

SIETAR JOURNAL



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Intercultural Fitness

*The never-ending struggle against
unconscious biases*

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Impressum

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SIETAR Journal

Editorial

Exploring unconscious biases

Intercultural learning is essentially studying and applying knowledge about different cultures, their differences and similarities. Developing this intercultural sensitivity requires above all an awareness of oneself, i.e. examining our culturally-based perceptions. However, entering into our ethnocentric world of unconscious biases, challenging the subliminal expectations and assumptions we all carry within us is something most people don't do. Gaining new insights and horizons requires moving out of our comfort zone, which takes mental effort. If the intercultural facilitator is skilled, curiosity and new neurological templates can be generated, accelerating the development of intercultural competence among the participants.

Our interviewee, Susan Salzbrenner, has devoted much effort to helping people understand their unconscious biases and habitual thought patterns. A strong proponent for explaining the neurological functioning of the brain, she has been successful in helping organizations transform themselves into more inclusive environments. This and other subjects are discussed in an animated interview. Starts on page 3.

An original comparison of Donald Trump's promises of «bigger and better» and Darwin's theory of size is Milton Bennett's contribution in this issue. He writes about how too many of us forget to remake our mental authorship of the

world, preferring a more passive construction of denial and make-believe. This doesn't hold well for the future. More on page 8.

In a tribute to cultural identity, Dan MacLeod discusses his Boston-Irish roots in a short story called «A Tall, Dark Man». A poignant dialogue between father, grandmother and the author himself. Begins on page 17.

Other articles: Pascale Sztun writes about her cross-cultural experiences in Africa and suggests we may need to reinvent our adaptation skills to be more relevant to both locals and expatriates. Starts on page 9. And Dimitris Polychronopoulos sums up the highlights in his extensive report on the Dublin Congress (page 12).

Much to read and enjoy.



Patrick Schmidt, Editor-in-chief



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Susan Salzbrenner

An interview with a “femme extraordinaire” in the intercultural world



How does perceived trust within a population have an impact on society? Surveys continually show that countries which score high on the statement “most people can be trusted” tend to have higher economic growth rates, better overall health, superior schools and lower crime rates. In short, all the elements for a stable and prosperous society.

But, going deeper, how does one’s perception of trust affect intercultural relations? What is the subjective feeling? Is trust a state of mind? Is it combined with behavior? And how do we actually use and act out the concept of “trust” when in a cross-cultural situation? Susan Salzbrenner has given much thought to the study of trust and discusses it, among other topics, in the following interview.

She is the product of a culture that experienced a sudden, radical change. Her first seven years were lived under the rule of the German Democratic Republic, where people were told “a good amount of suspicion was considered healthy in interactions.” After the fall of the Wall, she learned there were other ways of perceiving life. Her eagerness to learn about other cultures led her, at age 16, to spend a year studying in the U.S. She has since lived in Australia, China, France and, now, Denmark.

Her leitmotiv has been to learn, borrow and expand knowl-

edge and best practices so as to bridge cultural gaps and increase the “intercultural fitness” of expats or teams. Her output in the intercultural field is prolific, whether as trainer, writer, presenter or researcher. And, if those activities weren’t enough, she’s actively involved in Young SIETAR, becoming its President last January. Despite the busy schedule, she was able to squeeze in an hour with me to discuss her life and ideas.

What were the early experiences that led you to become an interculturalist?

I believe it has to do with being raised in East Germany and the whole transformation process that occurred after 1989. I was seven years old when the Wall came down. When the borders opened up, I met my father’s side of the family in Bavaria. Their way of living was different from Saxony, where I’m from. There was a more capitalist outlook and I was sort of in the middle of this clash.

I think that was really the first time I tried to mediate between two cultures, although I wasn’t consciously aware of it. Even though we were all Germans, and from the same family, there was a difference in how we spoke and interacted.

In another words, you were already observing and asking questions about why they were doing things differently.

Yes, you could say that. I was an only child and tended to

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Susan Salzbrenner

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Believing in your potential was what influenced Susan the most during her stay in the U.S.

watch people a lot. I always noticed things other people didn't. And that kind of led me to become more serious about other nationalities. A lot of East Germans were eager to travel because it was such a no-go before 1989.

When the Wall fell, there was this rush for East Germans to explore the world. I'd be sitting in my room, looking at an atlas, wondering what it was like to live in all these different places. My parents always encouraged me to go see new things and take advantage of the freedom they didn't have. I cherish that and am grateful for the opportunity I had. At 16, I managed to get into an exchange program with the U.S.

Where did you go?

To Kansas, right in the middle of the country. I did my high school senior year and graduated there. I was the only exchange student and didn't speak German at all. It was an enormously positive experience for me because I was so interested in the American way of life. I really took it all in.

What marked you the most during that year?

What surprised me most was the open-door attitude--you could visit anytime. People were warm, supportive, it wasn't superficial at all. Curiously, I think my East German background helped because the people in Kansas were just as community-driven as where I grew up.

The thing that changed me was their confidence in the ability to do things. If you weren't sure you could do something, people would say you could. They believed in their potential far more than I was used to. It sort of backfired on me when I returned to Germany. I was told, "Hey, you need to take it down a few notches." People in Saxony under-sell themselves and don't normally talk about their abilities. That's both a virtue and disadvantage.

In one of your articles, you write, "I was well known at the public library because I borrowed all their books. I was extremely curious." Do you think you were born with a curious mind or was it cultivated?

I'm not sure whether or not curiosity is something you're born with. I was living where we couldn't explore much in the real sense but we explored a lot in books. Both my parents read a lot and anything we didn't know, we'd look up. I think that's where one part of my curiosity came from.

I do have an innate need to find out about things that are different. I realize some people don't have this, they're perfectly satisfied being surrounded by people like themselves. They do the same things, go back to the same place each year for vacation because it's familiar. That always appalled me.

