Graduation Assignment Report

Facilitating International (Dutch-German) Dialogues and Business Encounters for Institutions of Higher Education as a Means of International Cooperation

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Word count: 15.053
Foreword & Acknowledgements

When I was looking for an organisation to start my graduation internship I was looking for a place where I could make use of my skills I acquired during the 3,5 years of studying ‘International Communication’. Luckily, I got the great opportunity to work for the municipality of Groningen in the area of international relations with Germany. This was perfect for me! With my Dutch and German language skills and my experience in working in an international environment, I felt like I could actually make a valuable contribution to this work and support the municipality in their relationship with Germany.

Looking back to four wonderful months of working at this project at the municipality I wish to express my gratitude to various people who helped and supported me during the course of this research paper. I am particularly grateful for the assistance and very valuable and constructive feedback provided by my highly esteemed research project supervisor Ken Drozd, Ph.D. Special thanks also go to my supervisor and colleague-for-four-months Dr. Dörte Mierau. She gave me the opportunity to complete this thesis project in the area of international relations at the municipality of Groningen. I took great pleasure in working with her and learning from her impressive expertise in the field. Last but not least, my thanks are extended to my other colleagues at the municipality of Groningen (RO/EZ) who made these four months a fantastic experience. Thank you, Dankeschön & dank jullie wel!
Executive Summary

The research project deals with the facilitation of international (Dutch-German) dialogues and encounters for Dutch and German institutions of higher education. These encounters aim at cooperation of the participating institutions. The project was designed for the municipality of Groningen. The municipality has an interest in internationalization and in the facilitation of prosperous cross-border dialogues and encounters, amongst others in higher education, to strengthen their global position and reinforce the city’s biggest industry: the knowledge economy.

During previous Dutch-German dialogues and encounters difficulties in communication between the participants were noticed. The different cultures involved and the participants’ lacking awareness of cultural differences caused unnecessary misunderstandings and delayed the process. The result of this research was an advice for the municipality on how to avoid such issues in the future.

As a consequence, the research objective was to advice the municipality of Groningen on how to raise awareness of certain preconditions (theoretical foundations, see section 3.4, p. 23) of Dutch-German dialogues and encounters for institutions of higher education, that aim at enhancing and substantiating the institution’s cross-border cooperation. This was done by analysing the potential participants’ knowledge about and experience with the theoretical foundations and identifying knowledge gaps about these foundations. The theoretical foundations were identified during extensive desk research and provide a theoretical basis for ideal Dutch-German dialogues and encounters. They cover the three theoretical areas of 1) cultural differences in communication and doing business, 2) international cooperation in higher education and 3) event features of business encounters & leading an intercultural dialogue. Consequently, the knowledge of the potential Dutch and German participants of such dialogue and encounter, concerning these foundations was investigated and their expectations of such encounter examined. The resulting gap of their knowledge about the foundations revealed their level of awareness of these foundations. This led to an advice with recommendations on how to fill this gap, so how to raise awareness of the foundations, and reconcile the differences and possibly diverging expectations of Dutch and German participants. This helps the municipality to successfully facilitate future Dutch-German dialogues and encounters for institutions of higher education.
The strategy for this research has been identified as a case study as it requires depth with both, profound theoretical insight and a thorough understanding of the potential participants’ knowledge and expectations. Hence, it was opted for triangulation of research methods: desk research and interviews were considered the most appropriate methods to gain the required depth of this research. Structured interviews were conducted with Dutch people, as well as German people, as it is important for the Dutch participants to be aware about the knowledge level of the German participants. The research population consisted of potential participants of such encounters, means of the teachers, management employees and international coordinators of the German and Dutch institutions of higher education the municipality generally works with. The population was selected through purposive sampling.

The results were divided according to the three theoretical areas. Concerning area one, cultural differences in communication and doing business, it became obvious that the participants lacked knowledge about several cultural differences. The main finding was that the participants were rather unaware of differences and highly underestimated the impact of those differences. There was some knowledge about several differences, but it was not known how to deal with these differences, so how to properly behave. Thus, the knowledge gap concerning some of the foundations about cultural aspects was rather big. The results of the Dutch participants were compared with the German participants. It was ascertained that the knowledge gap about the foundations was slightly smaller on the Dutch side. Results regarding theoretical area two, international cooperation in higher education, revealed both, very small and rather big knowledge gaps about the theoretical foundations. Both sides were quite experienced in working with the respective other culture, though. They were most unaware of the foundation about evaluating successful cooperation. The biggest gaps in knowledge were discovered in the theoretical foundations about leading a Dutch-German dialogue, theoretical area three. The biggest deception was that there are no differences in the way a Dutch-German dialogue should be led, compared to a dialogue with only one culture involved. This finding confirms the problem of this research: the lack of cultural awareness leads to unsatisfactory dialogues and delays the process of an encounter.

It was concluded that the overall awareness of some cultural differences seems to be existing. However, when this awareness was tested, the level of awareness seemed lower and the participants often did not know how to deal with these differences. Another conclusion was that Germany and the Netherlands are often considered the same. However, theory revealed
something else, so the knowledge gap concerning the theoretical foundations was rather big, especially in the field of leading a dialogue. From the results it could also be concluded that both countries have a lot of experience in working with the other country. According to theory, this is rather promising for successful cooperation.

From these conclusions recommendations were given on how to raise awareness of the theoretical foundations about which the participants showed the biggest knowledge gap, and how differing expectations could be reconciled. This advice was for the municipality of Groningen, and thus, focused on the Dutch participants. The advice had a twofold approach: an information strategy and a reconciliation strategy. As reconciliation can only work if one has intercultural competence, the informing strategy should be applied first. The information strategy included that the participants are informed about their lacking knowledge, in order to fill the gap. However, as informing someone does not necessarily mean an influence on behaviour, it was recommended to organise a practical workshop before the encounter. This preparation workshop consists of information sessions and practical role plays. The participants are asked to take part in an intercultural role play, where they have to deal with an intercultural (Dutch-German) incident, so their newly acquired knowledge is directly translated into behaviour. The reconciliation strategy is only meant for raising awareness of the cultural foundations. It was advised to bring the two differing cultural values together so they do not lead to conflicts, but supplement each other and form a new ‘culture’. This means that the differing sides are combined by taking parts of both sides. To ensure this is actually carried out the municipality was advised to have an impartial facilitator leading the dialogues in the encounter.
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1. Project Context

In 2009 the municipalities of Groningen and Hamburg signed an agreement of cooperation in the fields of culture and creative industries (Gemeente Groningen, 2012). This so-called ‘Letter of Intent’ (LOI) was prolonged in 2012 (see appendix). Inter alia, it was agreed to support and promote the goal of widening, strengthening and optimizing the cooperation between institutions of higher education (HE) in Groningen and Hamburg, with a focus on the Academie Minerva of the Hanzehogeschool Groningen and the faculty of Design, Media and Information of the HAW Hamburg (Gemeente Groningen, 2012, May). In order to explore the possibilities of future cooperation, a personal encounter between the potentially cooperating institutions of HE is considered appropriate by the municipality. This business encounter should provide an opportunity for extensive communication and information exchange in the form of a dialogue where concrete possibilities for future cooperation are discussed.

The municipality has experienced difficulties during previous Dutch-German dialogues in encounters, due to the different cultures involved. There were unnecessary misunderstandings between the participants which delayed the process and led to unsatisfactory outcomes on both sides. Eventually, the objective of previous dialogues in encounters had been achieved. However, as the municipality puts it, the participants’ different expectations regarding the process of such dialogues and encounters and their outcomes, the participants’ varying level of knowledge about differences in approaching such dialogues and encounters, and the participants’ varying level of experience with working with the other culture, caused misunderstandings and negatively influenced the encounters.

The municipality plans to facilitate future dialogues and encounters between Dutch and German institutions of HE with the goal of future cooperation between those institutions. They want to avoid that such dialogues and encounters will be negatively influenced by the participants’ lack of awareness of cultural differences and other related features, too. Therefore, this project aims at developing a plan on how to facilitate a Dutch-German dialogue and encounter between institutions of HE, in order to avoid a negative outcome caused by cultural differences, different expectations and unawareness of related features. This is done as follows:
First of all, existing theories are compared which leads to the identification of theoretical foundations about three theoretical areas: cultural differences, international cooperation in HE and event management. Secondly, the Dutch and German participants’ level of awareness of these foundations is researched by examining their knowledge and expectations concerning these foundations. This means that in this research ‘knowledge about’ and ‘experience with’ e.g. cultural differences is equated with ‘awareness of’ e.g. cultural differences. Consequently, the Dutch and German participants’ knowledge level and expectations concerning these foundations is identified. The potential knowledge gaps are separately looked at. This means it is investigated how much or little the German participants are aware of the theoretical foundations, and how much or little the Dutch participants are aware of the theoretical foundations. This is then compared with each other. From these results a conclusion is drawn. Eventually, this leads to recommendations on how to fill the gap, so how to raise awareness of those foundations, which results in an advice for the municipality on how to facilitate a Dutch-German dialogue and encounters of HE.

