The Experiential Learning in International Relations as an Effective Tool in Knowledge Transfer. Case study: Diplomacy and Gamification Instruments

Overview

The game – that we called MAEDRI - simulates a part of the regular activity of a ministry of foreign affairs, mainly the collection and analysis of information from open sources. Also, it simulates the work within an organization, where every member fulfills a specific role, follows rigorous procedures, and has to reach some key performance indicators, as well as a feedback system, at the end of each day.

The purpose of the exercise was both to familiarize students with the activities of Romania's permanent diplomatic missions in countries around the world, and compose detailed press reports. The simulation is organized each year during one week and aims searching, analyzing and presenting the most important international events in some countries where the students simulate the activity of virtual diplomatic missions.

The tasks were complex and entailed the application of students' theoretical filters, acquired during the master programs, and their abilities to detect and exclude ideological tendencies, subjectivism and even propaganda. Their final work was a synthesis, but also a fine analysis and explanation of the implications of the decisions taken at the level of the respective states in relation to the treated subjects.

Diplomacy is in constant transformation as a result of the necessary adaptation to digital revolution but also due to different types of challenges. Innovations in learning international relations are critical for building new competences or enhancing the competences already acquired during university studies. More specifically, developing learning programs in diplomacy, at university level, is a tangible issue. Diplomacy is an applied science built upon contributions from a number of disciplines, from public law and international relations, up to history, psychology and communication. Diplomacy skills are difficult to acquire exclusively from a theoretical point of view, while practicing diplomacy is almost impossible without being a career diplomat, due to the fact the largest part of the diplomatic activity is based on confidential information, unavailable/inaccessible to students. So, the challenge consists in creating learning experiences for the students by proposing educational games as close to reality as possible.

In these conditions, using gamification instruments in the International Relations and Diplomacy students' curricula of for simulating a part of the daily basis diplomatic activity is a step forward in preparing them for professional life.

Our challenge was to develop an educational game, effective in terms of knowledge transfer, by developing or enhancing those skills that diplomats are using in their professional life.

The MAEDRI game simulates some roles that the career diplomats can accomplish during their professional life: information analyst, decision maker within the ministry of foreign affairs and specialist in public communication (Table no. 1). As a rule, the information analyst role is assigned to students in the first year of master, who didn't participate before in any MAEDRI simulation exercise. The roles of decision maker in the ministry of foreign affairs and specialist in public communication are assigned to the second year master's students, who for the most of them have participated in a previous edition, when they fulfilled the role of information analyst. Thus, by organizing the exercise annually and handing over the baton from one year to another, students have the opportunity to go through each role. Each of these roles uses a number of universal and specific competences:

Table no. 1 Simulated roles and associated competences

Role	Universal skils	Specific competences
Information analyst	Task partitioning Team coordination Assertiveness Self-control and confidence Attention to details Flexibility Decision making based on data received Initiative and creativity Critical thinking Care for order, quality of work and accuracy Emotional intelligence Stress management Fluency and concision	Searching and filtering information in virtual space Problem solving Writing reports using a diplomatic language

	Procedure compliances	
Decision maker in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Giving and receiving feedback Initiative and creativity Critical thinking Care for order, quality of work and accuracy Change management Emotional intelligence Assertiveness Attention to details Flexibility Stress management	Building relations within the team Decision making based on data received Planning and organizing the work Ability to dialogue and persuasion Problem solving Team motivation Conflict management Writing reports using a diplomatic language
Specialist in public communication/Public communication expert	Giving and receiving feedback Initiative and creativity Critical thinking Care for order, quality of work and accuracy Change management Emotional intelligence Assertiveness Attention to details Flexibility Stress management	Building relations within the team Decision making based on data received Planning and organizing the work Ability to dialogue and persuasion Problem solving Team motivation Conflict management Writing reports using a diplomatic language

Our hypothesis is that the simulation game is able to transfer to the students some of the skills requested by the diplomatic activity, while the responsibilities acquired, consolidated or developed during the exercise will be used during their professional life.

Our findings show that the learning experience acquired through MAEDRI simulation is transferable in real life situations. Surprisingly, the game also provides a good outcome for some social skills. The participants' self-assessment demonstrated that they are reaching better capabilities in using their skills during university studies and afterwards, at their workplace. Moreover, the simulation is a factor of motivation for students in choosing those master programs. These findings can enrich the effective learning best practices and competences development.

Objectives

Using a game based learning to support the development of different competences is an old educational method and it is a topic often described in recent years as a powerful tool in developing real competences, by enhancing students' motivations and challenging their creativity (Michael David & Chen, 2005; Mustata, et al., 2017; Pivec, 2007).

The learning design in International Relations courses includes almost without exception different diplomatic simulations, simulations played by students and based on past events. There are pro and cons for using historic events in building simulation games as educational instruments. Pro, because it is easy for students to assume different roles, their motivation is increased when they have certain knowledge about the historic facts or they can find easy information about it. Cons, because students will be tempted to follow the course of historic events and to reach the same conclusion, or to find a solution as close as possible to the real event.

