



# International partnership and intercultural interaction

## interaction in the activity of public organizations

(by experience in seminars for Belarusian NGOs)

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During the past two years we have participated in development and holding of a number of seminars for Belarusian NGOs, which subjects were dedicated to international partnership and intercultural interaction. In this article we would like to summarize and analyze the experience gained and to attract the readers' attention to importance of relationship between "content and form" of such educational events. We think that to a great degree their success is determined exactly by happy combination of these two components.

Representatives of public organization of different kind (women, educational, social, cultural, sanatory rehabilitation, sport, etc.), that had different experienced in international partnership. Therefore we count on interactive interaction between participants which could encourage them to show their initiatives – when everyone working for

everyone works for himself/herself. In the context of methodology the attention is paid to different forms and methods of group work. It is particularly efficient in mini-groups, as a rule the majority of the students who responded to our questionnaire noticed this.

There are two subject areas in the programmes of our seminars tightly connected to one another: international partnership and intercultural interaction (see Annex 1). The emphases were placed in such a way that to make the participants examine the content through the perspective of their own experience on the one hand, and on the other hand – through practicing real situations and attitudes to other people's experience.

Already at the first stage of the seminar it is important "to build a bridge" to the subject field of the seminar. Using the method "The Time Line" (another method title is "My story")<sup>1</sup> the first experience of international partnership and intercultural interaction is made actual: its meaning and effects, both at the personal and organizational levels. Then using the method "The Partnership Cartography" (work in small groups according to a given scheme – see table 1) one of the key questions about motivation is discussed: what do public organizations need international cooperation for? Work in mini-groups is organized in four sectors: "We want", "They want" (partners are meant), "We can give", "They can give".

Table 1. Partnership cartography

We want	They want
We can give	They can give

\* Лабода С., Азарко Д. Межкультурное образование и международное партнерство в деятельности общественных организаций // "Адукатар", №3(6), 2005 – С. 9–15.

<sup>1</sup> The description for this method's variants see:

Velichko V.V., Dergai A.V., Karpievich D.V., Savchik O.M. Intercultural Education at School. Minsk, 2001. – pp. 96–98.

Ideas, Means and Work in the Field of Intercultural Education of Adult and Youth: Study collection / European Youth Campaign Against Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Intolerance "All Equal, All Different". Strasburg: European youth center – p. 242.

While filling-in “The Partnership Cartography” and discussing the gained results the participants came to the conclusion that some our motives are congruent with the partners' motives and it could be a nice key to the mutual understanding. But cooperation and partnership are excluded or impeded when we can not give our partners what they want and get what we need from them. When

there is no interlinks between the blocks located diagonally from each other (“We want” – “They can give” and “They want” – “We can give”), partnership is hardly possible. Analyzing organizations' needs and possibilities in each specific case it is possible to say if cooperation between these organizations is possible in general.

The seminar results' based scheme

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>We want</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaining experience (both in activity and in the field of NGOs' management)</li> <li>• Creation of positive image and strengthening of organization's influence, advertising</li> <li>• To have common information space and informational campaign</li> <li>• International interactions while solving global problems</li> <li>• Financial support to activity</li> <li>• To set exchange cultures, traditions (travels), etc.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>They want</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International interactions while solving global problems</li> <li>• General information space</li> <li>• Joint conscientious work</li> <li>• Reliable partner</li> <li>• To invest means in a benefit perspective</li> <li>• To promote democratization, development of active civil consciousness</li> <li>• To raise social level to interact on equal terms</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>We can give</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our experience and ideas</li> <li>• Space for self-realization</li> <li>• Active cooperation</li> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Human resources, etc.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>They can give</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial and technical support</li> <li>• A network of contacts at international level</li> <li>• To promote organization and its projects</li> <li>• To promote education</li> <li>• Ideas and technologies of programmes (for example, educational), etc.</li> </ul>

Having determined what public organizations need international partnership for, we come up to the next information block: in what way it is possible to build international cooperation, what competences are needed, how to set communication correctly, what problems are arisen often and how it is possible to solve them. To deal with these questions we use the “**Case-study**” technique<sup>2</sup>. We started with the “cases” that describe problem or even negative situations in practices of international cooperation (we splitted the group into three sub-groups and each studied its own case). Three situations were interesting and described reality. There is one as a sample (see next page)

Work in mini-groups and follow-up situation analysis could be so well-grounded and significant for participants that this block would require more time that it had been envisaged before. It is important that the participants could themselves define those negative moments that do not promote international cooperation and come to relevant conclusions.

