

T.I.P.S. T-learning to Improve Professional Skills for Intercultural dialogue

**Consorzio FOR.COM - Formazione per la Comunicazione
and
IRIV - Institute for Research and Information on Volunteering¹**

TIPS “T-learning to Improve Professional Skills for intercultural dialogue” is a two-year² multilateral project co-funded by the Leonardo da Vinci programme within the EU Lifelong Learning Programme. The TIPS multi-actor partnership is led by the Italian Interuniversity Consortium FOR.COM and includes six organizations from five European countries: Austria (Auxilium), France (IRIV), Greece (Hellenic Open University), Italy (Gruppo Pragma and FOR.COM) and Poland (Tischner European University).

The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union designated the year 2008 as the “European Year of Intercultural Dialogue” to promote intercultural dialogue as a process to deal with complex cultural environments and to benefit from a diverse and dynamic society. In response to this initiative, the TIPS project realized a **training course** for people interested in working in the field of cultural mediation in order to learn valuable skills and competences for working and interacting with migrants and immigrants.

The TIPS European partner countries were selected according to territorial criteria, each representing and reflecting different migration flows and integration practices in Europe. The Mediterranean partners, France, Greece and Italy, represent countries where migrant flows, often illegal and primarily from Africa, are frequent and relevant. The Austrian partner exemplifies a country where the majority of immigrants are completely integrated into the workforce. The Polish partner, a new EU member State, illustrates a country currently facing the challenges of migration, dealing mainly with asylum seekers and refugees. The added value of the multi-country partnership resides in each country's contribution to both the definition and identification of cultural mediators' training needs and the exchange of experiences among final beneficiaries through the TIPS virtual community.

In order for the TIPS partnership to develop a training programme that effectively addresses professional cultural mediators' training needs, a **comparative research** was conducted on cultural mediators and professionals working in cultural mediation: “an analysis to identify the professional role of the mediator and his/her training needs through the examination and assessment of different situations” in all five European countries involved in the project. The research team led by Iriv conducted a desk research (analysis of relevant reviews, press articles and statistical data) completed by focus groups and interviews with cultural mediators that helped provide a basis for the course training material. The research was conducted during a consultation among cultural mediators in France and Italy and through the collection of significant case studies from all partner countries (16 in France, 10 in Italy, 10 in Poland, 3 in Greece and 2 in Austria). The research pointed out the differences among legislative and educational frameworks in Europe and therefore, was the key element to help the TIPS pedagogical team define the final version of the training programme in terms of modules and contents. A comparative research report was produced by IRIV on the basis of the different national reports provided by the five countries involved.

The TIPS project designed and developed the unique **T-learning** methodology especially for social workers or professionals interested in cultural mediation who need up-to-date, on-the-job training to enhance their everyday activities at the workplace. The TIPS T-learning methodology integrates three

¹ Dr Bénédicte Halba, Iriv, Paris, October 2009.
² November 2007 to October 2009

different tools: the personal computer (E-learning), mobile phone (M-learning) and television (TV-learning). Each platform allows course participants to customize their own personalized training paths

based on their own specific availability, learning styles and training needs. Trainees are able to learn directly in their working environment and receive “on-the-job” training, thanks to the portable feature of the e-learning and mobile platforms, creating a “learning-by- doing” approach integrated with a “work based learning” method. The intention behind mixing the three systems is to continually support cultural mediators’ activities, deliver up-to-date information and ensure continuity between work and training. In addition, all trainees have the opportunity to join the TIPS European Virtual Community, via chat and forum on the e-learning platform, where ideas and experiences can be shared and discussed among course participants and professionals.

Background

The European Union is a pluralistic society enriched by a variety of cultural and social traditions, which will become even more diverse in the future. The influx of immigrants is continuously growing in Europe and therefore, integration has become a key issue for most European countries. In recent years, intercultural dialogue has greatly impacted the professional role and responsibilities of social workers and professionals working with migrants and immigrants in various sectors and consequently has become a transversal priority of European Union policies.

While integration is the primarily role of Member States, governments share this responsibility with civil society notably at local level where integration measures have been implemented. The key to successful integration is the establishment of micro-level actions based on partnerships between all the many actors who need to be involved: regional and local authorities, political leaders, education providers, healthcare, social welfare, the police, the media, social partners, non-governmental organizations and migrants themselves and their associations.

As remarked by the European Commission, “Two processes are critical to improving immigrants’ outcomes: the elimination of inequalities and the acquisition of competences. These challenges are the heart of integration policies in Europe”³. Each member state and the European Union as a whole, therefore, has to develop skills and professional competences related to immigrants needs focusing on issues of acceptance, both behavioral, historical and cultural, social integration and diversity management. Many professional figures have developed around these priorities.

