



MODULE 1

Getting to know the CONNECT programme and each other

Module 1: Learning objectives

This module will enable you to:

- Understand the CONNECT programme and your role in it;
- Get to know the other CONNECT participants and the municipality they work for;
- Plan – together with your partner municipality – the knowledge exchange mission
- Understand the most important challenges associated with intercultural communication

Table of Contents

1.1 What is CONNECT?

- Read the chapter;
- Watch videos 1.A & 1.B;
- Check out the CONNECT website and Facebook group.

1.2 Planning the knowledge exchange

- Read the chapter;
- Complete assignment 1.A – fill out the exchange planning template;
- Check out the CONNECT website and Facebook group.

1.3 Getting to know each other

- Read the chapter;
- Research your partner country's context;
- For visiting municipalities – read the country profile;
- Complete Assignment 1.B - Upload your personal profile and information about your country/municipality on the CONNECT Facebook group.

1.4 Intercultural communication

- Read the chapter;
- Watch video 1.C;
- Complete Assignment 1.C – Fill out the form on 'Analysing your culture's communication style'.

1.1 WHAT IS CONNECT?

You have been selected to participate in CONNECT, but what is this programme all about? In this section we try to give you some insights into the programme, its methods and its goals.

CONNECT is a programme to help local and regional governments from all over the world engage in exchange experiences and best practices. It works by linking a request for expertise from a local or regional government in a EU partner country to experience offered by a

"Knowledge and skills are exchanged between people doing the same job, facing similar problems and looking for practical solutions."



Frédéric Vallier
CEMR SECRETARY GENERAL
PLATFORMA

regional or municipal government in an European country by facilitating a short one-off exchange activity. The programme has been created by PLATFORMA and one of its founding partners VNG

International, and is financially supported by the European Commission. To explain CONNECT in a bit more detail we have created the following video, in which you also hear former participants talk about their CONNECT experiences:

[Video 1.A](#)



We hope this video makes you even more enthusiastic about participating in CONNECT! Let us know what you think about it on our [Facebook group](#)!

What is the CONNECT approach?

We believe that there is a wealth of experience and expertise within local governments around the world. Moreover, many local government practitioners want to share their knowledge and are keen to learn from the experiences of others. This is why we have built CONNECT to link the supply of local governance expertise to a demand for such expertise.

CONNECT is centred on colleague-to-colleague learning – CONNECT does not want to bring in external experts to tell local governments how to solve their problems. Instead we want to bring together a group of local government colleagues to – jointly – tackle concrete challenges. In doing so they can draw on the experience of the visiting municipality, as well as the experience with and knowledge of the local context of the receiving municipality. In this approach the municipalities work together as partners.

CONNECT is built on voluntary contributions – The people from the receiving and visiting municipalities, involved in the knowledge exchange mission, dedicate their time to this programme voluntarily and with the endorsement of their municipalities, because they believe in the CONNECT approach. This means that while the programme covers some expenses made, it does not fund the time of the municipal employees involved in the exchange (see financial guidelines, module 3).

CONNECT is demand-driven – The CONNECT programme is about identifying local government needs and linking those to offers of matching expertise. The programme does not set its own priorities in terms of which challenges to tackle, it is fully demand driven.

CONNECT is the first step – CONNECT can only fund short knowledge exchange activities. As such, we see the CONNECT knowledge exchange as a first step in a longer process of change. After the knowledge exchange, it is up to the participating municipalities to transfer the knowledge gained and connections made into real concrete change on the ground. This also means that CONNECT cannot fund follow-up activities after the exchange mission.

How does CONNECT work in practice?

How do we achieve our goal of knowledge exchange? We have developed a 6-step process through which we work. We have also used this for your exchange:



Step 1: Request expertise – The process starts with municipalities facing a challenge. Based on this challenge they formulated a request for expertise to help addressing this challenge. A selection committee, existing of practitioners, reviewed the different requests and selected the most relevant and suitable for a CONNECT exchange.

Step 2: Define objectives and activities – the request for expertise was then fine-tuned with the help of the CONNECT team.

Step 3: Search for municipal partners – the request for expertise was published by the CONNECT team and distributed amongst European municipalities. These were able to formulate offers for expertise and a selection

committee selected the most appropriate offer.

