

Rethinking dialogue and education between Slovenia and China: Sustainability – our common language?*

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The paper presents the methodology of appreciative inquiry with the aim of fostering understanding of the Slovenian and Chinese educational environments. Besides using various methods within an action-based, longitudinal case study, we applied a novel methodology – chain pair interviews – that were conducted by the stakeholders of the Confucius Institute Ljubljana. The findings show that community building is the core value of both Slovenian and Chinese representatives; we therefore propose that sustainability represents a common frame of communication. We recommend that the development of sustainable leadership becomes the focus of the Confucius Institute Ljubljana's educational activities, thereby presenting it with a competitive advantage.

Der Artikel stellt die Methode der wertschätzenden Befragung dar, um damit das Verständnis für das slowenische und chinesische Bildungsumfeld zu fördern. Neben der Verwendung von verschiedenen Methoden innerhalb einer actionsbasierten Längsschnitt-Fallstudie haben wir eine neue Methode – sog. Chain pair Interviews – eingesetzt. Die Interviews wurden von den Mitarbeitern des Konfuzius-Instituts in Ljubljana durchgeführt. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Gemeinschaftsbildung der Grundwert der slowenischen und chinesischen Vertreter ist, weshalb wir vorschlagen, dass die Nachhaltigkeit einen gemeinsamen Rahmen der Kommunikation bildet. Wir empfehlen, dass sich die Bildungsaktivitäten des Konfuzius-Institut in Ljubljana auf die Entwicklung von nachhaltiger Führung fokussieren sollte, wodurch das Institut einen Wettbewerbsvorteil erhalten würde.

Key words: *Confucius institute, leadership, sustainability, reflection, community building (JEL: M1; M12)*

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1. Introduction

Cultures (Catana et al. 2013; Fang 2005; Fink/Meierewert 2004) as different as Chinese and Slovenian call for a shared common ground (Garvey/Williamson 2002). In our paper, we have come to realise that sustainability (Bertoncelj et al. 2011) can be the shared value (Čater et al. 2013) that both East and West need to dedicate their attention to, and can aid as a symbol of collaboration. Sustainability (Sanford 2011) gained the world's attention with the Brundtland report in 1987 and has ever since been a value that integrates Western and Eastern leadership perspectives. The ways of thinking and practice may be different but the goal stays the same (Reichard/Paik 2011): "How to sustain a decent way of living for future generations to come?".

In our paper, we highlight one aspect of sustainability: "How does leadership development enable the integrating and sustaining of different cultures?". We argue that leadership scholars need to advance the leadership field by dealing with concrete cultural challenges and providing specific recommendations. Sustainability is the effect of corporate activity on the social, environmental and economic fabric of society. The economic perspective is particularly relevant because the Confucius Institute Ljubljana (CI LJ) aims to promote business opportunities between China and Slovenia and impact the economic development of both countries. The paper introduces the evolution of collaboration between the two nations in the cultural and business field as the CI LJ is the fifth CI in the world that is business-oriented. Dedication to developing sustainable leadership (Peterlin et al. 2013) is demonstrated through integrity and social innovation practice (Mramor in PRME Principles for Responsible Management Education 2011)¹.

In the paper we propose a further step – advancement of the dedication to sustainable development at the FELU and the CI LJ with the knowledge from the Chinese tradition that is incorporated in the CI LJ which was established at the FELU in 2010 – with the aim of promoting Chinese culture in Slovenia and offering business possibilities to explore the synergies that the Eastern way of tackling environmental and social challenges offers to the Western way of developing sustainably (Auer-Rizzi/Reber 2013).

The structure of the paper is the following: First, we identify appreciative inquiry phases within the research arena of leadership development in a multicul-

¹ The Re.think initiative was first introduced at the FELU in 2009 and started to raise students' and employees' awareness on environmental issues that then developed into the Movement for Sustainable Development and also spread the focus of attention to answer social issues. The Re.think initiative incorporates environmental commitment: recycle, reuse, reduce and, above all, rethink what and how it is used. It has been widely accepted and epitomises the environmental awareness and responsibility (Remišová et al. 2013) of the organisation and individuals. It is based on the idea of responsible living on Earth, the unique planet we share. The Re.think initiative encourages active engagement, it provides a platform for stakeholders' care about the sort of environment we live in (Re.think webpage 2014).

tural environment (Lang et al. 2013; Steyrer et al. 2006) and in the empirical part we present the findings of implementing appreciative inquiry at the CI LJ and in the Re.think initiative. In the last part of our paper, we offer strategic and tactical recommendations for the sustainable leadership development of the participating organisations and the broader interested public.

