The Power of Storytelling

in a globalized world

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Editorial

The Power of Storytelling

Many years ago during an Academy Awards ceremony, a well-known German-American film producer had a few words of wisdom for striving, young producers. “The key to making an award winning film is simple: tell a good story.”

The same principle can be applied to any effective intercultural training. A good story evokes curiosity by telling us about others, opening new worlds and expanding our viewpoints. One person who has mastered the art of storytelling is Joanna Sell. As she explains in our interview, intercultural competence is a lot about balancing between generalizations, zooming out, and stories, zooming in. People’s stories can be bridges, joining two banks of differing perceptions. Begins on Page 3

Complementing this theme, columnist Dan MacLeod analyses what constitutes a story and how stories relate to art, life and politics. (Page 8)

Migrants have taken on an importance in Europe that no one would have imagined a few years ago and we offer three articles on the subject. David McRae updates us about current refugee problems in Greece and the tragic consequences of limited financial resources (page 11).

Joe Kearns reports on a two-day meeting about how interculturalists can help make migrants a benefit for their host countries. Twenty-three SIETAR members met in Brussels to look at what’s been done so far and what other actions can be taken (page 14).

Finally, an interview with Dr. Tino Sanandaji, one of Sweden’s leading economists, who discusses the ramifications of his country’s traditional open-door policy toward migrants. About six months ago, the Swedish government made a huge U-turn and closed its borders. As he explains, this is not so much due to antipathy toward foreigners but rather a question of critical mass — the sheer scale of the increase in the migrant population has literally broken down the social integration system (page 17).

We hope you enjoy the read.
Joanna Sell

A lively interview with a skilled practitioner in intercultural storytelling

Storytelling goes hand in hand with language. From our very beginnings, it has fulfilled a need to tell each other about what we experience. Our ancestors created heroic narratives illustrating both fears and beliefs. There is security in explanation — in knowing why and how things happen — and it also helps bring us together. Tribes, villages, nations were strengthened and maintained through connecting the present to a shared past and collective future.

Philosopher Martha Nussbaum believes truths are often best expressed in story form. We are far more understanding when we behave as the “concerned reader of a novel,” each person’s life a “complex narrative of human effort in a world full of obstacles.” Great writers tell stories which entertain us even as they offer life lessons. Great thinkers inspire discussion and encourage action through storytelling. But narratives, especially political ones, can also be false.

Essentially, storytelling is a search for stability and comprehension, a search for truth. Joanna Sell understands this intuitively. Growing up in Poland, she was surrounded by a wealth of folklore and legend, not to mention her country’s extremely rich history. It’s no surprise she has taken up the tradition of storytelling and weaved it into her intercultural work.

As the interview reveals, she has perfected the art of the open-ended story, encouraging participants to generate their own “cultural reality” and, by doing so, bring differing understandings together.

Tell us a little bit about your early years.

I grew up in the Silesian region of Poland, in Rybnik and Zabrze. Both are located in the south, near Katowice. Later, I moved to Cracow where I studied at Jagiellonian University. These parts of the country used to be very diverse—with a mixture of Germans, Jews, Poles and Czechs—but after 1945 multicultural Poland disappeared relatively quickly.

When I was about 13, I remember sitting with two of my cousins and our mothers telling us we needed to study foreign languages. We hardly travelled and if we did, it was only in the Eastern Europe, so we didn’t need German, English or French. We looked at each and thought, “Why invest time and energy with languages that don’t bring you forward?”

When I look back, I need to smile, because I currently work in English, German and Polish and communicate with passion in Spanish and French. The knowledge of the last language I owe to my mom who speaks it fluently.

The only language we had to learn as kids was Russian, starting in primary school. That was our reality but, after the political and economic system had changed in 1989, English became compulsory.
That was the time when history “got rewritten” and I still remember that during one of the history lessons, I dared to say that Poland would have had better economic standing if it had been allowed to accept the Marshall Plan after World War II. My history teacher was speechless and, after class, said “Joanna, I’m happy that you know so many details of the past but please keep this information to yourself. You don’t need to share everything.” The truth is that if I had said something like that earlier, my family would have had problems with the authorities. It was really tricky because I heard two stories in two different contexts, one at home and one at school.

