

SIETAR JOURNAL



*Italy's contribution
to the world*

La Bella Figura

*A key to
the feeling and
understanding
of culture?*



Contents

(for quick navigation, click on the desired article)

Editorial	1
Ida Castiglioni <i>A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication</i>	2
Do You Capire? <i>An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy</i>	8
La Bella Figura Finnish Style <i>How Finns and Italians view each other</i>	11
Inappropriate Behavior <i>The flip-side of la bella figura</i>	13
Leading Multi-national Teams With 'Horse Sense' <i>Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training</i>	16
Book Reviews	18
Events, workshops, congresses	20



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SIETAR Journal

Editorial

The Philosophy of *la bella figura*

Bella figura, or “beautiful figure”, denotes a way of living which emphasizes beauty, image, and proper behaviour. It reflects the Italian worldview, which is difficult for outsiders to understand until they’ve experienced it.

For example, tourists remark that the uniforms of Italy’s policemen, soldiers, and carabinieri are more elegant than those in other European countries. Even the street cleaners seem better dressed! Italians apply this approach in the way they decorate their houses, how they design and market commercial products, even how they behave toward others.

In the present issue, we explore this unique philosophy of life. Ida Castiglioni explains how theories of embodiment and bella figura thinking are opening new avenues of research in the intercultural world. Gheraldo Veronesi, an executive in the IT world, provides an unconventional look at Italy’s history and culture. And Sietar Europa president Debbie Swallow shares a delightful comparison of Italians and Finns.



Columnist Dan MacLeod gives us the flip-side, demonstrating how inappropriate behavior has become the norm in North America.

Finally, SIETAR member Angela Henke has written a surprising story on companies which address intercultural misunderstandings by having their employees work with horses.

Enjoy the read.



Patrick Schmidt
Editor-in-chief

Contents

(for quick navigation, click on the desired article)

Editorial	1
Ida Castiglioni <i>A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication</i>	2
Do You Capire? <i>An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy</i>	8
La Bella Figura Finnish Style <i>How Finns and Italians view each other</i>	11
Inappropriate Behavior <i>The flip-side of la bella figura</i>	13
Leading Multi-national Teams With ‘Horse Sense’ <i>Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training</i>	16
Book Reviews	18
Events, workshops, congresses	20



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Ida Castiglioni

An interview with a leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication



Perhaps the most important value that Italians adhere to is creating the ultimate form of beauty. Known more commonly as “la bella figura”, this concept expresses an obsession with aesthetically pleasing one’s senses, whether it be Michelangelo’s magnificent sculpture of David or simply the perfectly-matched interior of an Italian home. Bella figura also can be understood as making the best possible impression through appropriate behavior. Speaking gracefully and exhibiting elegance and discretion is known as “cutting a beautiful figure”.

So it’s perhaps no surprise that some of the most advanced research in intercultural relations — the feeling of appropriateness in a foreign setting — is coming from Italy. Otherwise known as “embodied ethnocentrism”, it has become a new paradigm in the intercultural world. And one of its best proponents and theorists is Ida Castiglioni.

Born and raised in a multilingual family just outside of Milan, she intuitively sensed at a very early age that life is about having the right rhythms. Her continuing leitmotiv has been assessing the appropriate feelings for any situation. And it was no accident that, while studying international relations and cultural processes in Milan, she became a practitioner of bioenergetics, the science of

energy flow in living systems, seeing it as a key to social interaction.

Dr. Ida Castiglioni teaches the sociology of cultural processes at the University of Milano-Bicocca and is a founding director of the Intercultural Development Research Institute (IDRI). She’s also a certified therapist, working as an assistant faculty member at the Institute of Somatic Psychology in Milano. Author of many books and articles on interculturalism in both Italian and English, she does consulting work, conducting programs that include multicultural teamwork, global leadership and diversity training for both corporations and public institutions. And one last important aspect of her life is that she’s the partner and wife of Milton Bennett.

Wishing to understand on how Italians might enrich interculturalism with their bella figura outlook, I interviewed her during her holidays in Portland, Oregon.

Perhaps you could tell us a little about your early formative years.

I was born just west of Milan, with parents from two different regions--my mother is from Genoa and my father from Milan. In those days, people were speaking dialects so I grew up with two very different ones. The dialect in Genoa is almost like Portuguese while that of Milan is

Editorial	1
Ida Castiglioni	2
<i>A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication</i>	
Do You Capire?	8
<i>An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy</i>	
La Bella Figura Finnish Style	11
<i>How Finns and Italians view each other</i>	
Inappropriate Behavior	13
<i>The flip-side of la bella figura</i>	
Leading Multi-national Teams With ‘Horse Sense’	16
<i>Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training</i>	
Book Reviews	18
Events, workshops, congresses	20

Ida Castiglioni

— *continued*

Somatic psychology, the reciprocal relationship between body and mind, played a major role in Ida Castiglioni's work on embodiment.



a derivative of French, so you could say I grew up in a multilingual environment.

This perhaps explains my strong interest in languages, which led me to study three separate languages at school. But I think the real event that led me to interculturalism occurred when I was 18. I was asked to teach Italian to a group of Japanese managers, a challenging task that lasted almost two years. It allowed me to enter a world that was far away from me, my family, my habits — it was Japan. And it was a real exchange for me because I was more interested in what they had to tell me than what I could offer them.

After that, I traveled to many places and ended up staying with a family in San Francisco. Upon returning to Milan I did an advanced degree in political science. I've always been interested in history and the philosophy of politics. Of course, when you do political science, you are exposed to a lot of international politics, international diplomacy, international history, international treaties, international everything.

How did you feel about your studies in international relations?

To be honest, I wasn't at all satisfied. The studies were miles away from experiences I'd had abroad and,

in my family, we were surrounded by foreign people all the time. There was a gap which I didn't understand then.

In any case, at the end of those studies, I ran into a program sponsored by the European Union and managed in Italy by 'Intercultura'. It was the first one designed for young people to become intercultural specialists, although they were called "intercultural operators". Not that multicultural issues weren't already talked about, but the idea of "intercultural" was really new. It was full theory, not to mention very thorough--eight hours a day for nine month--followed by a very interesting internship with the Irish Commission on Refugees in Dublin.