2. Theoretical background

Reflecting the shift from traditional views on leadership (that define it as the role of a formal leader), we define it in line with the concept of collective leadership (Hiller et al. 2006) where leadership (Brown/Gioia 2002) is the interaction and shared responsibilities of members of a social entity (such as a team or organisation), whereas we go even further to expand its definition to a natural entity and propose a holistic (Shefy/Sadler-Smith 2006) system view: “*Sustainability, then, is not an individual property, but the property of an entire web of relationships. It always involves a whole community. [...] Sustainability does not mean that things do not change. It is a dynamic process of co-evolution rather than a static state*” (Capra in Schoenmakers 2012).

A learning orientation – to improve rather than demonstrate individual skills and abilities – is promoted in shared leadership where social dominance (an orientation that some groups are superior to others) diminishes (Moss et al. 2009). Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber (2009) integrate the work of Luthans’ positive organisational behaviour with Avolio’s life-span leadership development. We therefore conceptualise sustainable leadership as constant dedication to the values of sustainable development (Kotler/Lee 2004; Littrell/Dickson 1999; Riggio/Mumford 2002) and reflection (Bradbury-Jones et al. 2010; Chirema 2007; Fleck 2012; Petriglieri et al. 2011). Integrity, altruism and role modelling are shared characteristics of transformational, spiritual, ethical and authentic leadership (Brown/Treviño 2006) that sustainable leadership expands and incorporates by influencing a wider perspective and setting a long-term vision of balancing individual (Scott Ligon et al. 2008), organisational, social and environmental development through dedication to the value of sustainability that is a shared aim of all cultures that want to preserve themselves. Sustainable leadership development (Avolio/Vogelgesang 2011) requires a fundamental shift in thinking about one’s role from dependence to interdependence (Benjamin/O’Reilly 2011) where the long-term perspective (Gentry/Martineau 2010) involves an emphasis on personal reflection and emotional labour (Gardner et al. 2009) as a crucial part of the learning process. Sustainable leadership is not grounded in differentiation among leaders and followers as it seeks to perceive everyone as a leader in a certain time in the life cycle of a generation’s continuum.

Literature (DeRue et al. 2011) is unclear regarding how teaching leadership can be combined with the developmental challenges and needs of business students. Benjamin and O’Reilly (2011) identified dealing with multiple challenges si-

multaneously as being the most challenging for leadership development as this calls for a rethinking and changing of self-concept and behaviour. The incorporation of environmental, social and health values into the core business enables renewal and sustainable leadership (Figure 1; Willmott 2001). Eastern philosophy derives its influence from the community, while Western philosophy derives its influence from an individual that is presented as the moving power of evolution and changes; therefore, it is in balancing the community with the individual that enables sustainable leadership as the individual needs to be in sync with the environment into which his/her efforts are embedded: “*Every instance of successful integration of social and environmental value into products and services showed paths that were emerging, iterative and messy. It turns out you cannot analyze your way into sustainability. You can only learn and innovate your way into it*” (Laszlo/Zhexembayeva 2011:149).

Figure 1: Sustainable leadership



We propose that sustainable leadership enables renewal for leaders by deriving its influence from both the Eastern and Western management traditions as yin and yang. The attention of practitioners and scholars has shifted to look at how China deals with challenges and in this paper we pose the following research questions: (1) How is the CI LJ fostering dialogue and education between Slovenia and China?; and (2) What unites Chinese and Slovenian leadership development practices? Based on this insight, we revisit the traditional development of identity and skills as well as sustainable leadership development tools, such as the succession system in a wider perspective that is focused on future generations.

3. Data and methodology

Due to the under-researched area of Slovenian-Chinese business dialogue and education we adopted an interpretive research approach that is oriented to representing the interpretations of the people experiencing a phenomenon and is most appropriate where a prior theoretical background may not be available or applicable. With the aim not to impose existing explanations upon the data, we gave voice to the views of informants by representing their understandings (Weick 2011). Empirical evidence (Table 1) was drawn from cases that incorporate both 'inside' and 'outside' perspectives on the intercultural relational practices upon which the data is focused (Greig et al. 2013; Roulston 2010; Toma 2000). The case study research approach is known for its ability to result in a new or upgraded theory (Peljhan 2013). The data were collected through interviews, observations, a review of internal and external documents and focus groups that were a source of triangulation. A research protocol was established in order to establish correct operational measures and provide for construct validity. The draft case study report was reviewed by the key informants to increase its validity and reliability. We then re-organised the original transcripts around identified key events and issues (codes) and compared the findings emerging from our case study with the existing research, which is mostly international. Internal validity and reliability was ensured by analysing transcripts of the interviews and focus groups. With the collaboration of top management of the CI LJ we provided for the external validity of our research. The generalisation of our study is to the underlying theory of sustainable leadership development. Therefore, the in-depth case study method enables the generation of exhaustive data on sustainable leadership development to yield more insightful theories to provide the basis for the learning process of other Confucius institutes.