After finishing at the Gymnasium, what did you study?



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Susan Salzbrenner

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It was in the student town of Jena where Susan did her studies in psychology.



I studied psychology at Jena University, a double major in clinical and organizational psychology. I did the Master's program and spent the last year in Brisbane, Australia. My initial interest was groups and how they interact. Only later did I become interested in individuals and neuroscience.

How did this lead you to intercultural work?

It happened by accident. I was researching how groups react when you criticize them. I thought it would be interesting from a migrant perspective: how were migrants perceived, after being in the country a long time, if they criticize their adopted group. I dug into the literature and thought, "Hey, this is an actual field." I wrote my thesis on multiculturalism in Australia.

I wanted to do a PhD, but I was disillusioned by how little the material we produced was being used in the real world. I thought, "Why are we sitting here? Five people reading a research paper. I'd rather do something with organizations myself."

I had a Danish roommate and she said, "If you don't know where to go, come visit me in Copenhagen, it's a nice place." So I did that. And I heard about a cross-cultural company, Aperian Global, and wrote to ask for an internship. And they accepted me.

How then did you end up going to China and France?

Well, my husband was transferred to China and Aperian had just opened up an office in Shanghai. I worked for them remotely from Tianjin, which is the harbor city of Beijing, for two years. After that, there was an opportunity for my husband to go to France. That was an interesting shift of perspective for me. Before that I was also choosing where to go and what to do. But, because of his job, I was just the spouse, following along and just had my second child. But I felt so rebellious, like "Don't tell me what to do."

In hindsight, it was a good experience because I now know both sides of the coin when training expatriates. It was during this time I had the idea about athletes having to relocate.

Interestingly, you wrote "Play Abroad, 101--Your Ultimate Guide to Success as an Athlete Abroad." I assume you're an athlete yourself?

Well, I started playing basketball in high school when I was in the U.S. I played competitively when I went back to Germany and continued in Australia, Denmark and China. It was a process I used to get in touch with local people. I was always surrounded by other athletes.

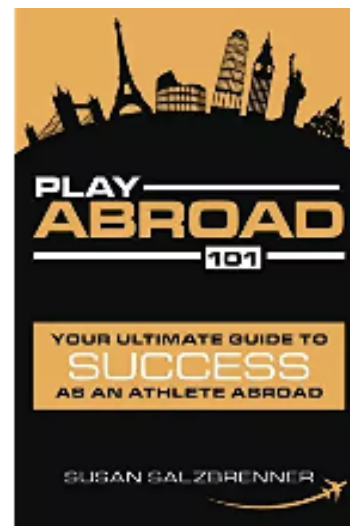
I discovered there wasn't a lot of psychological support when I was playing abroad. I thought it would be fun to work with athletes because I could identify with both the benefits and pitfalls of playing in a different country. I want-

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Susan Salzbrenner

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While in France, she wrote an intercultural guidebook for athletes playing abroad.



ed to present intercultural tools and practical tips for competing abroad in simple, understandable language and, to my surprise, the book was well-received.

One of the articles from your blog is entitled “Can I trust you?” In it, you cite a survey on the perceived level of trust among citizens. The highest was in Norway, almost 80%. At the other end are Columbia and Ecuador, below 10%. In the U.S. it was 46% in 1972 but now it’s 30%. What sort of conclusions can we draw?

I wrote it because of the differences in trust I experienced throughout my travels. When I returned to Denmark 18 months ago, I saw how the Danes trust one another but also how it’s a stumbling block in international work. They complain the other party doesn’t bring the same degree of trust. How interesting that Danes assume everyone should trust them as much as they trust each other. Being married to a Brazilian, having gone to Brazil many times, it’s obvious it’s not the case. Trust is not a given, it has to be earned.

Also, it’s a really good way to understand nepotism. If you don’t find the people in your country very trustworthy, you tend to stay very close to groups you know will not backstab you. Even if my cousin isn’t as qualified to do a job, he’s not going to take money from me because it will reflect badly on the family. So I’d rather hire him than a person

with the right qualifications who I don’t trust. This explains in large part why nepotism exists in the world.

I think it’s crucial to have trust in intercultural relations but it’s often overlooked. If you don’t know anything about others, if everything is based on second-hand information, you’re not going to establish trust. That’s why inclusion and bridging cultures is so important. To establish trust you need to reach out, find ways of working and being with people who are different. But, for that, you have to feel safe. Psychological safety comes before building trust. If people feel threatened, whether it’s real or perceived, they won’t be able to trust.

Creating a feeling of security within an organization is easier than within a country, obviously, because you’re dealing with a smaller critical mass. In an organization, you have to establish that everyone’s safe; people need to know their positions aren’t threatened. That step comes first, it’s almost a cultural change so the trust-level can go up. Once you create that, you go a step further and say “Now we want to work in a way to establish more trust between the different functions.”

In your blog, you talk about neuroscience. And one of your favorite books in this field is “Thinking Fast and Slow” by Daniel Kahneman. It’s central thesis is that people place too much confidence in human judgment. They associate new information with existing thinking

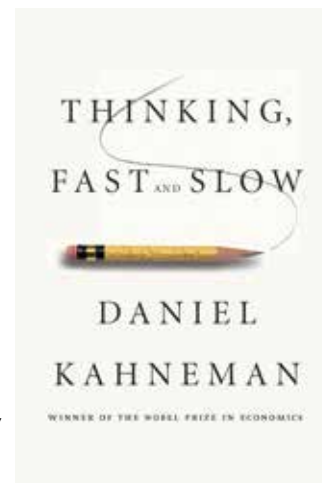
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Susan Salzbrenner

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An excellent book on how the mind works.

patterns instead of creating new patterns for each new experience. Could you expound on this?

