Don’t forget to sign up for the exciting SIETAR Europa Congress in Krakow, September 21-25

A lively conversation with Nancy Adler
one of the most influential interculturalists in our day

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The American spirit has changed a great deal since the ’60s, however. Political rallies are no longer about Flower Power and international peace, they feature gun-toting “patriots” who want to “take the country back”. Dan MacLeod compares the collapse of the Soviet system with the present collapse of the formerly confident America one. (page 10)

As you all know SIETAR Europa, in collaboration with SIETAR Polska, will be holding its congress in Krakow, September 21-25. Barbara Bartczak recounts SIETAR Polska’s birth and also how younger Poles see interculturalism as a gateway to the world. (page 19)

We hope to see many of you at the Krakow Congress. If you haven’t registered, by all means do so now—it’s going to be a great event!

The yin and yang of Classicism versus Upheaval

When it comes to social change, California has been at the forefront of new American lifestyles for half a century. The Golden State was relatively conservative—even complacent—until the ’60s, then “sex and drugs and rock and roll” changed everything.

The revolution was musical, first and foremost, because the music conveyed the message and the message was political. The first televised war in the history of the world resulted in a peace movement which stretched from San Francisco-Berkeley to London, Paris and...Prague.

Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, The Doors and Crosby, Stills and Nash were all based in California. Their anti-war anthems were the backdrop to a larger discussion on democracy: demands for equal rights for blacks, for women, for Cesar Chavez’s farm-workers in the San Joaquin Valley.

Nancy Adler was also living in California; she was in her teens, practicing classical violin after school. Her mother’s Viennese culture, rooted in intellectual rigor and perseverance, was — happily — coupled with the American revolutionary spirit of innovation. The result was to be her pioneering work in cross-cultural management. (page 3)
Thirty years ago, cross-cultural management was virtually an unknown field. It was widely assumed that American techniques were state-of-the-art and therefore could be applied to run any company anywhere in the world; saying otherwise was tantamount to heresy.

In the mid-1970s, Nancy Adler was beginning her PhD in management. She already sensed that global complexity couldn’t be reduced to American assumptions of universality. She began researching how culture affects global business behavior and chose to write her doctoral thesis on re-entry transitions.

Her research was highly praised, leading several U.S. universities to offer her a professorship...on the condition that she agree not to teach “that intercultural stuff” to their students. But McGill University — in bilingual, bicultural Montreal — appreciated the importance of her work. McGill hired Nancy to teach cross-cultural management, an approach that has since become a staple of MBA programs worldwide.

Her first book, International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior, hit the mark. A million-seller, now in its fifth edition, it’s become the standard reference on how the various dimensions of culture impact the managers’ and organization’s behavior worldwide.

Adler went on to conduct research on female leaders—presidents and prime ministers of countries and CEOs of global firms — as well as on what supports successful cross-cultural leadership. In a highly unusual convergence, she now integrates artistic approaches into management education and executive seminars. Drawing on her passion for painting, she found that art allows managers to reflect, to move beyond the “limiting, dehydrated language and behavior of traditional management”.

Her latest book, Leadership Insight, is a journal, combining words of wisdom from world leaders, images of her paintings, and blank pages for readers to add their own insights, whether verbal or visual.

Author of ten books and more than 125 articles, Adler is also a first-class communicator. She was named “Outstanding Senior Interculturalist” by SIETAR in 1991 and has received McGill’s Distinguished Teacher in Management award...twice!

Nancy is from an intercultural family (Austrian mother, American father). Her mother was one of the few members of the family who escaped and survived World War II. Even with this history, her parents managed to envelope their children in a “bubble of love”, which provided them with the impetus to pursue their dreams and also with the compassion with which to understand them.
Her perspective was influenced by the California culture she grew-up in: “laid-back” values, combined with a striving for excellence, that has led to innovation and, in some cases, radical change. In her family’s home, the music of the Beach Boys and The Doors played against a backdrop of classical music, with both Nancy and her sister playing violin from the time they were children.

Wanting to know more about what made her atypical, I began the interview with her early upbringing:

**What experiences in your childhood steered you into the intercultural field?**

In order to understand my interest in intercultural studies, you have to view both sides of my family. My mom is from Vienna and my father is American, which meant I grew up in an intercultural home.

I remember one particular incident when I was just starting elementary school. On the first day, like the rest of the children, I brought my lunchbox. My favorite sandwich was pumpernickel bread with cream cheese and olives. I sat down for lunch with the other children and they all started laughing at me because I was eating a dark bread sandwich. All of the other children had white bread sandwiches with peanut butter and jelly or baloney.

I returned home upset because my classmates were laughing at me and my sandwich. So my mother, who wanted me to be happy, bought white bread and peanut butter and jelly. At school the next day, I proudly took out my sandwich, ate my first bite, and immediately decided it tasted awful.

After school that day, I told my mom I hated the white bread. She responded by saying, “OK, what you need to do tomorrow is explain to your friends that dark bread is ‘very special bread’.” The new description worked instantly. Now the other children all wanted to taste my special black-bread sandwich. From then on, my mother had to send me to school with extra sandwiches!

My mother, being an immigrant, figured out what I needed to do to fit in. Not going into the melting-pot; I was not going to attempt to be exactly like ‘the locals’. Rather, the question was, how can I stay me without threatening the other children? From the perspective that you and I have today, we can easily decode what was going on. What I was doing was taking a foreign object (black bread) and explaining it to “the natives”. As opposed to them continuing to think that black bread was weird and awful, I (with the help of my mother) turned the bread into something special. The children immediately became comfortable with it; the bread was now interesting, rather than “foreign”.

