Can the European Union survive interculturally?

Perspectives from an American journalist and a British banker
Europe in turmoil

As Masha Gessen, Moscow correspondent for the "The New Yorker", pointed out last month in the latest Eurovision contest, more Russians voted for Ukraine than for any other country except Armenia. And most Ukrainians voted for the Russian. Kind of says something about the natural, if convoluted, evolution of Europe if politics don't get in the way. A concrete example of the benefit of dialogue: once England and France finally decided to work together, they built the world's best airplane and a geography-changing train tunnel.

Sixty-five years into the experiment, the European Union’s present existential crisis is due to conflicts on two other continents — an impossible influx of refugees — and the aftermath of a global financial melt-down. As far as Europe itself is concerned, the future is difficult, as always, but do-able.

Columnist Dan MacLeod sees Europe as a model for the rest of the planet...from his position as a stowaway on an England-bound cargo ship. Begins on page 10.

On the same theme, Sietar member David McRae takes a hard look at the crisis as it's played out in Greece, where he happens to live. He provides the context of modern Greek society, then examines the problem from both sides. The result is not at all what we’ve come to expect, and he has a very basic recipe for easing tensions. From page 13.

For our interview, we talk to Grant Douglas, an innovator in designing intercultural programs for universities. This is not the career he was expecting, but a combination of luck, creative drive and hard work can lead to extraordinary achievements. From page 3.

Finally, Sietar member Anke Middelmann contributes an insightful view of why the French are unique. They contradict each other continually, changing minds and plans, yet always manage to come up with innovative ideas that actually work. From page 9.

Patrick Schmidt, Editor-in-chief
Grant Douglas

An interview with a pioneer in intercultural studies programs

In the first scene of Woody Allen’s film ‘Match Point’, a voice-over discusses the topic of luck. We see a tennis ball volleyed back and forth over the net and then it hits the top of the net and the scene freezes. The speaker describes the two possibilities: the ball can go over the net for a win, or drop back and the outcome is opposite. Destinies are often decided by events beyond our control.

Grant Douglas’ fate seems tied to good luck. At age 11, in the north of England, he was at the bottom of his class and struggling with French, which he wanted to give up. But his future radically changed when his French teacher asked for a volunteer to become pen-pals with a young Parisian. Grant was the only one who raised his hand and, some weeks later, he found himself living in France for the summer.

Today Grant works in different places, mainly linked to Lille Catholic University, designing and implementing courses in intercultural communication aimed at enhancing the cultural skills of students and staff. As the interview shows, his decisions in life could be likened to a tennis match: hitting the ball at the right time and place to win the game.

Begin by telling us your early life experiences that led you to become an interculturalist.

I was raised in northern England, near Newcastle, and my father and my grandfather were farmers. During my childhood, a lot of British people were emigrating. My godfather moved to Canada, my godmother to Australia, my aunt to the States. I have memories of my grandparents going around the world to visit family. And relatives from abroad would come to visit us. It seemed fairly normal to me.

My first real intercultural experience was when I was 11 years old. I was at the bottom in my French class and saw no point in continuing but, at the end of the school year, my teacher received a letter from a French family looking for a pen-friend for their son. He asked if anyone was interested and I don’t know why but I put up my hand and was the only one. I went home and told my mom I had a French pen-friend. That was in 1973.

A few weeks later, I went on my first trip to France to stay with a Parisian family who had a summer home in Brittany; I spent four weeks in Brittany and two in Paris. And I returned to France for the next couple of summers.

The family spoke almost exclusively French to me and were extremely keen for me to try everything French: the food, the music, the language, even the wine. The parents, being teachers, spent a lot of time explaining the intricacies of the language. Learning French with them was almost painless. So I ended up doing French as one of my A-levels at high school and then studied it at university.
Volunteering to be a pen-pal inadvertently led you to this family, who took an exceptional interest in your language skills. Suddenly, French became your favourite subject...

Well, I don’t know if you could say it that way. All I know is that I sort of fell in love with the country and made friends. I actually tried to become more French than the French, wearing sabots (wooden shoes) and the blue-and-white striped t-shirts and smoking Gauloise cigarettes. That approach to the whole French culture continued well into my university time.

I attended Leeds University and, in third year, went to Angers for a study-abroad program. The international experience was very different then, with no real preparation, no cultural training. And there was no internet, you had to send letters to people. Even getting English newspapers, you had to wait until the next day.

Before we left Leeds, we had a meeting in a lecture hall. Some students were going to be assistants (teaching aides) in collèges. The others, like me, were going to be actually studying at the university. All I remember was learning how to draw a stationary cat and a walking cat. This was something that was apparently going to help people teach. The other teaching tool we learned was the “hangman” game. I used to imagine these poor French kids having hours of hangman.

