**SUMMARY based on the reflection reports[[1]](#footnote-1) per group**

**1. Identify the MAIN features of diversity and difference between the students of your group that this exercise was able to bring out.**

Gr 1 (5 women):

*\* disciplinary background (Internat.Relations, Internat.Studies, Political Science, Anthropology)*

*\* focus at specific regions (ME, Sub-Saharan Africa, N-America)*

*\* topics of interest ( top-down versus local decision making processes)*

*\* level of expertise (theoretical versus practical knowledge by field work, internships, travel)*

Gr 2 (5 women, 4 IR, 1 CA- *found it hard to find any differences*):

*\* specializations within IR (History, English, Politics and French)*

*\* our personalities*

Gr 3 (3 men, 2 women) :

*\* focus (contextual: the historian, arabist and local expert i.e. the Syrian) or theoretical (the social geographer and the anthropologist)*

Gr 4 (3 women, 2 men):

*\* fields of expertise and knowledge (2 IR, Political Science, Law & Governance,Sustainable Development)*

*\* task orientation: working towards an interesting presentation versus taking time for developing a well formulated , overarching research question)*

Gr 5 (5 women, 1 man)

*\* disciplinary background (3 IR+1 PS (both more state-centered approach), 1 CA +1 Interdisc SS (both more bottom-up strategy)*

Gr 6 (5 women, 1 man)

*\* disciplinary background (History (change of society throughout history)+ International Studies (shift from multiculturalism to stronger nationalism), PS (top-down construction of social identities),Psychology (how identities can be constructed bottom up)*

*\* nationality and culture (e.g the English student taking the perspective ‘what are the consequences of Brexit for the refugee debate’, the Dutch student wants to study the debate from the shift multiculturalism to stronger nationalism)*

Gr 7 (5 women)

*\* disciplinary background (History (focus on the past), CA (bottom-up), PS + IR (both state centered approach)*

*\* country (kind of education)*

**2. Did students find this an effective way of mining and mapping the diversity of knowledge, skills, and experiences within their small working group?**

Gr 1: yes

*This exercise indeed gave us the opportunity to find out about each other’s expertise and*

*experiences in a fun and intellectually stimulating way. It was surprising how quickly we*

*got to a topic of common interest, and how much expertise every one of us could bring to*

*the table. Learning about other students’ perspectives on the topic triggered us to think*

*outside the discipline we are used to, which was very eye opening and brought about*

*interesting and stimulating discussions.*

Gr 2: yes

*It was an exercise to map our collective knowledge within our own field rather than mapping the diversity of our group. Through the process of drafting three separate mind maps, we were able to fine-tune the discussion until we reached a topic and research question that incorporated each group member’s area of expertise and interest. As the discussion continued we realised that these areas were limiting in that some members were unable to incorporate their areas of interest, and so we eventually reached the general topic of Identity Politics with a focus on the current ‘Refugee Crisis’. In summary, we did find the task an effective way of bringing out each individual’s knowledge and interests. However, most importantly, we also found it a fruitful task with regards to getting to know each other and we each feel more comfortable approaching each other for assistance and support in future assignments.*

Gr 3: yes

*It was certainly effective, since everyone viewed the issue from a different perspective. Taken together, the skills and experiences of our group constantly built upon each other, which was enlightening and enriching. Not only was the diversity of disciplines helpful, previous papers written by individual members contributed greatly to the knowledge available. Every contribution to the mind map was from the top of our heads, and the only time someone used an electronic device was to find the name of the author of a particular book two of the members referred to. It was refreshing to experience how much knowledge was already in the group to begin with.*

Gr 4: yes

*The introduction day exercise was very effective in terms of mining and mapping the diversity of our knowledge and skills. We were allowed to take some time to introduce and get to know our actual differences, not only on an academic level, but also on a level of cultural background, interests and personal motivations. As we have said before, looking back and comparing us the other groups, we realized that this might have gone at the expense of the actual content (to which the other groups were probably more focused). However, we concluded that getting to know each other's backgrounds, skills and experiences was more important than actually applying them on a topic or building a research question (something we will do during the evolution of the MA Programme). Long story short, we decided to put more focus on the means instead of the ‘end goal’, which we thought was the idea behind the assignment and therefore the right thing to do.*

Gr 5: yes

*Although it was easy to pick a research question, there was a lot of discussion on how to approach this question as we view it through our own disciplines. After we noticed how different our approaches would be we tried to focus more on the approach and less on the content or possible solutions to our research question. The question we asked ourselves was “How would we (individually) start in answering this questions?” Then the diversity within our group became clearer. We started talking about what we had learned from our specific disciplines about conducting research, defining the topic, choosing the key actors and identifying theories. In sum, the brainstorm session was a very effective way to identify the diversity within our group, and learn from each other the different approaches we would use when employing different fields of study.*