As a child, Nancy Adler received a solid classical music education in violin, certainly not part of the 1960s California culture.
Were there other intercultural experiences?
There were many. Because my mother was Viennese, the arts and culture were very important to her. Although my family didn’t have much money (and certainly not enough to spend on symphony tickets), my mother discovered that the Los Angeles Philharmonic offered free dress-rehearsal concerts on Wednesdays that she could take my sister, brother and me to. None of the neighborhood kids had ever gone to a classical music concert, so she always invited some of our friends! Once again, it became a special adventure—going to hear classical music—at a time when classical music was certainly not part of mainstream California culture.

Both my sister and I took violin lessons, starting when we were very little. The talent, however, went to my sister. She became quite good and her son is now a professional violinist.

My mother also regularly took us to art museums. Those experiences influenced me profoundly, as I am now both an artist and a professor. From an intercultural perspective, my mother was constantly capturing what was precious about having grown up in Vienna and passed it on to us within the context of America’s culture.

Being polite and speaking correctly is another example of an early childhood influence. In general, there is a higher level of formality in Europe than in the United States. As children, we were taught to speak correctly and politely, in a way that is more common in Europe than in California. A constant refrain in our home was, “Don’t use the word ‘yeah’. Civilized people don’t speak like that!” In our home, any time you said ‘yeah’ instead of yes, you had to put a penny in the small jar my parents had placed on the table. The rule applied to our friends as well as to us. Every few months, my parents would buy us ice cream or something else special with the money. Although this was the opposite of California’s informal culture, all our friends knew that they needed to use proper language in our home.

When I reflect on my childhood, I realize that it gave me a very good grounding for my later writing and speaking. Today, when I lecture to international groups, they often comment that I’m easy to understand. I don’t tend to use contractions or slur my words. It comes in part from learning English from my mother, who spoke it as a foreign language.

Would you say this contributed to you receiving two Professor-of-the-year awards?
That explains part of it, but, if I were to use our cross-cultural vocabulary, I’d say that the more important piece is making ideas easy to understand. Luckily, I was coached that the most important aspect of teaching is what people understand...
and learn, not simply what is presented. So, instead of acting like a more traditional academic ("I’m smart about this topic and I’m going to give you a lecture on what I’m smart about"), I always try to start with what the audience is most interested in; what they have questions about. I try very hard to use everyday language rather than academic jargon.

Using the terminology of “push-pull”, I try to create pull strategies. Ideally, the audience should want to pull from me what they most want to learn, rather than me attempting to simply push what I know towards them. I therefore often use questions – similar to the way you started this interview (with “Why would a child steer toward the cross-cultural?”) The art is to have the audience ask itself, “What cross-cultural skills do I need?” “What can I contribute to the world using my cross-cultural skills?”

I wrote International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior for the first cross-cultural course I taught at McGill in the early 1980s. Each chapter was a module in the seminar. When I designed the course, I imagined that the people listening to my lectures and reading the book were intelligent people who knew absolutely nothing about the topic. It was my job to get them excited and knowledgeable about cross-cultural management.

This is quite different from traditional university teaching. Yes, it is. Perhaps this is another influence of California culture. California traditionally has had considerably less hierarchy—with more of a learning culture than an expert culture—both in comparison to much of Europe and to traditional academia. It is not surprising that Silicon Valley flourished in California.

I was raised and educated in California. I received all three of my university degrees from the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). During that entire period, I was inside of California culture. I remember taking a freshman course at UCLA called “The Jew and the Changing American Society”. The course, with hundreds of students enrolled, was presented by a psychologist, sociologist, historian, and rabbi. Their purpose was to give us skills at making sense of contemporary society. It wasn’t a traditional course in which students assume that the professor (or the textbook writer) already knows all the answers. Rather, the fundamental premise of the course was a question: how do we understand contemporary society. Everyone contributed their expertise and perspective, professors and students alike, to try to help us collectively make sense of reality.

You did your PhD on the re-entry process, which in the mid-70s was an unknown topic. Could you tell us a little more about how you came to focus on that topic?
In the 1970s, the field of intercultural management didn’t exist. The only international management topics that were taught were international finance and marketing. For instance, at a very basic level, international marketing taught that, with the advent of competition from Fuji, Eastman Kodak needed to use the local language on their film boxes in non-English speaking countries. Very, very basic understandings.

At that time, international organizational behavior wasn’t taught. Cross-cultural leadership, cross-cultural team building, cross-cultural negotiations...none of these fields existed. However, even though the field did not yet exist as an academic discipline, my MBA experience as an intern with the Ministry of Culture in Israel (and then getting caught in the Yom Kippur War), left me highly motivated to figure out how cross-cultural interaction and transitions really worked.

When I suggested doing my doctoral dissertation on re-entry – on how to manage the cross-cultural transition back home from a foreign assignment – UCLA’s management faculty was surprised. Nobody had ever conducted a study on re-entry. The cross-cultural literature at the time focused primarily on outbound transitions and cultural shock. UCLA made a deal with me: I could study re-entry if I also became an expert on research methodology. UCLA assumed that if I was going to research a topic that was so new that it didn’t even exist yet, then it was particularly important that I become knowledgeable in the best available approaches to research. So I became well-trained in both quantitative and qualitative methodology, which has served me very well throughout my career.

I formed my Phd committee with professors with a broad range of expertise. I chose a top international business professor, a cross-cultural psychologist, an anthropologist, and even went to the East-West Center in Hawaii to study with Richard Brislin, one of the luminaries of cross-cultural studies. At that time, the cross-cultural knowledge that was beginning to come into management was primarily comparative. The very notion of intercultural interaction, rather than comparison, that I was interested in, simply didn’t exist.