Table 1: Structure of the customised AI questionnaire

AI INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT
1. Let's talk about the things that you value most about yourself. What are the most important qualities, advantages that you bring to CI?
2. What is the smallest change that had the biggest impact on your life?
3. When you work, you probably experience »ups and downs«. Please think about a moment when you felt energetic and successful and accomplished while working at CI more than you thought is possible?
4. How do you renew yourself from daily challenges?
ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
5. Which are your three core advantages, values, qualities or ways of working at CI that you wish to sustain in the future?
6. What is most interesting about working at CI? Is your job designed to foster cooperation? If yes, how does the culture of CI build community?

7. Let's imagine that you go into a deep sleep tonight, that lasts for 10 years. While you sleep, mighty things and positive changes happen. True miracles happen and CI becomes what you want it to become. Now you wake up and observe what is happening. It is the year 2023 and you are proud to see what you see. As you look at the whole picture, what do you see is happening, is new, changed, better?

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

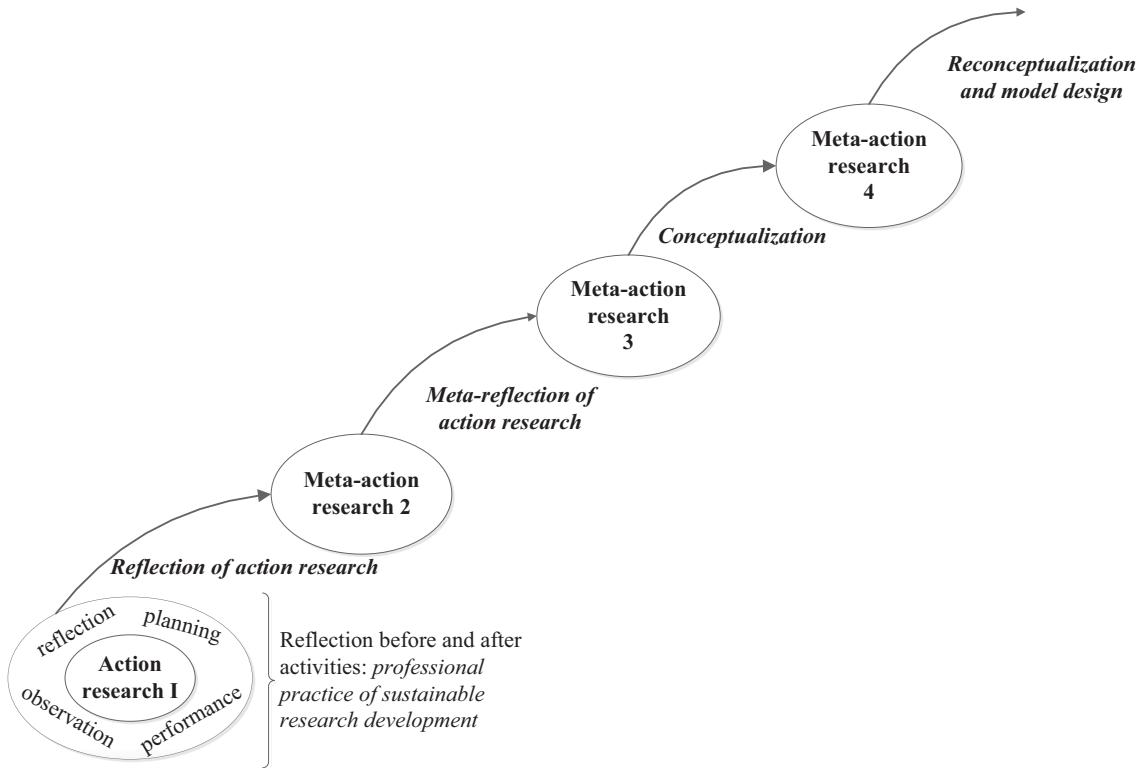
8. Can you please describe your view of the role that CI has for FELU?
9. What are the positive benefits of CI for Slovenian society that you have noticed from your work? Please state a concrete example.
10. How do you perceive main differences among China/Slovenia?
11. What is the difference between social responsibility in Slovenian and Chinese culture according to your opinion?
12. Changes are a part of life. Please, share with me an experience when you were involved into an important transformation that affected the results of the initiative? What was most exciting for you about the changing process? How did you make sure that the change was effective?

ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENT

13. What are the positive benefits of CI for the environment according to your opinion? Please state a concrete example.

Figure 2 presents the details of the methodological process of appreciative inquiry.