I was influenced by the stories my grandmother told me. For example, when she was 19, her family got a message that her father had been imprisoned in Auschwitz and fell sick. He’d been a politician and when Poland fell, he was one of the first prisoners in the camp. Back then, no one really knew what was going on there. The family decided my grandmother should go to the camp to bring medicine, blankets and clothing. But when she got there a German soldier told her to run away as quickly as possible or she’d be put into the camp herself. This young man saved her life. The lesson she was transmitting was not to think in boxes or generalize about others. Her beloved father lost his life; she survived. Life is not about coining black and white scenarios, but about reconciliation and sharing stories.

I think intercultural competence is a lot about balancing between generalizations — where we say, for instance, this person is from China and can be expected to act a certain way — and stories, which are personal, anecdotal. With generalizations, we tend to think in do’s and don’ts. But you can’t only rely on that part of the equation. With stories, on the other hand, you can get lost. It’s very important to consider both. It is like taking photographs and zooming in and out. You get a bigger, more complex picture only if you use both functions. In the cross-cultural communication the zooming-out effect can be compared to generalizations, whereas the zooming-in function corresponds with storytelling and paying attention to details.

I owe this observation to research done by Prof. Jürgen Bolten, whom I encountered during the academic program "Intercultural Trainer and Coach" at the Friedrich-Schiller-University in Jena. Thanks to my first studies in art history in Cracow, I know how important it is to describe and interpret what we see prior to any judgement and evaluation.

So it must be the art historic background that is reflected in your webpage — it’s full of visuals. What made you go in that direction?

I believe you can move someone’s heart with a piece of art. Visual arts and music speak the universal language. At the beginning of my art studies, I was curious as to how painters
saw reality, what was important for them, and how we can understand different epochs of history through art. As I am a visual learner, it was a way to study history of Europe and beyond. I simply found it interesting to investigate how artists depicted reality during certain periods in time.

I became fascinated with Byzantine art. I didn’t understand much because the professors used lots of Greek terms. It was a completely different world. Later on I studied the Renaissance, which became my favorite period, followed by visual culture (photography, architecture, fine arts) in the 19th century.

**How did you end up in Germany?**

During my studies in Cracow, I met my husband, who’s German. When we moved to Germany, I completed a public relations course and enrolled for a master program in European Studies at Leibniz University in Hannover. My thesis was on how the TV station ARTE could contribute to the creation of a European public sphere. This led me to do an internship at ARTE in Strasbourg in 2003.

I was put in the multimedia-editorial department, which consisted of almost exclusively French and German personnel. Immediately, I noticed that the two nationalities had different understandings of basic concepts, such as culture, European identity, etc. People, who were interculturalists and therefore responsible for creating programs on European culture, struggled with these differences in perception in everyday life.

“Wow”, I said to myself, “this is so intriguing.” I saw the same dynamic in my own life, being married to a German. I couldn’t help but have this urge to reconcile cultural differences. That’s how I started my career as an interculturalist, a jump into cold water, which led me to the University of Jena to do the one-year program on intercultural communication.

Little by little, I started offering workshops on intercultural sensibility and project management and country-specific relocation trainings and doing business with Poland and Germany. At the moment, I’m focusing on developing and working in multicultural virtual teams.

**What makes your training unique is that you emphasize storytelling.**

Yes. Stories in intercultural learning can be used as bridges, which join two banks of differing world understandings. We need to remember that our brain simplifies the world, our strategy to survive in an ocean of facts and data. That is the reason stereotypes and bias exist, we create black and white scenarios within seconds when dealing with other people.

I call this process “drawering”: we open a drawer, put people inside and feel we know what to expect from them. But as soon as a person shares with us a story that’s meaningful, as soon...
as we feel connected with the essence of that particular story and the feelings of the storyteller, drawers lose their meaning. The person is still part of a different group but, with the story, we gain insight into personal values. It’s the “emotional explanation”, the what-and-why, which is important to the person sharing the story. That’s the real power of storytelling.