The municipality of Groningen hopes to benefit from this and expects to use the plan as a blueprint for future Dutch-German business dialogues and encounters of HE. As the municipality only cooperates with the North of Germany this research is limited to the area of North-Germany and the Northern Netherlands (see 5.4 Limitations, p 35). The interest of the municipality is to organise prosperous cross-border business dialogues and encounters. This internationalisation and promotion of a city of knowledge and talent strengthens the municipality’s global position and reinforces its biggest industry: the knowledge economy. For the municipality this importance of endorsing the knowledge industry is rooted in their role which is elaborated on below.
2. Organisational Context

This research project is placed within the municipality of Groningen, the Netherlands (Gemeente Groningen), to be more precise, within the framework of international relations. The role of the municipality of Groningen concerning internationalisation as described by the municipality itself, is to facilitate the process, by “opening doors for businesses and interest organisations” (Gemeente Groningen, 2012, December). According to the handbook of international cooperation (Buis, 2001), municipalities can have different roles when it comes to international cooperation. This role can either be financial, stimulating, one of a project manager, partner and director or of a knowledge supplier. In the case of this project, the municipality takes the role of a stimulator, project manager and partner. Through investment in international cooperation the municipality of Groningen hopes to benefit from the added value, such as financial resources and increased knowledge. As stated in the preliminary international policy of 2013-2016 (Gemeente Groningen, 2012, December) the underlying motivation of internationalisation is to reinforce the concept of Groningen as a city of knowledge (“Groningen als kennisstad”). This is based on the economic policy (G-Kracht) and the Groningen Agreement (Het Akkoord van Groningen). The emphasis on knowledge is reflected in many projects and campaigns of the city. Knowledge is considered an export product of Groningen since there is no much other industry than knowledge (D. Mierau, February 13, 2013). The focus of this research project is also based on these stipulations of conveying and promoting knowledge through the cooperation of German and Dutch institutions of HE.

In the municipality of Groningen live about 195,000 inhabitants (Gemeente Groningen, 2012). The municipality as an organisation is subdivided in nine departments (Gemeente Groningen, n.d.). The field of international relations is placed in the division of Economic Affairs (Economische Zaken). This division operates as part of the department of Regional Planning and Economic Affairs (Ruimtelijke Ordening en Economische Zaken). It consists of approximately 25 employees. These are split into management advisors and account managers. The subject of international relations is shared between two management advisors, one being responsible for economic relationships with China, another one handling the cooperation with Northern Germany. The municipality of Groningen has engaged in international cooperation for more than 60 years and has ever since, enhanced their
partnership network all over the world (Gemeente Groningen, 2012). Groningen holds strong relationships with three municipalities of Northern Germany, namely Hamburg, Bremen and Oldenburg.
3. Theoretical Framework

The following section outlines the theoretical framework of this research which is based on three theoretical areas: cultural differences in communication and doing business, international cooperation in higher education and concepts of project & event management. The latter includes theory of leading intercultural (Dutch-German) dialogues which is to be part of the business encounter.

These theoretical areas are chosen due to the following reasons:

Cultural differences as a factor negatively influencing a Dutch-German business dialogue and encounter is chosen since during previous encounters the municipality has experienced that the differences in approaching work and leading discussions is culturally determined. The management advisor on internationalisation of the municipality of Groningen is a German herself. After years of experience in working in a Dutch environment and coordinating Dutch-German business encounters it could be concluded that cultural differences can in fact have a huge impact on successful transnational work and cooperation. This is also confirmed by various theories.

The choice of using theory on international cooperation in higher education was made for very obvious reasons: The plan is supposed to be about encounters for institutions of HE, in order to agree on cooperative activities.

In order to ascertain whether such encounter is the right choice after all, and how this should best be planned, theory about project & event management is considered.

The following theories contribute to answering the theoretical research questions and formulating the interview questions, as they give profound insight into the cultural differences and the consequent potential risks these differences mean for a business encounter. This section ends with stating the theoretical foundations of a Dutch-German business encounter in the higher education sector, which are derived from the theory discussed before.
3.1 Cultural Differences in Communication & Business

There are numerous theories on cultural differences. Most of the theories define culture as a construct or pattern/design of learned and shared behaviour, based on norms and values that distinguish one people from others (Kluckhohn & Kelly, 1945; Banks, Banks & McGee, 1989; Damen, 1987; Hofstede, 1984; Lederach, 1995). Usually, a culture is prevalent within the borders of a country. Thus, the traits of a culture are often confined to nations. However, not every person living in e.g. Germany necessarily has a German cultural background. People originating from a different culture, but living in Germany, might have a German passport and thus, a German nationality and citizenship, but still, their cultural background is most likely influenced by their actual origin. This indicates that a culture cannot be restricted to national borders. Besides, one should not generalize when it comes to culture (Hofstede, 2001). Nonetheless, culture needs to be defined somehow, in order to make sense of it. Therefore, several theorists define culture in terms of cultural dimensions which describe individual nations. This is, e.g., done by the Dutch researcher of (organisational) cultures, Geert Hofstede, who developed six cultural dimensions that are applied to nations. Using these dimensions helps to “unpack the concept of culture” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2011), as Hofstede states in an interview. Using nationalities for cultures “is often the only feasible criterion for classification” (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010, p. 21). The six dimensions are: Power distance, Individualism vs. Collectivism, Masculinity vs. Femininity, Uncertainty avoidance, Long-term orientation and Indulgence vs. Restraint (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). 76 nations are ranked according to these dimensions. The respective score only makes sense though, when comparing it to other nations (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

3.1.1 Dutch and German Business Communication and the respective Cultural Dimensions

Within the framework of this research, the focus is on the cultural differences between the Netherlands and Germany concerning the way of doing business and communicating. As described above, the concept of cultural dimensions helps to define cultural differences between nations. Since this research aims at the identification of people’s cultural awareness, it is appropriate and very beneficial to make use of those dimensions.
Between the Netherlands and Germany there is not only the most obvious barrier of language, which is, by the way, often underestimated (Hofstede, 2001). A large amount of communication is non-verbal (Novinger, 2008). This non-verbal behaviour is influenced by people’s cultural background and “since we cannot stop behaving in one way or another, we cannot stop communicating”, as Novinger (2008, p.1) describes it. This illustrates that culture can have a serious impact on communication.

When comparing Hofstede’s scores of both countries in cultural dimensions, it becomes obvious that the differences are rather subtle. The differences are not seen at first sight, and a common misconception of Dutch and German business partners is ‘to just simply do it’ (Agentschap NL, n.d.). Kerstin Schweighöfer, German journalist and foreign correspondent for German media in the Netherlands, puts it similarly and states during a speech, that to act on the assumption that in the Netherlands everything is done in the same way as in Germany, is a huge beginner’s mistake (K, Schweighöfer, April 19, 2013).

In addition, also theory supports that there are differences between Germany and the Netherlands which can influence communication and business. When comparing the countries of Germany and the Netherlands in terms of Hofstede’s dimensions, the biggest difference lies in the masculinity/femininity dimension. Also Hofstede himself calls this “the most striking difference between the German and the Dutch culture” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2011). Germany has a rather high score in masculinity. This is reflected in high competitiveness and a drive for success. Assertiveness is highly valued and “people rather live in order to work” (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). This is shown by the fact that people with a German cultural background tend to work hard in order to achieve the best possible results. In the Netherlands on the other hand, a life/work balance and quality in work life is very important and consensus highly appreciated (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). These different motivations and drives and thus, possibly clashing expectations concerning content and outcome of a meeting, and people’s unawareness about them, could impact a Dutch-German business encounter and consequently, affect its success. The difference in regarding the importance of work can lead to the situation that German people take their work much more seriously, than their Dutch partners, and thus, want to work much more and harder on the topic of the encounter. Dutch people might prefer some non-work related activities too. This could clash with the German drive for success. The German side might want to achieve the best possible result, whereas the Dutch side might be content with achieving a result at all.
In this situation the differing expectations concerning the quality of a result or outcome of an encounter can lead to dissatisfaction of both participating parties. Hence, the masculinity-femininity dimension is of significance for this research.

This leads to the dimension of *indulgence vs. restraint* which was added in 2010. It is based on Minkov’s data analysis of the World Values Survey (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). This dimension is about happiness, life control and importance of leisure as Hofstede puts it (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). An indulgent culture has the urge to control its own life and “enjoy the moment rather than using time to compare with others” (binschedler.com, 2012). Additionally, freedom of expression is very important. In a culture that scores higher on restraint gratification is contained and status objects as well as material rewards for performing well are of high importance. By considering these attributes one can conclude that Germany, although a rather indulgent culture as freedom of expression and the general gratification of needs are considered part of the culture, is still more restrained than the Netherlands. The fact that status objects are important within the German culture is also supported by Hofstede’s dimension of power distance. In the Netherlands, enjoying the moment (indulgence) is valued more than in Germany, as also confirmed by Hofstede’s dimension of masculinity vs. femininity. Here the Dutch culture scores high in femininity which is expressed in the importance of a decent life/work balance. This difference in approaching work and unawareness about it can lead to clashing ways of dealing with tasks during a Dutch-German business encounter. Again, this difference could lead to the situation that Dutch people might want to talk about non-work related topics as well, whereas Germans might focus on the work only. The German side could get irritated and conclude that the Dutch people constantly digress from the topic. Dutch people on the other hand, might as a consequence consider the Germans as too narrow-minded and serious, which might affect their interest in future cooperation. Thus, this dimension is considered a relevant part of this research.