Then on the contrast “**from negative to positive**” we offer to read a text about history of successful cooperation. The text was read individually using “**filters**”<sup>3</sup> and then discussed by everybody according to an algorithm specified by them. The result of the first day can be in an aggregated list of recommendations, worked out on a common circle – what to do to ensure successful partnership and what should be avoided.

<sup>2</sup> For detailed information on main principals of the technique application see: Marina Malinina. Case-study technique in informal education. Aducatar, #2/2004 – pp. 2–8.

<sup>3</sup> The description of this method's variants can be also found in the following sources: Professional Secrets of a Trainer (from experience within non-formal education in the third sector) / executive editor Elena Karpievich, Vladislav Velichko. Sankt-Peterburg, 2003. – p. 233.  
D. Kretu Motivation of Schoolchildren at the Lesson / Peremena, vol.4, #2. – p. 23.



**Sample**

The representatives of the youth initiatives from Vitebsk (M) applied to a German public organization (N) dealing with international youth exchanges between CIS countries with an offer to cooperate. In their message they pointed out that purposeful and active young people – students of the departments of creative arts in the Vitebsk colleges belong to the group, they are eager to receive a group of German young people and schedule their stay in Vitebsk. The message was optimistic and won the recipient's favor, therefore members of the German organization started Internet communication with the Belarusian students.

Being very experienced in implementation of such programmes the German organization decided to secure itself and sent two representatives on a mission to Vitebsk to meet possible partners on the spot and discuss the details of the future exchange. A respective e-mail was sent to the leader of Belarusian group (it is needed to be mentioned that correspondence was done only with him, his e-mails he signed as Nikolai). Nikolai replied that it was a good idea and then the terms of arrival of the German partners were coordinated. As the student group did not have legal position of public organization and could not send official invitation to the German partners they decided to issue tourism visas. They came to agreement that Nikolai would meet them at the Vitebsk railway station holding a nameboard with the German organization name.

One of the first oddities started in Minsk, where the Germans should change train to Vitebsk. An attempt to talk to Nikolai failed, as they were answered they had dialed a wrong number (Nikolai gave it the day before). The Germans made their mind to proceed hoping that technical misunderstanding happened. Information on the train and arrival date was given to Nikolai in advance.

When the Germans arrived to Vitebsk and came out of the train they saw neither nameboard, no Nikolai. Having spent half an hour at the platform they went to a local hotel and left Vitebsk next day.

On coming back to Germany they found an e-mail from Nikolai, he apologized and explained that he had not managed to meet them. Ingenuousness of such explanation caused regrettable smile and disappointment.

**The situation analysis questions:**

1. Is there a problem? What is it?
2. What are reasons for this problem?
3. Is there a positive side? What is it?
4. What could facilitate problem-solving?

**Some conclusions the seminar's participants came to**

What is needed to be done?	What should be avoided?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to make each other interested</li> <li>• to speak (or be eager to speak) partner's language</li> <li>• to study traditions, culture of partner's country</li> <li>• be honest in partnership (+ frankness)</li> <li>• to define goals and objectives of partnership (own interests, partner's interests)</li> <li>• To keep the word, be responsible</li> <li>• to be initiative</li> <li>• to keep on regular communication</li> <li>• to have the complete information about partner, his/her cooperation priorities</li> <li>• to create a team on international cooperation in the organization and to ensure its mobility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breach of human (moral) norms</li> <li>• Top-heavy requirements and expectations</li> <li>• Consumer attitude</li> <li>• Mixture of personal and professional attitudes</li> <li>• The "driven" position</li> </ul>

It should be also noted that at key stages of work we make definite steps to summarize and formulate conclusions-recommendations. With this purpose the additional theoretical materials are used at the seminar, they are brought together into "covering package" and designed for teach-yourself, they are followed-up by brief comments. They can be systemized and brought together according to

the "portfolio" principle: the seminar participants are given the file folders with questions, schemes, theme articles and other kinds of additional materials inside. There is also space to make notes, remarks and drafts of valuable thoughts (own or others), etc. With the help of "portfolio" a participant can fix self-standing and monitor own content development at the seminar<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> See more detailed information about "portfolio": Professional Secrets of a Trainer (from experience within non-formal education in the third sector) / executive editor Elena Karpievich, Vladislav Velichko. Sankt-Peterburg, 2003. – pp. 51–52.