It sounds like your stay in Angers was a lot of ups and downs. When I look back now, it was the classic culture shock model. There were some incredible highs but also periods when I was really down, feeling hostility, isolation and depression. When I got to the “at home” stage and had made friends, it became one of the best times of my life. And the last thing I wanted to do was to leave France. When I returned to England, I was miserable. I stayed about ten days and went back to Angers. But it was the holidays, all the students had gone, the university was closed.

As a young exchange student in France, Grant thought that by reading Le Monde and smoking Gauloises, he would become more French.
Grant Douglas
— continued

For the last 25 years, Grant has been a member of the teaching and administrative faculty at the Catholic University of Lille.

Eventually had a brilliant time after overcoming “reverse culture shock”. Upon graduating, I had no idea what I wanted to do. Because I wasn’t happy with my spoken French, I decided, with a friend, to go back. Through contacts, we managed to get jobs teaching in a collège in Paris. The original plan was to stay for a year, but some 30 years later, I’m still in France.

After four years teaching in Paris, Leeds contacted me about a job teaching English at the university in Lille. I accepted the position and, when they renewed my contract, I decided to move there. That’s where I’ve been ever since.

Two years later, I started teaching English in an engineering school at the Catholic University of Lille. It was when the Erasmus program was taking off and schools in France were promoting study abroad. I ended up being head of languages and international relations at this small engineering school in 1991.

The first few years, we had a low number of students going abroad or foreign students coming in. It was very small scale, which a lot of people in SIETAR will recognize — a one-person international relations office with no budget. During this time, I did a master’s degree in Language and Culture of English-Speaking Countries.

How did you get into intercultural field?

Dean Hipple, an American colleague, was head of another language and international relations department and convinced me that students who go abroad have to be prepared. He was putting pre-departure and re-entry programs together for his students and doing a master’s with Milton Bennett on the MAIR program run by the University of the Pacific and the Institute for Intercultural Communication in Portland, Oregon. That was when I started to get interested in intercultural communications.

I was also experiencing another culture-shock. My children had come along and many aspects of life in France, including my situation at work, weren’t making sense to me. Dean explained Trompenaar’s model, especially the dimension of universalism and particularism. I had one of those light-bulb moments and things in France started to make more sense.

We started to introduce intercultural communications at our schools through the language programs — we brought it in through the back door. And I got involved with his re-entry program, taught largely by members of SIETAR, which was my first contact with the organization.

Then Zhneyi Li, a Chinese professor who came to Lille, told me about the Certificate in Intercultural Studies at the University of British Columbia, which gave people tools to work effectively in international and multicultural settings. We had more and more students going abroad and the university bought into it.
UBC trainers came to give pre-departure and re-entry seminars to the students and members of staff did the UBC professional development modules, it was face-to-face sessions, then a month of online work. You had to do five of the modules to get the certificate but I got addicted and did all eight! We still have close links with UBC and the certificate. This is becoming quite a long story, don’t you think?

Not at all! I find it intriguing that these international programs all started in an informal, almost accidental way. And you happened to be at the right place at the right time to set them up.

I suppose the intercultural programs I have set up have been very much linked to a personal narrative and also the meetings I had with Dean and his team, Zhenyi and too many other people to mention by name. If I hadn’t met them, I might never have got interested in the corpus of knowledge that makes up the intercultural field.

The first SIETAR congress I attended was in Berlin in 2004, where I met Milton Bennett. Shortly afterwards, I went to Portland to train to use the IDI (Intercultural Development Inventory), which measures an individual’s sensitivity to cultural difference. I also became involved in SIETAR France and I’ve been a board-member since 2007.

In 2008, my school was merged with a bigger school; I was in charge of international relations but for 400 students a year as opposed to 60, my first experience of what I call “industrial-scale teaching”. I was basically an administrator and I started to think of ways of doing intercultural communications for everyone, not just students, but staff too.

After three years I decided to try and find a balance between teaching and administrative work. It was also now possible to teach courses completely in English, including international masters programs. We had a big increase in students coming in and going abroad. It started in engineering and business schools. The focus was increasingly on helping international students integrate and adapt to France and also work on multicultural teams.

In 2012 I was approached by one of our business schools (IESEG) at the Catholic University of Lille and asked to put into place an intercultural communications course for their second year students. At the time there were 500 students on two campuses, one in Lille and one in Paris. We put in place a semester-long course, basically about working across cultures.

So this means your schools were becoming more and more international.

Yes, indeed. We’ve always been international but the numbers have exploded. If we take IESEG as an example, in 2002, there were 32 international students. Ten years later...
there were 602 and now there are 1900, from 98 countries. We have 235 university partners in 58 countries, 790 students studying abroad and 860 doing internships abroad at any one time. We have 38 different nationalities among the permanent faculty. The administration told me, “It's not enough to have all these partnerships. We need to become not just an international school but an intercultural school.”