It opened a whole new world. Looking back, I'm very thankful for those days even though I probably didn't understand the importance that course would have on my life. I did it because I was interested in it, but I didn't know what was going to come next.

Afterward I did a master's degree in somatic psychology, which was not really intercultural. I'd been following bioenergetics since I was 19 and decided I wanted to become a counselor and therapist. At the same time I was doing a post-doctorate in the sociology of social processes.

Editorial 1

Ida Castiglioni 2
A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication

Do You Capire? 8
An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy

La Bella Figura Finnish Style 11
How Finns and Italians view each other

Inappropriate Behavior 13
The flip-side of la bella figura

Leading Multi-national Teams 16
With 'Horse Sense'
Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training

Book Reviews 18

Events, workshops, congresses 20

Ida Castiglioni

— *continued*

*The University of Milano - Bicocca where
Ida Castiglioni is an assistant professor
of sociology of cultural processes*



When my university created the new Milano-Bicocca campus, I was asked to help organize the sociology department, which invariably led me to becoming a faculty member. After receiving my professorship, I said to the dean, "Listen, I don't want to do academics just for the sake of saying I'm an academic. I want to open up the stream of intercultural studies that is lacking and is needed in Italy." He didn't know exactly what I meant but he was willing to say, "Go ahead, let's see what happens!"

So I was lucky enough to be among the founders of the graduate program for decision-makers in public policy and social services. We were able to establish a curriculum which included intercultural studies. It's not only me, but also Milton and people that do intercultural pedagogy and psycholinguistics. The programs are based on real experience. Twelve years later, I'm very pleased that this program has had a real impact in Italy.

Were you working only at the university?

Oh no! The early years of academic life in Italy aren't paid. You have to pay your bills with something else and, for me, that was training. By age 28 I was running lots of programs for people who needed to gain intercultural competence in Italy and abroad...from Nigeria to Norway, Eastern Europe to Mongolia! I helped support one of the biggest programs ever sponsored by the EU for former

Soviet countries, which was to train junior and senior managers. And since 2009 I've been doing training programs for women, recently in Russia, Uzbekistan and the Seychelles.

One program I remember fondly was for a global corporation in Norway. As you know, the country has a huge reserve of offshore oil and the people in the industry not only come from many countries, but also from state and non-state entities with different ways of thinking. This is particularly true of the Norwegians and the Italians, who were the main stakeholders. And then all the other nationalities had to fit in. Not only power dynamics needed to be taken into account but major differences in looking at life, organizations, the position and value of work in your life. It was a huge program, lasting four years, and all the possible value contrasts you can imagine were there.

How did you go about designing the program?

The premise of the whole program was based on one question: what does it mean to be an employee of the company? We started with the idea of perception--how do you create your perception and how do you perceive and construct a different cultural identity? This was also meaningful for people who didn't have direct contact with people of different nationalities. Everybody was involved,

Editorial	1
Ida Castiglioni	2
<i>A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication</i>	
Do You Capire?	8
<i>An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy</i>	
La Bella Figura Finnish Style	11
<i>How Finns and Italians view each other</i>	
Inappropriate Behavior	13
<i>The flip-side of la bella figura</i>	
Leading Multi-national Teams With 'Horse Sense'	16
<i>Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training</i>	
Book Reviews	18
Events, workshops, congresses	20

Ida Castiglioni

— *continued*

Breathing exercises can heighten the intuitive feeling of culture.



from the operator at the front desk all the way to the top, and we had secretaries and bosses in the same class.

We first did a layer of awareness and then became more and more specialized with groups. We arrived at a point where everybody had a basic awareness, a native language they could share, and different groups could go more into depth, depending on what role they had. At this stage, I worked with them on embodiment.

You've touched on your specialty. Could you tell us some of the actual methods you used for embodiment?

The most immediate aspect of embodiment from an intercultural perspective is the feeling associated with sensing the appropriateness of certain behavior. For example, exactly when is the appropriate moment to take leave after a hosted dinner in an Italian family as opposed to a Norwegian family. Awareness or knowledge of a culture is insufficient, you need to have a *feel* for it. This intuitive feeling of culture is built on sensory feeling, the interface between physical sensation and conscious awareness.

The sensory feeling can be heightened by doing "breathing work." When a person deeply changes his or her way of breathing, the body faces a series of reorganizations,

mostly at the neurological level. For instance, when we are exposed to an unfamiliar environment, we can intentionally change our breathing to improve our adaptation.

Through small physical movements accompanied by breathing exercises, I could make the group realize both their mental and physical agility. What I mean by agility is the ability to do context-shifting not only from a cognitive perspective but also an *experiential* perspective. How do you live your experience? With, and through, your body.

You make sense of the experience you're living at the cognitive level, but also the impulses and stimuli you're given through your body. This really changes your experience in terms of the way you can organize your perception. So what I was developing with them was two things: the feeling of appropriateness and the ability to context-shift. In the end, it means how to adapt to a different physical context and a different style not only by knowing something but by feeling something.

All this helps you become aware of the context you're in and how to locate yourself in that context. You go from simple basic awareness to how it feels to be there. So you go from comfortable to uncomfortable to deeper issues such as acceptance or rejection of the context you're in.

Contents

(for quick navigation, click on the desired article)

Editorial	1
Ida Castiglioni	2
<i>A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication</i>	
Do You Capire?	8
<i>An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy</i>	
La Bella Figura Finnish Style	11
<i>How Finns and Italians view each other</i>	
Inappropriate Behavior	13
<i>The flip-side of la bella figura</i>	
Leading Multi-national Teams	16
With 'Horse Sense'	
<i>Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training</i>	
Book Reviews	18
Events, workshops, congresses	20

Ida Castiglioni

— *continued*

And then there's work on flexibility concerning things that, for instance, are not to your liking.

How did you get into this field of embodiment?

The idea of embodiment came when I was first doing my work on bioenergetic psychology. I made the connection to intercultural communication in 1997 when I was working with Milton in a course on empathy at the Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication. I said I thought there was a dimension that had been neglected for too long and was very important in how we make sense in our reality.

Over the next five years, we explored that idea as "ethnophysiology", although we don't call it that anymore. The idea is that you can be sophisticated and culturally sensitive at a cognitive level but if you don't bring your physical perceptions to that level, your body will resist. There's a trailing issue that has to do with the physical perception of that context, holding your ethnocentrism in the body.

