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**GUIDANCE IN EUROPE: INTEGRATED RESOURCES AND NETWORKS FOR GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS
FINAL DISSEMINATION CONFERENCE OF THE ERGO-IN-NET PROJECT**

"Intercultural issues"

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All guidance and counselling are considered to be intercultural in the sense that counsellors need to recognise that all of their clients bring their unique personal history and cultures (e.g. gender, social class, religion, language etc.) into the guidance and counselling process. Counsellors and other professionals need intercultural competencies in order to be better able to take into account cultural diversity of their clients. Perhaps the most well-known way in conceptualising intercultural counselling competencies is the one developed by Sue et. al (1992, 1996). They divide the intercultural competencies into three characteristics of a culturally competent counsellor:

1. awareness of his/her own assumptions, values and biases,
2. understanding of the worldview of a culturally different client
3. an ability to develop appropriate intervention strategies and techniques.

Each of these characteristics include the following three dimensions:

1. beliefs and attitudes,
2. knowledge,
3. skills.

The first dimension deals with the counsellor's attitudes and beliefs about racial and ethnic minorities and the need to develop a positive orientation towards multiculturalism. To be able to place oneself in the situation of a person from another culture, one has first to become aware of the effects of one's own culture and values on one's action. The second dimension proposes that the culturally skilled counsellor has specific knowledge of the cultural groups he or she works with, and that he or she understands socio-political influences. The last dimension emphasis specific intervention strategies and techniques needed in working with minority groups.

During recent years, there has been a lively discussion around intercultural competencies needed in the work with immigrants and other minorities. Discussants agree that the foundation of developing intercultural competencies should be the fact that European people (i.e. majority population in Europe) have a tendency of being ethnocentric and there is a need to move beyond such monoculturalism (Sue et al. 1996). On the other hand, several critical comments have also been expressed about the attention given to ethnic minorities only. Framework of Multicultural Counselling Competencies (Sue et al. 1992,1996) is based on extensive research concerning cultural identity, intercultural communication, mental health of minorities, as well as on counselling research. It was originally carried out for counsellors in the United States for typical counselling interactions involving Euro-American counsellor with a client from a different ethnic background. In Europe these competencies are associated to counselling of immigrants. In immigrant counselling one central viewpoint is cultural adaptation and identity development.

Although there are significant individual differences, adaptation appears to be a psychological and social process that progresses in stages, usually lasting as long as a year (depending on the cultural distance of the cultures in contact). Adaptation usually begins with feelings of optimism and even elation. Eventually, these positive feelings give way to frustration, tension, and anxiety as individuals are unable to effectively interact with their new environment.

Recently, several training programmes, courses and methods have been designed to teach Multicultural Counselling Competencies to counsellor trainees. Although the single-course approach is most often implemented in training, most researches agree that the single course approach does not provide the intercultural training needed to become proficient or competent (see eg. Tomlinson-Clarke 2000).

Torres et al. (1997) interviewed intercultural counselling experts and faculty focus groups about ways of infusing multiculturalism to the whole counsellor education programme. According to this study there is a variety of ways for enabling this infusion, as follows:

1. A Multiculturalism-centred programme, in which the theoretical and philosophical cores of the programme, as well as its content, are rooted in multicultural counselling perspectives.
2. An independent curriculum, in which multicultural counselling content and training is a complementary component, but only one of several reciprocally interacting curriculum paradigms.
3. A specialist degree, which conceives multicultural counselling as a separate training area.
4. A Multicultural menu, in which students choose multicultural counselling coursework from the catalogue menu. Courses may be selected from such diverse areas as Black and Asian studies, women's studies and anthropology.
5. An infused programme, Multicultural counselling content is infused into all existing coursework.
6. Special courses. In this programme one or more independent multicultural counselling courses are offered.
7. Coursework and multicultural experiences. In this type of infusion multicultural counselling workshops, speakers or events supplement instruction offered in the formal coursework of the curriculum (Torres et al. 1997).

An interesting example of a counsellor training curriculum can be the training curriculum at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland in which multiculturalism as well as diversity issues have been emphasised within the themes of personal awareness, societal change and multiprofessional collaboration. The approach is to develop diversity-sensitive collaborative counselling competencies including theoretical base as well as reflection from various counselling contexts such as labour administration, social and health care, special schools and different EU-funded projects dealing with social inclusion. (<http://www.jyu.fi/indexeng.shtml>)

Another worth mentioning example can be the Kit "Intercultural Awareness" elaborated by Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Policy within Ergo-in-Net project. The main aim of the kit is to present information on five project countries that can be useful and valuable for career counsellors in helping his/her clients to solve problems they encounter after moving to another country. Such knowledge will help counsellors to understand a foreigner from a country with different customs or history and also will allow them to assist their compatriots intending to go abroad in fast adaptation to a different culture. In the content of Kit "Intercultural Awareness" practitioners will find, among others, following issues:

1. Cultural heritage in historical context i.e. most important facts in the history of the nation, national minorities, ethnic conflicts, tolerance to dissimilarity, etc.
2. Culturally established attitudes and behaviours i.e. attitude to one's family, single parents, divorce, having children, etc.
3. Useful intercultural communication tips. (www.ergoinnet.net)

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