An intercultural business school? That’s a new concept.
Yes, it is. And if we’re going to make it an intercultural school, we have to have an organizational approach. It’s not enough to do intercultural work only with the students; we’ve also put in programs for academic and administrative staff. If we can learn from what we do, if we can get it right, we can be a model for other schools. Other people will look at us and say this is the way to go.

What tools are you using to develop intercultural sensitivity?
There are two basic frameworks. One is Trompenaars’ “four Rs” — recognize, respect, reconcile, realize and root. The other is the IDI developmental tool, a sort of constructive approach. The whole idea behind our programs is developing cultural intelligence—knowledge, skills and mindfulness—so people can function effectively and positively in any culture and engage in culturally appropriate behaviour. We take a pragmatic approach and use a lot of tools from different places.

How do you see the future?
We’re currently looking at the impact on participants, finding ways to measure the effects of the programs to see if they actually change people’s behaviour. We’re using different measurements to see what the level of cultural intelligence is at the beginning of the program and at the end, and the impact of study abroad as compared to work experience abroad.

What I’ve seen over the years with the different programs I’ve been involved in is that some participants seem to significantly develop their intercultural sensitivity by participating, others register no notable change and a third group show a significant regression. I hope to find a way to develop programs that will enable all the participants to develop their Intercultural sensitivity and cultural intelligence. This is all going to take time and we still have a lot of work to do.

One of the nice things of having taught intercultural communications for a long time is that alumni sometimes get in touch. Many are working internationally and they tell us how grateful they are to have gone through these programs. I was recently contacted by two people who went through the programs quite a long time ago and are now welcoming professionals from all over the world. They asked us if we could help them set up programs to help with the integration as they remembered how much their courses had helped them. That, in some ways, is the best recognition that it can work.

More and more institutions of higher learning are developing intercultural studies programs.
The French Paradox

“Oui..., mais...”

by Anke Middelmann

“Oui..., mais...”, or, “Finding the Perfect Solution”

In the early years of my teaching and training career in France, I was often confronted with comments from such as: “All the French do is talk — but there’s no action” (Anglo-Saxon, North European, Indian, Chinese); “they’ve agreed to something and then change their mind at the last minute” (German managers), “they overcomplicate everything” (British), and more general remarks that “they contradict everything”, “always disagree and complain”, “are disorganized” and “cannot be relied upon”.

Determined to find satisfactory answers, I had to look no further than the French Enlightenment philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650). And was delighted that all the above could, in some way, be linked to his theories, specifically his antithèse. Eureka!

Still today, this Cartesian “method” is applied in all situations. The starting point (thèse) is straightforward—it’s the problématique, or proposition, situation, problem, or project to be dealt with. It’s the second stage, the antithèse, the process of figuring out the solution, that is tricky and that confounds non-French counterparts. While the British generally come up with an objective, devise a way forward, and change course if necessary, and the Germans develop, and follow, a structured approach, the French do something entirely different.

This is where Descartes’ “doubt”, or “scepticism”, comes in. Since the antithèse requires that everything be questioned, the French consider all aspects of an issue by “dividing each difficulty into as many parts as is feasible and necessary to resolve it” (Descartes).

It means dissecting, questioning, and possibly rejecting, all angles, knowledge and facts; it is important to decide not necessarily how or whether something will work, but rather why it might not, and if an existing or initial approach is indeed best. It leads to: “Yes, this might work, but...”; “What happens if we do/don’t do it this way?”; “How about this instead of that—or something else entirely?”

In working through the antithèse, one may retain some
The French paradox... — continued

initial elements, but discard others, inject new facts, develop new possible approaches, and subsequently review everything (thereby repeating the whole process!) to ultimately agree (often at the last minute) on the solution—the synthèse!

To onlookers, this contradictory back-and-forth thinking process, changing minds and plans, especially at the last minute, the lack of action until a solution is considered finite, the seemingly critical oui...mais, is time-wasting, exhausting and unnecessary intellectual acrobatics. However, to the French, not leaving any stone unturned implies doing a sloppy job. As one Frenchman observed: “We cannot work otherwise, even if, in the end, we go back to our first idea.”

Although complex, complicated, contradictory and seemingly disorganised, the “Cartesian Method” can be highly creative and has made France a technologically and scientifically innovative power house: the high-speed TGV train, the Ariane space rocket, Minitel (a Videotex online system that predated the internet by several decades), the Eiffel Tower, the morning-after pill, to name just a few, are all innovations achieved through the Cartesian approach.

How to practically deal with the anti-thèse on a daily basis? Understanding goes a long way: international students and managers say that just knowing that everything will take longer, involve discussion and difference of opinion, makes things less frustrating; a German manager said he now sits back, patiently observing the commotion of the anti-thèse, and reorganising his time accordingly. Non-French university teachers adjust class content to give students more time to discuss their ideas.