The dimension of *power distance* is of importance for this research as well. It describes the position people take in a culture towards inequalities within societies (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). According to Hofstede (2010), Germany and the Netherlands score low in this dimension. The Netherlands scores 38, and unexpectedly, Germany scores even lower with 35. Although both countries score similarly in this dimension and Germany scores even lower than the Netherlands, this dimension is regarded as significant. The differences in
business hierarchy between both cultures are considerably evident. Hierarchical levels and differences in job positions are obvious and widespread in Germany. The relationship between a German boss and its employees is far more distant than between a Dutch boss and its employees. Germans consider distance as an expression of professionalism. This also relates to Trompenaars’ and Hampden-Turner’s (1997) dimensions of Achievement vs. Ascription. According to this dimension, Germany is more of an ascribing culture. People’s positions are important and ‘ascribe’ one’s respective power and role. This becomes obvious, e.g., when Germans use titles in order to stress someone’s status (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). In the Netherlands on the contrary, people mention titles only when this is relevant for the situation. Moreover, the distance between boss and employees is more diagonal, and communication is more participative, informal and direct (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). This difference in hierarchy, attitudes towards other employees, in communicating with each other and importance of positions can influence communication and thus, the success of a Dutch-German business encounter. A result of the difference in hierarchy, or of the lack of awareness about it, might be that people do not know how to address each other or address each other inappropriately. As a consequence, people might judge the other party as ignorant and feel offended. Another possible consequence of differences in power distance between the Netherlands and Germany is the way decisions are taken. Dutch people try to find consensus (the well-known Polder model), whereas Germans tend to take decisions on a hierarchical level, which means the higher one’s position, the higher the decision-making powers. This might lead to different expectations during an encounter and cause frustrations. The difference in communication (Dutch people are considered more direct and less formal) could also cause a conflict, as German people might feel offended by the Dutch directness and interpret their informal ways of communicating as rude. Consequently, this deserves to be looked at in more detail in this research. However, as Hofstede (2001) also states “differences in power distance are more manageable than differences in uncertainty avoidance” (p.442).

The dimension of uncertainty avoidance, which describes the way a society copes with ambiguity ((Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010), is also relatively important for this research. Germany and the Netherlands are amongst the more uncertainty avoiding countries. Germany has a higher score in uncertainty avoidance than the Netherlands. This can be observed in the German way of handling a project. Projects are well thought-through and
detailed, and preferably based on expertise (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). In the Netherlands people try to avoid the uncertain too, but compared to Germany Dutch people are less thorough and more relaxed when it comes to work (K. Schweighöfer, April 19, 2013). In general, Dutch people expect the best, whereas German people tend to expect the worst (K. Schweighöfer, April 19, 2013). This diverging approach can set off different expectations concerning the outcome and thus, negatively impact a successful Dutch-German business encounter. Dutch people are, e.g., less meticulous in their work, whereas Germany is very systematic and thorough. This difference, or unawareness of it, might again cause different expectations concerning the quality of the results and the execution of joint projects. German people might expect a very well prepared encounter, whereas Dutch people might consider this less important and rely on their spontaneity. Such cultural differences can also influence the way administration is handled in a country. An excellent example of this administrational difference is given by Alon (April 2, 2013), the international coordinator of a university in Hamburg (Germany) who has experience in working with the Netherlands. He states, that in Germany official papers always need to be original, whereas in the Netherlands, a PDF copy is absolutely sufficient. As a consequence of all these differences, this dimension is also considered in the research, in order to avoid such clashes.

The dimension of Individualism vs. Collectivism describes a person’s tendency to regard society consisting of individual members (I) or a big group of people (we) (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). The Netherlands scores extremely high in this dimension (80). This is reflected in e.g. a very direct way of communicating. Germany (67) is also considered a very individualistic country where self-actualisation plays an important role. As both countries, Germany and the Netherlands, have a high individualistic tendency, this dimension is not expected to cause much obstruction during Dutch-German business encounters and is thus, regarded as peripheral in this research.

Similarly insignificant for this research is the dimension of long-term orientation. Long-term orientation refers to the society’s inclination to be future-oriented, instead of taking a short-term-oriented position (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Both cultures score quite low in this dimensions which means that they both have a short-term orientation.
In Summary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German style of communication &amp; doing business (in comparison to the Netherlands)</th>
<th>Dutch style of communication &amp; doing business (in comparison to Germany)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal, hierarchical → more distant</td>
<td>Diagonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well thought-through projects (profound, thorough)</td>
<td>Direct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed</td>
<td>Participative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of expertise</td>
<td>Consensus oriented (‘Polder model’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More formal</td>
<td>More informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of (job) titles</td>
<td>More relaxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live to work</td>
<td>Life/work balance</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3.1.2 The Influence of these Differences on Communication and Business: Risks and Consequences

As Buis (2001) states, differences in cultures negatively influence cross-cultural communication when the participants are unaware of them. The above outlined cultural differences between Germany and the Netherlands can have impacts on communication and business. In summary, these risks and consequences are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>difference in approaching work</th>
<th>different expectations concerning content and outcome</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Different motivations and drives</td>
<td>clashing ways of dealing with tasks/work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>different attitudes towards other employees</td>
<td>influences communication with each other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2 International Cooperation in Higher Education

International cooperation and cultural exchange is hardly possible without personal contact between people and thus, leads to intercultural encounters (Buis et al., 2001). Such encounters “are as old as humanity itself” (Hofstede, 2001, p.423) and happen once people from at least two different cultural backgrounds get together. These encounters are usually quite short. However, such encounters can be an excellent starting point for further meetings.

In order to internationalise higher education, personal encounters are a popular tool. Over the last years the importance of internationalisation in higher education has solidly increased. Universities realised how significant international competence of their students is and started to broaden their international network. Universities like Harvard even declared that a “study abroad will shortly become a degree requirement” (Tarrant, 2010, pp. 433-434). Several researchers state that today’s global perspective requires of students to look internationally (Mestenhauser, 1998). Stone (2006) also claims that internationalisation in higher education prepares students and universities to function well in this globalised setting.

A similar result had the most recent and geographically most comprehensive survey on internationalisation in HE ever, which was published by the International Association of Universities (IAU). The IAU (2010) survey found that internationalisation has never been as important as at the moment since it is considered the student’s preparation for a globalised world. In Europe internationalisation is motivated by the student’s learning. Furthermore, the study reveals that intra-regional cooperation is still the most common form of cooperation, just as in the case of this research about cooperation between the northern parts of Germany and the Netherlands. Unfortunately, internationalisation in higher education is still reserved for privileged people and missing funds is yet the main obstacle to internationalisation (IAU, 2010).

3.2.1 Internationalisation of Higher Education and its various Levels

Internationalisation in higher education can be realised through multiple activities. The activities or levels of cooperation can vary between simple student exchange and exchange of teachers or joint programmes/double degrees, bilingual programmes and e.g. German study programmes in the Netherlands (Nuffic, 2003). Another exemplary approach is the so-called buddy-project, undertaken by the Waikato University in New Zealand (Campbell, 2012). The
project was aimed at connecting international exchange students with host students, in order to promote intercultural contact.

3.2.2 Success Criteria for Cooperation

A precondition to successful international cooperation is successful communication. According to Buis (2001), the key to successful intercultural communication is “to take the partner seriously and treat him with respect” (p. 164). Additionally, the future partner universities should have similar notions and expectations concerning the success of a cooperation, in order to effectively agree on cooperation during an encounter. But when is cooperation in higher education considered successful? This question can be answered by using different criteria. Of course, the number of students studying abroad can offer quantitative information about the success of an exchange programme. Students themselves can be asked about their experiences during their study abroad, or it can be tested whether the level of intercultural awareness amongst students and teachers has increased. But how does this reveal the actual success of a cooperation? After all, about 50% of international cooperation is a failure (Cartwright & Cooper, 1996). A study by van Oudenhoven and van der Zee (2002) links the success of international cooperation of organisations to certain factors. These factors affect the success of international cooperation by organisations in general, but should also be applicable to international cooperation of universities. According to both authors, international cooperation is not only influenced by national cultural differences, but also by organizational cultural differences. It is shown that the higher similarity of corporate and national culture of both cooperating partners, the more successful the cooperation turns out to be (van Oudenhoven & van der Zee, 2002). Additionally, preceding experience in (international) cooperation also influences the success of a cooperation. Experience in cooperation with the same country leads to more success than experience in cooperation with countries with a similar culture, or even with general international experience in cooperation. However, the differences were rather small. A conclusion still is that “similarities in culture […] is positively associated with the success of the cooperation” (van Oudenhoven & van der Zee, 2002, p.637). Previous experience in cooperating with a culturally identical, similar or different country also positively contributes to the success of cooperation. Considering these results one could assume that cooperation
between the Netherlands and Germany has higher chances of success than e.g. cooperation between the Netherlands and China, as the Dutch and German cultures are more similar.

3.3 Event Planning & Project Management

The following section shortly outlines the third theoretical area of event planning & project management. It also discusses the concept of conducting an intercultural dialogue, which is an important tool for international business encounters.

3.3.1 Types of Events

There is plenty of literature on event planning. What they all have in common concerning the start of a project is that first of all, the type of event needs to be defined. As Lynn van der Wagen (2007) puts it there are sporting events, festivals, exhibitions, commercial events, fundraising events, meetings or conventions and many others. The latter belongs to the category of business events. Such meetings could be travel meetings or have a corporate or governmental purpose, but they could also be academic conferences (van der Wagen, 2007).