The field’s emphasis on comparison was understandable, but not helpful. Early academic studies on international organizational behavior were based primarily on anthropology. Anthropologists’ models have historically been primarily descriptive or comparative. Anthropologists usually ask the question ‘How can we understand the people who live in this particular place?’ Anthropologists rarely investigate what happens when people from one culture interact with those from another culture.

So, if I understand you correctly, you were increasingly...
moving toward what we today would label as intercultural questions. "How can people from around the world work effectively together?"

Correct. I was not simply interested in "How do we understand people from other cultures?" I wanted to know how people from different parts of the world could succeed in getting things done together. How could they negotiate together? How could they work effectively in teams together? What kinds of leadership worked best when teams included people from various cultures?

I was strongly drawn toward management models because business has the overarching goal of getting done what needs to get done. There has been stronger pressure on business to interact effectively cross-culturally than on other sectors of society. The business model invokes such questions as: 'OK, if, as a European company we are merging with a Japanese firm, how do we get the work done?' The underlying assumption is that there is always an answer; the challenge is to find it.

Let's turn to "International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior". Were you thinking of writing it when you started at McGill?

No, the concept for the book came about accidently. I was invited to my first Academy of International Business meeting and my new colleagues introduced me to David Ricks, editor-in-chief of the "International Dimensions" book series. When he learned I was developing a cross-cultural management course, he invited me to write a book on international organizational behavior. The first edition was published in 1985. Initially, it had no competition, as there was no field yet. Perhaps the reason International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior has done so well over the last 25 years is its message: that we all need to transcend parochialism — no matter which country we come from — and see the world from a global perspective.

What do you feel are the challenges facing the SIETAR movement in our globalized world?

It’s a fabulous question. I think an analogy is the pumpernickel sandwich I described earlier. For many people, when they hear the term cross-cultural, they confuse melting-pot and domestic-multiculturalism strategies. So, the first question for SIETAR and the field is clarity: what is the field aiming at? Is it aiming at everybody attempting to be the same? Or at transcending parochialism — no matter which country we come from — and see the world from a global perspective. The second fundamental cross-culture challenge for SIETAR and the field is: How do societies recognize differences and use them to build something better – better
teams, better organizations, better communities, better countries, and a better world. Implicit in that challenge is the need for education. Today, both in Europe and North America, issues of class and politics are now confounded with cultural dynamics. Many immigrants, due to class and poverty issues, have not had access to adequate education, language learning, or good jobs. That does not mean that immigrants cannot contribute. It does mean that people without access to society’s resources, including, most fundamentally, a good education, find it very difficult to contribute, no matter who they are.

Once a society establishes inclusive systems of good education, including the learning of languages, it can focus on supporting people in working effectively together. We need to ask what we, as a global society, can learn from the communities in which inclusive strategies have worked? If, for example, we were to study Sarajevo prior to the Yugoslavian Civil War, we would immediately learn that it had one of the most positive networks of relationships among Christians, Muslims and Jews.

Sarajevo, prior to the Yugoslavian Civil War, had one of the most positive network of relationships among Christians, Muslims and Jews.

I’m thinking along the same lines. My feeling is that economically-advanced societies aren’t really willing to put in the effort and resources to make multiculturalism work. Those in power say, “No, we can’t afford that. We aren’t going to raise taxes for these immigrants!” Unfortunately, such attitude are riddled with fallacious thinking. They assume, for instance, that immigrants will simply go back to where they came from and not cause ‘my country’ any more problems. Similarly, they assume that rising unemployment and levels of violence in one country will stay in that country and not impact their neighbor’s economy or society. As country after country is discovering, the assumption that isolation will cure everything may have worked in the 19th century, prior to global inter-connectivity, but such assumptions and the behaviors they foster no longer work in the 21st century.

We have a dangerous tendency to blame problems on others, and particular, on those we consider “outsiders”. In the economically-privileged countries of Europe and North America, for example, we have seen an increase in the popularity of anti-immigrant sentiment and legislation. In most cases, “blame” masquerades as problem-solving. The question we need to ask ourselves is “How do we, as a global society, achieve and maintain inclusive lifestyles in flourishing societies? It’s dysfunctional to blame and counterproductive to accept such simplistic statements as “The reason we’re losing ground is because of immigrants” as problem-solving.

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Nancy Adler
— continued

What would you recommend SIETARians do?
I would say again what I recommended at the end of the speech I gave at the SIETAR Europa Congress in Granada: “Intercultural skills are more important today than they have ever been before.”

Multiculturalism is not simply about understanding: “Oh, I recognize you’re different; that’s okay, you’re nice.” Rather, it requires that we ask the question “What is the advantage of working together with people who are different from me?” “How do we leverage our differences to the benefit of all of us?” For the world to thrive, it no longer has a choice not to succeed at multiculturalism.

Unlike what some politicians would have us believe, we cannot throw out the cultural diversity that exists in the world, nor make people who are different from us disappear. We cannot throw out immigrants and assume that we will have a successful society. That’s not an equation that has worked or will work; it’s founded on a fundamentally false premise.

One of the next steps for SIETAR is to consistently adopt a multi-level perspective, simultaneously considering events and dynamics from the perspective of the world, region, country, and organization, team and individual.