Step 4 & 5: Meet your colleagues and exchange your know-how – this is the next step in the process and the reason for this preparatory training guide. In the coming months you will get to know your partner municipality and – together – prepare the knowledge exchange mission. During the mission, you will further explore the municipal challenge and jointly look for possible solutions.

Step 6: Evaluate and learn – CONNECT continues after the knowledge exchange mission. You will evaluate the mission together with the CONNECT team to assess its successes and challenges, and learn from the exchange so that we can keep improving the CONNECT experience.

Who is the CONNECT team? And how do I reach them?

You have probably already been in touch with the CONNECT team and you might be curious to know who the faces are behind CONNECT. That is why we have developed this brief video to introduce ourselves.

[Video 1.B](#)



We are always ready to answer your questions and support you in your CONNECT experience. If you want to get in touch with us, you can do so by email (connect@ccre-cemr.org) or through our **Facebook group**, accessible [here](#). We try to respond to all emails and Facebook messages within two working days. This is also the place where you can get to meet other CONNECT participants, not just from your partner municipality, but also from other CONNECT exchange programmes. Please make use of the opportunity to also exchange directly with this unique network of people!

If you prefer to use **email**, you can also reach us at: connect@ccre-cemr.org..

Also, find below some information about the two organisations behind CONNECT:



VNG International is the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities. We support decentralisation processes and facilitate decentralised cooperation. The organization strengthens local governments, their associations, training institutes and decentralisation task forces both in developing countries and in countries in transition. We develop high quality services such as benchmarks for local governments all over the world.

For more information: www.vng-international.nl

PLATFORMA is the European coalition of local and regional governments – and their associations – active in city-to-city and region-to-region development cooperation. Since its creation in 2008, PLATFORMA has been representing more than 100,000 local and regional governments. All are key players in international cooperation for sustainable development.

The aim of PLATFORMA is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and mutual learning, but also to strengthen the specific role of local and regional governments in development policies.

For more information: <http://platforma-dev.eu>

Further information on CONNECT

If you want to get more information, you can check out the CONNECT website [here](#). We have also created a flyer which explains the programme and a flyer about the CONNECT pilot phase which you can find [here](#), and [here](#). If you want to know more about the implementing partners, you can find more information about PLATFORMA [here](#) and about VNG International [here](#).

FURTHER READING

If you are interested in knowing more about the CONNECT approach, you can have a look at the following publications:



- PLATFORMA, 'Development effectiveness at the local and regional level: Fostering synergies between local and regional governments and the EU in the post-Busan era', available at: <http://www.cib-uclg.org/cib-library/content/development-effectiveness-local-and-regional-level-fostering-synergies-between>
- PLATFORMA (2017), 'Shaping a new generation of decentralised cooperation For enhanced effectiveness and accountability', available at: <http://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/PLATFORMA-CPMR-Study-New-generation-EN.pdf>
- PLATFORMA (2017), 'HANDBOOK For a successful project', available at: <http://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/PLATFORMA-v2-EN-1.pdf>
- You can find more publications at: <http://platforma-dev.eu/publications/>

1.2 PLANNING THE KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

You have already completed the application stage of the CONNECT programme and have been matched to a partner. Congratulations! Now the real work starts! Below you will find outlined the actions that have to be undertaken in the coming weeks by both the visiting and receiving municipality. We have briefly outlined the main activities that will have to take place in the coming weeks. In the exercise below we ask you to fill out a planning template, together with your partner.

Before the knowledge exchange:

- 2 skype meetings will have to be organized between the visiting and receiving municipality;
- Finalisation of the knowledge exchange programme. Together with your partner municipality/municipalities you will have to finalise the knowledge exchange programme. This will be explained in detail in Module 2;
- Arranging of all logistics for the exchange programme by the receiving municipality/municipalities, in consultation with the CONNECT team, including accommodation and transport;
- Completion of the preparatory training by both (or: all) involved municipalities;

After the knowledge exchange (more information in module 3)

- Finalisation of the joint report and of the deliverables.
- Completion of the satisfaction survey by both (or: all) involved municipalities
- Completion of the change tracking forms by the receiving municipality

Assignment 1.A: Planning the knowledge exchange

We have made a template to help you plan the knowledge exchange. It can serve both as a check list, and as an agenda.