In this perspective, **cultural mediators** play a key role in migrants’ everyday life and enhancing their integration in host societies. They intervene between institutions and migrants where their main tasks are to: facilitate communication and mutual understanding between immigrants and hosting countries, provide professional consultancy to families and associations of immigrants and orientate migrants towards targeted facilities and services. The profession of cultural mediator is relatively new and developed on the basis of informal and non formal learning and personal and professional experience. The TIPS t-learning methodology addresses the needs of these professionals by providing continuous on-the-job training, supported by the latest technology and fostering customized learning. The main objective of the TIPS project is to identify and develop specific skills and competences for cultural mediators in order to facilitate the integration of migrants in their everyday life⁴.

T-learning approach

Cultural mediators require training that will provide them with key information and customized answers to very case specific issues. In many cases, cultural mediators must answer quickly to the growing demands of migrants in various fields. The best way to be prepared in these situations, therefore, is to have easy access to legal information and up-to-date information in the specific field.

³ Niessen (Jan), Schibel (Yongmi), MPG, Handbook on Integration for policy-makers and practitioners, European Commission, Directorate general for Justice, freedom and Security, Second edition, May 2007

⁴ Halba (Bénédicte), Institute for Research and Information on Volunteering, *Lifelong learning : a key issue for Migration, Migrants and professionals working with them*, Sofia, June 2008

In response to these training needs, the TIPS T-learning approach, integrating the three learning platforms (E-learning, mobile learning and TV-learning), provides a professional learning environment

and customized training programme for social workers and people interested in cultural mediation. The T-learning platform allows TIPS trainees to learn useful skills online and join the European Virtual Community, a social software network group of professionals from different countries who can discuss and exchange ideas, experiences and knowledge regarding cultural mediation and immigration issues.

The TIPS didactic methodology was developed according to two goals:

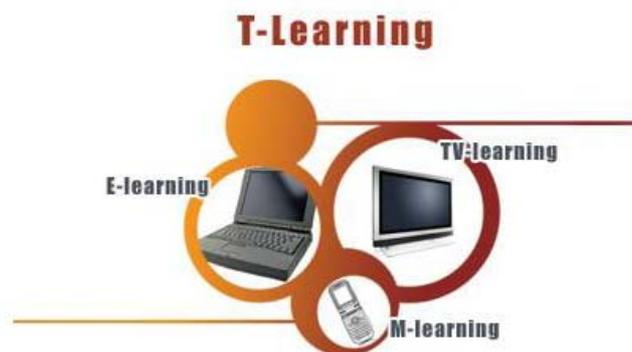
- exploiting the benefits fostered by the integration of distance and digital devices
- maximizing the benefits of each specific tool (E-learning platform, TV platform, mobile platform)

Different course contents, also referred to as "Learning Objects", were designed especially for each tool according to its specific technological features.

The **E-learning platform** delivers the core curriculum or main Learning Objects of the course featuring audio lessons, slides, quizzes and lecture notes, as well as social software tools such as Chat, Virtual Classroom, Forum, Agenda and Announcements. The Virtual Classroom, a synchronous teaching tool, allows trainees and teachers to interact and conduct lessons in a virtual learning environment.

The **M-Learning** platform, consenting trainees to learn anytime, anywhere, features learning objects and tools such as: "Mobile Learning Pills" - mini audio-videos highlighting the main topics of course contents, glossary - a collection of useful terms with their respective definitions relating to cultural mediation, phrasebook - a repository of the most important phrases and expressions translated into thirteen languages in order to help the mediator better communicate with immigrants in their native language and e-book - providing information about the cultural and traditions of seven major countries that immigrate to Europe.

The **TV-Learning platform** is accessible through the television allowing users to benefit from high quality images, movies and audio. Course participants browse the TV-platform using a remote control to access different IPTV videos featuring interviews with professional cultural mediators and relevant case studies.



TIPS course: "Practicing and Enhancing Cultural mediation in a Pluralistic Europe"

The TIPS course: "Practicing and Enhancing Cultural mediation in a Pluralistic Europe" on the T-learning system was experimented by 100 participants from five European countries: 27 from France 25 from Greece, 21 from Italy, 20 from Poland and 7 from Austria. The TIPS Course officially started in February 2009 and ended in August 2009.

TIPS course participants were selected among an identified "European Target Group" comprising of social workers and people interested in working in cultural mediation. The selection criteria, agreed upon by the partnership, required candidates to be highly motivated to learn and improve skills

relating to cultural mediation and have an intermediate level of English, basic computer skills, a personal computer with Internet access (ADSL or higher) and a mobile phone with Internet access (supporting S.Operative Symbian S60 or Windows Mobile 2005).