There is a literature on the learning aspects of simulations - such as objectives, interactions or teaching notes -, but there is little research regarding the students' perception in terms of skills enhancement or development following the exercise. As young adults, students are learning following the Kolb's Learning Cycle, which proposes a cyclical, experiential nature of learning. Duffy (2001) demonstrates that individuals differ in their learning process, in how they process information and how they assimilate and use it in future actions. Sungwook (2016) thinks that the game theory together with other behavioral disciplines may offer a better understanding of Political Science concepts. Teaching Political Sciences and especially Diplomacy is being confronted with a major difficulty – how to develop students' skills in these domains, taking into consideration the fact that the ministries of foreign affairs are dealing mainly with confidential information. Simulation is important where direct action is risky or difficult to access: for example, where social or direct costs can be very high (eg. errors in a simulation game can be corrected without costs, but errors in diplomacy can be catastrophic).

Analysis of international affairs and case studies are the main tools in the teacher's toolbox but those are laying on past facts/events. More or less, there is a lack of novelty and/or a certain influence of the already known results. The benefits of using

role play in Political and Social Sciences are well demonstrated in abundant pedagogical literature. Hardy and Totman (2107) consider that the use of these approaches in International Relations requires discipline-specific examination. Online diplomatic role play or international organizations debates simulations (MUN model or NATO Conference) are the most common simulations in all universities. Nevertheless, from a certain point of view such simulations are deficient because either they have a focus on situations from the past (and the students learned their evolution in reality and will try to adopt the same approach), or they use imaginary situations, while the focus is on understanding the internal mechanisms of each organization (Brynen, 2010; Chasek, 2005; Dougherty, 2003). The question is whether the role play simulations in International Relations (online or face-to-face exercises) generate measurable and meaningful outcomes in developing specific skills (Blum, 2007; Raymond, 2010; Stover, 2005).

According to Dadheech „students won't be able to gain any information and skills out of dull learning process but they understand the application of skills and knowledge to solve real-life problems with help of effective learning process. The knowledge and skills acquired through game-based learning are retained longer than information from other learning methods" (Dadheech, https://theknowledgereview.com/importance-game-based-learning-modern-education/).

MAEDRI design offers a pragmatic pedagogical opportunity to acknowledge through praxis game not only a small part of what diplomacy is in a day-to-day activity, but also teamwork, coordination within a hierarchical organization, work accuracy, change management or time management. Wilcox considers that the simulated praxis „encourages the design and development of games that guide players to discover knowledge inside a range of communities, domains, and experiences" (Wilcox, 2019). MAEDRI simulation responds to the elements identified by Wilcox: the context (the students learn easier because they recognize the situation), the practice (the exercise allow them to experience in a safe manner the theoretical concepts learned during their college studies), and experience (the students discover themselves what are the diplomatic day-to-day tasks).

The experiential learning exercised during the MAEDRI role play is focusing to develop or enhance a certain number of capabilities, as identified in their research by Giannakas et al. (2018) and O'Donell (2013). The competences acquired during the

role play can be separated in two categories: specific competences linked to the diplomatic activity and universal competences (Table no. 2).

Table no. 2 Universal and specific competences

Special skills	**Universal skills**
Deepening the basic concepts related to international relations and diplomacy, understanding their specific meaning, explaining the theoretical bases and causal relations	Ability to dialogue and persuasion. Developing organizational communication skills
Learning the terminology specific to diplomacy and negotiations and adapting them to various professional contexts.	Developing skills to work in a foreign language. Writing documents and translations
Searching and filtering information in virtual space. Application of methods of documentation and primary analysis of data in the field of diplomacy and international relations	Task partitioning. Developing managerial skills. Assigning roles and sharing tasks to team members Procedures compliances. Developing the capacity to follow the required procedures. Understanding the role of strict procedures within an organization
Problem solving related to diplomacy field through dialogue and persuasion. Resolving everyday problems and conflict situations in a non-discriminatory and calm way, through negotiation and dialogue	Building relations within the team. Developing the ability to relate and convey information effectively
Assertiveness. Increasing the ability to argue their opinions even when the rest of their colleagues have other opinion	Team work. Developing the ability to work in a team with well defined roles, to comply with procedures and deadlines and to maintain functional working relationships Team coordination. Developing the ability to lead and guide a team to take o responsibilities
Attention to details. Developing the ability to identify relevant information,	Self-control and confidence. Developing and strengthening self-confidence,

capturing all the necessary details, reducing the error rate	expressing one's opinions
Change management. Developing the capacity to adapt to change, recognizing and managing the sources that lead to resistance to change	Flexibility. Increasing the capacity to adapt to a new, ever-changing professional environment
Critical thinking. Developing the capacity to analyze and interpret the international environment and to make decisions based on real situations	Team motivation. Developing managerial skills to motivate the team using non-financial means
Care for order, quality of work and accuracy. Developing a certain degree of perfectionism though attention to procedures, deadlines, quality of work and accuracy of information	Giving and receiving feedback. Developing the ability to receive and give feedback
Planning and organizing the work. Development of managerial skills for planning and organizing teamwork	Developing emotional intelligence
Writing reports using a diplomatic language. Developing the skills to write diplomatic reports (in a cursive, coherent, yet comprehensive form), using specific language	Conflict management. Developing the capacity to manage inherent conflicts within the team
Fluency and concision. Developing the ability to convey relevant information in a concise, easy-to-understand and fluent style	Stress management. Developing the capacity to meet their professional objectives at the required quality level and by respecting procedures and deadlines under time pressure
Decision making based on data received. Developing the capacity to make decisions in a short period of time, based on data obtained in the work process	Initiative and creativity. Developing the capacity to find creative solutions to problems encountered in their professional activity

Hwang at al. (2013) argues the importance of enhancing the educational process by designing and including game based learning strategies. Researches show that game based learning increase the motivation of students and their achievements (Giannakas, et al., 2018; Chen, 2015).