The approach I like to use is interactive storytelling, a technique I learned at a Thiagi workshop. It consists of telling stories with an open end, whereby small groups have to figure out what happens next and why. First I give the group an example, so that they know how to act. People growing up in their own culture have a clear idea about how to behave. When confronted with other norms and thinking patterns, they can be overwhelmed. That’s where stories can help close the gap, by reframing cultural situations and encouraging new perspectives.

When we tell stories, we can inspire and influence people, which is great and scary at the same time. As intercultural trainers we must be aware of the power of the stories we share with our clients, as well as the power of the stories they share with one another. Simply put, stories are powerful if we’re sincere and the ethical aspect is our concern. I always highlight the danger of a single story and ask them to look at a certain scenario from different perspectives. As many people share stories of conflict and failure, I encourage a positive conclusion. At the end, there’s lots of laughing and an exchange of values, which happens in an atmosphere of trust.

In one of your writings, you quote Aristotle: “The soul never thinks without a picture.” Could you expand on that? Yes. We don’t only tell and exchange stories, we also show pictures, maps, diagrams, movies. We actually create a “cultural reality”, the part seen from our perspective and only our perspective. Our participants can do the same, aware of the fact that any attempt to describe a phenomenon as complex as culture is subjective — its perception always depends on the observer.

In our field, we still struggle to create new metaphors, new models to depict the complexity of cultures. We’re all aware of icebergs, partially visible on the surface, and know that onions have layers of symbols, heroes and values and trees have cultural roots. These visual metaphors have started to lose their power, so I encourage my participants to construct their own metaphors, which also activates the creative side of the brain.

The results have been amazing. A bowl of curry depicting India, a field of plants for Germany, a light bulb for China, the Kota mask for Gabon. All of them implicitly express two layers of culture. The first is perceptas, reality perceived with our five senses. The second is conceptas, values and norms explaining the observed behaviors.
in Berlin, are an example of how visual storytelling can be shaped in an interactive way. Instead of black and white scenarios, participants use the pictures to start their own stories and ask the others for help with the endings. Another possibility is asking them to arrange an exhibition of “Europe’s Faces”. Depending on the group, I use Famous Portraits or the memory game History of Art. The aim is to reflect on the cultural roots of Europe up to the present day. As a big fan of short stories I use diversophy games and story cubes as well. Often, I let cultures speak and share movies, commercials, infographics and pictures with the participants.

You recently wrote a paper on Chopin’s life in France and how his exile from Poland affected his creativity. This is an unusual way to examine the effects of expatriation. It started last year, when I joined the Board of the Chopin Society in Hannover, where I am currently responsible for public relations. The more I learned about Frédéric Chopin, the more I realized how unhappy he was away from his beloved Poland. Much of his works was impacted by his migration experience.

On the surface he seemed happy, spoilt by his rich benefactors in Paris, but his inner soul suffered enormously from the forced exile. It’s possible that Chopin suffered from adjustment disorder (AD), classified by the World Health Organization in the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Edition (ICD-10) as one of the stress response syndromes. I highlighted the need of sketching the bigger picture and having a close up at the cultural factors, the historic context, as well as the Zeitgeist. In his case, it’s impossible to analyze his works without taking the Polish great migration of 1830 into consideration.

I went further, wanting to explore the correlation between his depressive moods and how they affected creativity. The expatriation process, with its accompanying nostalgia and alienation, may have been key elements in some of his most beautiful compositions.

In closing, some thoughts about SIETAR? As I see it, the whole idea behind the SIETAR organization is to give us hope, that we’re going the right way, that we’re moving toward culturally sensitive communication. I don’t want to use the word “change” here, it’s more to question and “influence” old thinking patterns. New models are always needed, models that widen our possibilities. That’s why SIETAR is so important, to help us all pave the way to new horizons.

Moreover, SIETAR is a networking organization written with a capital N. As interculturalists, we are able to create multiple synergies and enormously profit from each others’ experience and approaches — an enrichment that is irreplaceable. Last but not least, it always is fun to exchange on cross-cultural issues. That is the part I love most about SIETAR.