TIPS Centers for course participants were established in the different partner countries providing access to the TV-learning platform or IPTV, mobile phone for the m-learning platform and computers with ADSL Internet connection.

The course is divided into 5 modules:

Module 1: "*Introduction to the TIPS course*", providing practical information on how to use the three learning platforms.

Module 2: "*Cultural Mediation: A Professional Profile*" exploring the profile and code of conduct of the cultural mediator.

Module 3: "*The Psychology of Cultural Mediation*" presenting the basic psychology, theories and areas of application of cultural mediation.

Module 4: "*National and European Legislation*" giving a general overview of the legal framework in the European Union, Austria, France, Greece, Italy and Poland.

Module 5: "*Cultural Mediation: Fields of Application*" examining the role of cultural mediation in different fields and in facilitating the integration of immigrants into their host country.

TIPS training course results

The profile statistics of the 100 TIPS trainees were as follows:

-76 females, 24 males

-Average age 28

-18 trainees have nationality other than the country where they live

-36 students, average age 25

-64 working professionals, average age 30, mainly employed in the following fields: cultural mediation, social work and other related fields working with foreign citizens, refugees, immigrants etc, education or international organization or volunteer sector.

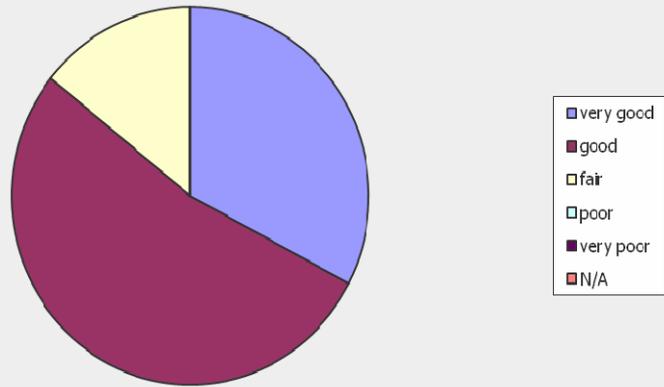
An evaluation of the TIPS Course was conducted in the final phase of the experimentation. Evaluation questionnaires were distributed in July 2009 to the trainees and tutors/teachers involved in the training course from each partner country.

63 aspects of the course were assessed and received an overall positive rating.

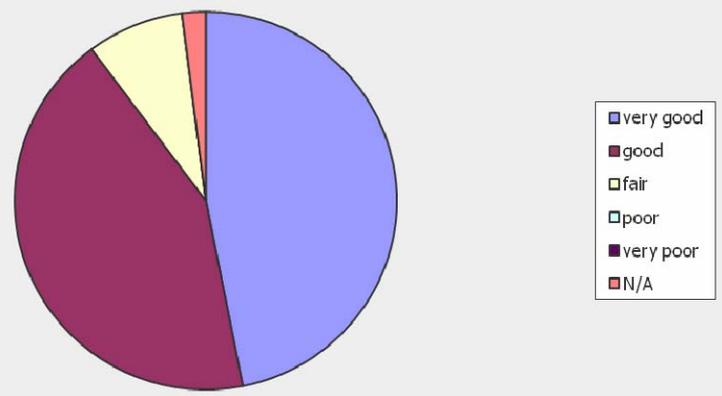
32 items were favorably rated by >75% of the trainees, 27 items were favorably rated by >50% of the trainees and only 4 items received positive ratings from <50% of the trainees.

Some of the major evaluation results were as follows:

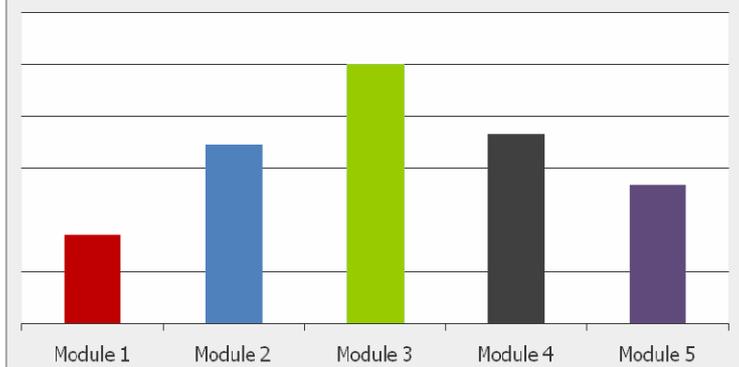
1. Overall relevance of the course content to your daily needs



9. Overall content quality of the course materials



32.2. In regard to the coverage of your personal training needs, which module do you like best?



33. Would you recommend the T.I.P.S. course to others?