O'Donnell Hmelo-Silver and Erkens (2013) highlight the key elements that strengthen the students' learning experience: common team experience, team-collaboration, and communication. These elements develop students' social skills such as: teamwork, dialogue and cooperation, and critical thinking (Giannakas, et al., 2018). Through learning experiences during the simulation game the individuals learn something and transfer the acquired competencies elsewhere. Bilett considers that transferable knowledge is „unrealistic because this learning is mediated by culturally, societally and situationally derived facts and personal factors" (Bilett, 2013).

The success of the MAEDRI simulation game was observed in students' motivation in keeping a high level of day-to-day participation to the exercise. In this respect we observed a good competition between different teams in obtaining for their articles a better post reach and post engagement rates on the MAEDRI Facebook page. More interesting, during the admission interview to the master programs, we observed that a number of students chose us because they heard that our master programs are more interactive than those of other Romanian universities, and named specifically this simulation as a criterion for their decision. Our research is in line with the literature findings (Giovanello, et al., 2013; Mariani & Glenn, 2014; Rivera & Simons, 2008; Owston, 2013) where an increase in engagement by simulation was demonstrated in teaching political science.

Is game based learning effective? Yes, according to our findings. Debriefing sessions organized at the end of each game and ongoing feedback sessions during the simulations are proving that the students are developing or enhancing their skills in Diplomacy. Students self-assessed that the game simulation helped them acquire the targeted skills or enhanced the existing ones. Moreover, students are using actively those skills in their professional life (during studies and post studies). It is remarkable that this conclusion is supported even by former students that today don't work in IR related fields.

Objectives of the simulation

The main purpose of the exercise is to prepare students in the fields of international relations, political sciences, diplomacy, for professional life after graduation.

The objectives of the MAEDRI were to develop and edge students' abilities to monitor, analyze and unravel the press and choose topics of interest related to the relationship of the state of residence with Romania, domestic political news relevant to Romania, as well as the positions of the country of residence with impact on international issues.

Moreover, the use of skills such as students' foreign languages and increased interest in certain geographical areas of the world were encouraged. At the same time, the emphasis was on time management and collaboration.

Searching for news in reliable media is a challenge because it involves identifying those sources that present the topics from a most possibly objective and complex point of view, analyzing and selecting information of interest according to instructions received from the tutor, writing diplomatic reports using specific language. The exercise helps students to better understand what diplomacy means, how a foreign ministry works and to apply the theoretical lessons learned.

At the same time, students understand how information flows correctly between the departments of an organization, the way in which decisions are made and working tasks are assigned, as well as the importance of teamwork, thus deepening their understanding of how work is carried out in an embassy and in a foreign ministry.

Group Size

For the successful development of the MAEDRI simulation game it is necessary to form at least ten virtual diplomatic missions (which means in terms of participants around 20-30 students, to which are added at least 10-14 students who will occupy the positions in the Directorates General and the Spokesperson's Office). Thus, the ideal number of participants to ensure a good dynamic of the exercise is a minimum of 30 and a maximum of 50 students.

Although the simulation game can be organized with a larger number of students (theoretically unlimited), the coordination issues raised by a larger number of

students are difficult to manage. It should be taken into account that 2-4 students can work in a diplomatic mission (depending on the importance of each virtual diplomatic mission), a Directorate General (where there are 2-4 students) can effectively coordinate up to 4-6 diplomatic missions, and the Spokesperson's Office must be sized so that the number of students is equal to the number of Directorates General plus 1-2 persons (each student in the Spokesperson's Office is responsible for a Directorate General, while the rest of the students are responsible for the last review of information and posting it online). Therefore, a significant increase in the number of virtual diplomatic missions requires a corresponding increase in the number of Directorates General and an increase in the number of students in the Spokesperson's Office. From our experience in the 6 simulations, in games in which over 50 students participated (the maximum number was 80 in 2021), internal conflicts became difficult to manage by students and there were cases when some of them left the simulation.