Gr 6: yes

*Together, we created a rather chaotic but very comprehensive mind-map, showing the many factors that somehow contribute to the polarization of the refugee debate, as well as the interconnectedness of it all. The exercise thus allowed us to visualise our different academic disciplines, expertise and backgrounds, as well as the overlap in our knowledge. Moreover, having to present this mind-map forced us to prepare just what each individual student had to say, which shed light on the fact that each student would have their own area of focus. This allowed us to consider our own limitations in approaching a task from a singular mind-set, while gaining awareness to how others might approach a similar task, thereby getting to know each other as well as ourselves.*

*Moreover, the working group had the perfect size for this exercise, as it was small enough for people to feel safe to contribute, but large enough to recognize the diversity in approaches.*

Gr 7: yes, but

*We found it to be a relatively effective way of mining and mapping the knowledge and diversity of the*

*members of the group, with the speed dating being a necessary pre-requisite to this. The part of this exercise that was most beneficial was the talking, discussing and suggesting ideas with the other students, but not necessarily drawing the 'mind-map' per se. It was a good way to analyze each other’s knowledge in the different academic areas, but not necessarily their skills or previous experiences, which could have been utilized to a larger extent.*

**3. Does your group have suggestions as to what you would change to make the assignment better at meeting the objectives of the exercise?**

Gr 1:

*We might have been more focused on mapping our diversity if the research question was already given. Using the term ‘research question’ implies that the group has to come up with a specific and narrowed-down question that is researchable. We spent more time narrowing down the research question (which is also very interesting and a good exercise) than discussing how the topic relates*

*to our knowledge individually. Maybe using a term such as ‘topic’ or ‘issue’ would be more fitting with the aim of the exercise.*

Gr 2:

*Despite the fact that the assignment clearly states that the aim is to focus on group diversity, we felt that there was room to misinterpret the assignment’s goal. We for example, looked for people with similar interests because we understood that the group must focus on one general topic, however this created a situation in which there was limited diversity in opinion and background. Maybe, rather than trying to let all people answer the same question, give the topic as only common ground and then let people discuss and explain what kind of questions this brings up from their perspective to bring out the diversity of the group.*

Gr 3:

*The general presentation of findings took long and interest became less as time passed. Presenting the posters throughout the room as people walk around and get the possibility to ask questions would make the presentation more interactive. Two presenters for each poster and three/four people walking around would be a good starting point. In total the exercise could have been shorter, and a more personal/fun game could have been added. A small competition for the best poster by a jury could be a nice addition.*

Gr 4:

*Content-wise, it could be possible to process a set amount of topics/research questions into the exercise, let’s say five. As these five topics would be of similar size and depth, it would take some pressure of the content (so one could focus more on the actual differences and diversity in background, knowledge and expertise). It would also help the process and dynamics of the different groups become a lot clearer during the presentations. Nevertheless, this change would open the possibility for the exercise to become a rat-race between the different groups, fighting to find the most information in two hours and forgetting the main purpose of the session. So two sides to this idea, we are sure a middle ground can be found.*

*The presentations were intense, but took quite long, longer than was mentioned in the assignment. A fact that implied lesser attention for the groups that were presenting at the end of the session. This is a problem that should be fixed, especially because everyone deserves a proper amount of input and feedback from the students and the teaching staff.*

Gr 5:

*We think it could be interesting if all groups would come up with their own research question within one topic. This way, the students are able to not only see the diversity within their own group, but also to see the differences within the groups as a whole. Also, it could lead to more interesting discussions at the presentations since everyone has thought about the same topic. Furthermore, it could be useful to define a time limit for each presentation and the follow-up discussion, so each group can get same amount of attention.*

Gr 6:

*A suggestion regarding the first part of the exercise would be not to think of a specific research question but rather a social problem. The assignment said it should be a research question, which made us a bit precarious, since we had all learned that a research question has to be very specific. However, as the presentations unfolded, it became clear that having a specific subject did not hinder the purpose of the exercise as it was not ultimately about the subject but about the students themselves and the process of integrating our different perspectives. This could have been made clearer at the outset of the exercise. Moreover, the presentations took quite long. We would therefore suggest to perhaps shorten the presentations, or to choose a select number of groups to present their findings. One way to shorten the presentations would be to instruct students to focus on their experience during the assignment, using the mind map only as a ‘vehicle’, rather than extensively addressing its content.*