I find it's great that we no longer believe we're all rational and are finally admitting we're all flawed. And that's a good starting point. At the same time, many people don't want to take our unconscious biases into account, don't want to do the work of developing new thought patterns. To put it in simple terms, our brain wants to work with existing thinking patterns, which explains in large part why we discriminate, create stereotypes and react aggressively in new situations. I firmly believe we can always evolve from this. I find the book valuable for opening people up, especially people coming from different backgrounds, such as technically-minded people.

In what practical way do you make people see the habitual traits they're not even aware of?

In coaching situations, I ask people to do homework. Write down certain habits, who they talk to, places they go, a sort of superficial observation of one's unconscious biases. But I use a lot of the research because I think it's compelling to show them the studies, to create new prophecies and structures that can counteract and compensate for our flaws. It can be an effective way of making sure these unconscious biases don't continue to dominate an organizational culture. I get the best results in long-term projects that allow me to be part of the transformation. You have discussions, check on how they're doing. That's what's most satisfying,

to see their culture changing and coming full circle.

How do you see SIETAR and its future?

Personally, I found SIETAR to be an excellent platform for meeting colleagues when I was working alone, a place to share your thoughts, frustrations and find partners. This is why I'm still involved in Young SIETAR--I find their spirit more open and sharing. It's something I'd encourage all Sietarians to do. It's not just to bring people together, but to create more platforms for ourselves and industry, which in turn will allow us to move forward.

However, it seems we're coming to an age where interculturalists are trying to sell to other interculturalists. Trying to commercialize and make a profit from "colleagues" is, for me, not the right business model. If you're putting effort into selling, trying to develop a business, it should be directed toward people on the outside. We should use our acquired skills to become more known, to be taken seriously. Why are we selling to each other and not to the other people? That's my biggest concern.

Don't get me wrong, I think it's good we develop our skills among ourselves. But we should focus more on representing the field to the outside world instead of focusing internally on the right model or teaching technique. I think we'd be more relevant playing a bigger role in current events, getting into debates and discussions. That's where the future of SIETAR needs to go.

Interviewed by Patrick Schmidt

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Darwin on Trump: Size does matter

by Milton Bennett

Size matters, but it doesn't make you superior. I'm talking about finch beaks, of course. In the last political campaign we heard a lot about size, but more thoughtful commentators are speaking of evolutionary change or correction. So it seems appropriate to revisit one of Darwin's original observations of evolution in action.

Finches eat nuts, and they need to break the nuts with their beaks. Depending on the prevailing climate, available nuts are either large and hard or small and delicate. Finches with big beaks are good at eating hard nuts, but they starve to death when the nuts get small. And vice versa. The lesson, as Darwin saw it, is that evolution rather quickly selects for the beak size that fits the available nuts – that is, “survival of the fittest.”

Human beings adapt to their social environment in similar ways. People who are thriving in the current social environment have, metaphorically, the right sized beaks to consume the available resources. This says nothing about the appropriateness of the environment or the inherent superiority of its denizens. All it says is that, in a particular social environment, some people are better adapted to survive than others.

So-called President Trump clearly has the right sized beak for the current media-driven social environment – he is eat-



ing it right and left. At the same time, he is cynically promising the people with wrong-sized beaks that he will change their environment so they can eat better. He and his coterie of disrupters can't do that, but the boastful promises are part of their big media beaks.

Of course, the social environment is “us,” collectively. We should be concerned about how we are supporting an environment in which Trump and the alt-right crazies are adaptive. Is it just our acceptance of social mediated news? Or does it go deeper into our reluctance to accept collective responsibility for our social creations?

It is time to revisit Berger & Luckmann's observation in their classic 1967 text, *The Social Construction of Reality* (edited for gender):

... Despite the objectivity that marks the social world in human experience, it does not thereby acquire an ontological status apart from the human activity that produced it.... people are capable of forgetting their own authorship of the human world, and further, that the dialectic between people, the producers, and their products is lost to consciousness...

That is, people are capable paradoxically of producing a reality that denies them.

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Do we really get a clear picture of cross-cultural skills needed when working abroad?

by Pascale Sztum



I began to be interested in the intercultural field when I started experiencing problems in my international collaborations: my work experience in the international trade daily confronted me with communicating, negotiating and working with foreign colleagues, clients and suppliers. Sometimes the experiences were amusing, but then and again they were frustrating. I even once left the company because my Japanese boss was deeply “disrespecting” me.

At first, I read the intercultural literature; in the 90s the francophone and anglophone business literatures were very rich on describing the influence of cultures in the workplace.

One day, as I was coordinating training programs for executives in a business school in Belgium, some Czech plant managers came to see me; they were attending a course based on the cutting edge material from Harvard Business School. They claimed that what they were learning did not make sense in their country. That material would not solve the problems they were facing... that “material” was in fact, nothing more than economics, strategy, human resources and marketing...

I informed the director of the program but nothing changed. I was so frustrated by the lack of reaction to their claim that I kept at the back of my mind as an unresolved mystery!

Later on, my life took me abroad and I became an expat working in several sub-Saharan countries. I was interested in studying the local cultures in connection with business performance. I thought that I could gather some useful information to the very poor existing intercultural literature on that part of the world.

My exploration of the local cultures took place in more than 15 different African countries, following the waves of my own expatriation, but also of my work assignments. I had the opportunity to meet with a wide range of Africans working in the business and academic fields as well as in the civil society.

When discussing cultures and business performance in their own country, I often heard the comment that Czech plant managers made years earlier: ‘it does not work here’.

Some informants were challenging the ‘universal golden rules’ to start, run or grow a business, claiming that the only way forwards for people in Africa was to close the imported business books. Some of these business books were focused on skills and competences in area such as entrepreneurship, sales, marketing, human resources, as well as leadership and managerial skills.

None of the skills, competences and knowledge that a

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Cross-cultural skills...