3.3.2 Steps of Event & Project Management

According to Lynn van der Wagen (2007), the basis of every event planning strategy is project management. This phase is divided into the following tasks:

| Development of mission/purpose statement |
| Establishment of aim |
| Establishment of objectives (SMART, more detailed and based on aims) |
| Preparation of event proposal |

The concrete steps that need to be taken in order to set up an event depend on the type of event that needs to be organised. A well summarised overview of the general steps is given by Grit and Gerritsma (2012). First of all, the idea needs to be formulated. This is followed by feasibility considerations. Consequently, the team is organised, the event promoted and the execution of the event prepared. Before the event is actually executed a run sheet is designed including the programme overview.
### 3.3.3 Criteria for a successful Event

An important aspect of event management is evaluation. Ernst & Young developed 10 so-called keys to success (van der Wagen, 2007). These success criteria can be applied before the event is executed to ensure the success of an event:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the event a good idea?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do we have the skills required to plan and run the event?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the host community supportive?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do we have the infrastructure in the community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can we get a venue at a price we can afford?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will the event attract an audience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will it attract media support?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it financially viable?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the success criteria reasonable?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the risks? (SWOT analysis)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.3.4 Features of a Business Encounter

A personal encounter between the cooperating parties often is a prerequisite for a successful joint project (Buis et al., 2001). Such encounters cannot only facilitate planning and execution of the project, but also improve personal relationships and promote knowledge exchange which fosters the contact and creativity (Buis et al., 2001). According to Buis (2001), such business encounters have the following features:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content/subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions to be answered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intended outcome</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3.5 Conducting an international Dialogue

The challenge of such international business encounters is that participants are not only influenced by their national culture, but also by occupational and organisational levels (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). This can influence communication during a meeting, as one important element of such business encounter is conducting dialogues. First of all, such dialogues or negotiations have one feature in common, no matter whether they are international or not: All negotiations are a communication tool between parties (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Or, as Helde (2012) puts it: “Dialogue is a special form of communication, in which participants seek to actively create greater mutual understanding and deeper insight” (p.18). According to her, a dialogue has four basic foundations: trust, openness, honesty and equality. Such dialogues are influenced by one’s basic values, frame of mind and dialogical practice (Lindgren Helde, 2012). Consequently, an intercultural dialogue becomes more complicated, as different cultures have different values and different frames to evaluate situations. This is also supported by Beamer and Varner (2010), who call these frames schemata or mental categories which people use to make sense of data. Hence, as soon as two different cultures enter a negotiation or dialogue the parties involved can have different objectives that are influenced by their different cultural background. Therefore, it is important to define the goal and the expected outcome of the gathering very explicitly.

Cultural aspects that can have a significant impact on the negotiation process of Dutch and German encounters are (according to Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural dimension</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power distance</td>
<td>Degree of control and decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Importance of status of negotiator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity vs. femininity</td>
<td>Resolution of conflicts: force vs. compromise and consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance</td>
<td>Different need for structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Degree of tolerating ambiguity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Indulgence vs. restraint | Atmosphere and strictness of protocols

Besides these cultural differences language and communication skills are also an important consideration for international dialogue (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Participants might not be professionals in this field and lack respective communication skills. Another critical aspect mentioned by Hofstede is the importance of the right participants who are at the appropriate level to, e.g., make decisions.

### 3.4 Theoretical Foundations

After extensive desk research about the theoretical areas the following foundations can be derived. These foundations are considered given conditions of ideal (Dutch-German) dialogues and encounters for institutions of HE. Consequently, the knowledge of the encounter’s potential participants about these foundations is tested and their expectations of such encounter examined. The resulting knowledge gap about the foundations reveals their level of awareness of these foundations. Eventually, an advice gives recommendations on how to fill this gap, so how to raise awareness of the foundations, and reconcile the differences and possibly diverging expectations of Dutch and German participants. This results in an advice for the municipality on how to facilitate a Dutch-German dialogue and encounter in HE, in order to overcome their experienced difficulties.

**Theoretical foundations of international (Dutch-German) dialogues in encounters for institutions of HE concerning cultural aspects in communication and doing business:**

| **Hierarchy** and **job positions** | have a different significance in Germany and the Netherlands |
| **Formality** and **form of address** | is different in Germany and the Netherlands |
| **Motivations** and **drives** | to do one’s work are different in Germany and the Netherlands (life/work balance) |
| Expectations regarding the **quality of results** | are different in Germany and the Netherlands |
| **Decisions** | are taken differently in Germany and the Netherlands |
Theoretical foundations of international (Dutch-German) dialogues in encounters for institutions of HE concerning levels of successful international cooperation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of cooperation</th>
<th>Evaluation criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(e.g. student exchange, teacher exchange, guest lectures, joint degrees, bilingual programmes, joint projects, etc.)</td>
<td>number of students (quantity), experiences of students (quality), increased awareness of cultural differences, preceding experience with the country, cooperation with a culturally similar country</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theoretical foundations of international (Dutch-German) dialogues in encounters for institutions of HE concerning event features and Dutch-German dialogues:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event features:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is essential to have a personal encounter to agree on cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having one common objective is vital</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialogues:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust, openness, honesty and equality are success criteria for encounters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having one common objective is vital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having good language &amp; communication skills is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including the right participants is vital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally determined differences in chairing and structuring meetings, taking decisions, solving conflicts, protocols and atmosphere can impact a Dutch-German dialogue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Research Design - Conceptual Research Design

4.1 Research Objective

Before the research objective can be defined it is useful to apply the intervention cycle of Verschuren and Doorwaard (2010). This research reflects the phase of a problem analysis as it involves the identification of theoretical foundations and the investigation of knowledge and experience of the Dutch and German participants. This helps to identify the problem, which is the potential lack of awareness of the participants concerning the foundations. Eventually, this leads to recommendations on how to solve the ‘problem’, i.e. on how to fill the gap in the level of awareness of the foundations. In fact, this is done to avoid ‘problems’, such as intercultural conflicts as elaborated on in section 3.1.1 (p. 12), or lacking awareness of the other foundations, which would make a dialogue and encounter much less successful.

From this the following research objective can be derived:

The research objective is (a) to advice the municipality of Groningen on how to raise awareness of the theoretical foundations (see section 3.4, p. 23) about Dutch-German dialogues in encounters for institutions of HE, that aim at enhancing and substantiating the institution’s cross-border cooperation, (b) by analysing their knowledge about and experience with the theoretical foundations and identifying gaps in their level of awareness of the foundations.

4.2 Research Framework

Considering the project context and the research objective several institutions of higher education in Groningen and Hamburg and the municipality of Groningen (EZ) are identified as the research objects. The municipality is considered a research object although their knowledge about the foundations is not taken into consideration. However, they provide the prevailing conditions for the dialogues and encounters, and this research, which are discovered during preliminary research. This is why they are still considered a research object.

Moreover, the theoretical concepts of a business encounter are identified (column a of the framework below). These concepts are narrowed down to a number of theoretical foundations (see section 3.4, p. 23). The objects and the foundations serve as the research perspective.
(column b of the framework below). This means that the knowledge and expectations of the objects (institutions of HE) concerning the foundations (parameters) of dialogues and encounters is investigated. This perspective is based on and developed from the theoretical concepts (column a), which together constitute the theoretical framework. The research perspective consists of the institutions of HE (as objects) and the parameters:

1) hierarchy & job positions, formality & form of address, motivations & drives, quality of results, decision taking
2) levels of cooperation, evaluation criteria
3) personal encounter, success criteria, common objective, language & communication skills, right participants, cultural impact

With this knowledge the following research framework is developed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) hierarchy &amp; job positions, formality &amp; form of address, motivations &amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drives, quality of results, decision taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) levels of cooperation, evaluation criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) personal encounter, success criteria, common objective, language &amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication skills, right participants, cultural impact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theoretical principles (research parameters):
1) hierarchy & job positions, formality & form of address, motivations & drives, quality of results, decision taking
2) levels of cooperation, evaluation criteria
3) personal encounter, success criteria, common objective, language & communication skills, right participants, cultural impact

Institutions of HE Groningen

municipality of Groningen: EZ/int. relations

Institutions of HE Hamburg

Results of Analysis

Recommendations on filling gap: Plan about facilitation of international (Dutch-German) business dialogues and encounters for institutions of HE
In words this framework means:

(a) After preliminary research a study of theoretical concepts about cultural differences, international cooperation in higher education and event planning & project management, yields theoretical foundations, (b) by use of which the knowledge and expectations of employees of institutions of higher education in Groningen and Hamburg will be analysed. (c) A separate comparative evaluation of the foundations and the Dutch and German stakeholders’ knowledge and experience about them, (d) results in recommendations on how to fill potential knowledge gaps, so how to raise awareness of those foundations, which results in an advice for the municipality on how to facilitate a Dutch-German dialogue and encounter for institutions of HE.
4.3 Research Questions

Theoretical questions:

CQ1: What is known from theory about a) the influence of cultural differences on communicating and doing business between German and Dutch organisations, b) the different types and levels of successful international cooperation of institutions of HE, and c) successful implementation of events and (international) business dialogues in encounters, and what are the consequent theoretical foundations of a, b, and c?

SQ1.1: What is the German and Dutch style of business communication and the respective cultural values?
SQ1.2: What are potential risks and opportunities of intercultural business communication?
SQ1.3: What are criteria for successful international cooperation between institutions of higher education?
SQ1.4: What are the different levels of cooperating between institutions of higher education?
SQ1.5: What are criteria for successful events/encounters?
SQ1.6: What are the features of business encounters?
SQ1.7: What are methods of conducting international dialogue?

Empirical question:

CQ2: What is the stakeholders’ knowledge and expectations concerning the theoretical foundation of (a) cultural differences in communicating & doing business, (b) the level and quality of international cooperation in HE and (c) successful business encounters as a tool for discussing cooperation and the coordination of a Dutch-German dialogue?