Time requirements

To describe time requirements throughout the simulation game, we divided the time into four phases (Figure 1), each of these phases having a specific time period mentioned in parenthesis:

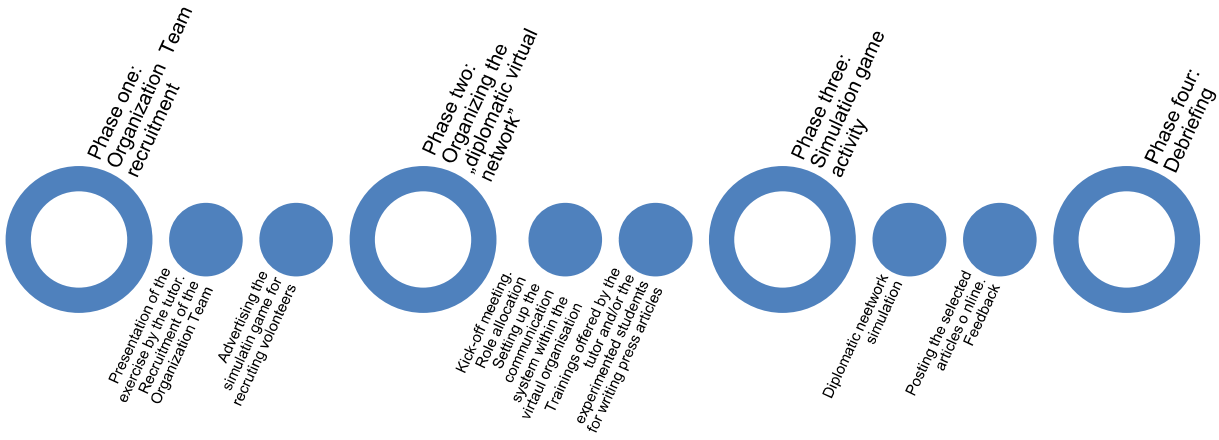
Phase 1: Preparation. Recruiting the Organization Team and advertising among SNSPA masters in order to persuade students to join the simulation game (2-3 weeks);

Phase 2: Selecting the students who will participate in the simulation game. Organizing the diplomatic network, assigning roles, conducting training sessions for writing press articles (3-5 weeks);

Phase 3: Actual development of the simulation game (daily activity, 4-6 hours/day during 5 consecutive days, usually from Monday to Friday);

Phase 4: Debriefing organized no later than one week after the end of the exercise (3 hours).

Figure 1 Phases of organizing the simulation



Set Up

In order to help students to understand the concept of the game and to facilitate their participation, they will get by e-mail several types of documents:

1. The concept of the game – a general description of the game, the objectives of the game, the description of each role and their expectations, rules and procedures to be observed, the organizational chart of the simulated ministry of foreign affairs and the communication system among and between groups, the presentation of the MAEDRI Facebook page;

Figure 2 Example of documents sent to participants (in Romanian)

Ministerul Afacerilor Externe al Departamentului de Relaţii Internaţionale şi Integrare Europeană (DRIIE) - MAE-DRI

Cum funcţionează un Minister de Externe? Ce presupune diplomaţia? Cum sunt pregătite deserte în relaţiile diplomatice? Care este activitatea reuniunilor diplomatice? Cum este semnat un acord, într-un contact internaţional domeniul de crize globale?

Departamentul de Relaţii Internaţionale (DRIIE), cu sustinerea Institutului de Diplomaţie Publică şi Globală, oferă mentionaţiile pasionaţi de relaţii internaţionale posibilitatea să descopere o parte din rămânerile la aceste întrebări şi să participe la activitatea diplomatică în cadrul Ministerului de Externe (MAE-DRI) înfiinţat de mantenimi Diplomaţie şi Negocierii Internaţionale.

I. Descrierea proiectului

MAE-DRI reprezintă un proiect nou, dedicat mantenerilor pasionaţi de relaţiile internaţionale în general, dar mai ales celor care doresc să descopere şi să înţeleagă modul de funcţionare a Ministerului de Externe.

Proiectul se desfăşoară în două etape:

- **etapa organizatorică**, destinată în principal formării Ministerului de Externe MAE-DRI, respectiv: Minister, Direcţii Generale, Cabinetul Particularului de Cavăţi,
- **etapa de aplicare**, care constă în desfăşurarea de activităţi concrete în cadrul MAE-DRI, în conformitate cu atribuţiile aferente şi tenede de interes aleea de participanţii la proiect.

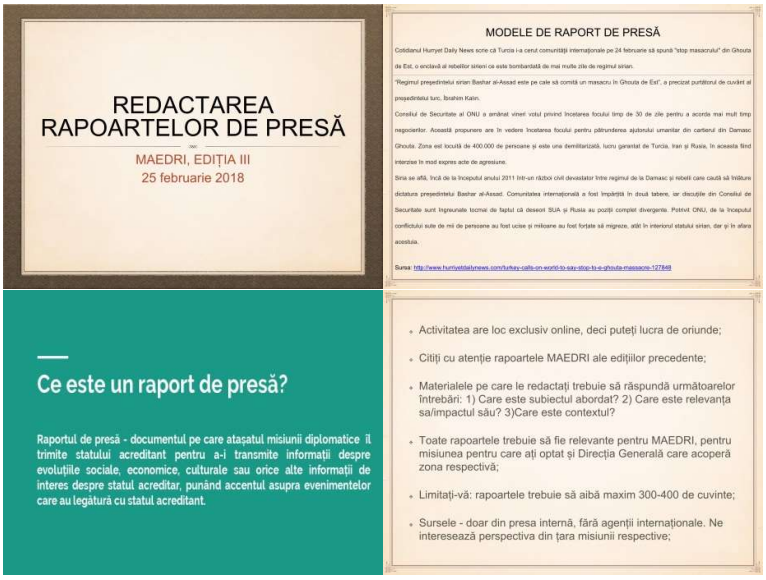
Activitatea diplomatică desfăşurată de diplomaţii aflaţi la misiunile externe şi acţiunile decise la centrala MAE-DRI vor fi reflectate în mod transparent pe pagina oficială de Facebook a Ministerului de Externe din cadrul DRIIE.