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Often there's conflict between modern business know-how and local values.



proper business training or course would recommend were useful in fixing the problems in those countries: the logic supporting business transactions and collaborations had nothing to do with the economic rationale of the business know-how taught in business schools around the globe!

When discussing with local academics and suggesting to them to retake ownership of the imported business know-how by adapting it to the local values, there was a lot of confusion as there was no tool to know how to proceed. Some hope that one day the business know-how would become effective...but they had no idea how and when this could happen. This reaction in itself was baffling me.

However, the lack of adaptation of the business know-how to the place where it is transferred has a big impact on the performance of expatriates working in these sub-Saharan countries. Expats experienced some challenges that many told me having never met in other part of the world where their former expatriation had taken them so far.

They were just at a loss with the rationale behind local business practices and expectations regarding staff management. Their sub-Saharan colleagues and counterparts were not productive and they could not understand why. Expatriates were facing surrealist situations such as in Zambia, where respecting local values meant expatriates had to al-

low three people to do the job that one individual could do! And this just because a local value makes it impolite to leave a person alone. Yet, the two individuals who keep company to the working one expect to be paid for their job!

Expats just cannot accept that, unless they put the performance of their business into jeopardy. So they say 'no' to that cultural value and practice. Yet they want to say 'no' in a way that locals can understand and accept. They want cross-cultural skills to do that well.

Working with local colleagues features other cross-cultural challenges for expatriates: the accurate interpretation of the numerous contradictions between what their local colleagues state and what they do. For example, a person can claim that he is an expert in time management and at the same time display attitudes and behavior that clearly show that he does not care about time management!

This is very upsetting for expatriates as they think they cannot trust locals counterparts. These cross-cultural challenges are documented in the literature under the name of double logic. Expatriates request help to handle these cross-cultural situations and to prevent their negative outcomes.

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Cross-cultural skills... — continued

Key to success abroad is the ability to revisit and adapt imported knowledge to the local place.



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The cross-cultural challenges are not only faced by expatriates in sub-Saharan Africa but they are also faced by local people when working with foreigners!

Local employees of foreign businesses and organizations are often recruited because of their technical skills competences learned during their studies abroad. However, they face some challenge to transfer those skills and competences in their work place and they are very uncomfortable telling their foreign counterpart that the skills and competences are locally irrelevant. They could be perceived as incompetent or they could believe themselves that they have poorly mastered the skills acquired during their training. So they keep quiet, but are desperate to understand why things don't work in their society: they need cross-cultural skills to move on and invent their own solutions!

My investigation of cross-cultural challenges of collaborations in sub-Saharan Africa has taken many years and it has shaped my understanding of the needs of cross-cultural skills that we need to equip people who go and work in sub-Saharan Africa.

Many of us in the intercultural fields assess the cross-cultural skills and competences in terms of communication or leadership style. However, this might be only the tip of the iceberg! My exploration of the cross-cultural challenges in

sub-Saharan Africa shows that effectively working in those countries supposes a wider range of cross-cultural skills than those developed so far. Central to those new skills is the ability to revisit and adapt imported knowledge and know-how to the local place where they are transferred.

The Czech plan directors comments but also those of other people I have been dealing with in Asia or even in the Middle East suggest that many foreigners and locals would benefit from new cross-cultural skills to revisit and reinvent a business know-how that is more meaningful to fix the problems in a specific society. That may mean more work for interculturalists, but that may also mean that we need to partner with other business experts to offer a comprehensive cross-cultural solution to those involved in cross-cultural collaborations.

Pascale Sztum is an international business consultant and cross-cultural trainer, having extensive field experience of working with over 50 nationalities.

More information about her work can be found at <https://www.performanceacross-borders.com>



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Impressions of the SIETAR Europa congress in Dublin

Passionate exchanges in turbulent times

by Dimitrios Polychronopoulos

Under a warm and sunny streak of beautiful weather, more than 375 interculturalists gather in Dublin for the 21st SIETAR Europa Congress. It opened at Dublin City University's (DCU) St. Pat's, a college of education founded 150 years ago, located just to the north of the Dublin city centre. The city was created by Vikings around the year 841 and first called it Dyflin. While the heart of the city is on the River Liffey, different neighbourhoods and pedestrian zones and pubs and restaurants radiate from the centre.

The kick-off event in the evening of May 24th found a lively crowd, enjoying a welcome drink and some canapés. In the past, the welcome drink had been only for presenters and committee members. This year the organising committee sought to make it a welcome event for all delegates.

The theme of the congress was *Cultural Dexterity in Turbulent Times*. SIETAR Europa President Pari Namazie gave a welcome in the Irish Language, 'Dia Guitch' and emphasised that in today's time, we need hope and not fear. The dean shared the news that DCU is recognised as a sanctuary to support asylum seekers and refugees. Next September, asylum seekers will start attending DCU free of charge and with full support.

Livingstone Thompson presented the first keynote speakers Dr. Randall Hansen and Dr. Nguyen-Phuong-Mai. By having

two people speak on the same morning, a cross-cultural connection was made between two disciplines: political science and neuroscience. Mai presented a talk on how the brain creating new pathways to form multicultural beings while Randall discussed the debate on whether a legal framework can be enough to help people integrate into new societies after fleeing from war zones.

The congress featured four practitioner tracks (business and organisational challenges, sociopolitical concerns, shaping intercultural professions, and practicing perspective change) as well as an academic track and on Thursday and Friday, attendees could also choose a film festival track.

The film festival opened with Maura di Mauro moderating on how the intercultural field relates to the tourism industry. With the film *Holi-Days*, we saw perspectives from Jerusalem, Florence and then Las Vegas. Despite the different cultural backgrounds and motivation of visitors to these locations, they often expressed the common thread of a theme park feeling in all three places.