Others are delighted that their French counterparts’ frequent oui...mais is nothing personal. And yet others see the process as a worthwhile exercise to hone their own observational and thinking skills, and to develop new ways of seeing the same issue.

I’m not saying it’s easy to adapt; just like the process itself, it takes time, patience, and mental agility. Personally, I’ve learned to listen for the oui — without the mais — to know we’re ready to go.

Anke Middelmann was born and raised in Germany, the United Kingdom and Belgium. She spent most of her working life in Belgium, the United Kingdom, and the United States, before moving to France in 2004. She is Lecturer in Multicultural Management at Skema Business School, and Director of two of Skema’s International MSc Programmes.
The ship was carrying paper, massive rolls of paper, all the way to England. The way onto the ship was to be walking in the middle of two or three sailors but none had come into the bar tonight, shore-leave had been cancelled. I was the doorman at a country-western bar across from the paper mill; the ship was docked beside it, a few hundred yards away.

I bypassed the guard at the gate by slogging through the snow, high grasses and occasional waterholes of the moonlit marsh next to the brilliantly-lit road to the wharf. I scrambled up the bank at the edge of the wharf wet to my knees, tried to act nonchalant as I walked half the length of the ship and up the gangplank.

It was impossible to know if anyone was out on deck but luckily the coast was clear. I hurried toward the closest door, found my way down to the crew’s quarters without running into anyone, followed a hint of music to the crew lounge.

Taffy and Mick were there and a guy I didn’t know. They should have met me at the bar but the boat had been loaded ahead of schedule. Taffy said, as if it was planned this way, “So you made it!” and handed me a bottle of beer.

I had a small shopping bag: a pair of jeans, two shirts, socks and underwear, a notebook. I was wearing a sweatshirt over a sweater under my winter coat, I figured I’d be in the hold. “And bloody freeze to death?”

No, Mick had a spare bunk in his cabin and they’d smuggle me food from the mess. They’d never had a stowaway before, this was like something in a book. But what, they wanted to know, was I running from?

I’d just turned 19; they were ten years older and amused. I began to calm down by the second beer. The crossing was five days, they said. We’d dock one night in Rotterdam, then on to Newcastle to start my new life.

Taffy rolled a joint with three papers, something I’d never seen. He said everyone in Europe did it that way. A few minutes later I was very, very stoned. I suddenly began thinking very, very hard about what I was doing. My plan was to find work washing dishes or something, maybe meet a local girl and stay. It wasn’t an actual plan. We drank more beer. Taffy winked at me, said “No, but what are you running from?”

And then an alarm sounded and Mick said, “We’re off to stations, be back in a bit.” Taffy paused at the door. “If you really want to go to England, just sit there five more minutes.”
Had it not been for the marijuana, that’s exactly what I’d have done. But now I was thinking: You’ve only got forty bucks, you should save up more. They’ll be back, you can go next time. Being alone didn’t help.

Suddenly I was vertical, heading for the door. I found the stairs again, raced up and out onto the deck. Two sailors were pulling in the gangplank but I yelled “Going ashore!” and they stopped. I jogged over, apologizing, and clumped down, then stood on the wharf waiting for my heart to slow. I began walking back to town, stopped to light a cigarette. When I looked up the ship was already out in open water.

... 

What was I running from? Nothing, really. Six months earlier, I’d left Boston for a New Brunswick mill-town to play hockey and work on my French for a year before going to college back in the States. But I was also trying Canada on for size, thinking I might stay.

Now I saw my way across the ocean, to England where I’d dreamed of living ever since I saw the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan show when I was six. And another childhood dream was to attend the Sorbonne someday. Anywhere in Europe, was what I thought. I wasn’t running from but toward. And what I was running toward was Culture.

Federica Mogherini calls Europe a “cultural superpower” but it’s more than that. In James’ “The American”, a rich businessman who lacks culture goes to Paris to get it. He has the misfortune of falling in love with a girl from the “hollow aristocracy”. Even without money, class is a barrier.

Exactly 100 years later, I was sneaking onto a ship for the same reason. The aristocracy was much diminished and I’d had an excellent high school education but the “culture” I was looking for was that of modern civilisation.

Europe has always been the world’s beacon. Half a century after James, it was Paris for Hemingway and Fitzgerald as well. There’d been a “world war” but the lesson didn’t take so there was a second one, with genocide attached, and that was enough. Since then, former enemies have come to work together at every level, from mutually-beneficial business to joint scientific research and collective social projects.

Existential logic — the inevitable “Star Trek” future of the planet. The East was closed off but that was political, not ethnic, so it was a question of time. The paranoia and propaganda would become ridiculous and defeat themselves.

... 

From six countries in 1951 to twenty-eight in 2013, the con-
Stowaway...— continued

Like the Tower of Babel, the European Parliament building symbolizes the hopes of a unified group of nations.