II. Obiective:

- **familiarizarea mantenerilor cu partea practică a diplomaţiei**
- **aplicarea conştiinţelor teoretice dobândite în cadrul studiilor mantenute**
- **dezvoltarea capacităţii de coordonare şi lucru în echipă**
- **dezvoltarea aptitudinilor de corectare, analiză şi sinteză**

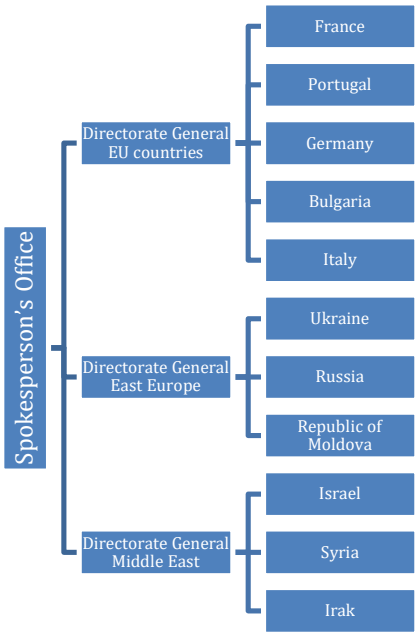
2. How to write a press report (a synthesis of the materials discussed during the training sessions, including examples of press articles suitable for MAEDRI Facebook page). The tutor and/or the students prepare a training session on writing press news for social media (the tutor will conduct the training for students in the first year; afterwards it can be carried out by students who participated in the first exercise, under the tutor's coordination).

Figure 3 Example of training presentation (in Romanian)



3. The structure of the MAEDRI organization is discussed in phase 2. The structure changes every year based on the interests expressed by the students. The number of virtual diplomatic missions as well as their geographic distribution is subject to debates and negotiations.

Figure 4 Example of the structure of MAEDRI (2018 game simulation)



Also, the students are encouraged to read the previous editions on the MAEDRI Facebook page in order to understand how the news are written, what are the points of interest, how the public interact with the page.

Procedure

The game is played annually since 2016. The participants are students from different masters in International Relations (Diplomacy, Conflict Analysis and European and International Relations) from the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (NUPSPA), Bucharest, Romania which are simulating, during a week, the activity of diplomatic missions. In this respect, the MAEDRI organization is reproducing on a small scale the structure of a ministry of foreign affairs and their diplomatic service (Figure 6). Based on their interest and knowledge for a specific topic or a geographic space, the students are assuming/embodying different roles.

The simulation game – MAEDRI - explores the interactions between real policies, politics and students' capabilities, and is appropriate for participants who are studying International Relations and/or Political Sciences at multiple educational levels. The game consists in simulating a part of the activity of real diplomats, that part which does not involve confidential data – obtaining relevant information from open sources. The exercise requires a regular, daily remote activity for a week in a

simulated diplomatic mission. In practice, the students are simulating the Press and Communication activity as foreign diplomats in various countries around the globe. In that sense, the students choose a country based on their personal interest, analyze the media in the selected country and every day they have to make a media report based on several criteria.

The objective of the simulation is to give students a real experience of the diplomatic daily tasks. The participants have to apply their theoretical knowledge acquired during their International Relations studies, developing their ability to work in teams and to coordinate their work with other teams, developing their skills in finding relevant information using foreign media in a given time frame, analyze the information and compile all in a report to their line manager.
Key learning skills acquired during the game can be separated in two categories: professional and social.

Phase one: Preparation
The preparation of the exercise involves the MAEDRI future management level:

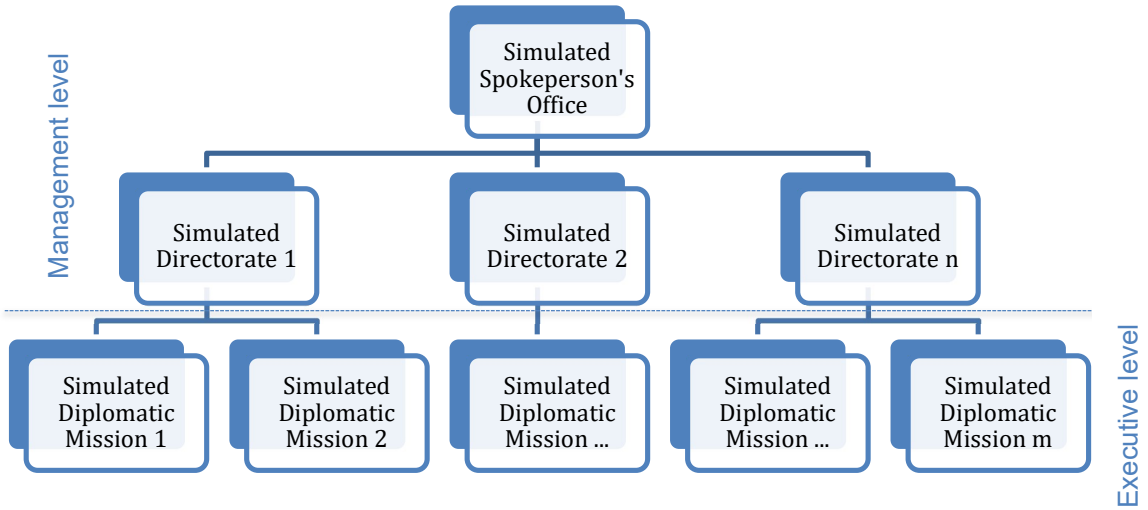
- Promoting the game simulation by the tutor in different meetings with the students;
- Selecting the Organization Team (10-15 students from the second year of master, on voluntary basis, will start to organize the exercise; later they will take the management positions in simulated Directorates and simulated Spokesperson's Office, during the week of simulation). Without being a must, we are encouraging students who participated in previous editions of the simulation game to occupy positions into the Organization Team. Setting up a communication network of the organizers (in general, we use Facebook closed groups or WhatsApp groups);
- Promoting the simulation for other students in order to convince them to take part into the simulation exercise. The Organization Team prepares posters to be displayed inside the University spaces.

Figure 5 Example of posters displayed inside the university spaces (the poster was used during the second edition, March 2015)

Phase two: Selecting the participants and setting the simulated diplomatic network

- The Organization Team selects the students on a voluntary basis, allocating the roles based on their interests (knowledge of a certain country, or language, or a specific interest for a region) and age (students from the first year of master can't fulfill management roles).
- There are different roles that the students can fulfill (Figure 6): diplomats at a simulated diplomatic mission abroad, management positions in the simulated chain of command at the headquarters (simulated Directorates organized by functions or by geographical criteria, or simulated Spokesperson's Office responsible for publishing the information);

Figure 6 The organizational chart of the simulated organization - MAEDRI



- The simulated diplomatic missions. The participants are choosing a country or an international organization according to their interests and/or knowledge of the local language;
- A system of communication and the chain of command is established in order to transmit and receive information and feedback (Figure 6);
- Organizers have to balance the interests of students with the necessity to obtain a virtual diplomatic network as wide as possible. In this respect, the organizers should try to form 10-20 simulated diplomatic missions (in function of the number of students), equilibrated in terms of number of participants, spread on each continent;
- The chain of command simulates the various divisions of an ordinary Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is organized in: simulated Spokesperson's Office and several simulated Directorates. We chose to create teams of 4-5 students in each cell of the organizational chart, based on our first simulation experience, when we found out that there were cases of abandonment. The reason for this is the fact that the motivation is difficult to be kept for the entire period of simulation, taking into consideration that the participation is on voluntary basis. Moreover, the activity could interfere with the professional activity of students, taking into consideration that in Romania, in general, master students in their final years are taking full-time jobs;
- Once the structure of MAEDRI is in place and each participant knows his role, the tutor will organize training sessions on how to collect information from open sources, how to write a diplomatic report and a social media post;
- The Organization Team is taking over the control of the MAEDRI Facebook page;
- The virtual diplomats are testing their abilities to collect and report information from their virtual geographic positions. In this respect, they will make a list of reliable media in their virtual home country, they will read the media regularly and they will send to Directorates one or two diplomatic reports as a test. The directorates will give a detailed feedback. The lessons learned will be discussed within the communication group.

Although the game is played mainly online, without the physical presence of the participants, a specific location would be beneficial in order to enhance the

communication between students with different roles. In our case, the students are doing their work from home and the teacher is always at their disposal during the game, through a Facebook group. This is a virtual space created and led by the teacher, where every participant can seek answers and ask for help regarding their attributions and responsibilities.

Table no. 3 Simulation game preparation checklist

Activity	**Students management team (Simulated Spokesperson's Office & Simulated Directorates)**	**Students (in Simulated Diplomatic Missions)**	**Teacher work**
I. Preparation	Advertising and promoting the simulation game among students in order to have a large selection base	Applying for the simulation game on a voluntary basis	Supervision and coordination
	Selecting the students from master programs	Proposing several countries as simulated diplomatic mission based on their interests (and language knowledge, if is the case)	Organizing several meetings with all participants in order to explain the their „job" and observe the rules of the game
Kickoff meeting	Creating the structure of MAEDRI organizations and the communication system between levels	Starting to read the media in their „home" country in order to select the most relevant sources during the simulation	Supervision and feedback. The teacher will indicate to the students what are the topics to be observed during the exercise
	Taking over all credential for the MAEDRI Facebook page and starting teasing their exercise		Supervision
II. Simulation	Coordination of their team, observing the rules in terms of strict time frame and relevance of the proposed subjects. Publishing at the end of the day the selected reports on the MAEDRI Facebook page. Giving and receiving feedback at the end of each day	For simulated diplomats: reading every morning the selected sources from the „home country". Choosing the most relevant articles based on the topics indicated by the teacher. Drafting the report and sending it to the corresponsive Directorate General. Requesting feedback at the end of each day. For the representatives of Directorates General: reading all the reports sent by the diplomats they are in charge with and summarizing regionally	Supervision

		reports. Transmitting the reports to the Spokesperson team and asking for feedback daily	
III. Debriefing	Preparing the report for the exercise including the data furnished by Facebook analytics	Giving feedback to the group	Giving feedback to the group and to the each participant