For this exercise please have a look at the 'exchange planning template' ([here](#)), and – together with your partner municipality – make an initial planning of the preparations. You will find all instructions in the template.

Once finished please share your planning with the CONNECT team. We are also happy to help you think about the planning (e.g. by attending one of your Skype meetings).

Time commitment:

For the visiting municipality: You can expect to spend 4 days on preparation and reporting, of which about 2 days for preparations and 2 for monitoring, evaluation and reporting. The knowledge exchange itself will last between 5 and 10 working days, depending on the request of the partner municipality/municipalities.

For the receiving municipality: You can expect to spend 4,5 days on preparation and reporting, of which about 2,5 days for preparations and 2 for monitoring, evaluation and reporting. The knowledge exchange itself will last between 5 and 10 working days.

How can I make the most of the CONNECT experience?

The knowledge exchange mission is just a few days, to make the most out of this you will have to take the following into account:

- **Plan your agenda carefully:** As the exchange mission itself will only last a few days, it is crucial to plan the mission well. This way during the mission, all energy can go to the exchange.

- **Understand each other's context beforehand:** For both the receiving and visiting municipality it is important to have some idea of the context of each other's municipalities. The best way to do this is to talk about it! In sections 1.3 and 1.4 we have designed some assignments to help you with this.
- **Recognise the limits of the exchange:** Set your goals in a realistic manner. Here it is crucial to consider the context of the receiving municipality: to what extent is there political will to enact change?; what resources can be made available?; are there external constraints (e.g. national legislation or policies)?; Are there elections upcoming?
- **Communicate about each other's expectations:** Make sure you and your partner municipality understand each other's expectations and have an agreement on what you want to and can achieve in the mission.

The constraints of CONNECT

As mentioned above, CONNECT can only fund one, short-term knowledge exchange between the partners. Concretely this means that:

- This is a 1-time exchange opportunity. Unfortunately, **CONNECT cannot fund follow-up activities**. However, we can inform you about potential funding opportunities, in case you want to continue the new partnership.
- **CONNECT is a 'soft', capacity-building initiative.** Our mission is to enrich people's knowledge, and their ability to realise social change, through international engagement and partnerships of cities and regions. CONNECT cannot fund other types of activities, such as infrastructure investment or repair, hiring of employees, political visits, private trips or holidays, cultural exchanges or performances, commercial consultancy, expertise, services or supplies.

1.3 GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

You have been linked to a partner municipality. Now let's get to know each other better! While you share a passion for your city or region, you probably are from different cultures, speak a different language and have maybe never visited each other's countries before. This section will help you to get to know each other better professionally and socially.

First, you may want to do a bit of research on each other's countries, but where to start? We have prepared several country profiles, and we ask the municipalities to study the one(s) concerning the other participant municipality/municipalities carefully. It provides valuable information on both the local governance context and the broader social and economic context ([here](#)).

However, we encourage both the visiting and receiving municipalities to do a bit more research about each other's countries. There are a number of websites that can be really helpful:

- The **CIA World Factbook** (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>) has the basic facts about all countries in the world, ranging from history to geography and economics;
- The **BBC Website** (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/country_profiles/default.stm) also has good country profiles with links to their news articles;
- Your own **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** probably has some information on the participating countries and the relations between your countries.
- As you might expect, **Wikipedia** is often also a good source of basic information, has information on territorial administration and governance, and contains useful links to further information.
- You can also find some interesting publications on the **PLATFORMA** website ([here](#)), particularly if you scroll down to the section on Global & regional reports

But you might want to know a bit more about each other's municipality than dry facts, and of course you want to get to know the people you will be working with in the coming months. The best way to do this is to get on the CONNECT [Facebook group](#) and start talking to each other! To this end, we have designed the below assignment.