Species consensus. Region by proximate region (tribes, clans, families), continent by geographic continent. It’s the future if you believe in a future. Trade and entraide instead of endless wars.

Europe is a Tower of Babel dedicated to human ingenuity, not gods. Verticity isn’t a problem but 360-degree horizontality is hard. And the tipping-point is tempests from outside. American invasions, international banking crises and Arab Springs. Now an unprecedented wave of migration is overwhelming the European continent.

Europe itself is a Tower of Babel that works. The British may be insular but they aren’t idiots and they aren’t exiting. The only real problem remains East-West, remnants of 1945. Putin’s neo-Soviet Russia, complete with forced annexations, obviously. But also, more insidiously, extreme xenophobia from Macedonia to Poland and everywhere in between.

These populations were shut off from the rest of the world for two generations. When I visited the ex-DDR in 1991, it was 97% German — statistically “immigrant-free”. It takes patience.

More than a “cultural superpower”, it’s Spaceship Europa. If the planet succeeds in extinguishing tribal conflicts, it will be according to the European Model.
A thought-provoking view of the Migrant Crisis in Greece

by David McRae

The following report was written for the ‘Migration and Interculturalism Forum’, held in Brussels at the end of May this year. The author, a British expatriate living in the north of Greece, is a retired international banker and has been a member of SIETAR Europa since 2001.

We must first start with an overview of where Greece stands as this growing migrant crisis develops — and, believe me, it is developing fast into something much greater than we have seen so far. In this respect, Greece’s iniquity is more than matched by that of Europe. The overview which I refer to is, of course, the six years of punishing austerity to which this country has been subjected. I won’t go into detail of that here — but it does form the background as to where Greeks stand on a further suffering which they are now expected to address — with very limited resources.

Modern Greece, formally in place since 1830, is largely a nation of immigrants itself — since the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, The First World War — and, especially, the forced expulsion of Greeks from Asia Minor in 1922. It has, incidentally, during those 186 years, been declared bankrupt six times [including this latest crisis, which is essentially a bankruptcy]. Add the Second World War, including three and a half years of enemy occupation — and a Civil War immediately following that [basically late 1944 thru 1947] ...and more population movement during those catastrophic events — and you get an idea of the confused mind set created. It didn’t stop there as a Military Junta took over from 1967 to 1974 - before democracy returned ...with economic success ...which in turn led to Greece being seen as the ‘rich’ country of The Balkans ....leading to massive immigration from Albania ....about 1 million people between 1989 and 2004 [of which some 300,000 have returned to Albania since the Greek Crisis began]. There was further immigration by Greeks from the Black Sea regions of the USSR post 1991 — almost all of whom settled in Thessaloniki [thus that city has a declared population of 1 million — but is commonly supposed to house 1.5 million]. So, when one asks what effect the current refugee crisis has had on ‘Greeks’, there are a myriad of responses - from being very helpful, remembering their own — or their parents or grandparents — traverses or, alternatively, fear — or even innate racism.

The initial reaction to the massive influx of refugees across the Aegean Sea from Turkey in 2015, to the islands of Lesvos, Chios and Kos in particular — some 1 million — was handled by the very new inexperienced Greek government by a general ‘wave through’ to other Balkan countries as none of the refugees wanted to stay here — particularly given our economic problems. In any case, they were assured that Germany and Sweden were keen to take them. ......and so it happened. It is only now that the escape route has been closed that the remnants [officially just over 50,000 — but I believe double that] are stuck in Greece — to the mortification of Greece and themselves. The ‘half-cock’
Migrant crisis...  
— continued

The refugee camp near the village of Idomeni, Northern Greece

EU deal with Turkey has temporarily reduced the new inflow to a trickle - but I believe that the numbers will jump dramatically if Turkey is unable to blackmail the EU into further concessions — and more money! To our north — at Idomeni just 50 kms from where I am writing this, there are reports that the FYROM authorities are squeezing refugees caught within their country back through gaps in the border fence to add to Greece's problems. Just wait until illegal immigration from North Africa [Libya, especially] starts in earnest again - not only to Italy, but also to Crete .......have a look at a map to see how close Libya is to Crete ......after all, the Mediterranean at that point is called The Libyan Sea!

Conditions in the refugee camps in Greece are appalling — and certainly not helped by the recent withdrawal of NGOs in protest at the ‘immoral’ EU deal with Turkey. This leaves the Greek authorities, woefully inexperienced and with very limited resources, in a real dilemma. I’ve seen it with my own eyes as a small refugee camp has just been set up in a disused Army Base some 4 kms from where we live. It is planned to hold 700 to 800 refugees — but has so far only received 100 to 200 as most of the refugees up at Idomeni refuse to move to any of the several camps opened recently across Northern Greece. This is because they are still hanging on to the hope that the border will re-open and they can proceed to their collective dream of acceptance in Germany. Reports I have received from those who have visited Idomeni [and I mean people who care and not the celebrities who want to be ‘seen’ there!] talk of atrocious conditions — with a growing fear of the spread of disease [TB and who knows what else].

