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Cross-Border Bridge-Building

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ABSTRACT
In this paper, we describe the experience of common workshops to train modest but operational cross-border managers for project and disaster management. The mixed small groups produce models or simulate emergencies together. The participants learn by doing to think and behave differently in order to act better.

Keywords
International workshops, cross-cultural competence, openness, readiness, operability, transferability

INTRODUCTION
We are two universities just 10 miles from each other, in the same valley but in two different countries with different languages, structures and Cultures: France and Germany.

We want our students to become efficient cross-border actors. In terms of competence, they have to learn a lot to be able to work together and first of all the language of the partner. They must overcome prejudices, grasp different administrative realities, barriers and tasks and understand what different points of view imply [1].

Geography determines cross-border co-operation: the nearer the border, the higher the number of fields of activity potentially concerned. Neighbors, who luckily begin to talk to each other, begin to realize that, above all that divides, there are a lot of things which are or could be common between them making a synergy possible [2].

Some public or private executives or expatriates claim their duty to co-operate across borders but are not always convinced that cross-border co-operation serves the interest of their own careers and act accordingly. On this respect too, geography plays an evident role: every superior business, administrative or political level perceives less clearly or even fears cross-border co-operation. And one has to master three levels of Culture; the national, the corporate and the professional one.

To meet these goals, the learning process is cognitive, affective and social for one learns with the head, with the heart and with the others. Keeping this in mind, our common seminars are aimed to develop openness, tact, competence, dynamism and efficient readiness for the participants.

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IMPACT
Since the beginning to this scheme of co-operation in the fall of 2005, there have always been 4 sessions per semester alternatively on the French and on the German site at almost no marginal cost.

This means 24 sessions until July 2008 for 662 participants in total, 312 studying in France, 350 studying in Germany. And the flow goes on: it was not a short-lived experience but is part of the curriculum and means (ECTS) credits. More than 90 % of the participants were satisfied or very satisfied with the added value of the seminars for them.

So the participants experience something very useful as well academically as humanly: they realize that they have more in themselves, that they may undertake more and reach synergy through a constructive conjunction of their differences in the way to handle challenges. This is a great asset for their professional future [3].

The trainers learn a lot too. Colleagues come, see and get inspiration. And there has been an official reward for the trainers; The “Prize of the Land of Saar for the year 2006 for the Quality of Academic Training” with an amount of 20,000.00 EUR (about 30,000.00 USD).

LET’S BUILD BRIDGES TOGETHER
This presentation has no conclusion because cross-border commitment doesn’t come to an end but is a continuous process. These common training sessions are aimed to prepare modest but operational people who will be tomorrow’s actors of cross-border co-operation. They have to be able to meet the cross-cultural challenges of their professional as well as of their private lives. Indeed, integrated high level and prestigious curricula are tailored for people who will go far away and please trainers who love travelling abroad. Our approach is more humble.

Our experience brings a sense of oneself (ego) and of a know-how that is new and mutual for it not only brings together people from both sides of the border but also coming new colleagues. A cross-border view of issues such as project management, logistics, trade, production etc. is a big asset. The simulations of interdependencies especially in the case of emergencies are of great value. The conception, production and sale of a car through a real, self created team is a highlight. And typically, the highly symbol-laden conception, budgeting and realisation of bridges mean a deep and lasting experience.

These well sensitised and trained managers will give life and dynamism to the cross-border socio-economic fabric because they will be active and efficient tiers in local private firms and public bodies. Their experience of a strong competence and of an efficient cross-border team spirit is of great value for themselves and for the area. And they can even get the opportunity to take off for assignments overseas as the careers of alumni already underline it.

In this sense, one may use the following figure to visualize the message of this presentation:

We are building a cross-border bridge above prejudices, resignation, fears, ignorance and pusillananimity. This gives mutual enrichment to the participants and better perspectives for their professional, social and private life.

So we give strong orientation to our students in order for them to find their own ways to serve the Common Good. This quality approach strives to deliver a message of dynamism and hope for the coming generation, preparing a sustainable future. On the banks of the Saar, one doesn’t speak of cross-border co-operation, one lives it and it shows. People think and act better. We remember Goethe:

“As Knowledge is not enough, one has to implement;
Will is not enough, one also has to act!” [4]

REFERENCES
1. Cf. J.F. Oberlin (1740-1826), Alsatian minister, teacher and philanthropist, with his “Image of Reconciliation”
2. This being the original sense of the anthem: “Germany above everything” [Deutschland über alles] implying: which divides us. But today, almost everybody (even in Germany) thinks it means “Germany above everyone”. So, only the 3rd strophe is used: “Unity and Law and Liberty” [Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit].
4. “Es ist nicht genug zu wissen, man muss auch anwenden; Es ist nicht genug zu wollen, man muss auch tun!” (Goethe)