This reminds me of modern psychotherapy, which takes the Freudian/Jungian method of being cognitively aware of your problem and combines it with physical awareness, a sort of Reichian therapy. Reliving earlier experiences is supposed to liberate patients from their neuroses.

"La bella figura" is the quintessence of Italian culture



Well, we don't want to do therapy. I'm very aware of that. Of course, when you deal with emotions, you work with a great part of the person. And when you deal with the body and the emotions embedded in the body, you're working with a greater part of that person's personality and you really have to be careful.

But we want to help people become more aware of physical cues. By doing so, they come to understand more about themselves than the context they're in. You have to use exercises that people normally wouldn't think about. Breathing has a major impact on the way you become aware of your body and it's true for every physical discipline related to breathing.

The point is you have people work not so much on overcoming limits but on what happens when you trespass limits. What's happening to you? How do you feel? How do you find meaning in cultural terms of that passage? How do you apply that to your work? It's actually a very powerful leadership tool.

Every time I go to Italy, I always have the impression Italians are so well dressed. And they love colors, forms, aesthetics. Your great heroes, for example Michelangelo and da Vinci, are from the world of art. Something very different from the American

Contents

(for quick navigation, click on the desired article)

Editorial	1
Ida Castiglioni <i>A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication</i>	2
Do You Capire? <i>An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy</i>	8
La Bella Figura Finnish Style <i>How Finns and Italians view each other</i>	11
Inappropriate Behavior <i>The flip-side of la bella figura</i>	13
Leading Multi-national Teams With 'Horse Sense' <i>Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training</i>	16
Book Reviews	18
Events, workshops, congresses	20

Ida Castiglioni

— *continued*

In Italy, it's the aesthetical balance of how you present yourself that counts.



mindset, which is more concerned with the concrete, the pragmatic. Can you put this into an intercultural context?

First of all, you have to view Italians as having been raised with aesthetical experience. Things don't need to be perfect but there must be balance. This is sought after in the presentation of self and called "*bella figura*".

I think Americans are concerned about how they look too, but they act in compartments. So, in formal or business situations, they end up wearing almost uniforms because they're taught to be a certain way and that it's the only possible way to be.

Also, what I've seen in the years since I came to the U.S. is a conflict in styles. Americans, like Italians, enjoy shopping for fashion, particularly women. But there's also pressure to be loose and casual, which has almost become an imperative in the last 20 years. American women tell me, "We end up storing all these clothes in the closet. We never get to wear them because everything has become so casual." I'm not sure they're all that happy about it. The real difference is Americans don't put as much value on the way you present yourself--what you say and how you engage the discussion is more important.

Not only what you can afford but also your social milieu: how you were raised and, above all, how you put things together. That typically tells Italians where a person is coming from and aesthetical balance really makes a difference.

How do you see the future development of intercultural research?

I personally believe that there's a lot more work that can be done, especially in reducing ethnocentrism, prejudice. And that's where embodiment comes into play. You don't do it when people are constricted by ethnocentrism, only by moving people forward and promoting ethnorelativism, where people can make sense of their intercultural experience and embodiment becomes a powerful tool.

That's what we are trying to do at the IDRI--creating critical mass to reach a deeper understanding of theoretical perspective (www.idrinstitute.org). Not to limit our options to the usual concepts that are around, but to go further, to explore physically what people wouldn't normally be aware of and, by doing so, to develop an awareness of appropriateness.

In Italy, the way you present yourself shows your status. *Interview conducted by Patrick Schmidt*

Editorial	1
Ida Castiglioni	2
<i>A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication</i>	
Do You Capire?	8
<i>An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy</i>	
La Bella Figura Finnish Style	11
<i>How Finns and Italians view each other</i>	
Inappropriate Behavior	13
<i>The flip-side of la bella figura</i>	
Leading Multi-national Teams With 'Horse Sense'	16
<i>Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training</i>	
Book Reviews	18
Events, workshops, congresses	20

Do You Capire?

An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy

by Gheraldo Veronesi



The Austrian Foreign Minister von Metternich described Italy as just “a geographical expression” at the Congress of Vienna in 1815

“**A**nd what about Italy?” asked the French envoy Charles Maurice de Talleyrand (himself a survivor of the past turbulent period).

“Italy is but a geographical expression,” answered Furst von Metternich (representing the House of Ausgburg; rulers of the Austro-Hungarian Empire).

As arrogant as this statement might have been, and unpleasant as any proud Italian might perceive this definition of their nation to be, he was at that time, absolutely correct. It was at the Congress of Vienna (1815) that the above exchange took place.

After forty years among the most intense periods in the history of mankind, which had witnessed the American Revolution, the birth of the United States, the French Revolution, the fall of the French Monarchy, the lightning rise to power of Napoleon Bonaparte and his final defeat at Waterloo, the big European Powers convened in Vienna with the objective of turning back the clock and restoring the previous order. Aristocratic decision makers, often more motivated by the preservation of their own class privileges than by defending the interests of the countries they were representing, redesigned the new borders of the European States. This new world order would last for 103 years, until the end of World War I.

The boot shaped land in the center of the Mediterranean

sea had often been referred to as “The Italian Peninsula”. Even during the Roman Empire, Italy, while part of the Empire, did not exist as the nation that it is known today.

While the history of France, by in large, has been made in Paris, the history of Italy reflects the vicissitudes of its major cities and the rivalry of their ruling families. These cities were economically independent, separated by borders and often at war among themselves. Rome, Florence, Venice, Milan, and many others, were thriving centers for arts and commerce, and they were powers in their own right. The Renaissance itself, while prompted by a unique concentration of an unbelievable amount of talent and genius, was also promoted by the patronage of the Pope in Rome, of the Medici family in Florence, the Sforza family in Milan, the Gonzaga family in Mantua, etc...

Though unmatched in its contribution throughout the centuries to art, history, and the development of the world civilization, Italy as a nation, is younger than the United States. The differences in culture, dialects, values and traditions between the various parts of Italy (most notably between North and South) cannot be fully appreciated if one does not understand this historical perspective.