Phase three: Simulation period

The students in Simulated Diplomatic Missions have the task to select all the relevant local newspapers from a chosen country (if possible, they must read newspapers in local language, else in international languages), official websites from institutions and think-tanks. During the game deployment period, students will read daily all the articles in the selected open information sources; they will analyze, select and filter the information based on several criteria[1], writing a daily report within a specific period of time and observing the diplomatic style in terms of language and concision. The report of each virtual diplomatic mission will be sent by 12:00 of each day of activity to the coordinating Directorate General.

The diplomatic report is in fact a series of synthesis of articles published in the media in that respective day, each synthesized article should be no longer than 400 words and includes the link of the article in order that the hierarchical structure may verify it, if necessary. The result of their work is sent it to the next level of decision – the Simulated Directorates, which virtually are based at the headquarters of the simulated MFA. The organization of the tasks within the Simulated Diplomatic Mission is split between the participants based on their team collaboration. In order to develop their time management capabilities and work organization, the reports sent after the agreed deadline will not be considered. Nevertheless, exceptions are possible for exceptional events in progress in their simulated local country, by informing the chain of command which will decide about the relevance of that particular event. The capabilities of assertiveness, team management, conflict management and stress management are exposed and developed. Members of the

[1] We choose three topics as criteria for searching information:
1. The bilateral relation between Romania and the country where the simulated diplomatic mission is based;
2. The political, economic, social and cultural situation in the allocated country, relevant for the international relations point of view;
3. Positions expressed by the representatives of the allocated country regarding the international main topics of the moment.

Directorates General read each article received from the virtual Embassies, check that the texts are worded correctly, filter – if necessary – only the news relevant to the project, so only those with international impact and recent ones, then forward the selected articles to the Spokesperson's team, until 18:00 o'clock.

For the chain of command, the tasks are related to analyzing and comparing information, filtering the reports based on the setup criteria, studying the allocated geographic space and re-writing the selected information using a diplomatic language, in order to obtain an outcome which is relevant and interesting to the public opinion. The decisions are made in a collective manner, like in a newspaper editorial office. The students in each structure are connected online and work simultaneously by using tools like Google docs. As for the previous structure, the simulated chain of command activities must respect a strict deadline.

The simulated Spokesperson's Office is the last and the highest hierarchical structure in the simulated MFA and their role is to examine the reports from the DGs and to turn them into press releases. In that sense, the members of the simulated Spokesperson's Office make the last triage, once again checking all the articles based on criteria indicated in the simulation, aiming to give them a unitary style and coherence of language. They are sent to the public through the simulated ministry of foreign affairs MAEDRI Facebook page[2], one by one (to ensure a maximum impact on social media) starting at 21:00. The Spokesperson's Office is formed by 2-4 students who have the tasks to analyze the consolidated information received from the chain of command, to discuss all reports, to frame the selected articles in terms of length and unitary style. Finally, around 30-50 articles are published on the project Facebook in the same day.

At the end of each day, the members of the simulated Spokesperson's Office discuss with the other colleagues from the Directorates General about how that day went; if problems have occurred either at the level of the DGs or at the level of embassies, they try to find solutions together; also, all participants receive and provide feedback on the day's work.

The hierarchical organization that we create during a week generates interactions between students within each compartment and between compartments in vertical

[2] MAEDRI Facebook page (in Romanian only): https://www.facebook.com/pages/MAEDRI-Proiect-al-studentilor-DN/768070223277127?sk=info&tab=page_info

hierarchies. Because students are from different masters and from different years we acknowledge that horizontal interactions between compartments situated on the same level are minimal or even null.

At the end of each edition we organized debriefing sessions that gave students the opportunity to provide feedback on the exercise, collaboration within the team, lessons learned and suggestions for improvements.

For a better coordination of the exercise, several discussion groups were created: one for each Directorate with the virtual missions it coordinates, one between the simulated Spokesperson's Office with all the Directorates, as well as a general discussion group open to all members of the exercise so that students can communicate with each other in real time.

Phase four: Debriefing

In this sense, at the end of the exercise, usually one week after the last day of the simulation, a debriefing session is organized, in which all students participate. To prepare the debriefing session, the Organization Team distributed a short questionnaire to the participants inviting them to analyze their own experiences. During the debriefing session each participant has the opportunity to present to the others their own evaluation of the experience.

We also use the debriefing session for the Organization Team to present the outcome of the exercise in terms of impact on the page's followers. For this purpose, the data provided by Facebook analytics are used.

Participants are also encouraged to share their thoughts, opinions about the project, what worked well, what didn't work as expected, what should be improved in the next edition.