Gr 7:

*The assignment was a good concept and did ultimately highlight the differences and diversity within our group, however, the implementation could be improved by: 1) Giving specific set topics to groups to avoid too much repetition in the presentations. 2) The instructions could have been more clear on the objective, which was mainly to highlight diversity and not knowledge on a specific topic. 3) Two hours was unnecessary for preparations and felt too long, this could perhaps have been done in one hour. 4) More attention should have been given to the presentation timing- it was written that each presentation should take 3 minutes, but in fact was far longer. Maybe a ratio of 5 minutes for presentation, 10 for questions would be a good time duration for discussions. 5) One preferable option would be a group discussion first within our small group, and then to be partnered to one other group. This would still allow for discovering differences in ideas and diversity, within and between groups, and also allow us to go more in depth into this topic together.*

**4. What part of the activity did each group member find most useful, illuminating, and/or beneficial? Briefly explain HOW it was useful etc., and WHY?**

Gr 1:

*The most useful part was the use of mind-mapping. After we decided on a shared interest, we used this to visualize all associations with the subject we gained from our individual expertise. By doing this we were able to draw the most important connections between related concepts and make the decision to leave others out in order to create a coherent story. Although the exercise was designed for us to identify the differences in our backgrounds, it also worked really well in bringing up common interests of the group. Despite the differences in background, we were all fascinated by the topics and views the other group members brought up. Therefore, it was no problem at all to come up with one common topic to address. It was very useful to find out that all the different disciplines offered examples and viewpoints for one and the same topic and thereby quickly extended our knowledge of it.*

Gr 2:

*Despite the fact we thought we have pretty similar (academic) backgrounds while discussing theories, it was interesting to see that the way we approached the assignment was completely different, as well as the case-study examples that were brought up. This insight might be the most beneficial outcome of the assignment because it can avoid constantly using the same methods while approaching a subject.*

Gr 3:

*Formulating our research question was the most useful to discover common interests and possible research ideas. While formulating the question we also already pointed out some disciplinary knowledge (for example, the geographer of our group wanted to territorially limit the research question). Additionally, there was time to spare during which we had time to get to know each other on a more personal level, which was fun.*

Gr 4:

*Something very useful was the fact that we already had our written profiles. Using these we could very extensively introduce everybody. Later on this gave us the opportunity to relate to each other experiences and expertise, even when the person himself was not aware of his or her knowledge!*

*Feedback of some of the teachers was also very beneficial. Dr. Fumerton mentioned the importance of being still actively and consciously trying to look for the kind of academic we would like to be in the future. Are you a tree-guy or more of a forest-girl? It is very good to know that we are still developing that part of ourselves during this master and that we are given the time and freedom to do so. Adding to this was Dr. Demmers comment about consciously questioning ourselves about what kind of contribution do we want to give as young academics. Do not just do research because you have to, and because you learned to do it in a certain way. But think about the meaning of your research (for you and for the others)!*

Gr 5:

*We discussed a lot of different topics to do with the research question and we wanted to present them as clear as possible on the mind map. Therefore the most difficult part of this exercise was to create an understandable mind map. This got easier as we roughly divided ourselves into two disciplines (International Relations and Cultural Anthropology). We think mind-mapping itself is a very revealing exercise because it makes it clear which differences stand out the most.*

Gr 6:

*Some group members found the actual making of the mind-map to be particularly beneficial, because it enabled us to visualize the thought process of the group as a whole, thereby bringing about a more fun and fruitful discussion. This enabled group members to get to know one another in greater depth than most introductory exercises would have achieved. One student found the presentation particularly useful, as it was here that each student had to present his or her own take on the topic. By doing so, we were reminded that students should try to create their own, unique approach to social issues, whilst still taking into account the bigger picture and the lessons we learn from others. Another student found the questions that were posed afterwards most useful, particularly those on the group dynamics, because this made us reflect on the process we had just gone through, instead of focusing on the result.*

Gr 7:

*We would like to say that despite these recommendations, we did think this exercise was a good method of getting to know each other, our interests, different academic backgrounds, our diversity and our knowledge. The discussions leading up to the presentations were inspiring and did achieve the goals of the assignment. It was interesting to see how each of us would approach the topic in different ways, depending on their previous studies, as it allowed us to work on the topic more in depth. We got the impression our fields would complement each other, leading to in-depth discussions. It was also interesting to realize that each discipline would ask different research questions and consequently would draw different conclusions. This insight will be helpful for further research, such as the essays and our master thesis that we will write this year.*

1. This summary of 7 group reports includes the answers of 37 students. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)