Assignment 1.B: Getting to know each other

We believe that investing a little bit of time in personal relations before your exchange mission, will make the mission more effective and a lot more fun! Please connect with each other on the CONNECT Facebook group in the following ways:

- Post a **short profile of yourself** on the CONNECT Facebook group, you will find this group [here](#). Feel free to be creative, but here are a few suggestions:
 - Include some professional information, such as your function and how long you have been working for the organization)
 - Also, include some personal information. A nice question to answer is: What is unique about you? (you are a rescue diver, an amateur actor, you have 5 cats, etc.)
 - Post a picture that says something about you as a professional or as a person. As the cliché goes: A picture is worth a thousand words. (a picture of the city hall, of your town square, etc.)
- Post some fun **information about your culture** on the CONNECT Facebook group. We suggest:
 - A link to a popular music video;
 - A suggestion of a good author from your country (available in English);

- A link to a good website to more information about your municipality or country (in English);
- A famous saying from your country or municipality. Something that summarises your culture;
- Ask your foreign colleagues something about themselves. Look for things you have in common (e.g. you both have young children, you like to be outdoors, you enjoy the mountains, etc.)

1.4 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

For most CONNECT participants, it is the first time to be part of such an international exchange, especially one between one (or more) European and non-European municipality (municipalities). This is why we think it is important to spend some time to look into the challenges of **intercultural communication**. A little time spent reflecting on this before your exchange will ensure a smoother experience.

We could spend many pages discussing intercultural communication. In fact, there are many university courses on this topic. However, in this section we will try to focus on some basic insights that will help make your exchange experience go more smoothly.

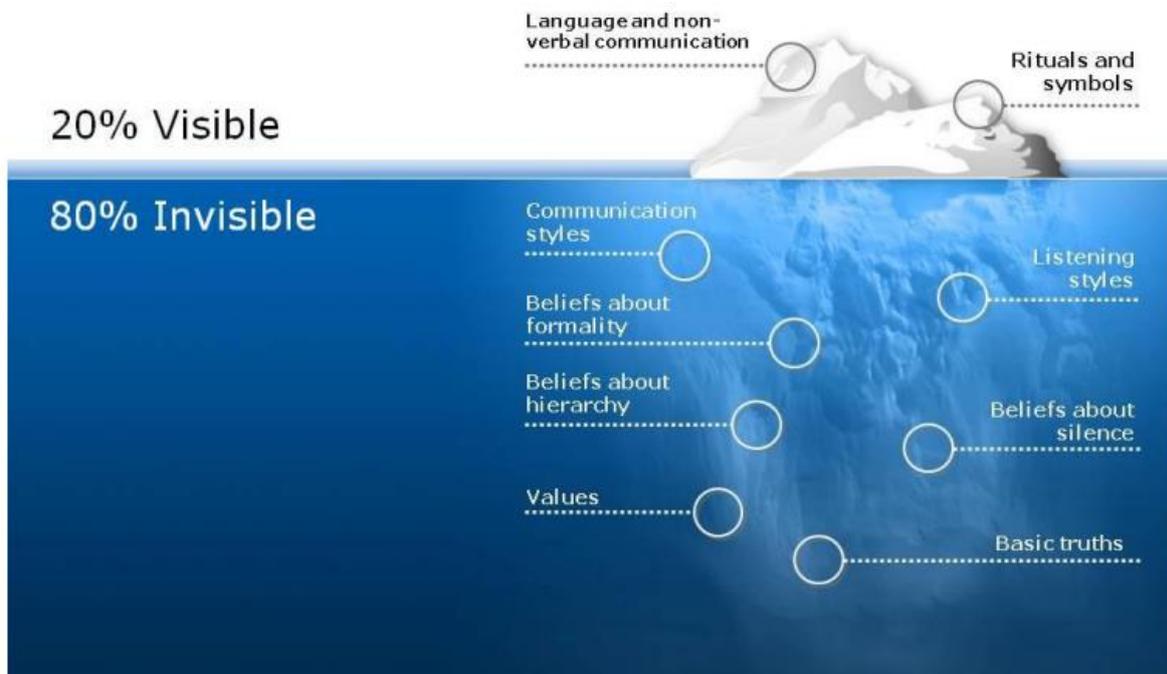
The first questions to answer are: what is intercultural communication and why is it important? The video below gives a brief insights into these two questions.

Video 1.C



So basically intercultural communication refers to what happens when people from different cultural backgrounds interact with each other. This can be incredibly fun, but also a difficult process as different cultures have different ways of seeing the world and different ways of communicating those points of view.

To be able to engage in intercultural communication, you need to become aware of all the different aspects that link culture to communication. The below image gives an insight into the complexity of this matter:¹



Of course, it takes years to truly understand the values and beliefs at the core of another culture, particularly because cultures are diverse and ever changing. However, we think that if you have an open mind, the exchange mission will be hugely enriching for both partner municipalities; it will provide you with a unique insight into a new culture and hopefully also help you learn something about yourself.