SIETAR has tended to be better at offering explanations for working effectively at the micro (individual) level; and at developing skills for individuals and teams. SIETAR has focused less frequently on developing the skills and understanding needed for working successfully with organizations and their overall strategy, with countries in achieving their overall goals, and with what is the most important for the world as a whole. There is no question that if SIETAR broadens its emphasis on historic, micro-level competencies, it can make significant contributions in the 21st century.

If, however, SIETAR remains circumscribed at the micro-level, it risks becoming irrelevant. That would be a shame, since, to state it from the perspective of a kindergartner: the world needs people to learn to play nicely with each other.

Interviewed by Patrick Schmidt
"Ossi" Cigarettes

Social Breakdown: 1985 - 2011

by Dan MacLeod

In 1985, when I was 28, I was in East Berlin smoking Karo cigarettes which fell apart about halfway to the end.

In spite of myself, I felt sorry for the steel-faced Ossis. They were rude, aggressive; they'd been taught to regard all Westerners as the enemy, tourists as spies. I wasn't a tourist, I was paying my way across Europe doing documentaries for CBC-Radio.

I was looking more closely than most and what I saw was defensiveness. Their system was corrupt — and bankrupt — and they knew it. Apart from a few blocks of showcase real estate in the center of Berlin, from classical Unter den Linden to the space-age radio tower, the country was a mess.

When the Wall fell four years later, the extent of the damage was laid bare. The entire infrastructure was crumbling, lakes and rivers were polluted and the air was brown with smoke from factories built two generations earlier. But it was the human damage that staggered the mind.

The effect of economics on social psychology can never be overestimated. The Caribbean island which depends exclusively on tourism can't help but produce "a country of waiters", as American author Paul Theroux succinctly puts it.

In East Germany, 44 years of Soviet occupation was enough to neuter an entire culture.

"They're too timid! They refuse to take any responsibility whatever!" It was 1991 and I was with two West German engineers in Leipzig. They'd opened a branch-plant there and it wasn't just for the cheap labor. "We wanted to help our cousins..."

What upset them most was that the East Germans were competent, knew what should be done in any situation, but nobody would do a thing until it was authorized at the top. Which meant them, their telephones, their time.

And it went further. Fear of authority had decimated individual confidence but there was a self-defensive reaction too, the lack of motivation to truly engage in anything. The next day my train stopped at a station where a dozen ticket-inspectors were sitting on benches on the platform. It was five minutes before anyone got up and even then half remained seated, lit another cigarette.

When I finally got to Munich, Pat O'Dwyer had his own Ossi story. He ran a delivery service and, being Irish, wanted to give some hard-luck people a chance. "So I hire two big lads from Dresden, looked like athletes, but after a day of running around they both quit! Said it was too hard!" O'Dwyer, who usually did the route alone, stood 5'6 and weighed all of 68 kilos.

In 1990, as I was about to embark on a cross-country tour of the U.S. (for a series of Radio-Canada documentaries on
Ethnicity-versus-the-Melting-Pot), a publisher from Boston put things into perspective. “Just because the Soviet system collapsed does NOT mean that ours is working.”

We’d been talking about upward mobility, blacks and Latinos — the last thing on my mind was Moscow. But he knew of what he spoke: he was the son of generations of Harvard men, traced his roots back to the actual Mayflower in 1620, lived on his own island north of Boston. He was, not surprisingly, a fiscal conservative. But he was also a firm believer in civil rights, the American Dream for all.

“In 1929 our own system collapsed,” he said, proof that unbridled capitalism was inevitably self-destructive. But out of that ruin came the Golden Age of democracy, beginning with President Roosevelt’s “New Deal”. The people and their government were united a bond that healed the country in time for its citizens to help defeat fascism abroad.

The genius of Ronald Reagan’s handlers is the reason the Tea Party exists today. Government is not only the enemy but emblematic of all that’s wrong in the world. For white Christians — especially if rural, under-educated or both — that means everything from evolution, abortion and the “greenhouse effect” (which Reagan blamed on trees) to the fact that the world contains a lot of colored people who eat weird food, speak strange languages, worship false gods and are invading America.

The cities on either coast are home to every race on the planet and are increasingly secular. The irony is that religion, not ethnicity, is the tipping-point. For a lot of folks the separation of Church and State is only valid if everyone’s more or less Christian.

Unfortunately, capitalism remains a zero-sum game. As blacks, Latinos and other ethnic groups got help climbing the ladder, whites were pushed aside. In a sense, America couldn’t afford a universal Dream...without a drop in profits at the corporate level. The Golden Age of democracy had lasted exactly half a century.

The national prosperity which followed truly lifted all boats. And Presidents Kennedy and Johnson fought the final battle to make the Constitution honest: from now on, all Americans would be equal without regard for color, creed or country of origin.

The collapse of the Soviet system, said the publisher, would greatly affect our own. He was alluding to something I’d learned in high school, that unions were what saved America from communism. It was why we had minimum-wage laws, compensation for work-related injuries, employer-based health insurance.
The Reagan-Thatcher ’80s began with union-busting and government cut-backs. Unemployment became systemic, public programs dwindled and environmental and financial regulations were slashed in the name of private enterprise. But instead of creating wealth for those who were productive in this “free market”, virtually everyone became poorer. After 50 years of growth, the middle class began to shrink.

By 1990, bankers and real estate financiers had taken advantage of deregulation to commit fraud on a massive scale, leading to the Savings and Loan Scandal and triggering a recession. It was 1929 all over again except this time there was no “communist menace” to put a brake on things.

“It’s going to be a Gold Rush now”, said the publisher. “Wild West times.”

