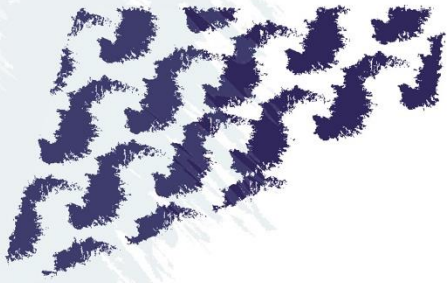


CULTURE is YOU



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Content Unit 10: Cultural Etiquette as Door Opener



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10 Cultural Etiquette as Door Opener

10.1 Introduction

"One cannot not communicate" (Paul Watzlawick) - this quote from a famous Austrian communication expert expresses exactly what we want to teach you in this learning unit: The importance of non-verbal communication. But also the well-known saying "Other countries, other customs" will be a topic in these pages: Because manners, from greetings to correspondence, can vary greatly from one country and culture to another. So how can you make interpersonal encounters pleasant and respectful?

Develop understanding, tolerance and intercultural skills through exposure to different customs. This is what this section is all about. Improve your intercultural etiquette by learning about the values, principles, behaviours, body language, communication rules and dress codes of other cultures.

In this module, you will look at the following:

- the term body language and gestures
- the importance of body language for communication processes
- the fundamental values of the EU
- the principles of gender equality
- the importance of integration within the European Union
- the different behaviours within the EU
- the main cultural rules of greeting in the EU
- the most important cultural rules in terms of casual and business wear within the EU
- the most important cultural rules for written communication in the EU

10.2 Body language in the EU

Surely you have noticed yourself that a friendly smile, an attentive look or a firm handshake can leave a very positive impression without a single exchange of words. On the other hand, avoiding eye contact, crossing one's arms or yawning can give the impression of rejection or insecurity.

These signals are part of **body language** and are an essential part of our communication.

But what is body language actually?

Body language includes, for example, a focused look, a confident handshake, a hunched posture, a head shake, a blank "poker face" and much more. These expressions can be divided into gestures (body movements), posture and facial expressions.



Definition

Body language is an ancient **form of non-verbal communication** in which we use posture, body movements (gestures) and facial expressions (facial expressions) to communicate. In a matter of seconds, we judge others and decide whether we like them or not based on their body language.

Have you ever wondered how important body language is in our communication?

It is hard to overestimate the importance of non-verbal communication. Some call it a universal language, others a secret code. What is certain is that **even when you think you are not saying anything, you are constantly communicating** through your clothing, posture, gestures, and facial expressions. The body is never silent.

Did you know that only about **5 per cent of your overall impression** is determined by **the words** you speak? You communicate 95 per cent with your tone of voice, your intonation and your dialect, as well as your speed of speech, appearance and body movements.

You can use positive body language in a targeted way by:

- Looking the other person in the eye
- Nodding and making small gestures of agreement
- Turning your face and upper body towards your counterpart
- Using gestures that reinforce what you are saying
- subtly mirroring the other person's body language

Note

The most attractive form of body language is a friendly **smile**. A smile signals openness, sympathy, familiarity and interest to the other person.

On the other hand, you should avoid:

- a weak handshake
- exaggerated gestures
- crossed arms
- a stooped posture
- wrinkling the nose
- looking down the ground
- the rolling of the eyes and
- raised eyebrows

Important

Before travelling to another country, always familiarise yourself with **cultural differences** in body language. For example, maintaining eye contact may be interpreted as trust in one culture, but as confrontation in another.

10.3 Common principles of etiquette

As a community of 27 European countries, the EU is also a **community of values**. This means that the member countries share a common set of values and principles.

Let's take a closer look at the EU's values.

The European Union has defined common values to promote peace and security, sustainable development and fair trade, the eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, as well as solidarity and mutual respect between member states. These form the basis of the transnational Union:

- **Respect for human dignity Human**
Human dignity must always be protected and respected.
- **Liberty**
Freedom allows people to travel and work freely within the EU. It also includes respect for private life, freedom of thought, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and freedom of information.
- **Democracy**
All EU citizens have the right to vote and to stand for election.
- **Equality**
Equality provides for the equal rights of all people before the law, including the principle of equal pay for equal work for men and women.
- **Rule of law**
The activities of the EU are based on treaties agreed voluntarily and democratically by the Member States.
- **Respect for human rights**
The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights guarantees human rights, such as the right to the protection of personal data and the right of access to justice.

Gender equality is also an important issue in the European community of values.