To navigate intercultural communication as effectively as possible, it helps to keep a few things in mind. Firstly, it is important to realise that you will share systems of belief in some areas, you may have different beliefs in other areas. Secondly, you will certainly have different ways of communicating your beliefs and values, both through language and through non-verbal communication. Finally, it is valuable to become aware of your own way of communicating and how it links to your culture. As part of this, be aware of your own stereotypes! After all, we all have them. One key issue in intercultural communication is gender. Almost every cultures has different beliefs about gender relations. Be aware of this and respectful of each other's beliefs, and – of course – always be respectful of people of another gender!

Navigating these intercultural communication challenges starts by being aware that they exist and then to be open-minded, sensitive, and flexible in adapting to them. Of course, by participating in CONNECT you have already shown yourselves committed to these values, and this has certainly been something we took into consideration in our selection process of the CONNECT participants. Below are some practical tips to successfully manage intercultural communication.

¹ Image taken from the 'Intercultural Training Exercise Pack' available at: <http://www.culturewise.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Cultural-awareness-training-exercise-pack.pdf>

Practical tips concerning intercultural communication

Source: Diana Rowland for Japanese Business.

- 1. Listen, listen, really listen.** Hear what they are really saying; not what you expect them to say.
- 2. Never assume anything.** Don't assume you understood correctly. Summarize your understanding of what they said. Don't assume they understood you correctly. Summarize important points using different words - or better yet, try to get them to summarize their understanding of the important point.
- 3. Slow down.** This is one of the easiest but most effective ways to help non-native speakers understand you. Don't forget they need time to translate into another language. This doesn't mean talking like a robot, it means slowing down enough to enunciate your words clearly and to express your thoughts in an organized easy-to-understand way.
- 4. Skip the Jokes.** Standard jokes don't communicate well across cultures. What is funny in one culture often makes no sense in another. You could easily inadvertently offend someone, make them perplexed, or convey an undesired image of yourself.
- 5. Drop the idioms** (sayings or expressions). Don't run the risk of confusion by having your idiomatic expressions taken literally. Even among countries that use English as their native language, they don't necessarily share the same expressions. In fact, an idiom in one country can have quite a different meaning in another, and even have an opposite or offensive meaning
- 6. Ask open-ended questions.** These are questions that begin with what, when, where, who, how and why. Because they cannot be answered by a mere yes or no, they give you a lot more information, and, more importantly, often more accurate information.
- 7. Write down large numbers.** Asia uses different units for counting large numbers, and even in the Western world, one billion can mean 1,000,000,000 in some countries and 1,000,000,000,000 in others.
- 8. Don't assume others are comfortable using first names.** Automatically switching to a person's first name can be a sign of disrespect. In some countries, the first name is only used among family member or between people who have been childhood friends. And people from group-oriented cultures draw identities from their family name.
- 9. Allow silences** when speaking with people from cultures like Japan where reflection before speaking is highly valued. This one of the most valuable ways to encourage communication to go both ways by giving them "space" to contribute. Allowing some silence before answering a question also makes your reply seem more important and thoughtful.
- 10. Conversely, be ready to jump in** when talking with people from cultures like Brazil, where two (or more) people often speak at the same time!

To help you tackle the challenges of intercultural communication and ensure you have an enriching experience, we have designed the following exercise for you.

Assignment 1.C: Analysing your culture's communication style

This exercise is designed to give your partner organisation an idea about your culture's communication style. It consists out of two parts

- Fill out the form on 'Analysing your culture's communication style' ([here](#)) and share it with your partner organisation. By sharing this form, both partner organisations will get a better understanding of each other's communication styles.
- We highly encourage you to create space at the beginning of your exchange mission programme to have a discussion on intercultural based on this form. You can highlight the most interesting differences and similarities between the cultures and have a discussion about the underlying reasons why your culture communicates the way it does. In this discussion feel free to share more than is on the form. After all, this is just a way to get you thinking and discussing.

FURTHER READING

Want to learn even more about intercultural communication? We recommend the following:



- A TED talk about Cross cultural communication by Pellegrino Riccardi: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMyofREc5Jk>