Birth of a Nation

It was in 1861 at the end of a period of rebellions and revolutions against the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the North

Editorial 1

Ida Castiglioni 2
A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication

Do You Capire? 8
An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy

La Bella Figura Finnish Style 11
How Finns and Italians view each other

Inappropriate Behavior 13
The flip-side of la bella figura

Leading Multi-national Teams With ‘Horse Sense’ 16
Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training

Book Reviews 18

Events, workshops, congresses 20

Do you capire?

— *continued*



Italy an an all encompassing definition of a common culture, from the Alps to Sicily, and is still very much a “work in progress.”

the Bourbon Monarchy (connected to the Spanish Crown) in the South, that the regular army of the Kingdom of Sardinia* descended from the North and a voluntary army under the leadership of Garibaldi ascended from the South. They met in Teano, a small town in the center of Italy, and, together, they declared the birth of the new Nation. The capital was moved from Torino (previous capital of the Kingdom of Sardinia) to Florence and, shortly after, to Rome (1871). The King of Sardinia became King of Italy. At the end of World War II Italy voted to become a Republic.

And the Italians?

Having created a nation had been a relatively simple task if compared with the challenge of creating the Italians. Communication was not easy at that time and the population of the various parts of the Italian peninsula continued their peaceful evolution in a somewhat isolated way. Modern technology has certainly brought about many changes and closed the gap, but “the Italian”, as an all encompassing definition of a common culture, from the Alps to Sicily, is still very much a “work in progress”.

To this date most Italians give their loyalty (in a decreasing order of magnitude) to their family, extended family, friends, city, province, region, and finally, to Rome. To use a business jargon, the creation of Italy was more of a “top down” driven event; the average inhabitants of Lombardy, Tuscany,

Veneto or Calabria having always felt little inclination to share a common destiny. This was different from the United States where, in spite of the diversity of its population, the objective of forming an independent nation was ultimately considered an undisputed necessity by most of its citizen.

A bird’s view of the Italians

Having a positive outlook to life can certainly be considered the most important common denominator of the Italians. Living in a land of contrasts, the Italians had to develop a profound resilience to the world’s problems and events.

Consider:

- We have the strongest ties to our family and the families have been decreasing since the mid sixties (there are less of them and they are less numerous).
- We have the most unstable among the western governments and yet we are, arguably, the most stable among the Western societies.
- We are probably the most “socially oriented” among the G8 Countries and yet we are producing the most expensive clothes, cars, furniture and some of the most refined foods.
- We are among the largest wine producers in the world and among the largest importers of French Champagne.
- The world looks at Italy for “lifestyle” and the Italians are like sponges in absorbing foreign habits (particularly from USA).

Editorial 1

Ida Castiglioni 2
A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication

Do You Capire? 8
An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy

La Bella Figura Finnish Style 11
How Finns and Italians view each other

Inappropriate Behavior 13
The flip-side of la bella figura

Leading Multi-national Teams 16
With ‘Horse Sense’
Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training

Book Reviews 18

Events, workshops, congresses 20

*) Comprising also the North-West part of Italy (today’s Piedmont and Aosta valley)

Do you capire?

— *continued*

Their continuous exuberance and persuasiveness make Italians excellent communicators.



And consider also that while Italians are very aware and pleased that “everybody loves Italy”, this is not what they really want. Just like the underlying cultural need of the:

- American is to be “liked”
- German is to be “credible”
- French is to be “admired”
- Italian is to be “respected”

But this is only true towards the foreigners. Among themselves, the underlying cultural need of the Italians is to be “trusted”. In other words, respect + trust is indispensable for building a personal relationship.

Trust, for an Italian, is the answer to his need of reducing societal anxiety. If they need a plumber they would ask their neighbor, or the barman at the nearby café. He would give you the telephone number of his plumber “*di fiducia*” (of trust). The same is true in business. It will certainly take longer to get started but you would be surprised how fast you can build on it, once the relationship is established.

A word of caution: being “trusty” does not mean being blind; Italians can be very cunning. Look for the real “objective” of the counterpart (including the personal objective of the negotiator) and be ready to loose a battle in order to win the war. Most of all: always be soft on people while being firm on principles.

Communication style

Communication is effective not only if the information (content) is correctly transferred and received, but also if we manage to “release” positive feelings from the counterpart (context). While in Germany (low context culture) the ratio content/context is heavily skewed towards content, in Italy context is largely prevalent. Italians are masters of communication, knowing exactly how to get across their message through drama, emotion and lively body language.

Italians like to talk a lot and are masters of improvised dialogue. Do not try to tell jokes if they are prepared in advance. In the land of the “*commedia dell’arte*” a good joke is always appreciated but only if “*impromptu*”. Italians cannot stand bad acting.

Perceived “status” is a highly motivating factor for an Italian. No only the size of the office, the car or business class traveling, but also small recognitions like golden pen set, dinner in a plush place, can go a long way. Praise can be publicly given but both rewards and punishments should be given privately.

Last but not least, Italians always dress their best. They say in Italy “The eye always wants its share”. And you certainly do not want to make a “*brutta figura*” (bad showing), but a “*bella figura*”.

The author is a former senior executive at a large Italian/American IT firm.

Editorial 1

Ida Castiglioni 2
A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication

Do You Capire? 8
An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy

La Bella Figura Finnish Style 11
How Finns and Italians view each other

Inappropriate Behavior 13
The flip-side of la bella figura

Leading Multi-national Teams 16
With ‘Horse Sense’
Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training

Book Reviews 18

Events, workshops, congresses 20

La Bella Figura Finnish Style

How Finns and Italians view each other

by *Debbie Swallow*

current SIETAR Europa President

Shockwaves of indignation have reverberated through Germany, according to the media, as the country faces up to the cost of supporting the Euro and especially the Greeks. Newspapers regale us with stories of the differing cultural values of the Germans and Greeks adding fuel to the flames. However, akin to this German-Greek culture clash lurks another just as great – the Finnish-Italian one. Apparently, the Finns have a “coconut culture”- the outside is initially very difficult to break, but once cracked the Finns are very open. The Italians have a “peach culture” - the outside is gentle and soft, but inside is a tough core.

Find yourself in a restaurant with Italians and Finns around you and you will instantly notice a difference. Italian communication is animated and loud. They speak and listen at the same time; a feat they manage because their verbal communication has a corresponding body language to match. So, what they don't hear with their ears they can see with their eyes.