In the practitioner track, Joe Kearns moderated a panel on migration as a follow-up to the Brussels meeting in May 2016. The first panalist, David McRae, based outside of Thessaloniki, introduced a brief account of refugees in Greece through different historical eras and then elaborated



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Passionate exchanges ...

— continued

Grant Douglas explaining the intercultural program at Lille Catholic University.



on the current issue of migrants in Greece. There are a lot of success stories in migration and integration, but they are generally not the ones to receive press coverage. Given the current political situation, the 60,000 migrants who currently find themselves in Greece, are now best off seeking asylum in Greece. Cynthia Tiden-Machiedt, Vincent Merck, Nouredine Erradi and Jimena Andino Dorato also presented. A special interest group is to be created within SIETAR around this issue.

Barbara Covarrubias led the newcomer session and we learned that there are 120 direct SIETAR Europa members and between 800 and 900 who are members of the different national SIETARs within Europe. In 2018, SIETAR is interested in developing an innovative and very different sort of event.

From Lille Catholic University, Grant Douglas introduced the methods his university took to turn around the lack of interaction between foreign and local French students. The driving idea was to create multi-cultural managers. The university used different tools to determine the students' cultural intelligence: the cultural intelligence survey, Diversity Icebreakers, six spheres of inclusion model, individual SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats). The students and staff saw where they stood from three levels: 1) where they are, 2) where their home culture is and 3) where other individuals and countries are. The university

issued a passport, where students were required to accumulate points in order to prove their cultural awareness before going for study abroad. Today, whatever the university does, cultural skills and diversity skills run throughout everything.

The World Café on Thursday evening allowed people to discuss issues concerning the current wave of migrants settling into different countries of Europe and how interculturalists can use their professional skills to help improve lives, build understanding and facilitate the integration processes. The World Café attracted more people than originally signed up, but fortunately there was room to accommodate everybody. Joe Kearns, one of the organisers of the World Café, is forming a special interest group for those who interested in furthering the discussions.

On Friday, Joanna Sell shared with us what Chopin can teach us about communications, values and how different emotions are felt with different languages. Patrick Schmidt and Elaine Mosimann revived Chopin's music on the piano.

Marta Nowicka, who coaches expats, shared her thoughts on how to support expat spouses before a move abroad. She said the key was to clarify goals, create vision of the assignment, prepare the move, plan the future career and prepare activities for the spouse. Marta uses a variety of tools to get the employee and spouse ready, such as the wheel of

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Passionate exchanges ... — continued

The congress was buzzing with excitement and joy.



life, the GROW (Goal-Reality-Options-Will) model, personality profiles, and Country Navigator.

Emma Dodwell-Groves' of BGRS made a presentation on virtual teams and had the crowd laughing with a role play, where the participants read from a script with different people in time zones ranging from 6 am to 11 pm. We discussed the disadvantages of virtual teams and the key issues of creating trust, solving conflict, and creating uniform understanding. The key is to set structures, which allow others to express disagreement, to have time zone allocation and to incorporate team-building activities in balance with the down-to-business agendas.

Friday was wrapped up with a general assembly, where discussions were presented on how to restructure SIETAR Europa so that there's greater efficiency in decision making.

The gala dinner took place on Friday evening to allow more people to attend. Indeed, it had the largest attendance of any SIETAR Europa congress, with more than 220 attendees. Irish music and Irish dancing lessons were followed by Stefan Meister as DJ and more fun and dancing.

On Saturday morning, the weather changed to cloudy and drizzly, stereotypical of Dublin. Livingstone Thompson pre-

sented in the academic track on how to deal with religious differences. He cited Jan Komensky (1592-1670), who noted that colonists saw that religions sustained the lives of others. Livingstone emphasised the Cultural-Linguistic Approach by George Lindbeck as a way to understand different beliefs, as each religion has its own 'grammar' or its own 'language'. To be religious in one religion is not being religious in a different religion. This explains why it makes it difficult for a Muslim to understand Christianity. The absolute truth of any religion is only valid in the context of that particular religion. In this regard, we can recognise religious communities as cultural communities.

Richard Lewis and Marit Gjesme spoke on how to implement corporate values, by applying observations and methods that Richard used to develop the Lewis Model. The main point is that values such as accountability, safety, innovation, respect, truth are often perceived differently from culture to culture. So simply posting corporate values up on a wall and expecting them to be followed by each employee can lead to clashes. Although the presenters concede the model is an oversimplification when used on a national level, on an individual level one can conduct a test, which shows where each individual falls within the model. This sort of knowledge will help the organization to prepare employees for engaging in the company values to the degree that a corporation expects.

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Passionate exchanges ... — continued

Robert Johnson holding a roundtable talk on inter-generational communication.



Workshop by members of the Institute of Human Connectivity focused on bringing new kinds of dialogues to the intercultural sphere. The workshop included small group discussions on multidimensionality, interconnectedness, and belief systems. Participants concluded that there needs to be more acceptance of newcomers into the field and fresh ideas that they bring, and that we don't need labels of competencies to be considered true interculturalists.

Saturday afternoon as a part of the congress, the family of Maria Jicheva arrived in Dublin to attend a memorial in her honour at the St Pats DCU venue. Attendees remember Maria as key to SIETAR's expansion into Bulgaria.

Abby Beckley and Andra Morosi made a presentation on how WorldWork helps individuals and organisations build up trust in current times of increased volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. Trust, they said is the antidote to fear. Since trust is rooted with emotions, it is important to build trust at an emotional level to succeed.

Robert Johnson held a roundtable talk on inter-generational communication and understanding. His focus was on avoiding stereotypes and explained how new technologies can increase the generation gap. The message was that interculturalists should include dialogues of cross-generational understanding and technology in their work.

The SIETAR Europa event ended on Saturday afternoon with many feeling happy to have made new connections and to catch up with people from previous connections.