SQ2.1: What do the stakeholders know about cultural differences between Germany and the Netherlands?
SQ2.2: What do the stakeholders know about the risks and opportunities of cultural differences?
SQ2.3: What is the stakeholders’ knowledge about evaluating success of cooperation in HE?
SQ2.4: What experiences do the stakeholders have in different levels of international
cooperation in HE (with each other) and what future cooperative activities are expected by the stakeholders?

SQ2.5: What do the stakeholders consider a successful personal encounter?

SQ2.6: What do the stakeholders think about a personal encounter as a tool for discussing cooperation possibilities?

SQ2.7: What knowledge and expectations do the stakeholders have about leading a Dutch-German dialogue?

Analytical question:

Remember that in this research ‘knowledge’ about and ‘experience’ with an issue is equated with ‘awareness of’.

CQ3: What are the significant gaps between the stakeholders’ level of knowledge and expectations, and the theoretical foundations of international (Dutch-German) business dialogues in encounters, concerning (a) cultural differences in communicating & doing business, (b) the level of international cooperation in HE and (c) the coordination of a (Dutch-German) dialogue in encounters, and what should be done to fill those?

SQ3.1: What is the stakeholders’ level of awareness about the theoretical foundations of cultural differences between Germany and the Netherlands?

SQ3.2: What is the stakeholders’ level of awareness about the theoretical foundations of cultural differences and its risks and opportunities?

SQ3.3: What is the stakeholders’ level of awareness about the theoretical foundations of successful international cooperation in HE?

SQ3.4: What is the stakeholders’ level of awareness about the theoretical foundations of different levels of international cooperation in HE?

SQ3.5: What is the stakeholders’ level of awareness about the theoretical foundations of a successful personal encounter?

SQ3.6: What is the stakeholders’ level of awareness about the theoretical foundations of a personal encounter as the tool for discussing cooperation possibilities?

SQ3.7: What is the stakeholders’ level of awareness about the theoretical foundations of conducting Dutch-German dialogues?
5. Technical Research Design - Research Strategy & Methodology

The following section illustrates the research strategy. It elaborates on the methods chosen for the data collection, the research sample and the data processing, and concludes with a short paragraph on the limiting factors of this research.

5.1. Research Strategy: Case Study

This research requires thorough and profound insight into the knowledge and expectations of the research objects, in order to ascertain their current level of awareness of the theoretical foundations. To gain this depth it is opted for the research strategy of a case study. Triangulation of sources, a typical characteristic of a case study, provides this required depth. This research is conducted through triangulation of desk research and a qualitative data collection tool: interviews. This multi-method approach of combining data collection techniques is considered appropriate since, in order to answer the research questions, primary as well as secondary data collection is essential. The theoretical foundations of dialogues in encounters are determined through desk research, and answer the theoretical research question. The information about the research objects’ knowledge and expectations concerning these foundations is collected through interviews and provide an answer to the empirical research question. Eventually, these two types of information are compared and the objects’ potential lack of awareness of the foundations identified. Hereby, the responses of the Dutch objects, and the responses of the German objects are separately analysed and compared, in order to ascertain whether there are differences in knowledge and expectations. This is another characteristic of a case study: comparing and interpreting results (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010). In the recommendations section it is advised on how to fill potential knowledge gaps about the theoretical foundations, in order to accomplish a successful Dutch-German business dialogue and encounter in HE. This provides an answer to the analytical research question.

As there are two cases that are compared to each other, the German objects and the Dutch objects, this research takes place as a comparative case study.
5.2 Research Methods & Data Collection

Type of data collected and type of information obtained:

For this research data sources as well as knowledge sources are used. This implies that people providing new data as well as literature and the media providing “ready-made insights and theories that have been developed previously by others” (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010, p. 207) function as sources of information. Literature and media sources help to answer the theoretical research question, while people as sources help to answer the empirical research questions. The analytical research questions are answered on the basis of data generated and knowledge gathered by both, people and literature & media.

Desk Research:

Desk research serves to gain the required profound insight and obtain valid knowledge on the three theoretical areas as described in section 3, Theoretical Framework. Through this the theoretical foundations can be identified.

Interviews:

Interviews help to gain insight into the knowledge and expectations of the interviewees concerning the theoretical foundations identified during desk research. Interviews also provide the opportunity to go deeper into a topic and observe verbal or even non-verbal cues when relevant. Additionally, interviews have the advantage of providing a lot of profound, detailed qualitative data, which is required for the depth of this research. It is not considered appropriate to conduct group interviews or focus groups as this might inhibit responses of individuals and thus, lack the required depth which is provided by individual interviews. The interviews take place in the form of a structured interview. The questions are standardized and asked to every interviewee, which gives the advantage that the Dutch and the German results can easily be compared. This is required when trying to identify the collective level of awareness of the population concerning the theoretical foundations. Besides this, a structured interview can generate quantifiable data and is more effective than unstructured interviews. In fact, one structured interview is considered as effective as four unstructured ones (Schmidt & Zimmerman, 2004). This also justifies the sufficiency of a smaller sample.
The interview consists of 18 open and closed questions, and four to five so-called scenario questions. The scenario questions are only concerned with the theoretical foundations of cultural aspects. Interviewees are given scenarios about Dutch-German intercultural situations and provided with answers. These answers are ranked by them from one to five, 1 being ‘I totally agree with the answer’, 5 ‘I totally disagree with this answer’. These scenario questions serve to get a deeper insight whether the objects are actually aware of cultural differences and how to deal with those. In summary, open questions serve to ascertain whether the objects have knowledge and experience about the theoretical foundations, such as Dutch-German cultural differences, and the scenario questions aim at ‘testing’ whether they actually know a specific cultural difference and how to behave during a situation when these differences occur. The scenario questions are based on the theoretical foundations of cultural differences as summarised in the table in section 3.4, p. 23.

The research population (interviewees) is selected through purposive sampling (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). For this research a number of 11 people is interviewed. This number corresponds with the approximate number of participants of such business encounters. As this is a rather small sample the objects are strategically selected, in order to maintain external validity of the results. A little experience in working with the other culture is required as people who participate in such encounters usually have some experience too. This shows that the cases have some similarity. The cases are selected by their usefulness to help achieving and answering the research objective and questions. The previous years of cooperation between the cities of Groningen and Hamburg have put forward numerous partners in the field of higher education who have experience in working with either Germany or the Netherlands. Eventually, all interviewees did show at least some experience with working with the other culture. The sample consists of teachers, management employees and international coordinators, the people who usually participate in such encounter. This makes the sample representative for the group who will participate in dialogues and encounters. Seven of the interviewees are from the Dutch side, while four come from Germany. As the research is for a Dutch organisation and the encounter is planned from the Dutch side it is considered appropriate to interview more Dutch people than German ones. The choice to also interview German people is justified by the fact that Germans will also participate in the encounter and thus, it is important that Dutch participants can be made aware of what their German partners know about them.
Special attention is paid to the formulation of interview questions. The interview sample consists of representatives of the art sector who tend to easily digress from a topic, as preliminary research has revealed. Therefore, the questions are formulated very precisely. The interviews in Groningen are conducted in person. Objects in Hamburg are interviewed via telephone. With interviewing the objects in Groningen face to face and the objects in Hamburg via telephone, validity of the results might be disputable. However, due to lacking sources objects in Hamburg cannot be interviewed in person. Consequently, particular attention is paid to the interviewees in Hamburg, in order to avoid one-sided results. This is ensured by digitally recording the interviews. The interview questions are based on the empirical research questions. An overview of their relation can be found in the appendix.

5.3 Processing Data

The data collected through desk research is analysed at an early stage of the research. The theoretical insights into the three areas (Cultural differences in communication & doing business, international cooperation in HE and event planning & project management), and a consequent analysis of those, lead to the theoretical foundations. Subsequently, the object’s knowledge and expectations concerning these foundations is investigated through interviews. This collected qualitative data is analysed in a deductive approach. Each interview is recorded and consequently, transcribed. Based on these transcripts the data can be processed. Interview questions 1-15 and 21-23 are processed in the following way: Firstly, the data is categorised into the three theoretical areas. Secondly, this is subcategorised into the interview questions (see table in appendix). As a result, the similarities between the answers are analysed and the Dutch and German answers compared. The scenario questions (interview question 16-21) are quantitatively analysed and presented in graphs (see appendix). Each question can reach an index of 100. 100 means high intercultural awareness and knowledge about how to deal with those differences, an index of zero means no awareness at all. The individual answers are totalled and an average index calculated. Both quantitative and qualitative results are then examined in the light of the analytical research question by comparing the knowledge and expectations to the theoretical foundations. Potential gaps are identified and appropriate propositions and consequent conclusions developed and tested (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). These conclusions (see section 7, p.45) result in recommendations on how to fill the gaps, so raise awareness about them. For the recommendations refer to the advice (p. 48).
5.4 Limitations

There are several aspects that need to be considered when analysing the research results. First of all, this research is placed in a manifold context. The political, educational, international and artistic context can pose challenges of possibly diverging interests. The institutions of HE can have different expectations and preferences regarding the cooperation than the municipality. However, as the municipality is the client of this project, the research is more aligned to the municipality’s demands.