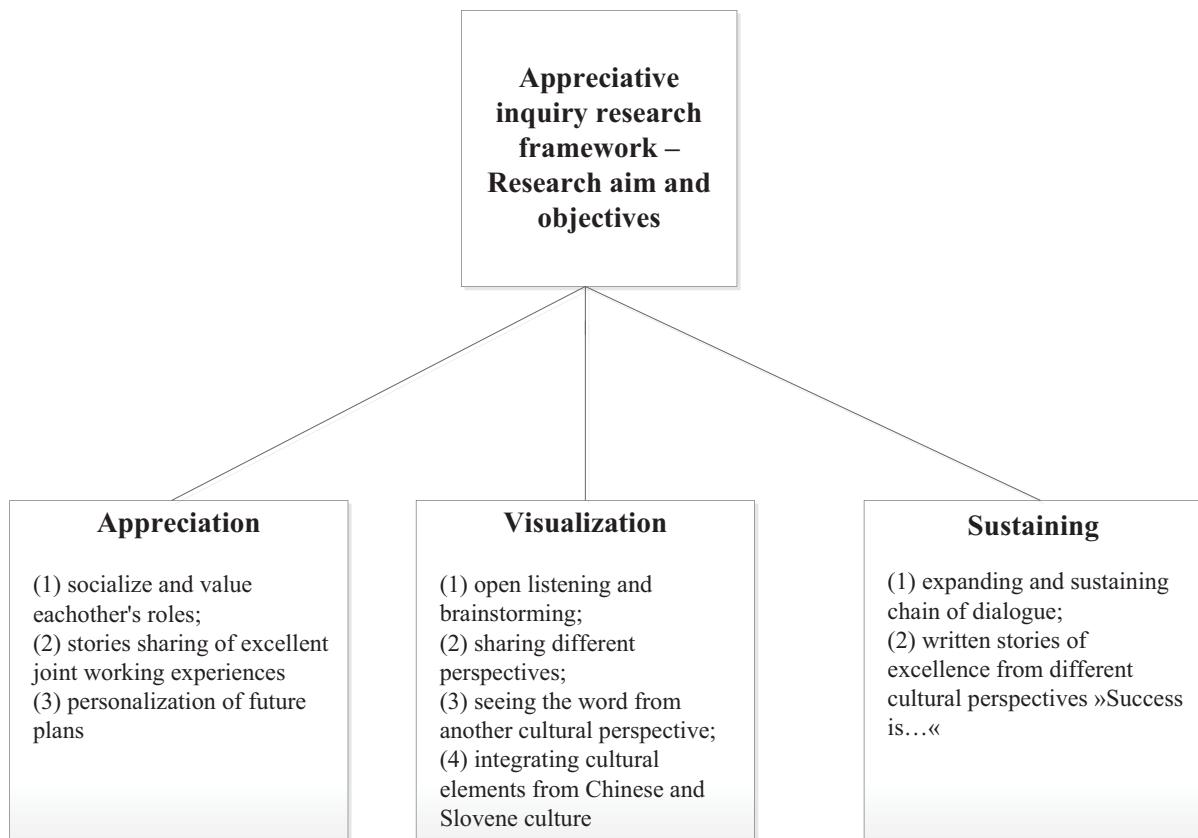
Figure 2: Action research design at CI



Source: Adapted after Fletcher, M.A./Zuber-Skerritt, O./Bartlett, B./Albertyn, R./Kearney, J. (2010). Meta-Action Research on a Leadership Development Program: A Process Model for Life-long Learning, 502.

A four-year field study was conducted of the CI LJ. Validation was carried out among the Re.think initiative stakeholders in the company Si.mobil and FELU international students. Ten in-depth chain pair interviews were conducted between 26 April and 6 September 2013. Open-question surveys were being gathered from 1 October 2013 to 13 February 2014 and we received 53 valid questionnaires. Key informants were chosen to represent the CI LJ and the FELU. Qualitative methodology (Bensal/Corley 2012; Lewis/Ritchie 2006) of a case study (Yin 2009) was used. In-depth, (semi)structured and chain pair interviews together with document analysis were employed (Gorard/Taylor 2004). The in-depth interviews with experts and key informants were unstructured, whereas expert interviews that are a method extensively used in social development by organisations such as the World Bank and the International Labour Office (Hakim 2000) were guided and designed as an introduction to the appreciative inquiry. The expert validation was implemented to yield additional information in the form of reflection on different cultures and in order to research representatives of the stakeholders as a whole so as to develop a perspective on the affirmative topic (Figure 3). The expert validation was in line with the overall goal of participation in the research to provide managerial recommendations and involvement in the decision-making of the CI LJ.

Figure 3: Research aim and objectives of the appreciative inquiry framework



The analysed 53 open-question surveys demonstrate all three research objectives of the appreciation, visualisation and sustaining of sustainable leadership devel-

opment at the CI LJ. Appreciative inquiry (AI; Cooperrider/Whitney 2003; Cooperrider et al. 2008; West/Thomas 2005; Whitney/Trosten-Bloom 2003) was adapted to research the topic in question and structured to focus on individual, organisational, societal and environmental development. The research setting was based at the FELU and dealt with the development of the CI LJ through the appreciative inquiry approach that is a qualitative, contextual, explorative and descriptive research method. The following main data collection techniques were employed: chain of reported narrative interviews conducted in pairs, focus groups, consensus meeting, field notes, open question survey, archival data, and observation. AI integrates three broad goals: appreciative storytelling (Sfard/Prusak 2005), positive development, and sustaining change through a type of action research (Stake 2010) that attempts to find out the best of what exists in an organisational and/or human system in a four-phase process (Table 2): (1) appreciating; (2) envisioning; (3) co-constructing; and (4) sustaining where, due to the limited time frame of the CI LJ being in operation, we integrated the co-constructing and sustaining phases.