Her book “Geschäftskultur für Polen” is considered to be an excellent introduction to Polish business culture.
Good versus evil. This is what storytelling was from the beginning, still mostly is and probably always will be. Not just "inherent narrative conflict" but existential combat. The village hero who kills the marauding puma; the warriors who defeat the invading horde. In its essence, "good versus evil" is simply us versus whatever threatens us. Stories celebrate tribal victories, share collective tragedies, teach the ways, history and beliefs of a people.

Later, stories delved into the ways and beliefs of the protagonists and antagonists — the interior dialogue of heroes, villains, star-crossed lovers. Stories of personal struggle, unfair social conditions, prejudice, poverty. Sometimes the adversary was nothing more than chance (usually bad luck, not good; the former makes for a better story).

Good and evil, good luck and bad, are words we use to situate ourselves but they mean nothing other than us versus the story itself. No matter how psychological, how modern or post-modern, it all comes back to winning and losing, survivors and those left dead, destitute or otherwise destroyed.

We identify with them, live temporary lives outside our own in books, plays, songs, movies. And sometimes a storyteller fools us into liking, believing in and cheering for a psychopath. ... Most songs are sad, a tradition from pre-Renaissance troubadours to Bruce Springsteen. A performer I saw in a Boston coffee-house when I was 18 said, "Most of my songs are sad. I write when I’m depressed. When I’m happy I have better things to do, like playing Frisbee with my dog." It’s true, sort of, except real writers don’t sit around waiting for “inspiration”, they write every day, whether it’s songs or stories — it’s work.

I’ve done both: songs in my twenties, when I was a professional musician, and short stories beginning in my thirties. But yes, you can certainly be guided by moods, romantic dreaminess, Baudelairean spleen.

When I was 21 and in the middle of a fight with my girlfriend, I suddenly decided I needed to write her a poem and have it on her doorstep by morning. Four hours later the electricity died, a blackout across all of southern New Brunswick. I found a candle and wrote until daybreak. Four pages, nearly a thousand words, the only poem I’d ever written that took more than a single page.

And it was a “real” poem, which I later published in the student literary review; I was planning to publish as I wrote. Because that’s the other thing about writers — it’s always work. James Taylor, Jacques Brel, Dan MacLeod...we all write songs for girls, sing them once for the girl in question, then rush them into the studio, onto the stage. Storytelling
implies an audience of more than one (except in the case of mothers and grandmothers who make up their own stories but, even there, they usually recycle from baby to baby).

A few months later, a minor author came to speak at my university. Few students turned up, the amphitheatre was full of middle-aged bourgeois types from the Moncton region, doctors' wives and the like, and he wowed them by saying he'd often written “all night long, all the empty hours until the sun came back.”

I thought, “I write until dawn all the time — everyone does!”...

Four years later, in a serious relationship with a flûte à bec major, I wrote a piece for her by moonlight, like the “Lara” poem from Dr. Zhivago or the way I imagined Beethoven wrote Für Elise. It wasn’t that there was no electricity, it was that she was asleep a few yards away.

I sat at her small table at the window, looked out onto icy snow and shadows under frigidly-clear starlight and moonlight, looked back at her face on the pillow. I returned to her bed four hours later, having written a seven-minute solo called “Clarté et Brume”.

My composition teacher—Serge Garant, a colleague of Pierre Boulez — said it was the best thing I’d ever written, that I’d finally “arrived”. The girl for whom it was written performed it at university to great applause and it was later recorded for Radio-Canada’s “classical” network. But the main thing? It was one of the most heartfelt “love letters” I’d ever written.

I spent weeks reworking the original score, developing ideas, polishing transitions, before it was performed. Five years earlier I’d spent weeks refining the above-mentioned poem after it was read by the girl who found it taped to her front door when she left for class that morning. Writing a story means rewriting and rewriting and rewriting.

Storytelling is not just an art but art itself. Jazz players say they “tell a story” with each solo and I imagine it’s much the same in interpretive dance. Every sincere emotion tells a story, it’s as obvious as the photograph of the girl at Kent State.

