REPORT ON THE CONFERENCE
"INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION – OUTLINES OF AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE"

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Intercultural communication is an offspring of several parents. Originally created from various mother disciplines in the USA, it developed in the German speaking countries only as late as in the mid-1980s, according to which dates it should now have reached adolescence. But has it really reached the maturity and autonomy to function as an independent academic discipline? This was the central issue of a conference to which the Institut Für Interkulturelle Kommunikation of Munich University had invited scholars and university teachers into the bavarian capital.

Several contributions presented the discipline of Intercultural Communication from the perspective of individual mother disciplines such as psychology (Alexander Thomas, Regensburg), ethnology (Alois Moosmüller, Munich), linguistics and speech communication (Dominic Busch, Frankfurt/O) and education (Jürgen Henze, Ursula Nguyen, Berlin). In addition, several different approaches to teaching Intercultural Communication at German universities were presented: at the University of Jena as, “Intercultural Business Communication” (Jürgen Bolten), at Munich University as the full-sized curriculum, “Intercultural Communication” (Juliana Roth) as well as, “Intercultural Communication” in the Munich elite network East European Studies (Galina Koptelzewa), furthermore at the University of Saarbrücken in the Department of Romanic Culture Studies as a programme on “Intercultural Media Communication” (Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink).

The papers and discussions revealed very specific orientations, theories and methodologies of the discipline, and
insofar Intercultural Communication can be called a discipline without a unified paradigm. But what are the criteria for turning a subject taught at universities into a proper academic discipline? If we take the criteria identified by Jürgen Straub (Chemnitz) and Astrid Ertelt-Vieth (Berlin) in their respective papers it will take, so the consensus of the ensuing discussions, years or even decades before Intercultural Communication can reach such a position.

A fundamental characteristic of the discipline is, in any case, its interdisciplinary orientation. However, the conference showed that there is need for more action: On the one hand it is necessary to scrutinize the mother disciplines as to what they can contribute to the further development of Intercultural Communication, while on the other hand their stronger integration and with that the utilisation of overlap can produce valuable insights and synergies.

The Internet Portal for Intercultural Learning (www.interkulturelles-portal.de) created at Jena University by Jürgen Bolten and presented by him is an excellent example for synergies deriving from stronger interdisciplinary integration. Its development was facilitated by his experience with e-learning and blended learning. The Portal intends to put together all courses in Intercultural Communication taught at German universities and to function as a hinge for the participating disciplines. It presents an information-platform on ongoing and planned research projects and offers the participating universities an opportunity to mutually enhance their teaching capacities by acquiring courses from other institutes. By virtue of this the Portal can open a virtual space which will make visible the whole variety of the discipline Intercultural Communication and will eventually contribute to its consolidation through exchange and cooperation.

In the meeting of European Intercultural Communication Committee which was held in Munich at November 12, 2004, Prof. Dr. Asker Kartarı from Ankara University was chosen president of the Committee which will start from July 2005 and last for two years. It was decided at the meeting that the congress and meeting in 2006 will be held in Ankara. The subject of the Congress is "Intercultural Communication in Europe".