Table 2: Summary of the methodology

Research framework	
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – action-based longitudinal mega case study (4 years) – phenomenon research
Learning theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – action learning – adult education – experiential learning – social innovation
Research methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – analysis of 120 structured questionnaires (undergraduate students at the FELU) – comparative analysis of the questionnaire with open questions <i>»Re.think why you study?«</i> – comparative analysis of the questionnaire with open questions <i>»Designing the future of the CI LJ«</i> – archive analysis of FELU internal documents on the intranet – four focus groups (two with business stakeholders, one with students and one with the interested public) – 12 qualitative interviews with managers, three validation interviews with pedagogues and three expert interviews – 10 chain pair interviews – observations at the CI LJ and the FELU (during the Management Course)

Appreciative meaning of the gathered data represents the foundation of dialogues (Fairhurst 2011) that inspire a vision based on the stories that were told.

After completing the interviews, the objective was to understand when and why the organisation is operating at its best and which core capabilities allow the organisation to perform well. Our research was focused on identifying the positive core that contributes to the continuity of good functioning and enables a transformation towards the vision.

In the envisioning phase we challenged the status quo and at the same time created synergy and excitement while the stakeholders started to communicate among each other by sharing positive stories and seeing common themes that created enthusiasm. In comparison with other methods, AI establishes a shared vision of the future that is grounded in real examples from the past and enables sustainable leadership. We determined the idea “How can it be?” by designing provocative propositions also called possibility propositions that connected ‘the best of what is’ with ‘what might be’ and were written in present tense. Co-constructing had four goals: (1) to select design elements for the social architecture to allow the co-construction of the vision to become a reality; (2) to identify internal and external relationships; (3) to identify themes and engage in dialogue; and (4) write provocative propositions.

In the last phase of sustaining, we focused on how to empower, learn and adjust/improvise by delivering a strategic plan that included the inputs of the participants. This phase was conducted to determine: “What will be?”. The data were focused on the co-construction of a strategic plan that could be implemented to enhance the Institute’s excellence in line with the sustainable development setting at the FELU. Individuals renew themselves in a conscious process of development (Winterton 2007) where they take time to care for themselves, get in touch with what is important to them and connect with the people they care about.

4. Results

The knowledge possessed by the CI LJ and the Re.think initiative is valuable and the sharing of knowledge between them enriches both. The CI LJ is led by Slovenian and Chinese leaders who share the vision of excellence. Therefore, sustainable leadership development was shown to be based on integrating Western and Eastern traditions of sharing environmental and social responsibility where Chinese representatives are met with challenges of both adjusting to Slovenian culture and at the same time promoting Chinese culture and language in Slovenia. The appreciative inquiry chain pointed to the following three key stakeholders of the CI LJ: (1) Chinese teachers of the Chinese language; (2) Slovenian teaching staff and students at the higher education institution – the University of Ljubljana; and (3) Slovenians working at the CI LJ.

4.1 Chinese teachers of the Chinese language

– “*I am a young Chinese and I can show them how we are.*”

Western culture can learn from the Chinese educational environment the focus on exercising both left and right hemispheres of the brain from a very young age which enables the ability to memorise, which is why a Chinese student is often seen by Western colleagues as an ‘*artificial calculator*’. Constant renewal is necessary as Chinese teachers often undertake extra work in order not to feel homesick and because their working ethics motivate them to act responsibly and sacrifice themselves for the greater good of the working community.

Teachers of the Chinese language have come to realise that Slovenian students have a weaker studying discipline than Chinese students. Their teaching methods vary between primary school and university level in the level of initiative that needs to be taken by an individual. While students in primary school learn from the activities, stories and cultural experiences that the teacher provides for them, at the higher institution level the teacher is only responsible for setting the language course in a certain cultural environment so that the student can play an active role in the partnership with the instructor. The Chinese teachers are energetic about working at the CI LJ as it is gaining wider recognition in the Slovenian environment and, as they put it “*gaining power like a Chinese dragon*”. They motivate their students through storytelling about Chinese characters used for writing (such as the character for retirement is a metaphor of a man who takes a rest under the tree), experiential learning by role-playing in real-life situations (such as a restaurant visit after learning vocabulary about food) and by experiencing artefacts of modern Chinese lifestyle (such as typical Chinese presents). Interactive classes are widely used and are seen as a way of motivating students to speak Chinese and demonstrate their improvement. In comparing Chinese and Slovenian interactive classes, the Chinese teachers perceive Slovenian students as shy and silent whereas Chinese students are more prone to challenge the professor.