At the second day the important role is given to a block for working with experts in the programme. The questions to the experts within the frames of the announced subject - “Existing conditions and perspectives for development of international partnership of Belarusian public organizations” – treat a problem of the third sector activity mainly via international partnership issue. To our mind this block is highly demanded by participants. As a rule Belarusian specialists greatly experienced in international cooperation were experts, and we also invited representatives of foreign organizations who viewed their opinions on possibilities and perspectives of cooperation with the Belarusian NGOs. International character of the expert group helps to increase, makes deeper and more precise the seminar content on many practical issues.

We worked over intercultural interaction again with the help of the “Case-study” technique but in simplified way and less serious situations were selected<sup>5</sup>. In spite of some curiosity of the observed cases they could stir up the participants' experience and brought them to a number of important conclusions, we used the **Model of development of intercultural sensitivity** on Milton J. Bennett<sup>6</sup>.

Milton J. Bennett considers intercultural understanding as individual process and divided this continuum at the level of personal development in identification and acceptance of differences of cultural differences. Development of intercultural sensitivity means development of ability to identify and accept differences in perception of cultures in the world. It passes through the following stages from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism:

**Ethnocentrism**

**Ethnorelativism**

1	2	3	4	5	6
Denial	Defense	Minimization	Acceptance	Adaptation	Integration

**Denial** – complete denial of other kinds of human being.

**Example:** *black slaves were treated not as humans.*

**Defense** – others are recognized, but with a strong enmity and negative feelings against them. The differences are considered to be a danger for their own group. The negative aims and prejudice to other groups take place.

**Example:** *prejudices to the Jews in the second world war.*

**Minimization** – others are allowed with account of minimizing differences between groups.

**Example:** *“We all are God's children”. The problem is that it means “All people are the same as I am”, in reality it sounds – “We all are children of God but **my** God”.*

**Acceptance** – acceptance of others via respecting differences in behavior and values.

**Example:** *bilingual schools.*

**Adaptation** – complete respect and adaptation to a human behavior, specified by cultural context.

**Example:** *parallel using of churches by religious ceremonies of representatives of different religious: Hinduism and Buddhism.*

**Integration** – absorption and integration of some aspects in behavior and values of others into the culture but support to own culture.

**Example:** *integration of words, phrases from other culture, some peculiarities in clothes or meals, etc.*

<sup>5</sup> Cases source: Kalachjov I.I. The Youth and Polycultural Education at Colleges in Belarus. Minsk, 2003. – p. 160.

<sup>6</sup> The site information [www.salto-youth.net](http://www.salto-youth.net)



This model can be extrapolated onto the scheme **“Steps of intercultural education”** on Groschen/Leenen (see Appendix 2). If time allows it is possible to conduct interactive simulation game **“Culture of three colors”** to improve this block.

The numerous researches of cultures' interactions testify that content and results of various intercultural contacts significantly depend on participants' ability to understand each other and come to agreement which is mainly defined by ethnical culture of each interacting side, the folk's psychology, values spread in this or that culture. In cultural anthropology these interactions between different cultures got a name “intercultural communication”, which means

exchange between two or more cultures and their activity's products carried out in different forms. This exchange can be done both in politics and in personal communication in households, family, informal contacts<sup>7</sup>.

To come to content concluding of the second day of the seminar we used the technique **“Silent discussion”**<sup>8</sup>. The participants were offered to define barriers and possibilities in development of international cooperation of the Belarusian public organizations. In fact the discussion came beyond the frames of “silent one”, as it happened exactly at the level of comments and attitudes to results gained – two posters, which catalyzed content and sometimes emotional discussion already at common circle.