Furthermore, the results can be influenced by the fact that all interviewees are from the North of Germany and the Netherlands. However, there are several (cultural) differences between the North and the South of both countries. As Hofstede puts it: “Even in a geographically small country such as the Netherlands [...] cultural differences may not follow national borders” (Hofstede, Pederson & Hofstede, 2002, p.132). Therefore, when reading the results of this research it is essential to consider that they could have been different if collected in the whole of the Netherlands or Germany. An exemplary difference between the North and the West of the Netherlands might be that the North is more aware of Germany as a business partner as they live closer to the border, and might have more experience in cooperating with each other. The reason behind the choice of limiting the research population to the Northern part of the Netherlands and Germany is that the client of this research is the municipality of Groningen which is located in the North of the Netherlands and has strong relationships with the Northern part of Germany only. This part is who they will cooperate with in the future so it is of their interest to do research on the North of the Netherlands and Germany.

Another important issue is that culture can have different implications on the different generations of one culture. As an example, the younger generation in Germany puts less emphasis on the polite form of address, than the older generation. This research focuses on people between 30 and 60, and consequently balances the differences between generations.

Additionally, the different positions of the interviewees (international coordinator, teacher or management) can have an impact on their answers which are influenced by their diverging knowledge. However, as such encounters usually consist of such a diversity of participants, the differences in e.g. intercultural awareness will be levelled out.
Lastly, it is important to consider that answers by the research objects can also be influenced by personal characteristics, which is not necessarily only determined by cultural factors.

Unfortunately, the answers to the scenario questions 16-20 (German side) could only be taken from three out of four people. The other interviewee was not willing to answer these questions. However, this does not negatively influence validity, as sufficient insight was provided by the Dutch participants.
6. Research Results

The following section presents the research results obtained through the interviews. The most important statements are taken from the interview transcripts (see appendix). A summary of the results can also be found in the appendix. For information on validity of the results refer to section 5.4, Limitations. In order to compare the Dutch and German results, they are divided according to nationality. For a more detailed overview of the graphs presenting the results of the scenario question please also refer to the appendix. The results are presented according to the theoretical foundations (section 3.4, p. 23).

6.1 Cultural Aspects in Communication and Business

**Overview results German scenario questions:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Boss</th>
<th>Holiday</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
<th>Borrel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 16</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 17</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 18</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 19</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 20</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Overview results Dutch scenario questions:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Boss</th>
<th>Holiday</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
<th>Borrel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 16</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 17</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question 18</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 19</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 20</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Hierarchy and job positions have a different significance in Germany and the Netherlands:* Surprisingly, this difference is not very well known amongst the research objects. Only two persons mentioned the higher focus on hierarchy in Germany. One was a German, the other one Dutch. One Dutch person even said that the Netherlands and Germany are the same concerning hierarchy. What was mentioned by a German is the fact that the Netherlands is more consensus oriented than Germany, and that Germany puts a greater emphasis on the use of titles, which implies some knowledge about the difference in hierarchy. However, the mediocre index of 55 in question 20 for German objects, a scenario about hierarchical differences, reveals that awareness is indeed not very high. In conclusion, the Dutch and German interviewees have a knowledge gap about the theoretical foundations.
**Formality and form of address** is different in Germany and the Netherlands: This difference was very well known, especially from the Dutch side. The people who mentioned that there are differences between both cultures mentioned this specific difference that Germany is more formal in addressing people. It was also known from the Dutch side that Germans are more prone to address each other with last name and use the formal form of addressing someone (‘Sie’). The Netherlands consider themselves to be more direct and less polite. Interestingly, this point comes from the Dutch objects only. In general it becomes obvious that both cultures are more critical about themselves. They say positive points about the other culture only and negative points about their own culture. It becomes obvious that the Dutch people are aware of the fact that Germans have a different form of address. However, in the scenario question for Dutch people about this (see question 16) they do not know how to actually deal with this difference. When asking whether they would still address the German with his/her first name (answer 1), which should not be done, they come to an index of 54.3, which indicates quite a low average of actual awareness regarding this difference. Consequently, the gap between the theoretical foundations and the objects knowledge and experience is apparent, although neither extremely big nor small. Especially the Germans seem not to know that the Dutch people are less formal.

**Motivations and drives to do one’s work are different in Germany and the Netherlands** (life/work balance): According to theory, Dutch people have a higher life/work balance, whereas Germans tend to live in order to work. German people are more focused on work. Dutch people, on the other hand, attach more importance to enjoying life. Results show that the awareness is not particularly high when it comes to the differing importance Dutch and German people attach to work. It was neither mentioned by Germans nor the Dutch interviewees. The related scenario question for Dutch interviewees (question 19) show that the knowledge about this difference is at a medium level: they come to an index of 62. The scenario question for the German side (question 16) confirms that the knowledge about these differences is at a medium level. In conclusion, both sides are neither very aware nor unaware of the fact that the other culture attaches different importance to work. As this difference was not mentioned during the open question concerning cultural differences the knowledge level about it seems rather low on both sides. Consequently, there is a gap in knowledge about the theoretical foundations from both, the Dutch and the German interviewees.
A different life/work balance also influences the way Dutch and German people approach their work. This difference was also not addressed by both sides of the interviewees, which could imply that knowledge about this difference in motivation and drive to do work is quite little. However, the results of the scenario question regarding this difference show something else. Question 18 for Germans and question 17 for Dutch people receive an index of 64.5 and 75.2 respectively. This means that the awareness of this difference is quite high on both sides, and again a little higher on the Dutch side. Question 18 (Ger), answer 5 and question 17 (NL) answer 2 go deeper into this topic. The Netherlands receive an index of 83, Germany one of 73. This leaves to conclude that awareness of differing approaches to work is high on both sides, once the objects are directly asked about it. Additionally, almost all interviewees (both Dutch and German) stated that different expectations could negatively impact the success of the encounter when asked about cultural differences that could negatively affect the encounter. This implies that the gap of knowledge about the theoretical foundations is very small. It is a little bigger on the German side than on the Dutch side.

*Expectations regarding the quality of results are different in Germany and the Netherlands:* According to theory, German and Dutch people have different expectation concerning outcomes of work. German people have higher demands. This is also confirmed by some Dutch interviewees who claim that Germans always try to be as good as possible and are always very successful. Additionally, almost all Dutch interviewees state that Germans are more thorough and conscientious, and have a better theoretical basis than Dutch people. So the Dutch people seem to know that there are differences in the quality of work and its results. The Germans however, seem less aware of this difference. Only one interviewee states that “Germany is more theoretical” and thus, has different requirements. However, the results of the scenario question (question 18 for Germans) with an index of 63.4 indicate that awareness of differences in doing work is just above the middle. Similarly, the results of question 17 (for Dutch people) reveal that awareness and also acceptance of different ways of working is high (75.2). This means that from the Dutch side awareness about those is high, and thus, the knowledge gap about the theoretical foundations is quite little. The gap on the German side is bigger, though.

*Decisions are taken differently in Germany and the Netherlands:* The German side was quite aware of the fact that the Netherlands is more consensus oriented when it comes to decision making. This was given as a difference between both countries by 50% of the German
interviewees. The Dutch side did not mention this difference at all. Therefore it can be said that the knowledge gap about this theoretical foundation is rather big on the German side, although not as big as on the Dutch side.

In conclusion, it can be said that the majority is aware of minor differences, but generally these differences are considered small and negligible. Moreover, both sides seem to know some differences, but not the related risks and opportunities. Only one German person mentions that one can learn from another culture. Consequently, there is a rather big knowledge gap concerning cultural differences and the theoretical foundations. On the whole, the Dutch side seems to be slightly more aware of the cultural differences than the German side.

The following table gives an overview of the results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Netherlands</th>
<th>Theoretical foundation</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medium gap</td>
<td>Hierarchy &amp; positions</td>
<td>Medium gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small gap</td>
<td>Form of address</td>
<td>Medium gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium gap</td>
<td>Importance of work</td>
<td>Medium gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small gap</td>
<td>Approach to work</td>
<td>Small gap (&gt; than NL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small gap</td>
<td>Quality of results</td>
<td>Medium gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big gap</td>
<td>Taking decisions</td>
<td>Medium gap</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.2 International Cooperation

There are different levels of cooperation (e.g. student exchange, teacher exchange, guest lectures, joint degrees, bilingual programmes, joint projects, etc.): The results show that both, the German and the Dutch interviewees’ knowledge about the different possibilities of cooperation is very high. However, what their respective institution is actually doing in internationalisation is very unclear, especially to the lecturers from both sides. Research has revealed that interviewees from the same university have diverging views on who they cooperate with and how. The high level of knowledge on levels of cooperation indicates that the knowledge gap about the theoretical foundations is very small on both sides.
The evaluation criteria for successful cooperation are: number of students (quantity), experiences of students (quality), increased awareness of cultural differences, preceding experience with the country, cooperation with a culturally similar country. As the results indicate (question 8) cooperation is most often considered successful when students get something out of it (result) and learn through others. This relates to the success criterion of increasing cultural awareness. Additionally, cooperation is regarded as successful when it is continued, or in the words of one German and one Dutch interviewee: sustainable. The knowledge about the success criteria of cooperation is very similar on the German and Dutch side.

