealing with international events. Event organizers are able to create events that are entertaining for their customers, which is important if the events in question are, as in this research, leisure events and not academic ones. Looking at the evaluation of the events by the participants shows that they are mostly very satisfied with what is offered to them. However, the event organizers seem to forget that the planning phase alone is not the only thing to remember. The biggest mistake is not being willing to take action and help anymore once the event is running, even though the organizers are present and could do something. The participants are missing the reliability of the event organizers being willing to answer questions and to solve problems. Also the feedback, which is a very important point in the event managing process, is neglected too much by the responsible people, which causes the same problems to occur during the events to follow.

In order to successfully manage an international event, the organizers must change their behaviour in collecting feedback. They have to be open to criticism and realize where they made mistakes, so they can learn from them and are able to organize more successful events in the future and the lack of feedback possibility implies that this is not the case. For a good event organizer it is important that they are good leaders and have a broad level of intercultural understanding, so that difficult situations can be solved in a fair and calm way that does not offend or discriminate anyone.

Of course in order to determine the problems more exactly and in greater detail, there would be the need for a longer and more thorough research including a wider range of people. However, it can be said conclusively that the international events organized for exchange and degree students are on a good level already, with a good basis which can be used for improvements. If event organizers start collecting feedback and also react to it, there is a good chance that international exchange student events will be even more successful and popular in the future, giving the attendees a unique experience in their host country.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Thesis Questionnaire, International Student Events

International Student Events

I am a third year student of Tourism & Hospitality Management at Tampere University of Applied Sciences and currently writing my thesis on the topic "Dealing with Cultural Differences in International Event Management" with focus on international events for students. In order to get an authentic picture of the current situation in different schools from the students' point of view I would like to ask you to participate in this short and anonymous survey to share your experiences.

Your participation would be highly appreciated and can also help to influence the organisation of student events in the future!

Thank you for your time!

1. Age
- ○ under 20
- ○ 20-24
- ○ 25-30
- ○ over 30

2. Gender
- ○ Male
- ○ Female

3. Nationality
- ○ Finnish
- ○ French
- ○ German
- ○ Spanish
- ○ South Korean
- ○ Russian
- ○ Other: [_____]

4. Current place of study

◉ Tampere University of Applied Sciences

○ Tampere University of Technology

○ University of Tampere

○ HAMK University of Applied Sciences

○ Other: [   ]

5. Status

○ Exchange student

○ Degree student

6 a. Have you attended an international student event?

○ Yes, several times

○ Yes, once

○ No, but I am planning to

○ No, and I am not interested

6 b. If yes, what kind of event was it?

(Choose all fitting answers.)

☐ International Student Party

☐ Trip (St. Petersburg, Stockholm, Tallinn, ...)

☐ City Tour

☐ Privately organized party

☐ Other: [   ]

7. Who organized the event(s) you attended?

(Choose all fitting answers.)

☐ CLINT (Club International Tampere)

☐ Tamko

☐ Other sub-organization of Tamko

☐ ESN FINT

☐ ESN INTO

☐ Other: [   ]

8. Have you been involved in organizing an international event?

○ Yes

○ No

9 a. Have you noticed any kind of culture related problems during the events you attended?

(e.g. discrimination, misunderstandings, language barriers, religious conflicts, etc.)

○ Yes

○ No

○ I can't say

9 b. If yes, please specify.

(e.g. in the organisation, in the execution, between the guests, etc.)

10. Did the organizers try to solve the problem?

○ Yes, and they solved it effectively

○ Yes, but they could not solve it

○ No

○ No organizers were present

○ There was no problem

11 a. Were the difficulties tied to people from specific countries?

○ Yes

○ No

○ I can't say

11 b. If yes, what were the countries?

12. Were you given the chance to give feedback during or after the event?

○ Yes

○ No

13. How much do you think the following factors influence difficulties during events?

	Not at all	Little	Somewhat	Much	very much	I can't say
Age	○	○	○	○	○	○
Gender	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Not at all	Little	Somewhat	Much	very much	I can't say
Nationality	○	○	○	○	○	○
Language skills	○	○	○	○	○	○
Cultural background	○	○	○	○	○	○
Personal values	○	○	○	○	○	○
Religion	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sexual orientation	○	○	○	○	○	○
Misunderstandings	○	○	○	○	○	○
Consumption of alcohol/drugs	○	○	○	○	○	○

14. How well were the events organized/executed in your opinion?

(Give the average for each point if you have attended more than one event.)

	Very poorly	Poorly	Adequately	Well	Very well	I can't say
Idea (theme/topic/type of event)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Information prior to event	○	○	○	○	○	○
Marketing of the event	○	○	○	○	○	○
Prices (entry fee/drink prices/attendance fee/etc.)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Transportation	○	○	○	○	○	○
Location	○	○	○	○	○	○
Food	○	○	○	○	○	○
Availability of the organizers (for questions/wishes/problems)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Possibility of giving feedback	○	○	○	○	○	○

15. How do the following statements apply to you personally?
(During international events as well as in other situations.)

	False	True	I can't say
I feel uncomfortable when meeting people from a very different culture.	○	○	○
I am afraid of misunderstandings due to cultural differences or language barriers.	○	○	○
I often judge based on stereotypes before getting to know the person.	○	○	○
I like to inform myself about a certain culture beforehand to avoid making mistakes.	○	○	○
I have never experienced problems in an intercultural encounter.	○	○	○
I am interested in learning about different cultures.	○	○	○
I prefer being with people from my own country.	○	○	○
I have problems accepting cultural behaviors that vary a lot from my own. (e.g. punctuality, etc.)	○	○	○

	False	True	I can't say
When coming to a country with another culture I have problems adapting to it.	◉	○	○
I have experienced discrimination by others caused by my cultural background.	◉	○	○