In many countries, there are differences in social living conditions and social roles between women and men. But what are the reasons for these inequalities?

Hint

The differences between men and women are not due to natural and biological inequalities but to **gender-specific socialisation processes**. This means that inequalities in access to, for example, education, resources and work, for example are created by social causes.

Did you know that?

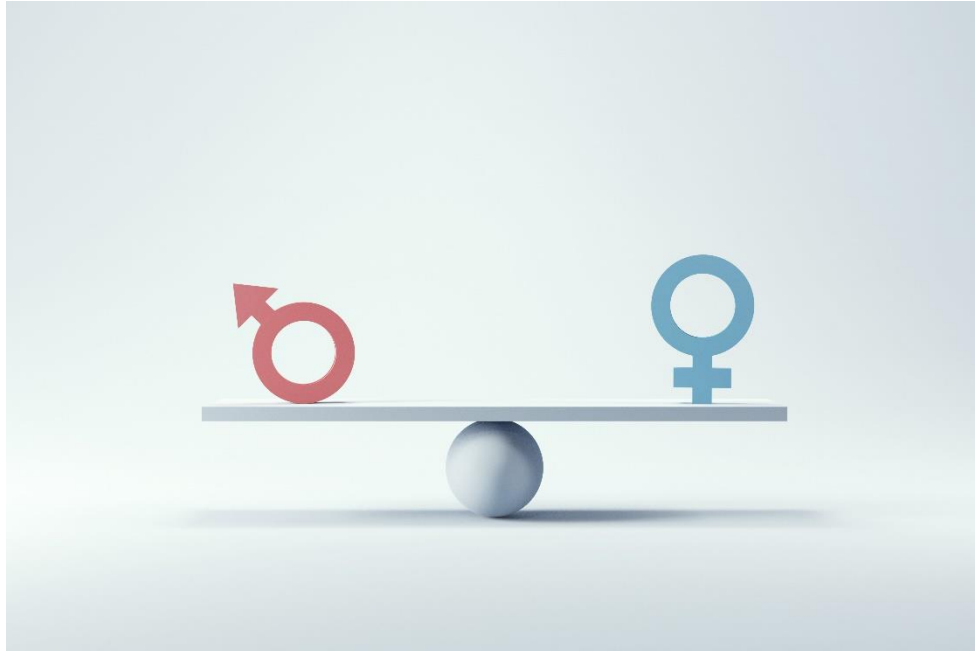
- Only 1 per cent of women in the world own land?
- Women in Germany still **earn about 18 per cent less** than men?
- **Violence against women is the greatest gender injustice** in Europe?
- Women earn only a tenth of the world's income?

This highlights the importance of promoting gender equality in all areas, whether it is reducing poverty, promoting health, strengthening the protection and well-being of girls and women, providing access to education or expanding women's economic freedom.

Note

Gender equality means that there are equal opportunities for men and women in all areas of life. This includes, for example, women and men having equal access to leadership positions and higher education.

Equality between women and men is a principle of the European Union and is enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.



The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** sets out these goals for gender equality. Women and men should be equal in society and all forms of discrimination should be eliminated.

Practical relevance

The EU aims to end all forms of violence against women and to ensure women have equal access to economic resources, health services and leadership positions.

Integration also plays an important role in the European Union. But what is integration?

Definition

The term "integration" comes from the Latin word "integratio", which means the restoration of a whole. In the European Union, it refers to **union or unification**.

European integration refers to the **political, economic, cultural, and social links and convergence** between European countries. Economically, this is done, for example, by reducing tariffs and creating cross-border markets. Political integration is achieved by bringing states together through treaties. Cultural integration takes place through intercultural exchange and fusion, and social integration through transnational contacts between civil society actors.

Why is EU integration so important?

- It helps to secure peace

- It increases material prosperity
- It unites transnational societies
- Creating a European identity

As one of the preferred regions for immigration, the EU has been confronted with high migration and refugee flows for many years. This is a political and societal challenge that needs to be addressed through well-managed **immigration and integration policies**.

Numerous action plans and projects are being implemented to ensure the fair treatment and integration of immigrants in the EU. These include pre-departure and pre-arrival integration measures, integration courses and education initiatives, labour market integration and active participation and social inclusion campaigns.

Note

The goal of successful integration always lies in respectful coexistence, shared responsibility and mutual acceptance.

10.4 Behaviour in the EU - different and yet so similar

Have you ever been in a situation where you were confronted with unfamiliar customs or did not know yourself how to behave towards people from other cultures?