One last thing. Some delegates on their way back to the airport were surprised to learn that some taxi drivers, not knowing what SIETAR stood for, had somehow come to believe that the congress was a gathering of some mysterious, crack-pot religious sect. When told the congress was about interculturalism, they smiled with relief.

After the SIETAR Europa congress ended in Dublin, ten of us decided to visit part of the island outside the city, all the way across the island to the west coast. Joe Kearns organised the journey. We had the opportunity to experience the history of the green island through his stories and his insights into his family's path. Each of us discovered Ireland on an individual level and with Joe as our guide. We learned about Irish culture and history. We shared fantastic stories during short hikes, sightseeing and during our mealtimes together.

For most of us, it was our first time to experience Ireland beyond Dublin. The landscape and the people left an amazing impression on us. As interculturalists, we had a wonderful opportunity to bond and learn about each other's experiences in the intercultural field.

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A few photographic souvenirs of the Dublin congress



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Who are you?

... Stories about identity

A Tall, Dark Man

by Dan MacLeod

I hadn't been home in a while.

In my first ten years in Canada I only missed one Christmas, hitch-hiking over a thousand miles round-trip in temperatures as low as -45. But as I got older, and even though Montreal was twice as close as New Brunswick, I was getting down to Boston half as often. I never hitched anymore either; if things weren't going well and I couldn't afford the plane, I simply didn't go.

I was there now because *Radio-Canada* wanted a series of documentaries on America. I was celebrating Christmas in May with my family before heading down the Eastern seaboard. Just like Christmases in December, there were separate pieces, corresponding to the schism that is my parents.

Tonight I was taking my father and his mother out to dinner. He prefers "time together" to a material present these days, not just with me but also with my two brothers, both of whom live within five miles of him.

He's getting old, regretting the years lost to the divorce, wondering how many years we all have left together. My grandmother is very old, nearly 80. She has been ridding her apartment of material things, giving things away and doesn't want more. She is preparing to die.



I'm taking both of them out to dinner at once because I'll only be in town for a few days and also because I figure there'll be more to talk about with Nana, if my father is there.

We go to Buster's, the new Tex-Mex joint on Route 1, because Nana says she's heard so much about it. We order barbecued ribs and onion rings and fries and coleslaw and watch the customers give the mechanical bull a shot. It hardly even bucks, the better to avoid lawsuits.

The cowgirl waitresses pass back and forth feeling stupid having to keep up Southwestern dialogue in their Boston accents. There is a floor-show, a magician, and he's really good. The food is good too and we're all talking up a storm and Nana has two glasses of wine which surprises all three of us.

...

My father was driving us back — Nana to her apartment, me to my brother's over in Chelsea— when I brought up the fact that he and I are actually Coyne. He was adopted and we all know Coyne is an Irish name. Nana was born a Beattie and married Jack MacLeod, a carpenter who'd emigrated from Prince Edward Island.

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A tall, dark man ... — continued

My father’s family was Protestant on both sides but I’ve always wondered about our blood. In my travels to Ireland I asked people in Dublin and Belfast if Coyne was a Catholic name and, same sense of humor on both sides of the border, the answer was invariably “Ye might be fuckin’ Jewish!”

I finally found a company that does computerized family-origins and prints them out on fake parchment, rolled up and tied with a red ribbon. I had both Coyne and MacLeod done and gave them to my father: this is who you are in the genetic-vs-environmental scheme of things... Turns out Coyne is, in fact, a Catholic name, a real Irish name.

I bought up the subject in the car, asked Nana how she knew his birth-name in the first place.

“Well, back then things weren’t strict the way they are now, you see. We were shown the birth certificate, your grandfather and me, and it said Richard Coyne. And we were told that the father worked at the State House. Supposedly he was a tall, dark man.”

My father had never really asked about these things. He said, “Richard? Gee, Ma, you never told me you knew my first name too!” He was trying to sound amused but I

could tell he was a bit stunned. He said, “What else do you know? What was Coyne’s job at the State House?”

“All I know is that he worked there. I have no idea what he did. And his name wasn’t Coyne. I have no idea what his name was.”

“But you saw the birth certificate.”

I cracked up. It’s a family trait —an adopted trait from my father’s family — that we make fun of serious things. I burst out laughing and said, “Your *mother’s* name was Coyne!”

He fairly snarled. “What? What do you know about it? *You* don’t know.”

My grandmother interrupted without thinking, 50 years of discretion out the window, gone. “Well, they weren’t married...That’s why she gave you up, the mother did. She was an unwed mother. She gave you *her* name because the father wouldn’t take responsibility...”

Then Nana stopped short, confused, realizing what she’d just said. The old man was dead quiet, thinking hard. He looked straight ahead at the road in the headlights.

I leaned over the front seat from the back and grinned at

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A tall, dark man ...

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him in the rear-view mirror. “You mean you never figured that out? We’re both bastards except I wasn’t adopted!”

I kept grinning into the mirror until he looked. His mother was looking out the side window at the houses we passed, embarrassed.

He finally looked up into the mirror at me, kind of serious, said “No...I never thought...I mean, I always just thought they were too poor, my parents. I figured I had a lot of brothers and sisters and that my parents were too poor to feed another kid, you know?”

...

We pulled up in front of her building and he got out and walked around to open Nana’s door and help her out of the car. He took her arm and walked her into the lobby. He said something to her and kissed her on the forehead. I got out and sat in the front.

So his father may have been a senator or a janitor. His mother was probably just some kid from South Boston with an Irish accent and no education.

And Coyne is an Irish-Catholic name, we know that much at least. And his father was probably Irish as well, just

some guy from the neighborhood, probably a janitor or one of those State House cops, probably a kid himself.

When he got back in the car I asked him what he’d said to Nana. He told me he’d said he had only one real mother and it was her.