Fifteen years later, politicians and reporters were amazed that a quarter of the population of New Orleans was living below the poverty line when Hurricane Katrina struck. But the percentage was roughly the same in Paris, London, Montreal.

Just as the Earthlings themselves have become the Martians at the end of Ray Bradbury’s chronicle, we in the West have become our own Ossis.

In 2011, young Germans will tell you, there’s really no longer much of a difference between Ossis and Wessis — that’s how rapidly societies change now. From Leipzig to Hamburg, Oslo to Austin, Texas, everyone’s in the same boat.

That boat, however, is sinking. Southern Europe is bankrupt from Greece to Ireland and nobody knows what it means. The “2008 Recession” is poised to become a full-blown Great Depression in 2012. The U.S. economy is in free-fall but the country is paralysed by xenophobic, right-wing hordes clamoring for an end to government as a concept.

I was thinking of all this as I lit a “native”, the black-market cigarette manufactured by Mohawks on the New York-Ontario border. The Quebec government says it’s losing hundreds of millions a year in tax dollars but what hit me was that a third of all smokers smoke these things.

I used to think Ossi cigarettes were a joke; these are worse. They’re full of twigs and whatever else is lying on the ground with the tobacco leaves. You have to pull hard to keep them burning and they taste horrible. But they cost five times less than store-bought cigarettes. Then again, they’re twice as bad for you--now that so many people smoke them, doctors are doing studies here in Montreal.

Besser Wessis indeed...

At the end of Ray Bradbury’s saga, the descendents of Earthlings have themselves become the Martians.
When I was ten, I spent the summer with my French grandparents in Alsace. I was from suburban Los Angeles and didn’t speak French. Nobody in Leimbach, a village on the edge of the Vosges Mountains, spoke English. Culture shock is a mild way to describe my first few weeks!

But those weeks stretched into 15 months. I attended the local École des garçons, became fluent in French and far less American in my ideas. Unfortunately, this didn’t help during recess when all the kids automatically switched to the Alsatian dialect they spoke at home. That was, as Mark Twain would say, “too many for me.”

I was having enough trouble learning one language, Alsatian was out of the question. Nonetheless, strains of it — words and phrases, sound and rhythm — made their way into my ears. And the charm of that unique pocket of Franco-German culture stayed with me.

A decade later I returned to the region for a year as a student at l’Université de Strasbourg. And after graduating from the California State University, I went back to Europe, learned German and began working in Stuttgart. I didn’t know it but I was well on my way to becoming an interculturalist.

Which came first, chicken or egg? Was it 15 months in Alsace as a child that gave me the wanderlust to spend my adult life in Germany, Austria, French Canada and Malaysia? Or was there already something inside me which made those 15 months take such hold? Is it “in ourselves or in our stars?”

Shakespeare says it’s the former but I think it’s a combination of the two. What is certain is that the cultures we come to be part of, no matter how marginally, become part of us. And so, when my wife and I sat down to discuss the next part of our lives, I remembered Alsace.

Settling down in Strasbourg gave us the best of both worlds. For my wife, who was born and raised in nearby Besançon, it was to return to la douce France. But the bridge across the Rhine to Kehl means as much to her as to me. Our years in Germany and Austria—the language and culture we gained there—have left their mark of adopted homeland.

Settling down in Strasbourg I was also, as a friend of mine likes to say, looking forward to the past. Wondering how much would remain of that year at the university when I was 20. Not just in the changing architecture of stores and cafés but in the feel of the place—the "vibe", as people from California say.

I remembered that the kids from l’École des garçons, thanks to their Alsatian dialect, had gone on to learn German. And that the university itself had a bicultural history: classes were in German when Goethe got his law degree in 1771.
In 1940, the Nazi authorities initiated a policy of eliminating anything French in Alsace. In 1945, the French government copied the idea, sweeping away not only Nazism, but all that was German.

To sum up two millenia briefly, Alsace was home to Germanic tribes from before the Roman Invasion and was later part of the Austrian Empire. When France took possession with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, Louis XIV repeatedly stated “Don’t touch the affairs of Alsace.” Commerce and government continued to be conducted in German and, in fact, customs stations excluded Alsatians from official French territory. It was only in 1860, with compulsory schooling, that French language and culture began to influence the populace.

But then it was back to German a decade later, after the Franco-Prussian War. Ironically enough, although most Alsatians didn’t speak French, they resented being forced to change their nationality. By 1914, however, Alsace had regained a thoroughly Germanic identity based on both language and geography.

When Paris regained control of the region in 1918, the government attempted to institute unilingually-French schools. Alsatians were horrified at losing their cultural identity and a political movement emerged (Heimatbund) that was heading toward popular revolt when the French government accepted a de facto bilingual system.

Twenty-two years later, when the Nazis annexed Alsace, a famous poster depicted the future of anyone who refused to reject Gallic culture. Likewise, in 1945, French authorities used the same poster to initiate a campaign to eradicate all traces of Germanic culture in the province. Any child who spoke Alsatian in the schoolyard, much less in the classroom, was severely punished and the parents were suspected of a lack of national loyalty.

This policy is the key to understanding the Alsace of today: denigrating German and the dialect did incalculable damage to the self-esteem of young Alsatians. Research in socialization tells us that children learn culture by internalizing their parents’ and teachers’ behavior and re-enacting these subjective experiences through role-playing. This is how culture is transmitted. When small children are told in no uncertain terms that their mother tongue is bad, it doesn’t take long before the culture disappears. And that is exactly what has happened.

