
The role of geomeia in building intercultural competence

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A qualitative case study within the context of a student exchange program between Austria, Germany and China

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Abstract: Structured student exchange programs are known to foster intercultural competence (IC). We conceptualize IC as a construct that ranges from the individual level to the interactive cultural level, and we complement existing models of intercultural sensitivity and processes of introspection. Several factors may influence IC, such as mediatization, the ubiquity of geomeia, and global economic power shifts – in our case the rising global influence of China. In our long-term, qualitative case study on Austrian/German and Chinese exchange students, we consider geomeiatization as a new *socio*-technological regime that influences processes of social, cultural and physical orientation. The results indicate that, at the level of student exchanges, IC is a process of self-reflection and self-development. Geomeia play a major role in this process: they promise to provide a certain authenticity of experience, and sense of independence and safety, promises that are thwarted by exchange students' strong platform dependence and reliance on "the bubble".

Keywords: Geomeia, intercultural competence, China, student exchange, qualitative case study

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