On the other hand, Finnish communication is quiet and measured. The Finn thinks before speaking, is succinct, has little body language and uses lots of silence.

The infamous Silvio Berlusconi once exclaimed, “Finns don't even know what prosciutto is” as he poured scorn on



Finnish smoked reindeer and the fact he had to ‘endure’ Finnish food. The Finnish relationship to food is practical; they eat to live – and usually do so in silence. Italians are passionate and romantic about food; they live to socialise and eat. In Italy, any type of socialising, dining or wining is never considered time wasted.

One thing the two nations have in common is coffee; Finns drink a lot of it but, according to the Italians, Finnish coffee has “nothing to do with Italian coffee.” That said, Finland is a paradise for vegetarians, vegans, and celiacs. Most supermarkets and restaurants have options for a range of different allergies and Finnish hotels have special rooms set aside for those with allergies.

In Finnish business, clever, well-formulated arguments, which appeal to common sense and logic, are used to persuade (interpreted by an Italian as uncaring and impersonal). An Italian, on the other hand, enjoys passion and an emotional appeal to galvanise their listener (interpreted by the Finn as lacking objectivity). An Italian's ‘situational truth’ is seen by the Finn as deception and the Finn's ‘black and white truth’ is seen by Italians as being pedantic.

A Finn may misinterpret the wordy and extrovert Italian as being boastful and empty-headed while an Italian will look

Editorial 1

Ida Castiglioni 2
A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication

Do You Capire? 8
An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy

La Bella Figura Finnish Style 11
How Finns and Italians view each other

Inappropriate Behavior 13
The flip-side of la bella figura

Leading Multi-national Teams 16
With ‘Horse Sense’
Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training

Book Reviews 18

Events, workshops, congresses 20

La bella figura

Finnish style

— *continued*

For Finns, Italy is a country to love and make a life in, but not a country serious enough to call home.



upon a Finn's shyness and modesty as a lack of charisma and charm. To an Italian the Finns definitely lack 'La Bella Figura'.

'La Bella Figura' is a concept as far from the Finnish psyche as it can get. 'La Bella Figura' epitomises beauty, looks, balance, grace, etiquette and loyalty, whereas Finland stands more for practicality, efficiency, frankness, and autonomy. The Finns might well see it as fanciful nonsense.

'Sisu' has been described by *The New York Times* as "the word that explains Finland"; strength of will, determination, perseverance, and acting rationally in the face of adversity – equivalent in English to "having guts". It is a compound of bravado and bravery, of ferocity and tenacity, of the ability to keep fighting after most people would have quit, and to fight with the will to win. This is far removed from an Italian man's sense of 'machismo': a strong sense of masculinity stressing attributes such as physical courage, virility, being strong for their women and be ready to protect them, but which Finns may see as egotistical and an exaggerated sense of strength or toughness.

Nonetheless, the abundance of Finnish blogs about Italy (especially of Finnish women with Italian husbands) tells a little bit about a new generation that does, perhaps,

understand, or is trying their best to understand 'La Bella Figura'; as something worth pursuing. The way these women write in their blogs is still very Finnish, however. They clearly adore and admire the Italian life (the food, the wine, the weather, the men) and they aspire to be a part of it, but their constant admiration is probably exactly what makes them not fit for it.

'La Bella Figura' may be for style, beauty, and the appreciation of good things in life, but it is also for subtleness, and for self-worth. The Finns are taught to be humble and modest, and when faced with such a loud, passionate culture as the Italians they will, quite easily and willingly, downplay their own culture.

In many of these blog posts, Italy is portrayed as a romanticised, passionate, intimate, fashionable, warmer, and more exciting country than Finland. On the other hand, these women also write glorifying statements about the Finnish health care system, Finnish schools, Finnish traffic, and punctuality. Italy, in these blog posts at least, is chaotic, disorganized, immature, impractical, and fanciful. Italy is a country to love and make a life in, but not a country serious enough to call home. According to 'La Bella Figura' concept a woman should please the people around her. Finnish women are perhaps too used to speaking their mind. And this, of course, is outside 'La Bella Figura'.

Contents

(for quick navigation, click on the desired article)

Editorial	1
Ida Castiglioni	2
<i>A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication</i>	
Do You Capire?	8
<i>An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy</i>	
La Bella Figura Finnish Style	11
<i>How Finns and Italians view each other</i>	
Inappropriate Behavior	13
<i>The flip-side of la bella figura</i>	
Leading Multi-national Teams With 'Horse Sense'	16
<i>Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training</i>	
Book Reviews	18
Events, workshops, congresses	20

Reporter's Sketchbook*...an American in Montréal***Inappropriate Behavior****The flip-side of la bella figura***by Dan MacLeod*

Lance Armstrong was one of the greatest cyclists of all time until he was caught using steroids.



The concept of *bella figura*--the logical harmony of coherency and, especially, appropriate behavior--was in my mind when I went to the bank the other day. Even the fact that I had to go to the bank was an example of systemic disharmony: someone had given me a hundred-dollar bill except most stores won't *take* hundred-dollar bills, due to counterfeiters.

So I had get it changed into twenties and I went to the bank across the street, my own bank being four blocks away. It was crowded and I had to wait in line for 15 minutes but I was in a good mood when I handed the bill over, telling the teller "This won't take long, all I need is change!"

Except it did take long. He frowned, looked at the bill, asked if I had an account. No but I live right across the street. He frowned some more, said "I don't know if I can take this, I'll have to see someone."

"But it's Canadian currency!" I said. "You're a Canadian bank!"

North American banks have universally adopted a *trompe-l'oeil* design where pretty much everyone except the manager works out in the open, in front of the customers, fostering an impression of inclusiveness and transparency.

So I watched him approach an older woman who gave him an annoyed look, stared across the room at me and shook her head. When he came back and tried to hand me the bill, I demanded to speak to her. I told him I'd waited in line for 15 minutes, also that Canadian banks were legally obliged to take Canadian currency.

She was more than annoyed. She glared at me from her desk and continued to do so even as she navigated the 10 metres separating us. She was already talking when she was still two metres away, before I could say a word. "You don't have an account here."

I pointed out the window to my apartment, said "We're neighbors. All I want to do is break a hundred. You're a Canadian bank. It's Canadian money."