Still, that’s the thing about redrawn borders: it takes a toll on the people living there. After the Nazis, there were very few Alsatians who wanted anything to do with Germany. In any case, they were French again but continued to speak a form of German at home. And the essential things—cooking, music, jokes—were Germanic, not Latin. But the future was quite obviously French.
In 1970 Strasbourg was a unique pocket of Franco-German culture but when I returned 40 years later all that had changed. Young Alsatians no longer learn German, they study English instead. Just as with any linguistic culture in the process of disappearing, few understand their grandparents’ dialect and even fewer speak it. Two generations of official institutions and media and a culture can all but disappear.

And culture is a big word, a jumble of actions and attitudes. Behavior. These days I drive across to Kehl just for the peace of organized traffic, clean sidewalks and quiet cafés. Then I plunge back across the bridge and, even though I live there, I feel my blood pressure rise in the emotional clamor of Parisian-style driving.

At the end of it all, languages are disappearing in the Global World at an increasing rate. And when the words cease to be spoken, an entire and distinct culture disappears. At the same time, once political movements have more or less homogenized society, they can go back and repair some of the damage. Walking through the campus I once attended, depressed at the extent to which the Alsatians have lost their roots, I thought of the Acadian people I learned about while living in Canada.

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In the 1750s, the British deported French-speaking Acadians who refused to pledge allegiance to the king of England. Atlantic Canada was to be an English-speaking region.

In 1755. Acadians who refused to pledge allegiance to the king of England were deported to Louisiana (where Acadian became Cajun). For those who remained, life was in English from then on.

Two centuries later a quarter of a million people had managed to keep something of their language and culture alive. It went without saying that most spoke better English, or at least they wrote it better, because there were no French schools. There was no service in French anywhere—not in hospitals or at the Post Office, not in stores or restaurants.

But then, just as the last generation of francophone Acadians was in sight, the federal government finally gave in to local demands. There would be French-language schools, bilingual service in government offices, even in stores and restaurants. The politicians voted the laws, then spent money on programs designed to make the idea behind those laws come true.

It took less than a generation! Acadian music, theatre and literature exploded. A French-language university opened its doors to a few hundred students and a quarter-century later there were five thousand. Francophone businesses sprung up, just in time to replace the dying traditional trades of farming, fishing and forestry.

This is what I hope for here in Alsace. That both Strasbourg and Paris recognize there’s still time to save a language and culture which was once vibrant and could be again. All it takes is a plan; all it takes is the political will to act. As for the Alsatians, they’re both willing and able to meet the challenge, I’m sure. After 40 years as an interculturalist, I’m willing to stake my reputation on it...
What happens when a leading manufacturer of office furniture carefully examines the cultural workspace preferences of half a dozen customer nations and begins to successfully meet them? We might call it “office glocalization.” Office Code is the publicly distributed report reflecting the research conducted by the Steelcase Corporation about culturally sensitive office solutions and their development. With the appearance of a colorful and attractive “coffee table” book, it is in fact a richly illustrated serious study that focuses on the exploration of cultural dimensions as they apply to work life and consequently to office layout and furnishings in the UK, Germany, Netherlands, France, Spain and Italy, with solid observations of the specifics as well as the communalities of European workspaces.

This book was a discovery for me in the way one might apply intercultural inquiry and know-how to the creation of functional space and furnishings. The Introduction explains how research leading up to its publication essentially applied Hofstedian dimensions, reinforced with other professional literature and hands-on research, to examine specifically how the cultural dimensions might affect workplace preferences and hence the design, layout and furnishings in the office cultures of the countries chosen.

After a particularly well-written and nicely illustrated chapter explaining the Five Dimensions of Culture, the book examines each of the specific European target cultures in terms of what the workday looks like, cleverly illustrated by cartoons depicting the critical hours and activities of the day. Included for each culture is a spatial profile illustrated by actual photos of office buildings and interiors and a cultural profile based on the dimensions, enriched by examples and anecdotes. Finally, most challenging, a space-cultural analysis of how and whether the spaces match cultural preferences of the users or, in fact, may be failing to do so as well as they could. These culture specific examinations are the better part of the volume.

The last sizeable portion of the book contains a pair of interviews and several case studies. These explore how collaboration of people from diverse cultures may not only benefit from well-designed workspaces, both in terms of productivity and satisfaction on the job, but also show how creative new synergies can occur in multicultural environments.

Steelcase is doing its best to be a forward thinking, humane, and socially responsible organization. This book is not overt publicity for its work, but it is perhaps the best kind of advertisement, a tool developed by serious study and experience, to encourage and empower us to look carefully at the role of culture as they restructure or create workplaces that meet the demands of the organization’s activity and the needs of its people for quality work life. Office Code begs us to look at how the place where people spend the greater part of their day can be made culturally and humanly friendly.

Reviewed by George Simons
Cultural Guide to the United States
(This critique first appeared in Dialogin, June, 2011)

by Gary Althen with Janet Bennett
£16.99, 279 pages
Publish by Intercultural Press

Understanding one’s own culture is challenging enough; trying to explain it to others leaves most people at a loss for words. We don’t usually give much thought to our upbringing and the tendency is to treat it in an uncritical light. To provide a balanced view, both positive and negative characteristics must be presented. But accepting one’s culture “warts and all” is difficult.

And it’s only the first step; the second is even harder. When pointing out unfavorable aspects of our “people”, we can’t help but feel we’re betraying family, tribe, nation.

The best descriptions of culture usually come from the outside, an objective perspective. Alexis de Tocqueville’s Democracy in America is just one example but his observations still ring true 180 years later—despite upheavals in the outside world, individual societies change incrementally.