This is what actors do as well, translate the emotion of stories onto stage and screen, whether Meryl Streep or Mick Jagger. Actors interpret, as opposed to create, are always intermediaries no matter how sincerely gifted. But entertainment is part of art; art is almost always a combination of entertainent and social contestation, from Shakespeare and Molière to the Beatles to punk rock to Pussy Riot.

Storytelling has always been political; heroes showed codes of conduct and warriors’ tales were also warnings about hos-
Donald Trump represents a new way of storytelling, based on deligitimizing facts and enhancing negative stereotypes.

The United Nations was a joke — ambassador to that very U.N. And in 2008, John McCain chose as his running-mate a born-again Christian who not only didn’t read newspapers but also mocked the national media as being “lame”.

Sarah Palin lowered the bar of American democracy to the point that, eight years later, a reality-tv personality with no political experience could become president. There is a trend here, a strategy based on delegitimizing facts, democratic institutions and a national narrative.

That the narrative has not changed is evident in Trump’s channeling Richard Nixon’s apocalyptic 1968 law-and-order campaign — including its code-worded racialism — as well as in Trump’s hiring Republican strategists from the ’70s. But it is another president to whom Trump owes most.

In 1981, Ronald Reagan proclaimed “Government is not the solution to our problems, government is the problem.” Then, in a time of nascent ecological awareness, he pointedly named James Watt — a rabid anti-environmentalist — as Secretary of the Interior, signalling a gold rush for petroleum, gas, coal and the like.

It’s what we’ve come to call “disruption”, the first line of the story being played out 35 years later. In 2005, with the U.S. in two wars, George W. Bush named John Bolton — who’d said the United Nations was a joke — ambassador to that very U.N. And in 2008, John McCain chose as his running-mate a born-again Christian who not only didn’t read newspapers but also mocked the national media as being “lame”.

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The actor and renowned “Commie-hater” John Wayne campaigned for Nixon in 1960 but, when Kennedy won, said “I didn’t vote for him, but he’s my President, and I hope he does a good job.” Times have changed.

Barack Obama, a church-going Christian, has been president for nearly eight years. Two-thirds of Trump supporters believe he’s a Muslim. Their rallies are often violent, protesters have been beaten and racist language is the norm.

As the “Washington Post” editorial board put it: The Republican Party has moved the lunatic fringe onto center stage, with discourse that renders impossible the kind of substantive debate upon which any civil democracy depends.

Anti-storytelling.
Migration

From the front line in Greece — an update

by David McRae

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.

With a nod to Ernest Hemingway: ‘All quiet on the Eastern Front’ .....but not quite!

To the temporary relief of the overburdened and under-funded Greek authorities, the controversial EU/Turkey deal holds. The refugee influx across the Aegean Sea has fallen to a trickle.....but for how long, one has to ask?

In an interview just one day before the attempted coup in Turkey, their new Prime Minister reminded us [BBC Hardtalk, July 14th] that his country is now hosting 3 million refugees, has spent 11.5 billion US Dollars to date [of which, he says, only 5% has come from the UN] and awaits the initial 3 billion Euros promised by the EU [plus a further 3 billion Euros within 5 years].

He further says that Turkey is not threatening Europe with a repeat of the 2015 flood of migrants via Greece .......but who knows how the reaction to the coup attempt will affect relations with Europe? Already, in the first two weeks since the coup attempt, more than 1000 new migrants have arrived on the 5 most affected Aegean islands — where the existing camps are all now beyond their intended capacities .... and Turkey has temporarily frozen agreed returns of migrants from Greece to Turkey. We are told that more NATO warships are heading to the Aegean just in case of an uptick in crossings .....but, even with this, how would they prevent a new massive influx of migrants in rubber dinghies? ...... and the undoubted tragedies which would likely occur.

All is quiet in Crete — even with its proximity to Libya. Why? Because the re-concentration has been turned on to Italy again — a more direct route to the centre of Western Europe for increasing numbers of African migrants — and, no doubt, others from further afield.

