

Shared Apartment Led by Landlord or Landlady as a Building Block of Intercultural Integration

Life-Mentoring for international Students

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Goal

Integration of students into the German society / job market

Strategies

A landlord-led or landlady-led shared living leads to a / an

- **Increase** of the intercultural, neighborly, regional, and social integration
- **Strengthening** of respect and tolerance for each other through living conditions similar to family life in an intercultural context
- **Acquirement** of problem and conflict solving strategies
- **individual**, goal-oriented assistance for up to 2 years
- **daily training** of the German language

Target Group

Young adults, students with an intercultural background

Background

By living together in an intercultural community with a family-similar structure cultural differences (the “foreign” or the “familiar”) can immediately and concretely be addressed. Through this the competences such as intercultural tolerance and openness for experiences are trained and strengthened daily.

The intercultural and family-similar community receives new impulses from external through the intercultural circle of friends of each housemate. Regular (possibly religious) festivals, get-togethers, eating together and international cooking strengthen the living together of the intercultural family-similar shared apartment.

The role as a life-mentor of the landlady/landlord, that is operated according to the lean management approach (responsibility for oneself, responsibility for the community), leads to a continuous improvement of the intercultural shared apartment.

Regular meetings, introduction of pilot schemes according to the PDCA-cycle, introduction of common standards, e.g. a common shared internet based communication platform, rules of living together, integration of housemates into the process, lead to an increased trust and expand the intercultural horizon.

The offer of regular individual supervision/mentoring (goal development/life planning) supports the target-oriented integration of the respective housemate into the German society/job market.

Because language is power, it is a standard of the intercultural family-similar shared apartment that every housemate’s level of German increases so far that they can manage everyday life at the university and in the German society (government agencies, doctors, medical insurance, banks etc.) on their own. The goal of the shared apartment is that German becomes the main language and English takes a supporting role and helps during the transition period.

This approach leads to the effects of intercultural empowerment of Thomas (2017):

- Increase of the chance of **conflict free communication**, interaction and cooperation with partners of different cultural backgrounds.
- Reduction of **loss of control** and therewith connected irritation, uncertainty, infuriation and break-off of social contacts.

- Gain of chances to **implement effectively one's own and professional resources** such as one's knowledge, experiences, expertise, in the cooperation with foreign partners.
- Creation of requirements for **productive collaboration** in multicultural teams.

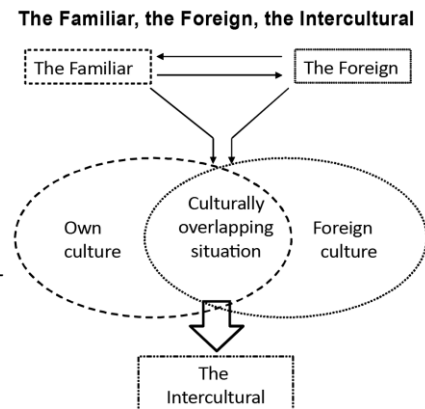
Specially for the target group of engineers Thomas devises two additional effects of intercultural empowerment (that can be adapted for other professions):

- Enabling the **discovery and utilization of cultural differences** for the creation of technical and engineering-scientific synergies and innovations. E.g. during product development.
- Setup of an in-depth **understanding** of the effects of cultural influences on the development, design, utilization, and handling of technology, tasks for engineers and findings of scientists.

The concept of intercultural empowerment of Thomas (2017) is based on three assumptions:

- Conflicts caused by culturally overlapping situations are difficult to get rid of because these processes happen automatically, i.e. below the threshold of consciousness.
- Together with the observation of unexpected behavior by a partner an explanation-process (attribution-process) is activated to find an applicable and satisfactory explanation for this behavior.
- The task is now to find, understand, respect, and deal productively with the special features of the intercultural while maintaining the familiar and the foreign.

The classification of the terms "Familiar", "Foreign" and "Intercultural" by Thomas are displayed in the adjacent graphic.



The Familiar, the Foreign, the Intercultural (according to Thomas 2014, p. 9)

Study 2020 Intercultural Integration during Studies

With the work of Thomas (2017) and the description of the term culture by the UNESCO (1982) as a basis we are performing the study „Intercultural Integration during Studies?“. In a culturally overlapping situation partners with different cultural backgrounds encounter each other. The orientation (standards) of one's own culture are confronted with the different cultural orientation (standards) of the foreign partner. This creates irritation, unsettledness and loss of control on both sides. This process can also happen automatically or subconsciously. This activates the attribution-processes in the partners. These are influenced by the context of the situation, such as the familiarity of the surroundings or support offers and personal qualities like one's personality or intercultural competence (q.v. Feldtheorie, Lewin, K., 1963).

Using a questionnaire we asked students with a foreign origin that have been living in Germany for at least three months or lived in Germany for at least three months to self-assess. The goal of this study is to provide current knowledge on how successful intercultural integration of students in an intercultural context can work.

Further Information

- about the "landlord/landlady led shared apartment as a building block of intercultural integration"
- about the study "Intercultural Integration during Studies"

can be obtained from Dipl.-Ing. Elisabeth Gärtner (gaertner@gaertner-partner.net).

References:

- Thomas, A. (2017): Technik und Kultur, essentials". Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH. Wiesbaden.
- UNESCO (1982): https://www.unesco.de/sites/default/files/2018-03/1982_Erkl%C3%A4rung_von_Mexiko.pdf
- Kurt Lewin: Feldtheorie in den Sozialwissenschaften. Bern 1963.