Still, a few people are able to portray their own culture astutely enough to distinguish themselves in the cross-cultural equation. Gary Althen and Janet Bennett are in this category and their American Ways captures the American spirit in all its facets.

Althen wrote the first (1988) and second (2003) editions but this third one (2010) has been updated, and enriched, with the help of Janet Bennett. Insightful and honest, the authors succeed in making American culture understandable to foreigners and compatriots alike. The language is clear and examples abound to illustrate their conclusions.

Organized into 23 chapters, the book delves into customs, values, styles of communication, patterns of thinking and national behavior in general. The first part deals with concepts such as individualism, freedom and competitiveness; providing fodder for class discussions and a solid basis for intercultural awareness. Part two part explores everyday American life: politics, media, education and relationships. Presented in matter-of-fact narration, each chapter offers concrete suggestions for foreigners living in, or visiting, the U.S. The last section, on coping with differences, examines classic themes like culture-shock and the benefits of keeping a journal.

What I liked most was a look at communication styles which surprised me with insights into my own background. The authors point out that Americans are masters of “small talk” as a way to avoid class-oriented intellectualism; we don’t get much practice in debating ideas but—unlike what many non-Americans think—it doesn’t mean we’re incapable of serious reflection and analysis.

At the same time, Americans love it when their media paint contemporary issues as black-and-white struggles. And political leaders have long ceased to search for common ground: virtually every word is an attack in an never-ending ideological war. The public is always entertained but seldom educated.

American Ways is based in solid research and delivers original variations on a well-known theme. It’s must-reading for almost anybody interested in the country, including those who were born there.

Reviewed by Patrick Schmidt
The MMS of SIETAR Europa
A member management system for you

by Rob Giardina

SIETAR Europa members can now access the member data base through the SIETAR Europa website. The Member Management System (MMS) is a data base tool that SIETAR Europa uses to manage its members’ information and to communicate with them. It also allows members to contact each other directly, as well as to search for other members with specific characteristics or areas of expertise.

When someone uses the SIETAR website to register as a new member or to renew a membership, his or her vital information (such as name and email address) is automatically and securely stored in the MMS. Members can also add or update their information at any time. We use this information to send individual, group, or mass mailings to our members.

Members can also choose to provide more information, such as professional sector, areas of expertise, or a company website.

They can also “opt in” to showing their professional information (but never personal information such as email address or telephone number) to other members. If they do, then other members (and only other SIETAR Europa members) can access their listing in the member directory or see their information in search results. Similar to popular networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn, the MMS allows members to send messages through the system to any other member, without revealing individual email addresses.

The MMS uses CiviCRM, freeware specifically designed to help non-profits and NGOs stay in contact with members and constituents.

All SIETAR Europa members – direct members as well as those of national SIETARs – can access the full MMS data base at the SIETAR Europa website and search within the database of all SIETAR Europa members (who have actively chosen to opt into the system).

To add or update your information, to see what information would be confidential to SIETAR and what would be open to other members, to register as a new member or renew your membership, click here: www.sietar-europa.org

If you are a direct member of SIETAR Europa, you can start using the MMS right now by signing in with the Member Login box at the top left of this page. Then you can enter new information, update old information, or search for other members.

Members of national SIETARs need to visit their national SIETAR website to renew a membership or enter personal and professional information into the MMS.
Barbara Bartczak
An interview with the President of SIETAR Polska

IETAR Europa in collaboration with SIETAR Poland will be holding its Congress in Krakow from the 21st to the 25th September of this year. For this occasion, we interviewed the President of SIETAR Polska, Barbara Bartczak. We asked about her views on SIETAR, interculturalism in Poland and why SIETAR Polska has become such a dynamic organization.

Why did you become involved in SIETAR?
This is an interesting question. I guess you could say it was because I grew up bi-culturally – between Poland and Germany. My first 7 years were spent in my home town Olesnica, about 20 km east of Wroclaw. Then at the age of 7, my parents moved to Northern Germany. I stayed there until I was 17 and then returned to Poland.

Back in my home country, I felt torn between Poland and Germany and experienced so many misunderstandings. In my Polish surroundings, I was considered too direct. But when I was back in Germany, I was too high context. I tried to explain things with a slightly soft touch – the Polish way. My German friends looked at me and thought, “what is she talking about?”, “what does she want from us?”. I began to understand that I was in some state of in-betweeness, neither here nor there. But I didn’t understand why and could articulate this rootlessness.

Then I had a boyfriend, who was involved in intercultural trainings. He took me to a SIETAR conference and there I met some people working in the intercultural field. To my surprise, they understood my psychological and emotional realities. It was, as the Americans say, “a mindblowing experience”.

So, this first encounter with SIETAR provided you answers to your bi-cultural identity.
Yes, I felt so understood and had conversations for hours. I couldn’t stop it. They were SIETARians from all over the world, very open minded, explaining my bi-culturalism. I completely fell in love with SIETAR.

Essentially, the SIETAR world gave you an opportunity to work with your bi-culturalism.
Yes. It was through SIETAR that I became aware that there’s an intercultural field. And it allowed me to have contact with other persons who are like me with similar backgrounds. I stopped being so alone in my bi-lateral, bi-cultural feeling. And above all, I appreciate very much the confidence SIETAR has given me.

How did SIETAR Polska start?
When I first became acquainted with interculturalism, we didn’t have a SIETAR in Poland. But one day in 2007, I received a call from a friend, who said “We are ready to start SIETAR Polska now.” After long conversations, we began working to set up SIETAR Polska officially. It was a great time, building up this organization.
Barbara Bartczak — continued

SIETAR Polska seems to be growing by leaps and bounds.
Yes, you could say that. At the beginning we were only 24 members. Now, we are well over 100. It’s an amazing number of people who are interested in the intercultural field. We are not only trainers, but also professors, students, academics, young people. They all want to learn about the intercultural field and contribute.