The Chinese teachers perceive that they bring to the CI LJ a Chinese attitude to the individual’s work, professionalism and teamwork and see room for improvement in stronger cooperation between the faculty members of the FELU and the CI LJ. The organisational culture of the CI LJ is perceived by the Chinese teachers as a “*funny culture*” where the boss and colleagues have a sense of humour and a positive attitude to work is also demonstrated in the perception that the role of the CI LJ is becoming more powerful in the Slovenian environment.

Cooperation between the FELU and the CI LJ is lacking the academic dimension and therefore the conference held in October 2013 is perceived by the Chinese teachers as a positive step towards positioning the CI LJ in Slovenia as a CI that provides possibilities for language learning as a tool for academic research

and doing business. The vision of the CI LJ for the next 10 years is tied to spreading the role of language teaching across Slovenia with an efficient system of branches extending out from Ljubljana – the centre.

The Chinese teachers differ in how they perceive the social responsibility of Slovenians and Chinese since this has become an important topic in both countries. Pollution is much greater in China where economic advancement has led to environmental issues and clean water management is gaining wide attention. Sustainable leadership development is thus valued in both countries and the Chinese teachers do not perceive big differences in relation to social responsibility, which is in line with Confucius: “*By nature, men are nearly alike; by practice, they get to be wide apart*”. The Chinese teachers perceive social and environmental responsibility as something that all people feel strongly about but often lack the will to act upon it and feel we could all do more, including in the educational environment, to promote it.

4.2 Slovenian teaching staff and students at the higher education institution – the University of Ljubljana

– “*Chinese people are hard-working and self-disciplined.*”

Before the CI LJ was established at the FELU, the main contact FELU staff had with Chinese people was through Chinese students coming for an exchange at the FELU and the main impression of them compared to other students was that they work longer and harder than their peers in class and that you often see them late in the evening in the library. For the teaching staff at the FELU, the CI LJ is perceived as an opportunity for a teaching exchange and research endeavour. Since China is “*a global player*”, situating the CI LJ at the FELU seems wise because it enables a better understanding of the Chinese way of business and offers a bridge to some of the best business schools in the world. FELU staff members admire the hard-working and self-disciplined work ethics of Chinese colleagues and students. When faced with the stereotypical way of perceiving Chinese, they admit that their family and Slovenian friends sometimes still comment that China is “*the world’s biggest factory*” and that Chinese people are mostly “*restaurant workers*” but that, after getting to know Chinese people better through CI, they are building a community that respects and knows more about modern China and is slowly changing the conventional way of perceiving foreign cultures.

With the expansion of collaboration between the FELU and Chinese companies, embassy and educational institutions in China, the possibility for in-depth relationships also arises and China is losing the perception of it being a distant threat and is becoming an ally in doing business and research.

4.3 Slovenians working at the Confucius Institute Ljubljana

– “I have to explain and simplify.”

Slovenians working at the CI LJ perceive the Chinese way of working as very different from the Slovenian way and admit they often think that they understand each other but often later come to see that they misunderstood each other. They therefore see diversity and cultural management as vital in a turbulent global business environment where the CI LJ has an important role in educating and developing Slovenian business people to be better equipped for doing business with Chinese people: “*For some things, they [Chinese people] are very rigid, for others they appear to be very practical, so you are sometimes quite surprised by their thinking. On the other hand, what for us seems quite normal can be for them [Chinese people] something abnormal*”.

Language and cultural knowledge is an important part of showing respect towards your business partner and enables one an in-depth understanding of the other in a business interaction. They have realised that important things need a longer period of time to develop; therefore, patience is something they have learned to develop while working at the CI LJ, which is designed to foster cooperation between different cultures, companies and populations. Slovenians working at the CI LJ hope that in 10 years’ time: (1) there will be more people working at the CI LJ and the CI LJ will be a big organisation with a wide variety of units; (2) Slovenians will perceive China differently than they did (in a positive way) and not so many stereotypes will be present (such as Chinese people mostly seen through people working in Chinese restaurants across Slovenia); (3) a lot of children will learn the Chinese language; and (4) trade between China and Slovenia will be expanded. People working at the CI LJ are change agents in their home communities as they spread their good experiences (DeRue/Wellman 2009) working with Chinese people and their advanced technologies. The Chinese relationship towards sustainability is reflected in the words of an expert validation: “*In Slovenia the social and environmental consciousness is slowly growing. In China, on the other hand, it has been neglected for a long time but has lately become one of the priorities. Chinese society has such a system that they can extremely quickly mobilise the whole system once they are aware of the challenge. That is why they have achieved a great deal in certain areas but, due to the wild development, they are faced with many environmental issues.*”

5. Discussion

As a starting point for developing sustainable leadership theoretically as a concept and practically at the CI LJ, we propose the advancement of the Re.think initiative (Peterlin et al. 2011) with the insights of the CI LJ in this paper and vice versa the adoption of the Re.think philosophy in Chinese language and culture teaching at the FELU as a competitive advantage of the CI LJ and expan-

sion of its mission in the form of a collective self-organising movement (Laszlo/Zhexembayeva 2011) that is not told to change behaviour but aspires to build sustainable leadership.