Within Greece, there is a sense of semi-permanency for those migrants stuck here. Registration processes for asylum seekers on the Aegean Islands, in particular, are painfully slow — and, with international charities still holding back their assistance in opposition to the EU/Turkey deal, the overall strain on the limited resources — and finances — of the Greek Government continue to build. No longer are we the centre of news as attention turns to Brexit or, in the case of Italy, a potentially serious Banking Crisis [which, in turn, obscures that country’s re-awakening refugee issue].

So what is happening locally in Greece? Official figures
now show more than 56,000 migrants stranded here – with over 8,500 detained in camps on 7 Aegean islands.

The most egregious situation – as The Times of London reports – is at Hellenikon, the abandoned national airport in Athens, where 15,000 are stranded in appalling conditions. Reports have come through that there are no windows and no ventilation …..with, get this, 12 bathroom stalls for 15,000 people! The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention has just come out with a report that the 16 existing migrant centres in Greece pose a public health risk and must be closed. They recommend that migrants be inducted into Greek society as their stay in Greece is likely to be permanent.

In my own very local area there have been developments. 800 migrants are now settled in the nearby camp – a disused army base. Large tents are in evidence – but we are now well into a very hot summer [temperatures well into the mid 30s – and above ]. The heat inside those tents must be unbearable.

There is, however, some good news to report …and it even made the Greek National Press. Our local Roma community decided to invite young males in the camp to play soccer against them at our nearby stadium. This was a big success and they then set up a six–a-side pitch next to the camp so that migrant youths and children can also play. There was a report that one of the Syrians was an aspiring footballer in Syria – with dreams of playing professionally in Germany.

A potentially much more disturbing situation seems to be developing locally. I hear that, in an attempt to start formal education classes in September for refugee children in our camp, Greek authorities have announced that the High School [ or Gymnasium, as it is referred to here ] in our largest local village is to be commandeered for this purpose …..with existing Greek students to be removed to several neighbouring villages ….presumably in existing Junior Schools. This is leading to protests, particularly in the High School village community affected.

My question is – why can’t a school be built at the camp location? I’m guessing that the obvious answer is that of financing needs. I don’t know, at this point, as to whether the same decision is being made at other refugee camp locations around Greece …..but it seems highly likely.

In the bigger scheme of things – and on numbers alone – Greece’s problems may seem small to a Western European reader …..particularly compared to, say, Germany, where much money and effort is being devoted to trying to sort out the integration problems created by the large
Migration...  
— continued

2015 influx. However, even though Greece is currently a backwater, future events could put this country back on the map in a hurry. Even in a small way, there is likely to be more pressure on resources here.

I note, for instance, developments on the Serbian/Hungarian border where Hungary has recently pushed 600 migrants back into Serbia – swelling informal camps on the Serbian side to some 1,300 in size. When, I ask myself, will these migrants be pushed back down the ‘Balkan Chain’ to Macedonia/FYROM ….and then Greece?

The EU has announced a new, revised plan for all members to share in re-settling refugees. The ‘political’ chances of this coming to fruition are very slim, in my view.

Greece has its problems, as we know, not just in how to handle the migration issue, but with the overhang of a true economic depression ……for example, latest statistics show that 157,000 homes have been deserted during the six years of crisis …….and there have been between 40,000 and 50,000 suicides.

Hard and tragic as statistics like these are, they could pale into insignificance – for Greece and Europe – if the situation in Turkey resulted in a further flood of migrants heading our way …….not to mention what happens to the millions in camps in South Eastern Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan …….or the millions internally displaced by war in Syria and Iraq.

Viewed from Greece, the whole Eastern Mediterranean scene is truly frightening. We are too close to the vortex of a geopolitical storm likely to become more complex in the next few months and years.

Major world leaders seem incapable of dealing effectively with the central issues involved – and this can only result in more and more displaced peoples further complicating the human tragedies that have already unfolded. It is no surprise that migrants are being drawn into the vortex from further and further afield – both from eastern regions of The Middle East and from Africa. Their reasons range from physical fear to economic hardship – and Europe is the ‘shining castle on the hill’ – to be reached at any cost.

