



Cultural differences in INTERREG-projects

When a Scandinavian Chairman of a meeting with INTERREG partners pours coffee for everyone, the Chairman could be interpreted as being insignificant by partners from Mediterranean countries. They may even draw the conclusion that he is not the person making decisions. This is just a small example of how cultural attributes can give rise to different interpretations. The CULTPLAN project will address the management of cultural differences due to different perspectives, specific working customs or planning culture in INTERREG projects.



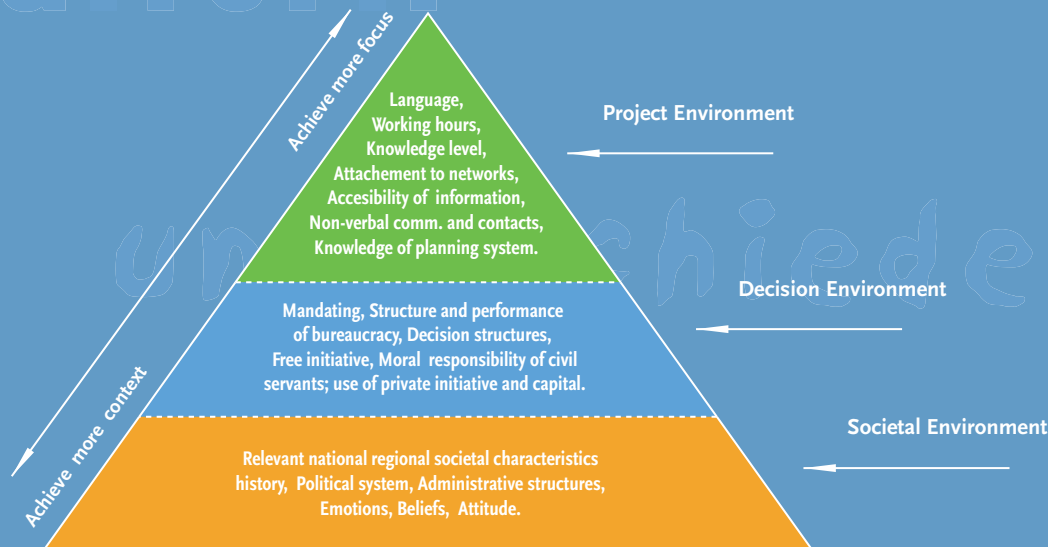
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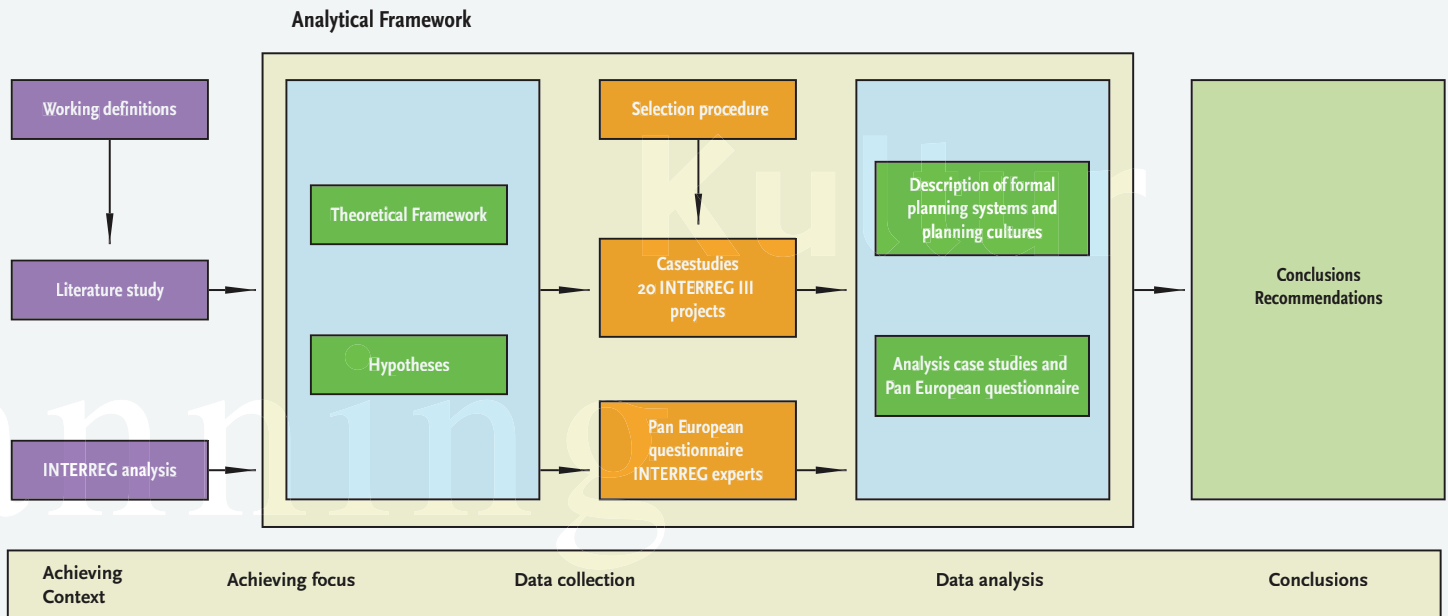
Spatial planning is largely a cultural activity because it impinges directly on political, social and economic issues. Planning concepts, development processes and planning decisions are always influenced by the cultural backgrounds of social groups and individuals, and cultural differences are one of the obstacles to successful planning. Cooperation between actors is complicated by their different perceptions of the meaning of space and understanding of planning systems and processes. This can be a particular problem in international projects because planning traditions and decision-making processes may vary considerably between the countries involved.