Our research is in line with previous findings (e.g. Benjamin/O'Reilly 2011) and shows that sustainable leadership is about developing and enabling others to develop. The findings of our research indicate that reflection is the added value the business school provides in sustainable leadership development (Table 3) through partnership with a cross-cultural business partner and by advancing academic collaboration. Without the development of multiple intelligences (Kezar 2001) an individual experiences dissonance. Dedication to developing all aspects of an individual enables the achievement of all potential by emphasising and rethinking the community building, empowerment and engagement of the CI LJ stakeholders (Table 3).

Table 3: Dimensions of sustainable leadership development

Sustainable leadership development:	Key developmental dimensions:
Individual development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ development of multiple intelligences ▪ mindfulness ▪ hope ▪ compassion
Organisational development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ succession system ▪ mentorship/coaching ▪ action learning/reflection
Social development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ cultural empowerment ▪ community building ▪ activation of engagement
Environmental development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ rethink ▪ recycle ▪ reuse ▪ reduce

Source: Peterlin et al. 2013.

The results were guided by the affirmative topic choice which was dialogue and community building among the stakeholders of the CI LJ. During this appreciating phase, the participants had an opportunity to discover the Institute's positive core and conducted one-to-one interviews with each other where they engaged in deep dialogue about past success stories. A customised interview guide as seen in Table 1, structured around the topic chosen for the inquiry, was used to guide the interviews. The aim was to elicit vision-generating stories. The life-giving force of the organisation CI LJ is shown to be community building between the Chinese and Slovenian cultures.

In the chain pair appreciative inquiry the environmental component proved to be underdeveloped and therefore in the expert validation's structured questionnaires additional questions were included in order to reflect on the managerial implications of strengthening the social and environmental responsibility of the CI LJ in line with the Re.think initiative. The CI LJ management showed an interest in opening the space at the CI LJ in line with the Re.think initiative that is being implemented at the FELU where the CI LJ headquarters are located. We coded the data by identifying key terms and concepts in the gathered information via a constant comparison over time and across informants by seeking convergence in higher-order categories and themes (Table 4). In the process of the research, we simultaneously analysed the data, searched the relevant literature and engaged in theoretical sampling by gathering additional data about the evolving themes. The findings were validated with the key informants through qualitative interviews and a survey. Positive themes 1–4 are answering (based on the process of coding the gathered qualitative data) the first and second research questions, whereas the fifth positive theme is answering the second research question. Key themes were elicited from the participants and captured through the coding shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Valued themes at the Confucius Institute Ljubljana

Top five most valued themes	Positive theme
1.	community building
2.	build business cooperation between different cultures
3.	quality management
4.	build a learning organisation
5.	demonstrate contemporary China and Chinese people

Envisioning and projective techniques (Finch/Lewis 2006) were used to highlight the variation in perspectives and to lead to a discussion of the similarities and differences and the reasons for their existence. The staff at the CI LJ wish to see the CI LJ in the next 10 years as “*a powerful dragon*” where students learn to speak fluent Chinese that helps them understand Chinese people and do business in the international environment. One of the future visions for the CI LJ is to have cooking classrooms in the Chinese language where people can learn about authentic Chinese food and influence the local Chinese restaurants to promote genuine Chinese food. Through pair interviews of Chinese and Slovenian co-workers at the CI LJ, a community was being built and an exchange of ideas constructed a shared common ground – building the mission of the CI LJ – to bridge the Slovenian and Chinese cultures.

In order to sustain the research efforts, the participants were invited to expand and maintain the positive flow of information and the working environment by

further expanding the chain of dialogue on a regular basis also in the future after the research intervention had concluded. In time the challenges will change, but AI offers a useful framework. Sustainable leadership is about sustaining the positive value core (Dimovski et al. 2009) of the individual, organisation, society and/or environment. For the influence of sustainable leadership to have its impact, all four perspectives are in line and share the same dedication to the affirmative ongoing development and therefore sustainable leadership is not only dedicated to the value of sustainability but also practises it through the process of appreciative inquiry that brings positive changes (Table 5). In order to sustain the identified positive themes of the CI LJ, in collaboration with the CI LJ management team we incorporated into the FELU's undergraduate didactics a contest "*Designing the future of the CI LJ*", where in the 2013/14 academic year 53 students collaborated and reflected on their perception of the role of the CI LJ in their lives and envisioned the future of the CI LJ which also had an educational role and the role of promoting dialogue about Chinese and Slovenian business culture.