Let me finish by asking SIETARians …….are we to remain oblivious to all of these events without – as interculturalists – putting our heads together and, in some way, dealing with critical issues at hand? The tragedies of Nice, Paris, Brussels, Munich, Orlando ….the list goes on – are diabolical …….but these are end-products …..the real need is to address the root causes.
SIETAR Europa Event  
at the University Foundation, Brussels, May 28-29 2016

Interculturalists and Migration

A brief report by Joe Kearns

With the current dramatic increase in migration into and within Europe there has been much discussion around National SIETARs in Europe about the issues facing all the countries of Europe, with some more affected than others. The causes of the migration are many, but as Interculturalists, there is a strong feeling that not only have we much to contribute to making this migration a benefit for all but that we actually have a responsibility to be involved.

The topic of migration, whatever the cause, is a multifaceted, with issues ranging from integration, assimilation, racism, economic and political effects and much more. Many SIETAR members are already involved in work relating to migration, particularly in the current dramatic increase, and many more members have been participating in discussions as to what SIETAR and its members should be doing.

Following the SIETAR Europa Board meeting in Brussels in February, we agreed that it would be useful for interested people to meet over a week-end to discuss matters of migration to Interculturalists and to come up with actions and initiatives including the possibility of a more comprehensive longer event later in 2016.

So, after much communication 23 people came to Brussels over the weekend of Friday 27th to Sunday 29th May 2016. The plan and aims of the weekend were:

- Meet with other interested, and interesting, people to:
- Explore the area of migration in the context of the current dramatic rise in migration into and around Europe
- Identify key areas relevant to Interculturalists
- Find out things we didn’t know we didn’t know and to stimulate ideas!
- Look into possible areas of study or research
- To explore opportunities for collaboration and action

The format of the event was small group discussions, 4 or 5 people, with a topic leader, followed by larger group evaluation and documenting of outcomes. We emphasised the need to be action-oriented while allowing the conversation to flow.

DAY 1 SATURDAY 28th MAY 2016

Presentations: In order to give context to our discussion and to stimulate ideas, we asked four people to present briefly on activities they have been involved with.

Jimena Andino Dorato presented work being done in Brazil with migrant workers there, mostly Haitians. It was a summary of a half-day presentation given in Paris to SIETAR France a week earlier.

Steven Crawford presented on a project at JAMK University, Finland, where in fall 2015 students created a community...
Interculturalists… — continued

Finnish students have created a community-wide awareness program at JAMK University. Link: https://www.facebook.com/jamkunitedforrefugees/

nity-wide awareness program about the refugee crisis in Finland (see video report here https://vimeo.com/154578003). During spring 2016 the students focused on developing a Diversophy Finland migration game, and nine asylum-seeking students completed the course and received credits.

Cynthia Tilden-Machleidt gave an update on work being done in Berlin with the huge volume of migrants in that city.

Veronique Njo, who is working with the UNHCR in Calais, updated us on the situation in that city and some of the complex issues arising there.

We then broke into our groups and took a topic each from the following:

• Education
• Receiving Communities
• Authorities
• Social Entrepreneurship

Note: The “social entrepreneurship” group changed the focus to integration – providing an integrated experience for refugees. Key theme was co-creation

Migrant’s Board “Game”

Out of the group work we had a detailed discussion on the work done by Caritas France to develop a Board Game “en route avec les migrants” designed to allow players to get some insight into the experience of migrants on their journey to Europe. We watched a 6-minute video explanation of the game by Catherine Roignon who unfortunately could not be with us. Much discussion centred around how the tool should be used and who would it be appropriate to use it. There was some discussion as to whether it is correct to refer to this as a “game”. Details of the tool here: http://www.secours-catholique.org/actualites/en-route-avec-les-migrants-un-jeu-a-telecharger.

After an exhausting, motivating and energising day we went as a group to an African restaurant and some people went on to a tour of the Grand Place led by Vincent Merk. Some even continued to some nice Belgian pubs and stayed out late…..