What are the goals of SIETAR Polska?
Well, there are so many goals. In general we want to provide intercultural education. In Poland there hadn’t been much interest in intercultural education. There are historical reasons why this is so.

Polish culture has been shaped heavily by geo-political-historical events. Following the two world wars, traditional communities in Poland disintegrated. Many social and cultural ties were broken. And we were locked in the Soviet sphere of influence with hardly any contact with the West.

Now, that we are free from our “big Russian brother”, we have one goal — see ourselves as a partner and global player. We want to take part in it in the world. But to be successful at this, we need to communicate effectively. That’s why intercultural communication has become so important — we have to not only understand the outside world, but ourselves as well. This probably explains why SIETAR Polska has become so popular.

And then there’s the economical aspect. In the context of social and economical change, Poland has gone through a lot since 1989. Because the country has a great geographical location, in the heart of Europe, the economy has become highly dynamic with its large domestic market. And thanks to its pro-active policies, Poland has weathered the last economic crisis rather well as compared to other European countries. But if we want to grow economically, we need to understand our neighbors, the foreign business partners that come to Poland. How can I understand my foreign colleagues better so that we can provide the services needed in Poland.

So, we at SIETAR Polska also have this goal to provide companies and people cross-cultural training. There is a great need for intercultural education in the business community.

How do you see the future of SIETAR Poland?
Like any organization, we would like to have more members, especially from government organizations, the academic field, elderly people. We, at SIETAR Polska, are asking ourselves what we can do to attract a more diverse group. We have mostly young people, which makes us very dynamic. This, of course, is an advantage, but on the downside, it can be perceived as a sort of student association, as not being serious. We want to be perceived as competent experts.

Interviewed by Patrick Schmidt
Dear SE members!

Join the 18th Annual SIETAR Europa Congress 2011 to be held in Krakow, Poland, September 21st to 25th, at the crossroads of transformation and development.

You will have the opportunity to discover Polish culture as you team up with experts and professionals from all over the world and share knowledge, skills and experiences.

We invite you to present latest research and best practices and join us in strengthening links with international companies as well as with NGO groups working across cultures. Welcome with us into the SIETAR network new colleagues from Central and Eastern Europe. This is our opportunity to develop lasting relationships, create learning experiences and broaden our existing network of intercultural expertise.

Last but not least, catch up with old friends and make new ones!

Sign up here: http://www.sietareu.org/congress-2011

And for more details on congress attendance and the call for papers and workshops, please visit our online site or email the SIETAR Europa office.

www.sietar-europa.org
office@sietar-europa.org
Events, workshops, congresses

Krakow, Poland
September 21-24, 2011
SIETAR Europa Congress
Interculturalism ahead: Transition to a virtual world? will be the theme of the next SIETAR Europa Congress. Come to Krakow and you will have the opportunity to discover Polish culture as you team up with experts and professionals from all over the world. For more information, go to: www.sietareu.org/congress-2011

Bath, U.K.
3-7 October, 2011
Developing Intercultural Training Skills. This is a 5 day course for experienced trainers in language, communication skills and management training, who want to develop skills to design and deliver intercultural courses, or to integrate cross-cultural topics into their current courses. The facilitators are Adrian Pilbeam and Phil O/Connor. More information at www.lts-training.com/ICTCcourse.htm

Prague, Czech Republic
10-12 October, 2011
Leading and Coaching Across Cultures. Based on Philippe Rosinski’s highly acclaimed book, this seminar integrates the cultural with traditional managerial and psychological perspectives, and addresses challenges brought to the top of the agenda for leaders. For brochure and how to enrol visit this website, or contact Dina at dina(at)philrosinski.com.

Milan, Italy
October 20 - 22, 2011
Constructivist Foundations of Intercultural Communication: Applying the New Paradigm. Milton Bennett, worldwide known interculturalist, will hold this seminar that explores the relativistic and constructivist roots of intercultural studies and examines paradigmatic confusion in applications. 15% discount for SIETAR members. More information at www.idrinstitute.org

Milan, Italy
October 21, 2011, 14:30-18:30
Rosinski’s Coaching Across Cultures. Philippe Rosinski addresses culture as a concept involving people from different organizations and backgrounds, and learning how cultural inclinations can affect coaching styles. More information at www.sietar-italia.org/activities

Konstanz, Germany
November 12-11, 2011
The International Profiler (TiP) Special Licensing Event. The International Profiler is a questionnaire and feedback tool that has been developed to help managers and professionals understand where they put the behavioral emphasis when working internationally. For more information, contact Eric Wang at WorldWork office on +44(0)2074869844 or email eric.wang@worldwork.biz

Milan, Italy
November 19, 2011
Managing Change in China: A computer based simulation (in English). David Trickey will explore some of the strategic, tactical and emotional factors in a Chinese operating context. Participants will create a strategy and then implement it through taking a variety of change initiatives over a 22 week simulated timeframe. More information at www.sietar-italia.org/activities

Online Everyday
The SIETAR Europa group discussing “Competence in Intercultural Professions” on LinkedIn has now over 1950 members in the group. Hot topics: “Decolonization of Intercultural Theory and Practice,” “Certification for Intercultural Professionals,” and “2011 The EU year of Volunteering.” For more information, contact George Simons or Mirka Lachka at: sietareu.volunteers2011@gmail.com