Table 5: Strategic plan for engaging the community

Engagement with the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conduct a community needs assessment ▪ Conduct workshops to plan community engagements ▪ Initiate community projects to address identified needs (teaching the Chinese language in the primary, secondary and tertiary education system in Slovenia) ▪ Expand partnerships to increase institutional support in the community (sponsorships, partnerships in the university network and in the region) ▪ Enhance marketing and public relations efforts (localising the logo and integrated marketing of the CI LJ) ▪ Assess the community's satisfaction with service delivery and competency
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The authors regard the CI LJ as a convenient developmental environment for developmental goals such as cognitive, emotional, bodily and spiritual ones (Table 6).

Table 6: Rethinking the Chinese culture and language teaching course – tactical plan

Intelligence	Technique	Sustainable Development
Verbal	Chinese language teaching	Cognitive development
Logical	Connecting Chinese language teaching with sustainability	
Musical	Looking for similarities between Slovenian and Chinese music	

Intrapersonal	Reflection: <i>“How do I feel as a Slovenian learning the Chinese language and culture?”</i>	Emotional development
Interpersonal	Exercise/Reflection: <i>“What are the similarities between China and Slovenia?”</i>	
Bodily	Taijiquan in Qigong	Bodily development
Visual	Chinese writing	
Naturalistic	Outdoor excursions (e.g. landscape/company visits)	
Existential	Awareness of Chinese philosophies and traditions	Spiritual development

6. Conclusion

The main theoretical contribution of our research entails reinterpreting sustainable leadership development through sense making of the CI LJ and the Re.think initiative and revising it to meet the demands of the current refocusing on the environmental and social responsibility of both Slovenia and China. If the Re.think initiative had a very narrow focus at the outset, it has gained a wide range of attention through its focus on sustainability that in this paper we proposed is a common language of such unique cultures as Slovenian and Chinese cultures.

Managerial recommendations are intended to help the CI LJ leadership in establishing productive collaboration by knowledge sharing and synergy building defined by Schneider and Barsoux (2003) as alliance forming and following a strategic process of adapting where interaction among cultures influences which strategies are pursued and which processes are implemented. Due to the importance of sustainable leadership at the FELU, the CI LJ also needs to adapt its mission of promoting Chinese culture and language in Slovenia to the daily concerns of Slovenian people and, most importantly, students and the business community at the FELU. In the paper the conceptualisation of an outdoor language course through sustainable leadership is recommended where sustainability and leadership are connected and also the language didactics is based on developing and renewing the individual, organisation, society and nature through different assignments that strengthen multiple intelligences. In today's turbulent business environment, our students and alumni must deal with multiple challenges that can lead to burn-out and therefore it is necessary for renewal to be incorporated into the learning/working cycle. In the paper, we stressed that sustainable leadership is based on developing and renewing cognitive, emotional, bodily and spiritual components and enabling the productive functioning of individuals in the community in which they are settled. As the CI LJ is focused on teaching the Chinese language and culture, an example of sustainable leadership development through multiple intelligence techniques was introduced as an ex-

ample for the further development and advancement of the scholarly community. We recommend that the CI LJ organise a network together with the Movement for Sustainable Development in order to see where future collaboration is most needed and possible.

The multi-methodological study involved two stages, with the first entailing the guiding of research at the CI LJ to identify positive themes that could be made applicable to their daily working (promoting, research, coordinating, teaching) activities and thus facilitate their individual professional, organisational, social and environmental development. This was accomplished through the process of AI. The second stage of the study was completed once a reflection of the participants' findings on their practice had been made. The study identified themes common to the promotion of Chinese culture and language and sustainable development.

Due to the limited amount of time the CI LJ has been in operation (since 26 May 2010), our longitudinal research endeavour is limited and will need to be carried out in the future to cover a longer time period. In the words of Professor Adriana Rejc Buhovac (2013), sustainability is "*the contribution of an organisation to the sustainable development of the Earth*" and the planet Earth is something we all share – Slovenians and Chinese people – therefore, dialogue and mutual understanding are necessary to facilitate our contribution and further develop for the good of our future generations.

The implications of our research for leadership development practice are that through a change of mindset we achieve a change in strategy, where our paper proposes a new distinction in leadership development – sustainability that needs to be implemented systematically and through the succession system provide the capturing of cross-cultural tacit knowledge. Implications for leadership development teaching include that we incorporate internationalisation training in business schools with a cross-cultural component in the centre of sustainable leadership development attention as our alumni will need to satisfy the needs of the intertwined global market. Implications for the leadership development research agenda include raising awareness towards understanding the complex phenomena of leadership development in international partnerships, where the case study of the CI LJ can provide a starting point for other similar international studies – building on researching the leadership development of the CI network around the globe. Implications for leadership development policy include supporting schemes for sustainable leadership development and accompanying stimulative incentives at the organisational and national levels.

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