I haven’t been inside the Alexandria camp — and would certainly not be allowed to given the extensive presence of Army personnel and Police — but I pass by the main gate regularly and can see what’s happening. Basically, the base has been unoccupied for many years, all the windows of the barracks are broken [and remain so], the waist high weeds have at least been cleared — and there are two — if not three — large tents erected. Through a local friend who has heard from a senior police officer, I have learned that conditions inside the camp are deteriorating rapidly in that the refugees themselves are not lifting a finger to keep their living quarters clean - expecting, I am told, that everything will be done for them — or, possibly, in protest that they are located there in the first place. What the reality is, I can’t say. In terms of the local Greek population — essentially a farming community — there is a combination of disinterest and some trepidation as the refugees are free to walk about outside the camp and to the periphery of the town [population 15,000]. Our local priest has for several weeks now used his Sunday Morning sermon to plead for help from our villagers for food and clothing — and has complained in a recent sermon that he has not even received one offer of help. The reality is that most of the villagers are suffering themselves from the weight of the economic and political crisis .......and, as the saying goes ....believe that ‘charity begins at home’. In reality, who is to fault them?

The current Greek Government is essentially a coalition of Radical Socialists, coupled with a small minority rightist anti-austerity party [ none of the Coalition has any previous governing experi-
Migrant crisis... — continued

What should be done from an intercultural point of view? End the civil war in Syria.

ence] — and has a parliamentary majority of 3 seats. They are totally concentrated on trying to steer clear of taking Eurozone/IMF forced further economic and financial reforms to parliament — whilst trying to get the Eurozone, in particular, to loosen the terms of last year’s 3rd Bailout Agreement & receive the first payment — due, originally, last September — and which, if not received by the beginning of July, will result in Greece defaulting on debt repayments to those creditors — and a new election — and, most likely a reversion to the Drachma. So the answer to your question about whether the Greek Government has done anything about cultural awareness either for the Greek people or the migrants, it’s a flat ‘NO’. The Government is so pre-occupied with the economic crisis - and political survival - that they are just hanging on for a miracle amid the fear of a failed state. That’s the reality!

In other words, without professional outside help, the situation for the remaining refugees — who could be here on a permanent basis — will become more dire quite rapidly. Our local camp experience is a case in point as the initial 100 or so refugees from Idomeni rioted on the first night and were forced to get on two buses — and immediately shipped down to Athens - to another overcrowded camp — the old Hellenikon Airport [housing 10,000 in facilities for no more than 6,000]. Oh, and by the way, the Piraeus Sea Terminal which the Greek Government wanted to clear of 5,000 refugees there — in time for Greek Easter in order that Sea Cruise tourists could land as the season gets under way — are still left with 2,000 plus — again, refusing to move to other camps. Those who have left seem to be trying to head to Patras and Western Greek ports in an attempt to try and cross the sea to Italy — smugglers are reported to be charging 3000 - 3500 Euros a head!

The refugees who have come to Greece i.e. the 1 million last year — and the number who remain - are, in the majority Syrian — but intermingled with Iraqis and Afghans in the main — with some Iranians and Eritreans — very few from other parts of North or Sub-Saharan Africa. there should be a fair amount of fighting between the national groups — and, no doubt, between religious groups also. The Syrians certainly consist of many educated people — and quite a few still have money with them. There was a story from Idomeni up on the FYROM border that the two village kiosks [peripito in Greek] which would normally earn 500 euros each in a month in selling cigarettes — now earn 50,000 euros each!! Also, refugees themselves, upon receiving free donations of food, then go and sell them on the road outside Idomeni to uninformed new arrivals!

You asked what could or should be done, from a cultural awareness point of view, to ease any tensions and make the experience better for all? I hope that my answer doesn’t sound flippant but......it’s 1] end the Syrian Civil War, 2] destroy ISIS, 3] get the EU to act together and formulate an immigration policy akin to that of post WW2, 4] Sort out Libya, 5] Galvanize North African and Sub-Saharan economies so that people stay at home and 6] be very committed to achieve goals 1] to 5] — and try to teach our world to be very inter-culturally sensitive ... In other words, there is a definite role for SIETAR worldwide to play .... and certainly in Europe.
Lothar Katz is the founder of cross-cultural business training and consulting firm, Leadership Crossroads, and the author of “Negotiating International Business” and “The Global Business Culture Guide,”. He has a wealth of experience in achieving productive cooperation across cultures and driving business success on a global scale. Here he talks to Jan-Christoph Daniel from Untoldcolors about how he came about writing his book on negotiations.