The success of cooperation can also be measured. The research results show that according to the interviewees, most cooperation is measured qualitatively through conversations with students about their experiences. The answers are very similar between both sides. Therefore they can be taken as one. Taking the Dutch and the German interviewees together, 66.7% say that success is measured through personal conversations. This also corresponds with one of the theoretical foundations and thus, indicates a small knowledge gap about this measurement tool. Another popular approach is surveys. Only one German person mentioned the number of exchange students as an indicator of success, though. In conclusion, it becomes obvious that the interviewees do know when cooperation is considered successful, but not many of them actually know when cooperation is most likely to be successful. Thus, the interviewees’ knowledge gap about the theoretical foundations is still rather big on both, the German and the Dutch side. In general, it became obvious that the German interviewees knew very well how they have cooperated with Groningen, whereas the Dutch had little knowledge about their cooperation with Hamburg. However, the research results show that together, 77.8% of the interviewees have experience in cooperating with the other culture. The other 22.2% do not know whether they cooperate with the other country, partly due to their function as a lecturer who does not have insight into this and thus, do not have experience with it. This means that the majority has cooperated with the respective other culture before.
6.3 Event Features and Dutch-German Dialogues

Event features:

*It is essential to have a personal encounter to agree on cooperation:* Research results show that 91% of the Dutch and German interviewees consider a personal encounter as the right tool to agree on international cooperation (Question 1). All the Dutch interviewees consider it essential, whereas on the German side, one out of four interviewees thinks that it is not necessarily required. Both sides state that a precondition for such an encounter is preparation. Hence, the knowledge gap about the theoretical foundations is very small on both sides. The bigger part of the interviewees considers such encounter as successful when the outcome is rather concrete, means when there are actual agreements or at least ideas on how to cooperate, so if it is “not just another meeting” as one person puts it. No relevant difference can be seen between the Dutch and the German level of knowledge.

*Having one common objective is vital:* Neither the German nor the Dutch side mentioned that a common objective is important when asked about a successful encounter. Generally, it was not mentioned that an encounter is perceived successful when there is one common objective, but when there are concrete outcomes resulting from the encounter. This counts for the Dutch and the German side. Consequently, the knowledge level about this foundation is rather low.

Dialogues:

*Trust, openness, honesty and equality are success criteria for encounters:* The above mentioned success criteria of openness and honesty were mentioned once, by a German interviewee. Overall, the knowledge about leading an international (Dutch-German) dialogue was non-existent. The complete sample did not know how such dialogues should be led. The general opinion was that German-Dutch dialogues should be led in the same way as Dutch-Dutch or German-German dialogues. This indicates a very big knowledge gap about the theoretical foundations. Both sides had the same lack of knowledge about it.

*Having one common objective is vital:* It does not become clear from the research results whether a common objective is considered of high importance or not. It is possible that interviewees did not think about it and hence, did not mention it. However, it was mentioned from the Dutch side that preparation is significant, and that the German side will be better prepared. This does not indicate that the interviewees know about the importance of a
common objective, though. Thus, there is a big knowledge gap about the foundations from both sides.

*Having good language & communication skills is important:* Language as a barrier to a successful dialogue was mentioned most often by both, the Dutch and the German interviewees when asked about differences in leading a Dutch-German dialogue. It became obvious that conversations between Dutch and German people that are led in Germany are usually led in a mix of English and German, whereas such dialogues in the Netherlands are usually led in English. One German mentioned, that Dutch people often think that they speak German, but actually they do not, which leads to misunderstandings. The results show that the gap of the interviewees’ knowledge and experience about the importance of having good language skills is very small, especially from the Dutch side. However, none of the interviewees mentioned the importance of good communication skills in order to successfully lead a dialogue. The only aspect mentioned was that it might be important to structure the dialogue by dividing the group into smaller units so people who are rather contained have the chance to speak up. This does not say much about the knowledge of the importance of communication skills, though. Thus, the gap concerning this aspect is very big, both on the Dutch and on the German side.

*Including the right participants is vital:* It was mentioned by one Dutch person and by one German person that taking the right participants is very important. This is only 18% of the research population, which implies that the interviewees do not know about the importance of having the right participants, or did not think about it during the interview. This indicates a big knowledge gap about this theoretical foundation.

*Culturally determined differences in chairing and structuring meetings, taking decisions, solving conflicts, protocols and atmosphere can impact a Dutch-German dialogue:* More than half of the Dutch and German interviewees were convinced that dialogues between Germany and the Netherlands are led in the same way as Dutch- or German-only conversations. Germany is considered so similar to the Netherlands that people think, as one Dutch interviewee put is: “I’ll be alright there!” (Daar red ik me wel!). This indicates a rather big knowledge gap about this theoretical foundation, on both sides. Concerning the awareness of differences in chairing and structuring a meeting 50% of the Germans and 43% of the Dutch people knew that a meeting in Germany will be more structured, and that conversations might be more formal. This indicates a rather big gap too. People were not very aware of the fact
that decisions are taken differently. In Germany there is a bigger hierarchy and the higher one’s position, the more power one has in making decisions. In the Netherlands, however, decisions are taken through consensus. The same counts for the difference in solving problems. Concerning the protocol it was only mentioned by one person that a meeting in Germany is more formal than in the Netherlands and that agendas and minutes are important. The formality relates to the last point: the atmosphere. Besides the formality aspect it was not mentioned that there might be a different atmosphere influenced by varying expectations. However, as one German person puts it: “Coffee and cake is always good” no matter which culture! In conclusion, this suggests that knowledge about the impact of cultural differences on a Dutch-German dialogue is very low from both sides and thus, the knowledge gap about this theoretical foundations is rather big.

The following table presents an overview of the results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Netherlands</th>
<th>Theoretical foundation</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small gap</td>
<td>Importance of personal encounter</td>
<td>Small gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big gap</td>
<td>Common objective of encounter</td>
<td>Big gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big gap</td>
<td>Dialogue led differently</td>
<td>Big gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big gap</td>
<td>Common objective of dialogue</td>
<td>Big gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big gap</td>
<td>Language &amp; communication skills</td>
<td>Big gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big gap</td>
<td>Right participants</td>
<td>Big gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(medium -) Big gap</td>
<td>Concrete cultural differences</td>
<td>(medium -) Big gap</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Conclusions

In this section a conclusion is drawn from the research results. In the results section the level of awareness concerning the theoretical foundations was discovered, and whether there is a knowledge gap about them, which could influence the success of the dialogue during a encounter. This gap is then filled by recommendations (see section 8 Advice, p. 48) which help to achieve the research objective: to advice the municipality of Groningen on how to raise awareness of the theoretical foundations about Dutch-German dialogues in encounters for institutions of HE, that aim at enhancing and substantiating the institution’s cross-border cooperation, by analysing their knowledge about and experience with the theoretical foundations and identifying gaps in their level of awareness of the foundations.

It can be started with the conclusion that there are some very big gaps between the interviewees’ knowledge and the theoretical foundations, which could consequently influence a successful Dutch-German dialogue in an encounter and thus, requires some recommendations on how to fill these gaps. However, there are also quite some smaller gaps.

Cultural aspects:

When comparing the knowledge of both countries, it becomes obvious that the gaps on the Dutch side are a little smaller than the gaps on the German side. Dutch people seem to be more aware of the cultural differences of Germany than Germans of the Dutch ones. One German even said that “we are all the same”. Additionally, overall awareness of some cultural differences seems to be existing (when asked about them), however, when this awareness was tested with scenarios, the level of awareness seemed lower and they often did not know how to deal with these differences.

As summarised in the theoretical framework (p. 11) the difference between the Netherlands and Germany are rather subtle, but still exist. This explains the general result of the interviews that Germany and the Netherlands are often considered the same. However, the comparison of both countries in terms of Hofstede’s various dimensions illustrates the existence of differences. Such a difference can be found in the way of addressing each other, so in formality. From the results it can be concluded that although there is knowledge about this difference, especially from the Dutch side, it is not known how to deal with it. This also becomes evident in the results of the Dutch-German dialogue questions. Although there are
only medium gaps in knowledge concerning cultural differences, there are big gaps in knowledge when it comes to cultural aspects in a Dutch-German dialogue. This again shows that in theory knowledge about cultural differences seems higher, but it is not known how to practically apply this, how to deal with these differences. From the results it can indeed be concluded that the knowledge level about cultural differences is higher on the Dutch side, with one exception. The Dutch side seems not to know that decisions are taken differently in Germany than in the Netherlands. Generally, the cultural differences are highly underestimated.

**International cooperation:**

From the results about the different levels of cooperation it can be concluded that both sides have a very high level of knowledge about them. In conclusion, the gap is very small and can be neglected. However, when it comes to evaluation criteria of successful cooperation there is still a lot to learn and the knowledge gap is rather big.

In theory, successful cooperation of organisations is more prone to be successful the more similar the national cultures are (van Oudenhoven & van der Zee, 2002). Moreover, previous experience in cooperation with the same country also positively contributes to successful cooperation. Having this in mind, it seems that Germany and the Netherlands have good chances for successful cooperation. From the results it can be concluded that both countries have a lot of experience in working with the other country which is rather promising for successful cooperation. This means that the potential to successfully cooperate is very high, provided that the theoretical criterion is correct. Moreover, the interviewees do know that the Netherlands and Germany are similar in their culture; in fact many even overestimate similarity of both countries (compare interview question 10), which is another indicator for potentially successful cooperation.