The tutor leads the debriefing session and provides feedback to each participant.

Directions

To describe the instructions that the tutor gives to the students before and during the exercise, we will use the phases of the exercise described above (Figure 1).

In phase 1:

- The tutor presents the exercise, the purpose of the simulation and how it takes place. He/she can also provide students with written material about exercises. The Organization Team consists of 10-15 students, usually from the last year of master and who, at least some of them, have participated in previous editions of the simulation (fulfilling other roles);
- The tutor guides the volunteer students who have been selected as organizers in the process of selection and promotion of the simulation exercise to all interested students. In this regard, the tutor invites the organizing team to create their own materials to promote the simulation and disseminate them among the students in the target group.

In phase 2:

- The tutor organizes a kick-off meeting to which all students will attend. The tutor will introduce the exercise in detail, its purpose, how it takes place, the activities of each role, the program, the expectations;
- The tutor will distribute any written materials about the exercise and answer any questions;
- The tutor supervises the assignment of the roles, ensuring a balanced virtual diplomatic network. He/she will also manage any conflicts that may arise;
- The tutor will supervise the creation of communication groups;
- The tutor will hand over to the organizing team the credentials of the MAEDRI Facebook page;
- The tutor will organize and support at least one session of training on diplomatic writing and news writing for social media. After the first edition, these trainings can be held by students who participated in the previous edition and have skills in writing press news;
- The tutor will indicate to the participants the news selection criteria. These may the same to every exercise or may vary from one exercise to another, with the tutor creating a different degree of difficulty for each simulation;
- The tutor will ask all students in the virtual diplomatic missions to start scrutinizing the media in the virtual host country and to compile a list of reliable media that they will use in phase 3 to gather information for daily reports. Students will start watching the selected media regularly.

In phase 3:

- Every day, for a week, the students in the virtual diplomatic missions will analyze the media (the one selected in the list outlined in phase 2) from the virtual host country and will send, until 12 o'clock, to the coordinating Directorates, the information collected in the form of a report. Reports sent after 12 at noon will no longer be considered; the tutor will explain to all participants that observing the deadlines is essential to the success of the exercise. In case of exceptional events, an extraordinary procedure is applied;
- In the event that in the virtual host state important events take place after 12 noon, the diplomatic missions will apply an extraordinary procedure requesting the approval of the coordinating Directorates and, if justified, will sent reports on this extraordinary situation;
- The students in the Directorates will provide assistance through the communication groups and starting with 12 o'clock, the time for receiving reports from the virtual missions, will analyze the information transmitted, will select the relevant information to be released on the Facebook page and will rewrite it (if necessary) in the form of adapted social media news. The result of their work will be sent by 6 pm to the Spokesperson's Office;
- Students in the Spokesperson's Office receive reports from the Directorates and an editorial meeting takes place through the communication group. In this meeting, the information received will be discussed, and the information most relevant for the purpose of the exercise and which best meets the criteria defined in phase 2 will be selected;
- Students in the Spokesperson's Office give a final form to the information selected for publication to ensure a unified writing style and then schedule, starting at 10 pm, the publication of news on the Facebook page. In order to generate interaction with the public of the MAEDRI page, we found that it is preferable to publish the news with a small delay (15 minutes) to each other, so that the followers can read all the news;
- At the end of each day, students receive and give feedback to colleagues.

In phase 4:

- To prepare the debriefing, the tutor sends the participants a set of questions regarding the development of the exercise. These questions only have the role of guiding students in structuring the assessment of the simulation;
- The Organization Team prepares and presents a report on the development of the exercise based on statistical data provided by Facebook;
- The tutor prepares and organizes the debriefing session;
- In the debriefing session students are invited to present their own conclusions based on the questions received from the tutor.

Debriefing

Debriefing is the stage of awareness and explanation that aims at three aspects:

- What did I learn?
- What difficulties/problems did I encounter and what solutions did I find (if any)?
- How can be applied what I have learned?
- What would I do differently if I repeated the exercise?

These questions are sent to the participants immediately after the end of the exercise, the tutor asking the participants to answer questions reflecting on their own experiences and lessons learned.

During the debriefing session, the tutor will allow all the participants to publicly present their answers to these questions, as well as to share with others the opinions, thoughts, emotions they experienced or proposals to improve the exercise.

The Organization Team will prepare a presentation of the results of the exercise based on data collected using Facebook statistics.

At the end of the debriefing, the tutor will give his/her feedback both on the whole exercise and personally to each participant.

Variations

There are several alterations how can be done without affecting the goals and the objectives of the simulation exercise:

1. The criteria for searching information can vary from one edition to the other. The tutor may setup the difficulty of the simulation either by increasing the number of criteria, or by imposing a narrower one. By example, we choose three criteria (see 1) and we kept the same criteria during our six editions. The tutor will choose the criteria

in function of the capabilities that needs to be developed and the experience of the class. The directions that should you give to the students are the same, except for the criteria which are announced in kick-off meeting and retrieved into the concept of the game handled to the participants.

2. The exercise can be organized for a shorter period of time, but in our experience 5 days is the ideal time for students to learn to search for information, select and analyze it and then synthesize this information in the form of reports.

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