In 2006 you published your first book ‘Negotiating International Business’ which took you 1.5 years to complete. Tell us how you have tackled the massive task of compiling data for 50 countries.

My personal experience from countless business interactions around the world was a useful starting point – but not nearly enough. I began to compile an extensive list of facts and inputs from a wide range of sources, from Hofstede, Trompenaars and the GLOBE study to negotiation-specific works, as well as many online resources like Executive Plan- et or Kwintessential, to name but a few.

Based on the resulting collection of data, I structured the country-specific book sections such that they followed a consistent pattern and started writing. Inevitably, far more information is available for some countries than others, but I feel I ended up with at least a fairly comprehensive overview for all of them.

The final step was crucial: working through my network, I identified about 70 people with first-hand experience from working in one of the targeted countries, as well as in at least one other country, meaning they understood the difference between inside and outside perspectives. Everyone in this group was generous enough to review a country section and provide their feedback and suggestions.

It looks like the result proves the effort worthwhile: reader feedback has been very encouraging and today, the book to my knowledge is being used at more than 35 business schools around the world. Even the U.S. Marines and Air Force use sections of the book to prepare soldiers for overseas assignments.

You have also developed an App called Business Anywhere based on your book The Global Business Culture Guide. How did the idea for the App come about?

Well, that book is another comprehensive reference, intended to let readers look up information when they need it rather than reading the book once and then stashing it away for good. But seriously, who wants to take a 450-page reference book weighing nearly two pounds along on an international business trip, which is when you need it most?

That is where the idea for the app came up: why not provide
Negotiating ...
— continued

all of that content in a format that is easy to take with you? As a matter of fact, even more country-specific information is available in the app than the book, as the former also presents current time and temperatures, rates of exchange, and much more. Best of all, the value-for-money ratio is hard to beat: it’s free!

What does it take to be a global job nomad? What are in your opinion the most important transferable skills you need to have?

No offense, but I don’t quite like the idea of a ‘global nomad,’ since to me it implies needing no roots. We all need our identity, which for the vast majority of people relates strongly to the place and culture that shaped them most.

Having lived in Germany, Spain, and the United States, and having traveled the world very extensively, have helped me understand how my own identity is still strongly influenced by my German upbringing. Trying to become a ‘cultural chameleon’ and blend in well, no matter where you are, strikes me as a rather futile effort.

Working globally and bridging cultural differences does not require losing one’s identity.

To me, three aspects are most relevant for global success:

– Be an explainer. Help others understand your own intentions, habits and motivations, and create an environment around you that encourages everyone to do the same. That what we understand, we are willing to accept and tolerate much more readily, a fundamental requirement for global collaboration. This is a behavior and skill anyone can learn, which makes it transferable.

– Leave your ego at home. In cross-cultural interactions, confrontations and hurt feelings are frequently the result of simple misunderstandings, different interpretations, misaligned expectations or conflicting values. Once you decide not to take any of that personally, you have a foundation allowing you to find solutions and bridge gaps. This only requires a decision and a little bit of practicing, so while not completely transferable, it is still available to everyone.

– Care about others. Relationships matter a great deal in global business, and only fools believe that today’s technology changes anything here. Unless you demonstrate to people, on a continual basis, that to you they are more than a means to an end, that you care about them and are willing to work hard in order to build and preserve relationships, even when making tough decisions that affect them, you are bound to fail. Unfortunately, this last trait may not be transferable: it is a personal value many people have but a few do not.
Book Review
The Secret History of Wonder Woman

By Jill Lepore
Vintage Publishing, 464 pages
U.S. $ 10.59

Suffering Sappho! Somewhere in my deprived childhood, I missed out on the superhero comic book phase and somehow passed from Donald Duck to the classics where, in fact, Sappho became my favorite poet. So, I picked up Jill Lepore’s book on a lark, recently having become interested in the significance of popular culture, in this case of comic books, for interculturalists.

It turned out to be the best thing I’ve read so far this year. It’s basically history, the story of William Marston, the creator of Wonder Woman and the continuation and mutations of this comic book character after the death of her originator. All of this is set in the ongoing saga of the women’s movement, its fluctuations, and the real life “wonder women” in the struggle for women’s rights.

It is a tour de force for Lepore, who seems to have crammed what looks like a lifetime of intensely patient research into a single volume that, nonetheless, is hard to put down because it reads like a novel. It provides a day-to-day look into Marston’s life as a student, psychologist, would-be inventor, lover and sire of children, and betimes charlatan, set into the background of feminist aspirations with significant flashbacks into important historical moments and characters in the feminist struggle.

Lepore pulls no punches when looking at the politics, often rather nasty, from national level down to that of the Harvard administration, the publishing industry and within the women’s movement. The book is thus an antidote to any excessive idealism we might have nurtured about those institutions.