### Some results of the seminar participants

#### Silent discussion

There are following **BARRIERS** in setting international partnership for the Belarusian NGO:

- No foreign language
- Lack of finance and inability to find ways how to get it
- No information on contact opportunities
- No cooperation between the Belarusian NGOs
- Isolation of an NGO on “itself” and unwillingness to work “in pairs”
- No real acting system of NGOs' coordination in the country. We need such a system now. We are isolated and we need to learn to unite.
- Project literacy
- What do you mean?
- First of all, a lack of skills to write application was meant.
- When there is an idea, which is needed to be presented in a project to implement it and inability to plan future actions clearly. As a result, it is needed to write project correctly.
- Lack of ability to use means, knowledge, partnership relations while working over the project.
- Lack of experience to build and develop partnership (low juridical, communicative competence).
- Differences in the world view and perception (sometimes in accordance with historical development of the country)
- Consumer attitude to a partner (“give me everything ready”).

There are following **POSSIBILITIES** in setting international partnership for Belarusian NGOs:

- Free working space for activity, project implementation.
- Social groups at which this or that project is aimed, wide masses and population groups to which it is needed or useful
- Wish to work.
- Methodical literature presents.
- Possibility to verify life, to raise cultural level.
- Possibility to launch cheaper and efficient, perspective techniques and programmes into practice. Possibility to apply to colleagues presenting here.
- Possibility to be introduced to new culture, new views on surrounding reality.
- High professionalism of NGOs' members, ability to work qualitatively.
- Plenty of nice ideas and efficient projects which could work efficiently being financed.
- Nice people, their readiness to work with foreign partners.

<sup>7</sup> Grushevitskaya T.G., Popkov V.D., Sadohin A.P. Principals of Intercultural Communication: Manual for Colleges Moscow, 2002. – p. 352.

<sup>8</sup> See variant of this technique:

Velichko V.V, Dergai A.V., Karpievich D.V., Savchik O.M. Intercultural Education at School Minsk, 2001. – pp. 98–99.

In conclusion we would like to notice some important conclusions from our point of view:

- the presented seminars' subject is of current importance, as aspects of international partnership and intercultural interaction are important for the Belarusian public organizations both for those which have relevant experience and those which have just started to develop it;
- the diversity of participants is not a problem if the seminar programme is drafted efficiently, it is contrary can be the main means for achieving the goals;
- it is necessary to use such approaches to the seminar work which would stimulate participants to

show own initiatives (work in mini-groups, "case-study" technology, structured discussion);

- engaging experts can enlarge and make deeper content field of the seminar;
- "covering package" is efficient tool (for example, as a "portfolio"), they could be worked both at the seminar and individually.

We permitted ourselves to confirm that the proposed subject is on demand and for near-term outlook proposal of educational programmes of similar content will be asked not by the Belarusian sector of NGOs but by any other organizations interested in international partnership and intercultural interaction.

Appendix 1

The seminar programme

1 <sup>st</sup> day	Content
<p><b>9.15–9.30</b></p> <p><b>9.30–12.45</b> (11.00–11.15 coffee-break)</p>	<p>Registration of participants .</p> <p>Programme presentation and agreement of seminar and work schedule. Acquaintance.</p> <p>The first experience in the international partnership and intercultural interactions (personal and organizational): meaning and followings.</p> <p>Presentation of participants' expectations.</p> <p>International partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivation: what do the Belarusian organizations need international cooperation for?</li> </ul>
<b>12.45–14.15</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
<p><b>14.15–17.30</b> (15.45–16.00 coffee-break)</p>	<p>How to build international cooperation efficiently:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• necessary competences;</li> <li>• problems and ways of solving;</li> <li>• efficient communication.</li> </ul> <p>Concluding of the day programme.</p>
2 <sup>nd</sup> day	Content
<p><b>9.00–12.15</b> (10.30–10.45 coffee-break)</p>	<p>Existing conditions and perspectives for development of international partnership of Belarusian public organizations: questions to experts.</p> <p>Intercultural interactions: responsiveness of differences, national peculiarities and specifics.</p>
<b>12.45–13.15</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
<p><b>13.45–17.00</b> (15.15–15.30 coffee-break)</p>	<p>Development of international cooperation of Belarusian public organizations: barriers and opportunities.</p> <p>Concluding of the seminar.</p>



Appendix 2

Steps of intercultural education  
(on Groschen/Leenen)