She acknowledged none of this. "We have obligations to our own customers only. Go to your own bank." As flat as that, as impolite. I said "Look, I was in line..." but she was already walking away.

I had no other choice than to leave. I told the teller I'd be filing a complaint but he just looked at me, expressionless.

I could't believe what had happened. This was no longer

Editorial 1

Ida Castiglioni 2
A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication

Do You Capire? 8
An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy

La Bella Figura Finnish Style 11
How Finns and Italians view each other

Inappropriate Behavior 13
The flip-side of la bella figura

Leading Multi-national Teams With 'Horse Sense' 16
Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training

Book Reviews 18

Events, workshops, congresses 20

Inappropriate behavior

— *continued*

Wall Street bankers before an angry U.S. Congress. Their testimony that they were working in America's best interests was not what the public was experiencing.



about the eight blocks *aller-retour* to my bank; I wanted to see if refusing to change bills for non-customers was a unique phenomenon or had it suddenly--without anyone noticing--become "s.o.p." (standard operating procedure) at all banks.

There's another one at the next corner. I wait in line five minutes or so, then try out the same joke, "This won't take long..." Except it does. Again, a supervisor is called in. She runs the bill through a machine to make sure it's good, then makes a point of coming over to talk to me. "We don't have to do this but you waited in line. Next time go to your own bank."

...

Seen any bank commercials lately?

If you live in Canada you can't have missed the one that's been running day and night for about three years now. A short, chubby, prematurely bald guy in a cheap suit somehow appears at the door of one of those enclosed offices in the back I mentioned earlier. Of course, the door happens to be open...

Before giving away the ending, what this supposes is that the man has managed to bypass the counter, cross a roomful of people at desks and simply wander into the

manager's office. In real life, the bank guard would have his gun out and the police would already be on their way.

In the commercial, however, the man arrives unscathed. He summons up all his courage, squares his shoulders, actually bounces up and down on his heels as he says, firmly, "I want a second opinion!" He hands a sheaf of financial reports to the woman.

She's older, dressed with style but severe-looking. She's surprised at the intrusion but she accepts the documents and examines them with professional concentration. Then she grins, looks up, says "But these aren't ours." And that's the punchline--the childish buffoon isn't a customer.

Nonetheless, she's happy to help. She smiles, motions for him to sit down, says "Let's get started!"

...

Another bank ad pursues the fiction that anyone can get rich. It features two comically crusty old gents who while away the day on a sofa in the waiting area, talking loudly to people who are actually there for a reason. Like the waitress from the neighborhood diner, who probably makes around \$20,000 a year (16,000 Euros). She flashes them the kind of smile which means you just had good news,

Editorial 1

Ida Castiglioni 2
A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication

Do You Capire? 8
An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy

La Bella Figura Finnish Style 11
How Finns and Italians view each other

Inappropriate Behavior 13
The flip-side of la bella figura

Leading Multi-national Teams With 'Horse Sense' 16
Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training

Book Reviews 18

Events, workshops, congresses 20

Inappropriate behavior

— continued

As in Charlie Chaplin's film 'Modern Times', people today live in a dissonant world.



chirps "I was just in to see my financial advisor."

In a dissonant world there is no pretense of honesty, fairness or even logic. Insurance companies bombard us with ads based on homespun family values, then spend hundreds of millions of dollars a year on lawyers whose job it is to invalidate claims.

The medium is no longer the message or the massage; the message itself is totally disconnected from the reality it purports to represent, unapologetically opposite, in fact. Whenever I see the term "user-friendly", I cringe.

Televangelists tearfully plead for money and desperately poor people send in five- and ten-dollar bills; they don't have checking accounts, maybe not even bank accounts, while the pastor lives in a mansion with a swimming pool.

Literature from Chaucer and Rabelais onward is evidence that there have always been religious frauds but as media have developed from newspaper to radio to television to the computer age, one man's words become a tidal wave. And there are hundreds of millions of people broadcasting hundreds of millions of messages and each message is instantly planetary via real-time social media.

This week it was announced that the arctic may be completely ice-free within ten years but right-wing politicians representing petroleum multinationals continue to say global warming is communist (sic) propaganda.

Every week or so, in America, somebody walks into a school or church or shopping mall and blows away a bunch of total strangers with a perfectly legal automatic weapon which he bought at a gun show where they don't bother with background checks.

The heroes of yesteryear, the great athletes--kids these days watch records fall and have to wonder, "Are they doping?"

Anyone can be a singer with *auto-tune* and auto-tuned singers can tour the world and not even sing, thanks to *lip-sync*.

Computer-geeks take evening courses on how to socialize in real life but virtual love is virtually everywhere.

Charlie Chaplin, going through the gears in *Modern Times*.

Bella figura submerged in a frayed and dissonant world.

Editorial 1

Ida Castiglioni 2
A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication

Do You Capire? 8
An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy

La Bella Figura Finnish Style 11
How Finns and Italians view each other

Inappropriate Behavior 13
The flip-side of la bella figura

Leading Multi-national Teams 16
With 'Horse Sense'
Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training

Book Reviews 18

Events, workshops, congresses 20

Leading multi-national teams with “horse sense”

Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training

by Angela Henke



Editor's note: Our profession as interculturalists is unique, in that we have the task of making people aware of their behavior by comparing their ways to others. The implicit aim is enhancing and facilitating cooperation. There is, however, a new competitor to our profession — the horse. Many trainers are now using horses to help people gain true insights into who they are and how their behavior is perceived by others. This is a precious gift horses naturally give when they interact with people. More and more major global organizations, such as banks, pharmaceutical companies, international airports, are having their personnel go through this non-conventional form of training.

Angela Henke is an intercultural management coach and has for the last 15 years done many of her trainings with horse-assisted education. In the following article, she explains why understanding “horse sense” can be highly effective for international teamwork.

Executives today are increasingly required to motivate their global teams for peak performances. One's own charisma and communication skills, both verbal and non-verbally are crucial. According to a famous U.S. study, 93% of communication is done through non-verbal language. If body language, facial expressions, gestures and voice are so important, then a special kind of coaching is required. And this sort of feedback is best learned not from colleagues or superiors, but by horses.