**Event features & Dutch-German dialogues:**

In conclusion, it becomes obvious that the importance of having a personal encounter in order to agree on cooperation is very well known. Thus, the gap is small and negligible for this research. What needs to be worked on though, is to ensure that there is a common objective for such encounter as both sides seem very unaware of this importance.
When it comes to the results of leading a Dutch-German dialogue it can be concluded that the level of knowledge regarding this aspect is very low. In fact, leading a Dutch-German dialogue presents the biggest gap in knowledge about theoretical foundations. It can be concluded that there is a big lack of knowledge on both, the Dutch and the German side concerning the way of leading a Dutch-German dialogue. First of all, both nationalities are not aware of the fact that Dutch-German dialogues should be led differently than Dutch- or German-only dialogues. Additionally, the importance of one common objective, the right participants and good communication skills is highly underestimated. Besides this, Dutch-German cultural differences affecting such dialogue are also not taken seriously enough.
8. Advice

In this section the results and conclusions are examined and recommendations given. It is advised how awareness of the theoretical areas (foundations) of which the interviewees showed a big knowledge gap can be raised, and how diverging expectations can be merged. It was discovered that potential participants of dialogues and encounters had several knowledge gaps about the theoretical foundations of such Dutch-German dialogues. This advice gives recommendations on how to close these gaps. It focuses on recommendations for the Dutch participants, as the client of this research is a Dutch organisation. The results of the German participants are mainly considered in order to make the Dutch side aware of the knowledge level of their partners. It is essential that the Dutch side is aware of what the German side knows about the Dutch side. This can reduce misunderstandings which can negatively influence the encounters as where experienced by the municipality before.

The advice takes a twofold approach: it involves an information and a reconciliation strategy. The information strategy is intended to increase the knowledge of the participants of a dialogue and encounter for institutions of higher education. However, knowledge does not always have an impact on behaviour. This can be seen by the fact that interviewees did show knowledge about certain cultural differences. However, when this knowledge was tested with scenario questions they did not know how to deal with it, how to behave. Therefore, the information strategy is very practically oriented. This advice also recommends applying a reconciliation strategy. The reconciliation strategy is intended to bring together and connect the conflicting differences and the lacking knowledge about the theoretical foundations, in order to close the gap. This means, that the reconciliation strategy is only used for the gaps in cultural aspects, whereas the information strategy is used for the cultural aspects, but also for closing the knowledge gap about the other theoretical foundations (international cooperation and features of encounters).

First of all, the interviews revealed that a personal encounter is indeed considered the right tool to get universities together to cooperate. It became clear that preparation is a vital part, though. Therefore, it is advised to carefully prepare the encounter. It is advised to create a hand-out including all the steps of preparing an encounter. These are: purpose, scope, goal, participants, content/subject, programme, questions to be answered, intended outcome, form and minimum requirements of minutes, activities to be done after the encounter (see section
3.3.4). This hand-out should be distributed to all the participants. The step of preparing the intended outcome also involves creating a common objective for the encounter with which both parties comply, in order to avoid disappointment. The municipality is advised to collect forms on which the participants have filled in their expectations of the trip. The various expectations need to be reconciled by taking aspects of both sides. All participants need to be informed about the final objective of the encounter.

Information strategy:

As research has revealed general knowledge about cultural differences between Germany and the Netherlands is rather low, consequently, the knowledge gap about the foundations rather big. A significant number of the research population considered the cultural differences between Germany and the Netherlands non-existent or very little. The results show that a Dutch-German dialogue is even considered to be led in exactly the same way as a dialogue within one culture. As revealed in the theoretical framework (section 3, p. 11) this unawareness could negatively influence a dialogue and business encounter. Thus, it is advised to organise a preparation workshop in which the participants can learn about the differences about which they lack knowledge. As already mentioned, informing people does not mean that it has an impact on their behaviour. Therefore it is advised that the workshop includes information sessions, mixed with practical intercultural training (role plays), in order to ensure knowledge is also translated into behaviour. This preparation workshop needs to take place before the encounter, so the participants have sufficient time to digest their newly acquired intercultural competence. The topics of the information session and role plays are the following:

- Form of address: Although research revealed that generally the Dutch knowledge and awareness level concerning Dutch-German differences in terms of addressing others seems to be quite high, it became obvious that participants do not know how to correctly deal with this. Hence, it is considered vital to explicitly train participants in how to address their foreign partner. Dutch people should be informed that Germans are rather formal and an informal form of address is only advisable after it has been explicitly talked about. This can be translated into behaviour by participating in a role play about a Dutch-German discussion, in which Dutch people have to take the role of both, a German and a Dutch partner. Additionally, it should be made clear to the
Dutch participants that the German partners are rather unaware of the fact that there is a culturally determined difference between addressing each other.

- Hierarchy, positions: awareness of hierarchical differences between both countries was surprisingly low. During a Dutch-German dialogue this can have an impact on structure, protocol and atmosphere of the encounter. The participants can best be made aware of these differences, by participating in the role play representing a German person who is chairing a business meeting. Also, a conflict situation can be used, in order to illustrate that conflict and discussions are handled differently in both countries.

- Taking decisions: The Dutch side was very unaware of the fact that decisions are taken differently in Germany. This difference can also be made clear to them during the role play in which Dutch people take the role of a German and need to take a decision about an important issue.

- Quality of results: Although the majority of the Dutch people did know that Germans tend to work to achieve the best possible result, the German side was rather unaware of the fact that Dutch people have different priorities. Therefore, it is very important for the Dutch people to know that when working with Germany there might be different expectations concerning the outcome. Hence, it is advised to inform the Dutch people during the workshop that they need to be very clear to their partners about their expectations of the encounter and their cooperation. This implies that, as stated with one of the theoretical foundations, a common objective is an important feature of a dialogue. In order to ensure a smooth encounter the municipality is advised to have a facilitator leading the dialogue in encounters. This could be an employee of the municipality as he/she will be impartial towards all institutions involved and take a neutral stance. The facilitator is advised to ensure everybody knows about and agrees with the objective so no dissatisfaction and wrong expectations can arise.

- Life/work balance: Research has shown that the level of awareness about the differing ways of contemplating the importance of work is at a medium level. This also influences the way work is approached during an encounter. Thus, it is advised to be specifically clear about the various activities on the programme agenda. It should
be clearly indicated when there is time for work related activities, and when the schedule leaves room for leisure activities.

In order to convince the participants of the importance of cultural awareness, they need to be informed about the advantages of intercultural competence. Hence, it is advised to inform the participants about the advantages of cultural awareness. Such advantages are: no frustrations arise, dissatisfaction is reduced, conflict and disappointment prevented. Additionally, dialogues and encounters will flow better, and the goal will more easily be reached.

Reconciliation Strategy:

Reconciling cultural differences means connecting the differing values so they actually do not lead to conflicts, but supplement and enforce each other. This is based on Trompenaars and Prud’homme’s (2004) work of reconciling corporate cultures. Reconciliation can only work if one has intercultural competence. Therefore it is important to first have the preparation workshop where the participants receive training in intercultural awareness. The aim of this reconciliation strategy is to close the knowledge gap. This is often done by looking at one’s own cultural values and the partner’s cultural values, and bringing both together with doing things in the partner’s way. Thereby they create their own ‘culture’. If both cultures do so they can reconcile their cultural differences. The facilitator needs to ensure that this is done.

Dimensions that are advised to be reconciled:

- The difference in hierarchy, positions and decision making are advised to be reconciled as together they are most unknown amongst the participants. Trompenaars and Prud’homme (2004) summarise these differences in a dimension called Egalitarian vs. Hierarchical. The German decisiveness and leadership orientation can clash with the Dutch flat hierarchies and consensus orientation. In order to reconcile these differences it is advised to combine both and be decisive through consensus. This means that during the encounter it needs to be ensured that e.g. leaders use their status to encourage people to jointly achieve the best result. This should be the task of the facilitator.

- The difference in quality of results is another issue that can be solved by reconciling the German rather result oriented and the Dutch more process oriented attitudes. Trompenaars and Prud’homme (2004) call this the dimension of People Centrality vs.
Result Centrality. This can be reconciled by bringing the Dutch people’s personal needs and goals in line with their organisation’s needs and goals, and by stressing the importance of people for the German side. With making the organisation’s goals the Dutch people’s personal goals their engagement in work can be increased. This can be done with scenario planning during the workshop, which means that people will have to think about the future situation of their organisation.

In general, differences are advised to be reconciled by showing the participants that work can be done differently as well. Ideally, they can learn from each other. If both sides move towards the partners’ side, they can meet in the middle and create their own way of doing and approaching work, their own ‘culture’.

Information strategy for the other gaps:

- Agree on one language and have a translator: The results show that the language issue is the most recognized, and probably also most crucial barrier to a successful international dialogue. Therefore it is advised to agree on one language and stick to this language throughout the dialogue. By using English as the leading language both parties have equal chances as no one party has the benefit of using his mother tongue. Additionally, it is advised to have a translator at hand in case of difficulties. This way, also participants who are less proficient in English have the opportunity to state their opinion.

- Take the right participants: Research results show that the importance of taking the right participants who can make the needed decisions was not very well known amongst the research population. Therefore, the municipality is advised to investigate who the right participants might be and encourage the participants to think about this as well. This should be done before the preparation workshop, so the right participants can also take part in the workshop.

The knowledge concerning the various levels of cooperation is very high and leaves a small gap between ideal foundations and present knowledge. However, it seems unclear to the potential participants with whom and how they already cooperate. In order to have a smooth and successful encounter it is advised to ensure that every participant is on the right track concerning their partners and cooperation. This should be done by briefings within the respective institutions of HE. This internal briefing should not be done by the municipality,
though. The municipality is merely advised to send them reminders (E-mails) about such a briefing.

Another finding that could negatively influence a successful encounter is the big knowledge gap about ideal evaluation criteria of cooperation. Knowledge about measuring successful cooperation is very low. Therefore it is advised to increase this knowledge by including measurement options on the agenda of the encounter. The participants need to have similar expectations on how to evaluate the success of cooperation, in order to effectively cooperate. This is advised to be done by encouraging mutual exchange on their evaluation criteria. Additionally, it is advised to already discuss the evaluation criteria during the preparation workshop. This way, the Dutch side is already aware of their own criteria.