When dealing with people from different cultural backgrounds, it is important to be open-minded and to be able to act according to the situation. Here you will find examples of different behaviours in the EU and tips on how to develop your intercultural skills.

Other countries, other customs - you have probably heard this saying before.

Communication and interpersonal exchange are always successful when the participants understand each other. However, instead of interpreting the behaviour of others based on your own views and expectations, it is advisable to get to know the cultural background and to understand basic forms of behaviour and communication.

Hint

Show openness and interest in other countries and cultures and their experiences and expectations. Show tolerance and respect for different behaviours and demonstrate adaptability and intercultural competence.

"**Cross-cultural**" learning also means paying attention to the other person's reactions. Facial expressions and gestures often reveal what is well received and appreciated and what is more likely to cause irritation. When in doubt, it helps to simply ask your interlocutor. This signals interest and respect for the other culture.

Let's look at some examples of different behaviour in the EU.

Do you want to know in which country it is better to be punctual and in which not, or how best to make a good impression? Here are some hints about customs in different EU countries.

- While punctuality is not taken very seriously, especially in southern countries such as **Spain, Italy** and **France**, where it is perfectly acceptable to be 20 minutes late, this is not the case in northern countries. If you are meeting people from **Austria, Germany** or the **UK** and want to make a good impression, you better should be on time.
- When you meet people for the first time, are you sometimes unsure whether it is polite to address them by their **first-name terms** or whether it is better to be casual? There are different customs in different European countries and even in different environments. In the **Netherlands**, communication is very friendly, and it is customary to address people by their first name. In **Greece**, people also like to use the form of address "you" In **Poland**, it is best to address people as "pan" (Mr.) or

"pani" (Mrs.). In **Hungary**, however, it is not so simple. There are three different forms of address, used according to distance and respect.

- If you enjoy informal **small talk**, then you are in the right place when talking to people from **Croatia**. People like to chat in a social and informal way when they meet. **Germans**, on the other hand, tend to use small talk as a conversation starter, but then get down to business fairly quickly.
- In **Sweden, Norway and the UK**, the bill is usually shared when eating out. In **Italy**, the bill is usually paid by one person at the counter. Set meals or pastries are charged extra and tips are already included. Out of habit, Italians rarely tip in other countries.



- Hospitality is very important in the **Czech Republic and Poland**. Whether you meet in a restaurant or invite someone to your home, **building long-term business relationships** is very important. It is especially appreciated during home visits if you bring the woman a souvenir from home. Avoid refusing food or drink. A symbolic tasting is better than a refusal.

Important

Whatever European country you are in, be aware that there may be specific expectations and customs that you should follow to make a good impression. Research typical etiquette and behaviour online or ask people directly.

10.5 Living and working in Europe – the most important etiquette rules

The right to free movement offers you as a citizen: in the EU the opportunity to live and work in any country in the European Union. Cultural dos and don'ts in dealing and communicating with each other are therefore essential. Do you know how to say hello in Austria or what is appropriate in Spain? If not, learn the most important greetings, dress codes and rules for correspondence for living and working in the EU.

Let's have a look at the forms of greeting used in the EU:

Only those who know how to greet and address each other correctly can make a polite and good impression on those around them. But do you know who greets whom and where, who shakes hands or gives a kiss of greeting?

Basically, there is a difference between the North and the South when it comes to the warmth of greetings. In northern countries such as Sweden, Finland and Norway greetings tend to be cool, like the weather, whereas in southern countries such as Italy, Spain and Portugal hugs and kisses are often common.



Meeting people in the **Czech Republic** is often very casual. Both in terms of clothing and small talk, people are generally relaxed and informal.

In **Poland**, on the other hand, kissing hands is still commonplace, especially for older men. Even holding the door open, taking off one's coat and other traditional behaviours are still present in this country.

In **Austria**, everything from a hug to a kiss to a handshake is possible. People who know each other like to say "Hallo", while "Grüß Gott" is used to greet strangers.

Cultural Etiquette as Door Opener - Living and working in Europe – the most important etiquette rules

In **Spain**, a simple handshake and a formal greeting of "señor" (gentleman), "señora" (woman) or "señorita" (unmarried woman) is appropriate. Informal greetings often include a kiss on the cheek or a hug, especially for women and within the family.

In the land of "dolce vita" (**Italy**) you will often find very boisterous and spirited manners. The culture of conversation is characterised by physical closeness and a higher volume of speech.

In **France**, whether you are in the supermarket or at a formal meeting, you always greet each other with "bonjour". It is also important to take your time and be patient. The French like to talk and they are very relaxed about time.