“Her eyes teared up when I said it...”

...

All the way to Chelsea we were quiet, just looking at the road in the headlights. I couldn’t wait to tell my brother about it all, knew he’d laugh his ass off, but my old man wasn’t laughing so I kept my mouth shut.

Although it wasn’t like he was sad or upset or anything. He was just thinking, thinking...

When we turned into my brother’s street, my father thanked me for the dinner. He stopped the car and we shook hands. As I was getting out he said, “You know, this puts a whole new spin on things...”

(for Don MacLeod)

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Book Review

A Bridge Too Far or Seldom Crossed

*The Value of Work Means Different Things to Different People,
Spanning Cultural Disparity in a Globalising Labour Market*

By Ruby Welch

Strategic Book Publishing & Rights Agency, LLC, 166 pages

U.S. \$ 18.35

In my language “work” is used to describe everything from the brilliant artistic creation to the drudgery of those enslaved by their own compulsion or by the chains, figurative or literal, placed on them by others. Seeing the title and launching into the pages of the book, I was shocked to realize that, as an interculturalist, I could not recall seeing much direct and significant cultural exploration of the meaning of work or comparison of its meanings across cultural communities. Was this my negligence, or a black hole in our profession’s comprehension of how work has been constructed across time in human communities?

Yes, work has been discussed within our own culture in social, political, and economic terms (Marx), in its religious roots (Max Weber), and in the history of struggles for power and ownership. However, its overall socially constructed sense, its place in common discourse and in realities that most of us take for granted, remained to be discovered. With Welch’s work, the lid has been lifted, using ethnographic research and fresh insight. Make no mistake, this is essentially an anthropological research report. Some of us may find it a somewhat less fluid read, but nonetheless quite clear and informative.

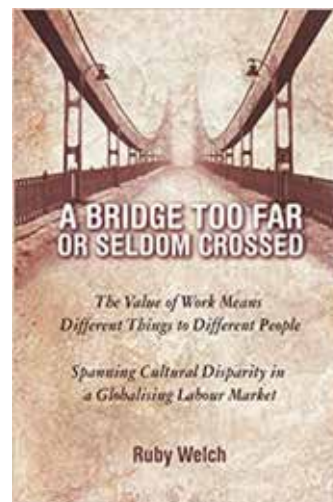
The author’s core research was on the role of work in Maori culture, its belief systems and its conflict with the invading English colonists and their domination of the systems of work. Most revealing in this regard, the heart of the book, consists of numerous excerpts from the author’s interviews with Maori

individuals and those of mixed ancestry where conflicts of perception and values are laid bare supporting the thesis of the diverse meanings of work across cultures.

Welch goes forward, highlighting differences in attitudes, beliefs, and practices around work, specifically India and China. Despite modernization and globalization, culturally diverse intellectual processes signal different approaches to perception, understanding, collaboration, and negotiation. The weeding out of indigenous cultures’ lifestyles and work styles by invaders, as in the case of the Maori, and today around the world by the forces of globalization, may prevent the flowering of cultures, but roots continue to sprout in the lives of subsequent generations.

The final chapter of the book is an excellent summary of what goes before. It focuses on the importance of building bridges of communication to reduce the cultural dismantling threatened by globalization. Today communication technology and automation challenge both the nature of work and our beliefs about it, as well as the nature of the opportunities available to the next generation entering the workforce. The book’s theme provides a good stimulus for interculturalists to pay attention to work, this highly neglected dimension of human cultures, not just theoretically, but in terms of their activities in training and coaching. The topic of work is definitely, as the title of the book proclaims, “A Bridge Too Far or Seldom Crossed.”

Reviewed by George Simons



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Book Review

Intercultural Communication

Strategies, Challenges and Research

Brenda Griffin, ed.
Nova Science Publishers, 140 pages
U.S. \$ 82

Intercultural Communication: Strategies, Challenges and Research is an interesting collection of five, at first sight, seemingly disparate essays focused on different areas of the world as well as on socially distinct groups. These studies become linked only by the expanding how one frames the theme of intercultural communication.

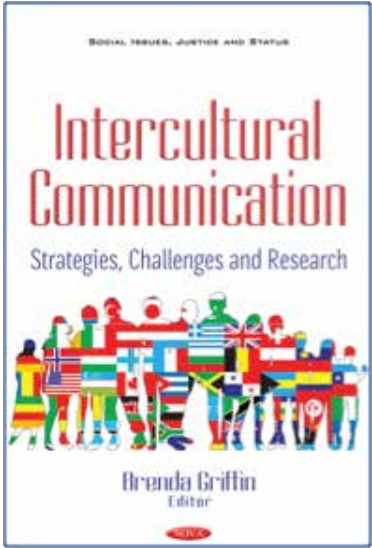
The first essay addresses teacher education for multicultural learning environments. It records the researchers' efforts to explore the reframing of basic childhood education stressing the importance of play particularly in the pre-school curriculum and environment. Long-term experimentation and assessment are reported. This leads to a highly technical description of studies about attempts to change specific environments and measure the results of increased play in terms of learning on the part of preschool and incipient primary school children. The nonprofessional reader will probably be disappointed in the fact that the play activities are not described in much detail, as it would be interesting to imagine and picture what the children were actually doing and how it differed from what they did previously.

The second chapter describes qualitative research on a rather successful project team communication in a managerial environment involving Chinese and German participants working in English in the process of setting up a custom telecommunication network. It explores both the up

and downsides of strategies needed for using a corporate language as a link with the various levels of fluency required and encountered as a project proceeds and as it involves personnel of various functions and authority.

The key challenge here is the existence of personnel who may be competent in general language ability and those not so generally competent but well immersed in the genre language (specific to the technical aspects and details). Put in personal terms, this is a situation I can find myself in when taking a car to the garage for repairs. My daily conversational French is quite good, but, lift the bonnet on the bagnole, and I am lost, whereas the immigrant mechanic has words and functions for everything, but has a hard time bringing them to bear on my confusion with the technical problem.