Simply put, horses are excellent coaches. When people first encounter horses, they are impressed by their size, strength and charisma. But in addition, they are highly sensitive, observing with extreme accuracy and sensitivity people who approach them. They see through people and scan them very closely.

People also have this ability. We all remember very well when the attitude of a supervisor is not congruent with his/her actions. Although we may not give direct feedback, our later actions show we don't agree with him. Afterwards the manager is confused as to why his team doesn't demonstrate loyalty or commitment.

Horses are different. They give feedback instantaneously. They do not respond to status or title, tactical games and strategies are unknown to them. They judge you based on how much they can trust you, how open you are and how you behave towards them. Their feedback is direct and without ulterior motives. If your behavior and thoughts are not consistent, they won't respond to you. A valuable learning experience for leaders of multi-cultural teams.

A horse reacts only to a firm leader

We are all leaders, some lead themselves, some lead others. There are many traits that make a person a leader. Among them are presence, attention, assertiveness, accountability,

Editorial	1
Ida Castiglioni	2
<i>A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication</i>	
Do You Capire?	8
<i>An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy</i>	
La Bella Figura Finnish Style	11
<i>How Finns and Italians view each other</i>	
Inappropriate Behavior	13
<i>The flip-side of la bella figura</i>	
Leading Multi-national Teams With ‘Horse Sense’	16
<i>Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training</i>	
Book Reviews	18
Events, workshops, congresses	20

“Horse sense”

— *continued*

A horse senses immediately if the trainer wants to lead or not.



authority and discretion, responsibility and fairness. If these attributes are experienced, then respect and trust develop.

All these traits can be experienced when you are in contact with horses. Why horses? Because horses are extremely clever herd animals. They don't follow blindly, yet they are looking to be led. They cannot be forced or seduced, they choose to follow. They only react well if there's good, consistent leadership. Because of their survival instinct, they intuitively challenge weak leaders. They read body language accurately and mirror your behavior right back at you without fear or favor.

This is what makes horses so useful in global training — their means of communication is almost 100% non-verbal. Although words are important, it's your non-verbal style that will determine the horse's behavior.

Essentially, being with horses requires you to connect with them emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually, creating a dynamic, bonding experience for both human and horse. Horses will simulate their trainers and masters emotionally and therefore provide critical feedback to those who are sensitive to learn from them.

For instance, in one exercise, the trainee arrives with hunched shoulders, a slightly bowed head and a listless body, and pro-

ceeds to give the horse a command. It will not respond — at worst, the trainee will not be respected.

Another exercise demonstrates the metaphor of change. When a new employee is added to a team or there's a change of a leaders, this means a new “play of forces”. The participants experience this first hand when new horses are added to the herd. A “clearing up” begins, where there are fights for the hierarchy of rank. The quicker the participants understand this principle, the more effectively and sooner they can restore order “in their flock.”

What is interesting in this type of training, the participants receive diverse activities and exercises without ever having to ride the horse. The horse interacts with you as a partner and co-facilitator in the activities. Not only does the horse mimic your behavior, but video playback and analysis support and enhance the learning effect.

This is what one manager of a large computer company had to say after participating in such a course: “A great thing coming out of the seminar is that it puts everybody on one level. In front of a horse, you have no other power than that of your personality to make things work — fooling is impossible. That's the lesson I will keep in mind when I working with my global team.”

The author's e-mail address: info@alogo-leadership-and-horses.com

Editorial	1
Ida Castiglioni	2
<i>A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication</i>	
Do You Capire?	8
<i>An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy</i>	
La Bella Figura Finnish Style	11
<i>How Finns and Italians view each other</i>	
Inappropriate Behavior	13
<i>The flip-side of la bella figura</i>	
Leading Multi-national Teams With ‘Horse Sense’	16
<i>Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training</i>	
Book Reviews	18
Events, workshops, congresses	20

Book Review

La Seduction

How the French play the game of life

by Elaine Sciolino

U.S.\$ 15.95, 368 pages

Published by St. Martin's Griffin

Couldn't keep my hands off! Took her to bed with me. Sent her around to see my friends. Yes, *La Seduction* seduced me, one of the best-authored reads I have had all year. It not only explained a lot about the country I now live in, but about me, and how and why I choose to live here, my cultural successes, my failures and my challenges. A perfect complement to the insights to the USA found in Nathalie Monsainte-Baudry's recently reviewed book *Française et Américaine*.

Since the year of my freshman French class, I have known that I would someday live in France. The enthusiasm of our prof, fresh from his doctorate at the Sorbonne—we were his first-class—was contagious. However, it took a reading of *La Séduction* for me to realize why. Certainly he had been seduced and he seduced us.

It wasn't just his energy or his friendliness, attractive enough in themselves, but I see now that it was the deep pleasure he reflected in recounting the stories of his sojourn in France and in his appreciation of French language and literature, a pleasure that he passed on to us, the desire to know more and find out and enjoy for ourselves.

In those rather rigid times, he was an exception to the established pieties and dour discipline then surrounding student life. Père Hilaire was a Benedictine monk, but France was the woman of his life. He helped us discover the honesty



of pleasure, which US novelist Edith Wharton described as the “general fearless and joyful contact with life.” It is a Catholic sense of forbidden pleasure, rather than the Puritan one, best described by Heinrich Heine when he said, in the French of his adopted Paris, “Dieu me pardonnera. C'est son métier.”(God will forgive me. It's his job.)

Sciolino's book might be described as an account of her own discovery of the seduction of France, starting with a baise-main from the president of France, himself. She explores her encounters with not just the language, the people, the diplomacy, the history, the gastronomy, but also the intelligence, the delicious rumors, the simple sexiness of it all.

My colleagues Gilles Asselin and Ruth Mastron, authors of the *Cultural Detective: France*, in attempting to sort out the core values of its people, identified *savoir-faire* and *savoir-vivre* as key in comprehending French culture. *La Séduction* provides a rich, erotic, colorful and pleasurable picture of what these actually mean both in everyday practice and at the pinnacles of public performance.