In **Sweden**, you can always address everyone with "you" and their first name. Even in business and at formal meetings, everyone is addressed as "you".

Wondering about every day and business dress codes in the EU?

Every country has its own dress codes, whether for everyday life or business. Although these are interpreted more freely in many areas of life than they were a few years ago, it is still advisable to know the dress codes of different cultures and to adapt to the environment.

You should always avoid:

- Flashy jewellery and accessories
- Clothing that shows a lot of skin, such as miniskirts, open-toed shoes and spaghetti straps.

Although many tourists in **Spain** wear casual holiday clothes, the Spanish appreciate good clothes. So leave your miniskirts, shorts and sandals at home when you're away from the beach. A stylish and well-groomed appearance makes a good impression.

For example, modern shirts and trousers are worn for leisure, while businessmen usually wear a dark suit and tie. A skirt or dress works very well for women in formal settings. A more conservative dress code that looks fashionable and sophisticated is always desirable among Spaniards.

Cultural Etiquette as Door Opener - Living and working in Europe – the most important etiquette rules



If you want to follow the usual dress code in **Austria**, wear a dark suit, shirt and tie for formal meetings. For women, a classic pantsuit or suit with a blouse is ideal. For casual wear, cotton trousers, jeans and a polo shirt or blouse are more appropriate. Trainers are also popular for casual wear.

In the **Czech Republic**, people tend to wear jeans and T-shirts for leisure, i.e., more casual clothes. In the business world, however, appearance and style are also very important. A well-groomed and rather conservative dress code, which avoids bright colours, is particularly important for meetings. In general, you show respect for your business partners by the way you dress.

Simplicity and elegance in the dress code are appreciated when doing business in **Poland**. Suit and tie for men and knee-length dress or suit for women are common. Modest jewellery is appropriate. Bright colours, eye-catching designs and ostentatious accessories should be avoided. In their leisure time, Poles like to wear fashionable and casual outfits, as in other European countries.

Note

The **transnational rule of business dress code** is:

A safe choice of business attire for a man is a dark suit, light shirt, and tie. Women can choose from a skirt with a blouse, a trouser suit or a dress.

Cultural Etiquette as Door Opener - Living and working in Europe – the most important etiquette rules

Communication and expression are not only important in face-to-face interactions but also in **written or electronic form**. Especially in the context of technological change, it is important to know the right when it comes to e-mail.

General tips for e-mail correspondence:

- Include a **clear subject line** in your email so that the content can be clearly identified before it is opened.
- Use a professional **email signature** that includes your name, position or department, company name and company address and phone number.
- Use **standard fonts** and avoid emoticons and bright colours in the text.
- Correct your email correction before you send it. Grammar and spelling mistakes do not make a good impression.
- Always try to **reply to** emails within **a day**. If you are unavailable, use an out-of-office message

Hint

Your email address is often the first impression you make. Always use a **professional email address** with your name or company name and avoid unprofessional nicknames or slang.

You may be wondering if there is a European style of communication that should be followed.

Basically, there is no one style that fits all European countries. In **Northern and Western Europe**, such as Germany, Austria or France, it is common to **communicate in a very direct and relevant way**. Emails are seen as a quick and easy way to communicate and get to the point quickly. In more **southern and eastern countries**, such as Spain, Portugal and Bulgaria, people **take more time to build relationships**. This means that questions about family well-being or personal messages are also common in written communication.

Hint

Since correspondence lacks the personal touch, you can include a link to your **LinkedIn profile** in your email. This will allow them to find out more about your career, skills and expertise.

10.6 Summary

Have you been able to develop an awareness of our **non-verbal communication** as an important **form of conveying information**? Our body language can be divided into **facial expressions and gestures**. It can tell us a lot about our counterparts, especially when we meet people from other cultures and want to communicate with colleagues from other EU countries.

Likewise, you have learned about the **European Union as a community of values** as well as a community of countries. By joining the EU, all Member States have committed themselves to **common values and principles** such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. We have worked hard on gender equality.

Integration is understood as **the fusion or unification of the** member states of the European Union on a **political, economic, cultural and social level and has become** increasingly important, especially in recent years.

Did you learn anything interesting from the tips on communicating with your EU neighbours? **Being able to communicate appropriately and respectfully with people from other cultures**, whether in face-to-face conversation or in digital correspondence, increases your chances of successful leisure and business relationships. Develop your intercultural communication skills through personal enquiries or online research and be aware of cultural differences between countries. This will help you make a positive impression on people across Europe and open **doors to fascinating cultures** through your **empathy and tolerance**.

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