The third section of the book is about Gypsy media in the Transcarpathia and the struggle for social inclusion and economic advancement where cultural differences are hindered due to long-standing exclusion. Forced integration has been a failed strategy and bad press had exacerbated bias. Now some cultural organizations have made progress in recognition and greater acceptance of Roma. Focus is on the newspaper Romany Yag, and the promotion of cultural unity and expression, a rebirth in online media as well as print. The situation nonetheless remains fragile.



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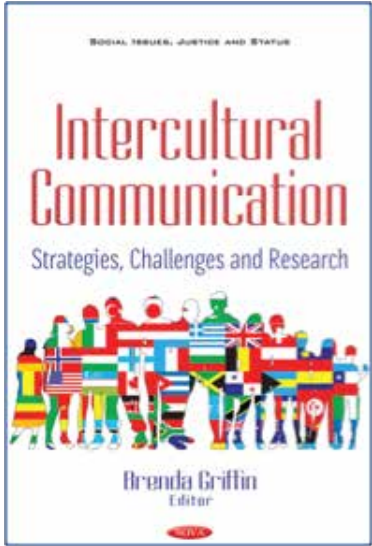
Intercultural Communication...

— *continued*

Chapter Four deals with the cultural phenomena of rhythm and discourse which form an often-unappreciated aesthetic, or even a neglected feature within intercultural theory and practice. This essay by Stephen Holmes fascinated me most as an interculturalist. It reawakened my perspective, by putting some step and tune into what tended to be rather static and standard intercultural descriptions and dimensional modeling of communication. Alas, these are still very much in vogue for many teachers, practitioners and coaches.

While it has been pointed out that the music and the dance, that is, vocal tonality, movement and gesture frequently outweigh the words we speak when we seek to establish meaning and intention, these elements are often ignored. This is perhaps because they are harder to interpret and, also perhaps because of our classic dichotomous thinking about human nature as split into mind and body. Opposing thinking and words to sensing and feeling has subordinated the physical to the mental in how we value them.

This is a persuasion that contemporary neuroscience and cognitive psychology no longer permit us to hold. Artifacts and architecture are as culturally expressive as literature and rhetoric. Theory is now emerging to support our aesthetic sense.



The book closes with the study of Chilean migration from a woman's perspective. Half a century ago, I wrote an article asserting that gender was the ultimate cultural difference and, rereading it today in the light of this research essay, much of it seems still relevant. In this chapter, the phenomenon of migration and women's experience of it brings the topic into focus once again. While difference can be understood as part of ones being, the inner narrative of identity, it can be as well as a narrative externally imposed, as the two become entangled and politicized. This is unquestionably highlighted in the nakedness of the person imposed by migration.

This essay shines this light on the female narrative of identity through qualitative research focused on migrant women in a specific Latin American context. Ten migrant subjects revealed their experiences, often discriminatory and subordinate positioning and treatment. One senses the pain and loss as they are frequently forced and molded into socially constructed roles and precarious employment situations.

In sum, this book broadens our sense of intercultural communication's challenges, allowing them to be seen in the experience of both communities and individuals in daily life and interaction with each other.

Reviewed by George Simons

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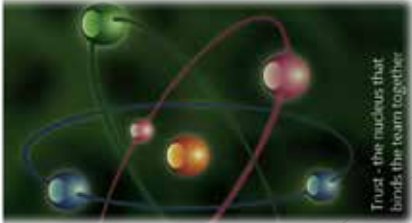
Autumn

Learning Platform opens: 25th September 2017
Web Conference 1: 3rd October 2017
Web Conference 2: 11th October 2017

Winter

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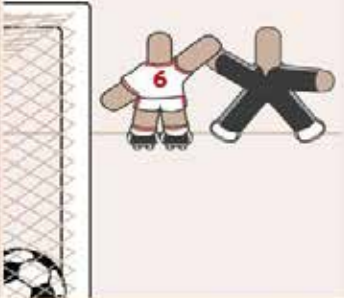


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7-9 Sept. 2017

Personal Leadership: Making a World of Difference Leadership change through mindfulness and creativity, turning theory into applied competence. More Info at arvid.john@nvce.eu

Bath, United Kingdom

19-23 Sept. 2017

Developing intercultural training skills This 5-day course is for trainers wishing to learn more about theory and practice of intercultural training.

25-29 Sept. 2017

Designing and delivering intercultural training This is a follow-up to the above course, also suitable for trainers who already have experience in the field. Information at: www.its-training.com/ or contact adrian.pilbeam@its-training.com

Milan, Italy

Nov. 2-4, 2017

Facilitating Intercultural Consciousness: Ap-

plying the New Paradigm Core course facilitated by Milton Bennett.

Nov. 6-8, 2017

Constructivist Intercultural Training and Assessment. Milton Bennett and invited IDRInstitute partners. Prerequisite is the course *Facilitating Intercultural Consciousness: Applying the New Paradigm.*

Nov. 9-10, 2017

Embodied Culture: Discovering the Feeling of Self and Other in Cultural Context Course facilitated by Ida Castiglioni. Prerequisite: *Facilitating Intercultural Consciousness: Applying the New Paradigm.*

Nov. 11, 2017

Awareness of Transformation for Leading Organizations. Faculty is Karin Jironet and Harry Starren. No prerequisite.

Nov. 13-15, 2017

Realizing the Intercultural Dimension of International Educational Exchange Faculty Lilli Engle, Gabriela Bosley, Kris Lou, Milton Bennett, Ida Castiglioni. No prerequisite

More info at <http://www.idrinstitute.org/>

Bingen/Frankfurt, Germany

Feb. 23-24, 2018

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Impressum

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