This “secret history”, is full of secrets, realities obfuscated deliberately by the actors, as well as those that the entire book opens to the reader, the often hidden sources of the dynamics found in the tales of Wonder Woman, her secret history. This reader was struck by the frequent dissonance between real-life, particularly the secret family life of Marston, the struggle to keep up appearances, and his feminist advocacy, but this is probably also due in part to hindsight which projects today’s gender focus on to the past.

Most interesting to me as an interculturalist were the various cultural struggles that occurred between the forces of the time regarding freedom of speech, norms of decency, and particularly the war of the sexes. Lepore’s narrative bespeaks volumes about the cultural values systems of the protagonists in their attempts to promote them. For me, this reading confirmed my hunch in picking up the book, that the dynamics of popular culture and art, literature, and artifacts would open doors to the perception of cultural values at work and often provide insights into the continuity of these values from the past into the present. Artifacts reflect, express, modify and motivate our identity narratives all the more effectively when delivered as not-so-secret “secrets” scantily clothed in art, as the curvaceous figure of Wonder Woman herself suggests.

Reviewed by George Simons
SIETAR Europa Congress 2017

Themes and Tracks

Dublin, Ireland
22-27 May 2017

CONFERENCE THEME:

21ST CENTURY WAVES OF CHANGE.
CULTURAL DEXTERTITY FOR TURBULENT TIMES

Track 1: Business & Organizational Challenges:
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WORK TOGETHER?

Track 2: Sociopolitical concerns:
HOW CAN CULTURAL SENSITIVITY BECOME PART OF THE CREATION AND
APPLICATION OF LAW, MEDIA, HEALTH AND EDUCATION SYSTEMS?

Track 3: Shaping Intercultural Professions:
WHAT ARE THE CURRENT UPDATES & FRESH
DEVELOPMENTS IN THEORY, METHODOLOGY AND PRACTICE?

Track 4: Practicing and shifting Perspective Change:
WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES
AND CHALLENGES OF HYBRID IDENTITIES?

Track 5:
ACADEMIC TRACK

Interested?
Click here for more detailed information:
dublin2017@sietareu.org
www.sietareu.org/call2017

Interested in working
with us?
Contact Barbara at:
barbara.covarrubias@sietar.at

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Events, workshops, congresses

SIETAR Europa Webinars

June 27, 2016 at 17:00-18:00 CET
Fredrik Fogelberg: “Leading global remote teams”

July 21, 2016 at 19:00-20:00 CET
Mai Lam Nguyen-Conan: “Le nouveau Français” identity evolution of the French representation in marketing and communication”

September 13, 2016 at 19:00-20:00 CET
Dr. Olga Kovbasyuk: “How to do business with Russians”

November 22, 2016 at 19:00-20:00 CET
Dr. George Simons: “Digesting paradigm shifts in intercultural thought & practice” More information at office@sietar-europa.org

Bath, United Kingdom

June 27 - July 1 2016
Designing and delivering intercultural training. This five-day course is a follow up to the above course, also suitable for trainers who already have experience in the intercultural field. Courses in 2016 may be eligible for EU funding under the new Erasmus+ programme. More information at http://bit.ly/Summerschool_InterculturalCompetences

Dublin, Ireland

22 - 27 May 2017
SIETAR Europa Congress 2017 This five-day event will have as its theme: 21st Century Waves of Change: Cultural Dexterity for Turbulent Times. This congress brings together practitioners and scientists alike in order to foster the dialogue between practice and theory in the cross-cultural field. For more information, write to: dublin2017@sietareu.org or click: www.sietareu.org/call2017

Tampere, Finland

July 27 - July 30 2016
Young SIETAR is celebrating its 20th anniversary by holding its 15th congress in Tampere Finland. The theme is building planetary happiness across cultures. More information at www.youngsietar.org

Utrecht, Holland

8 - 12 August 2016
Utrecht Summer School - Intercultural Competence for Master Students The University of Utrecht is offering a challenging course on “intercultural competences”. This week-long theoretical and highly interactive course will support you in operating effectively across (international) borders. Parts of the program are: a self-assessment (Intercultural Readiness Check©), theories of cultural understanding and differences, a framework for intercultural efficiency. For more information go to: http://bit.ly/Summerschool_InterculturalCompetences

Winterthur, Switzerland

7 - 9 June, 2016
Interactive Training Strategies This workshop, conducted by Thiagi, practices what it preaches. It helps you design and conduct 24 different types of effective training games, simulations, and activities.

10 June, 2016
Tools for Intercultural Training This one-day workshop will explore topics related to intercultural training and teamwork as well as debriefing read-to-use simulations and games. More info at info@diversityandinclusion.net

Online Everyday

The SIETAR Europa group, discussing “Cultural parameters of free speech” on LinkedIn, has now over 8000 members. Plus it offers videos, articles, books, tools for the intercultural profession.

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