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Workstream 4

Lessons Learned

Deliverable 4.3

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Editors: Vlasta Kučič and Natalia Kaloh Vid

Contributors: Katalin Balogh, Isabelle Bambust, Caterina Falbo, Mira Kadric, Sylvi Rennert, and Maurizio Viezzi

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Lessons learned from piloting transcultural law clinics

1. The cooperation between law students and interpreting students was fruitful and enriching for both groups, allowing them to develop their existing competences and acquire new ones. Among the most important findings regarding competences (based on the experience from piloting the transcultural clinics as well as students' logbooks) are the following:
 - Law students need to learn about the translating/interpreting process because what they know in this regard is often superficial and limited. They also need to realise how important it is to cooperate with legal interpreters.
 - Students from both fields need to become aware that everything that happens in the court is a linguistic and communication act that will have a direct impact on people's life, reputation and integrity. They must understand that a trial is about people, and thus become aware of their professional and moral responsibilities and duties with regard to dignity and professional interpersonal communication.
 - It was very helpful for students to see and fully realise that working conditions in a courtroom are not always ideal, e.g. technical difficulties, conflicts, interruptions, time constraints, etc. It is essential to observe real-life hearings so that the students will be able to adapt to various situations later, in their professional life.
 - When organising mock trials, the students should be encouraged to include their experiences from real-life court hearings.
2. Observing the court hearings aims to enable the students to become aware of the challenges present in such a situation, to analyse and understand the underlying reasons for everything that is said in court (formulas, questioning techniques, rhetoric strategies, etc.) and take them into account when interpreting.
3. Students enjoyed translating real documents that will actually be used in real-life situations.
4. Students found mutual cooperation and teamwork very encouraging. It also helped to improve students' ability to contribute to the common effort.
5. Students gained an awareness of the challenges and the skills needed to establish successful communication through translation and/or interpreting in legal contexts.
6. It is highly important to motivate the students to participate in the clinics, especially law students. It is necessary to find a way to involve them because language alone is not always interesting enough for law students.
7. It is very important to prepare the students for what will happen in the courtroom, what to expect there and what to focus on (briefing and debriefing), e.g. to show students around the courtroom before the trial or mock trial or to explain the court procedures and details of the case in advance, and to assuage any fears they may have.
8. Translation/interpreting and law students appreciated the discussions after the observations and listening to the different perspectives of their fellow students. This also highlighted that a listener's prior training and whether they understand the interpreted language or not can significantly influence their perception of an interpreter's performance.

Lessons learned

9. When organising observation activities, it can be beneficial to combine different languages (a more familiar language and less familiar languages as well as sign languages) to let students experience different levels of understanding.
10. It is not always possible or easy to count on successful cooperation with judicial and prison authorities when it comes to access to persons suspected or accused of crime, as they are often constrained by norms or procedures. This also has a direct impact on organising the practical parts of the transcultural law clinics, so a certain flexibility of planning is required.
11. The number of participants should be adapted to the programme. While a small number of up to ten will enable everyone to be directly involved, make it possible to do proper group work, and allow an in-depth analysis of the various topics, larger groups may be desirable for other types of activities and with a view to involving more students.