Objectives

The CULTPLAN project addresses the management of different planning cultures and contexts in INTERREG projects. It is based on the assumption that many problems arise from differences in the cultural backgrounds of the cooperating partners. Project managers who are able to cope with this issue can exploit such cultural differences to good effect: positive energy can be generated if project work is allied to traditional ways of working and planning.

CULTPLAN aims to articulate and exchange best practices on managing differences between planning cultures within programmes and projects. A further objective is to formulate conclusions and recommendations for managing cultural differences in future initiatives and international planning processes. Learning from and adapting working practices to the different planning cultures will contribute to the success of the INTERREG III programmes and projects.





The methodological design of the research

An analytical framework has been constructed which recognises different levels within projects and programmes, such as a project team, plans and planning processes, and implementation level. Taking the example of communicative aspects within a transnational team, the relevant issues at a higher level include traditions in using design strategies, concepts and visualisation techniques in plan-making processes. Characteristic implementation strategies associated with the cultural identity of a nation or region will also be taken into account. The concept of culture is broken down into horizontal and vertical components. The horizontal component consists of cultural segments that are manifest at the same level: how individuals live together (social institutions), who controls whom (political institutions), how knowledge, ideas and values are disseminated between individuals and groups (language and

communication in the widest sense), etc. The vertical component deals with the manifest and more hidden aspects of culture: the immediately observable symbols, morals, patterns and norms, etc.

The analysis of INTERREG III projects (Strand A, B and C) will focus on the influence the cultural context exerts on planning processes. All the partners will work on at least 20 case studies, each of which will consist of a desk study of documents concerning the project and several interviews on location. A questionnaire will be sent to INTERREG participants across Europe to collect statistical and empirical material about the cultural determinants in INTERREG programmes and projects.

Results

A better cooperation between EU member states will have a positive effect on all kinds of environmental issues that need to be addressed. Environmental issues – and often also spatial and social issues – are rarely bounded to borders. Better insight in each others planning culture will indirectly stimulate national and regional governments to cross-border and transnational cooperation when environmental issues are concerned. A better knowledge of the different planning cultures and a better cooperation between EU-member states and in particular of regions thus also will lead to a sustainable development which is claimed in the European Spatial Development Perspective.

The project will present the final results in a conference for a wider audience at the end of 2007.

The project and their partners

CULTPLAN is a research project of INTERACT

<http://www.interact-eu.net>.

The consortium of CULTPLAN consists of partners with a research profile and a management profile and encompasses a wide cultural diversity in its own.

- **Alterra Green World Research**, the Netherlands
<http://www.alterra.wur.nl>; lead partner
- **HCU, HarbourCity University** Hamburg, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Germany
<http://www.hcu-hamburg.de/site/stadtplanung>.

- **ANEM, Development Company of Magnesia**, Greece
www.anem.gr.
- **Consvipo, Consortium for Development of Polesine**, Italy
www.consvipo.it, and its subcontractor **IUAV University in Venice**, faculty of urban and regional planning, www.iuav.it.
- **EUROREG, Warsaw University**, Centre for European Regional and Local Studies, Poland, www.euroreg.uw.edu.pl.

The CULTPLAN-team would appreciate if readers who have witnessed these cultural processes in their daily work could inform the project with interesting experiences and examples. Please address them to Pat.vanderjagt@wur.nl. The project has its own website: www.cultplan.org, for any further information.

planning culture in Europe
CULTPLAN
coping with cultural differences