Despite the fact that Sciolino, a stellar journalist, hobnobs with levels of society and government that most of us don't have access to, what she describes is tangible at every level in French society. She speaks from her acquaintance with presidents and policymakers, intellectuals, novelists, poets, artists,

Editorial	1
Ida Castiglioni	2
<i>A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication</i>	
Do You Capire?	8
<i>An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy</i>	
La Bella Figura Finnish Style	11
<i>How Finns and Italians view each other</i>	
Inappropriate Behavior	13
<i>The flip-side of la bella figura</i>	
Leading Multi-national Teams With 'Horse Sense'	16
<i>Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training</i>	
Book Reviews	18
Events, workshops, congresses	20

Book Review

La Seduction - continued



The French edition of 'La Seduction' is published by Presse de la Cités

designers, architects and critics, those who are able to articulate the cultural discourse of the nation, those who are shaped by and continue to shape the beauty and desirability of France.

In my intercultural trainings, I sometimes show participants a cartoon in which a French manager is greeting a German team. Each of the German Fachleute (professional specialists) is carrying a briefcase labeled with his trade, be it engineering, accounting, production, sales, etc. The French manager, on the other hand is alone, but wearing a stack of hats on which is inscribed, "Je sais tout" (I know everything).

This touch of intercultural humor is not meant to mock either the Germans or the French, but simply to show differences in the way they operate. In France the politician is more likely to be novelist and poet as well, rather than boxed in by whatever his professional specialty may be. Life would not be pleasurable without being well rounded, multidimensional.

France is a beautiful country. But it is also a regard, a seductive way of looking at things, a way of life where anticipation, foreplay and the lingering satisfaction of digestion are paramount. It is never, "slam, bam, thank you, Ma'am." It is a place where secrets excite, yes, where rumors and good taste may trump facts and practicality, often to the disdain and disappointment of the uninitiated. Yes, even the language sounds sexy, and it is, but it is never banal, naked or gross. Savoir-faire and savoir-

vivre, the ability to seduce, with words, appearance, character and the scent of flowers result in disregard for what other cultures may see as peccadilloes or even mortal sins.

France is not what she once was, but she is who she is. She may have her rigidity, her economic, political and multicultural challenges, yet in a world where French is no longer the lingua franca of international diplomacy and where empire is passé, there is a stubbornness and irresistible charm to her grandeur. On the other hand, some may too easily dismiss her as lightweight. "Quelle drageuse!" (What flirt she is!)

Some time ago, an eminent interculturalist asked me to tell him what were one or two of the best books on culture that I had read during the past year. At that point, to his surprise and disappointment, I cited a novel and an autobiography. Certainly one must stay up-to-date with his or her professional research and publication, but I have found it invaluable to read around the edges of my field as well as plowing its center.

Such rich, first hand expositions as La Séduction challenge us and keep us honest. It is as good as bread. France is, of course, much more than what is presented in this single perspective, but what Sciolino has provides is powerful point of view, a lens with which to understand and pull into focus the French cultural landscape and the behavior of people in it.

Reviewed by George Simons

Editorial 1

Ida Castiglioni 2
A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication

Do You Capire? 8
An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy

La Bella Figura Finnish Style 11
How Finns and Italians view each other

Inappropriate Behavior 13
The flip-side of la bella figura

Leading Multi-national Teams 16
With 'Horse Sense'
Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training

Book Reviews 18

Events, workshops, congresses 20

Events, workshops, congresses

Warsaw, Poland

15-16 Sept, 2012.

Migration, Mobility, Multiculturalism

This SIETAR Poland congress provides a wonderful opportunity for all professionals interested in multiculturalism. The first day will be devoted to workshops and exchange of practical knowledge, whereas the accent during the second day will be put on exchange of theoretical knowledge and academic experience. The congress will be at Kozminsky University. More information at <http://sietar.pl/images/docs/congress-call.pdf>

Bath, U.K.

17-21 Sept., 26-30 Nov. 2012

Developing Intercultural Training Skills. This 5-day course is for trainers in language and management training, who want to further develop their skills in course design and delivery or integrate cross-cultural topics into their current courses. The facilitators are Adrian Pilbeam and Phil O'Connor. More information at www.its-training.com/ICTTcourse.htm

Berlin, Germany

27-29 September, 2012

Global Integral Competence: mind, brain, culture and system. SIETAR Deutschland and Young SIETAR are collaborating on this forum.

Dealing with the evolution of communication in a multicultural society, it will try to answer which intercultural competence is required for "cosmopolitan communication" in the future. Languages are English and German. More information at: <http://www.sietar-forum-2012.de/>

Mandelieu, France

11-14 October, 2012

Cultural Detective Facilitator Workshop

This 5-day seminar will enable participants to learn and become certified to use the *Cultural Detective* methods and materials as well as plan, design and present a complete intercultural session. George Simons will be the lead facilitator. More information at: diversophy@gmail.com

Milan, Italy

15-17 November, 2012

Constructivist Foundations of Intercultural Communication: Applying the New Paradigm

Milton Bennett explores constructivist roots, contrasts intercultural assumptions to those of other fields, and examines paradigmatic confusion in applications. This course shows how careful applications of intercultural theory can generate coherent and sustainable training and development. 15% dis-

count for SIETAR members. More information at www.idrinstitute.org

Tallinn, Estonia

22-25 May, 2013

'Global Reach, Local Touch' is the theme of the upcoming SIETAR Europa congress. It will be a 'glocal' event, using the latest technology to be wired to the rest of the world with live presentations from partner organisations across the globe, along with interaction from our audience via Twitter, Facebook, etc. There will be plenary sessions, conferences as well as TED-style presentations and workshops. More information at: <http://www.sietareuropacongress.org/>

Online Everyday

The SIETAR Europa group discussing

"Competence in Intercultural Professions"

on LinkedIn has now over 3200 members in the group. Hot topics: "Does Having Intercultural Marriage mean Intercultural Competence?," "Politician's suggestion on getting to grips with Australian culture."

For more information, contact George Simons at diversophy@gmail.com

Editorial	1
Ida Castiglioni	2
<i>A leading proponent of embodied intercultural communication</i>	
Do You Capire?	8
<i>An unorthodox, but delightful historical and cultural look at Italy</i>	
La Bella Figura Finnish Style	11
<i>How Finns and Italians view each other</i>	
Inappropriate Behavior	13
<i>The flip-side of la bella figura</i>	
Leading Multi-national Teams With 'Horse Sense'	16
<i>Why companies are turning to horses for leadership training</i>	
Book Reviews	18
Events, workshops, congresses	20



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