DAY 2 SUNDAY 29th MAY 2016

Action Focus: With only a half day more to work together for now, we agreed on the need to work on specific actions to be taken. We once again broke into groups, three this time, to address the following pressing items

1. What do we gather? What information/knowledge?
2. How to report/share it? What kind of repository is needed?

One of the groups focussed specifically on an action plan while the others discussed more of the “What”.

Key insights and learnings

• As Interculturalists, we must be a voice that speaks up for dialogue and integration in the heated debate about migration.
Interculturalists...— continued

The 23 interculturalists in Brussels

- Interculturalists can help to counteract the rise of xenophobia and right wing politics.
- The helpers and people on the ground (volunteers, teachers, civil servants) need support and how we can help them.
- We should not shy away from addressing touchy topics (such as religion). There is expertise within SIETAR.
- Many great projects with and for migrants exist and we should see whether the experiences are transferable to other countries/situations/groups.
- More inclusive approaches are critical: Instead of talking about migrants, engage in a dialogue. Instead of doing projects for them, do them with them. Co-creation may be the path to mutual learning which is essential for real integration instead of one-sided assimilation.
- As Interculturalists, we can each take action by facilitating others to take action. This way, we compound our energy and results.
- Education is key, as has always been the case, and so teachers and trainers can embed migrant issues and related projects into their courses. Some experiences can uplift a refugee like being a participant on equal footing in a course.
- Interculturalists can aid receiving communities by educating on cultural difference.

Actions from the Event
The following actions were agreed at the meeting and in the following days (not in any specific order):

- Everyone to report individual ACTIONS they have taken after Brussels. New initiatives.
- Everyone observe/report back on how Ramadan is reported in their own country.
- Collate and share practices in working with migrants – from best to worst.
- Create country reports on how things are managed in each country.
- Data on art (music, cinema, painting, theatre, writing etc.) referencing migration.
- SIETAR Europa Statement – write a statement to be approved by SIETAR Europa Board in the position and values of SE on migration.
- Define how we work as a group after Brussels.
- Approval process for publishing material.
- Clarify the status and structure of this group within SIETAR. Important in the context of the project examining possible restructuring of SIETAR Europa.
- Establish a repository to gather, store and retrieve information on migration.

Those who met in Brussels are currently working through the action items and in particular how we can engage with the large number of people who want to be involved but could not make it to Brussels.

joseph.keams@carminetraining.com
Sweden on the Brink?

“There’s Definitely Something Strange Going On in Sweden”

Excerpts from an interview with Dr. Tino Sanandaji about Swedish immigration policy

Dr. Tino Sanandaji is an economics researcher at the Stockholm School of Economics, Sweden. A Kurd from Iran who moved to Sweden at the age of 9, he has written extensively about immigration policy as a researcher and contributor to prominent Swedish journals. The interview was conducted by Erico Tavares in February, 2016.

E. Tavares: We would like to talk about a very sensitive topic at the moment – mass immigration in Sweden, something that you have researched extensively. You have publicly expressed some pretty serious concerns about current trends and what might unfold as a result.

We studied in your country back in the mid-1990s and it was a great experience. There was already a sizeable immigrant population but for the most part everyone seemed to get along fine. Middle Eastern girls dressed like any native origin Swedish girl and were very open and friendly. The only place where we ever witnessed any major tension between communities was in a nightclub. What has changed since then?

T. Sanandaji: I don’t think that anything has happened in the relationship between migrants and native Swedes. On the contrary, there has been even a slight improvement. However, in 1990 non-European immigrants accounted for only 3% of the population and any problems could be isolated and managed within the bigger framework of society. That figure has increased to some 13-14% now, and is growing at perhaps 1-2 percentage points from last year, with persistent gaps in income, unemployment and education. It’s really a question of scale rather than degree of divisions.

You still have a sizeable number of Iranians, Iraqis, Bosnians and the like who are well integrated, dress like any westerner, speak fluent Swedish and openly talk to anyone. That group is even bigger than in 1990. But there is another group which is living in a ghetto and who does not speak Swedish all that well, does not feel a part of society, is unemployed and so on. And that group has increased rapidly. When it reaches a certain size it starts to influence everything around it – like schools, social spaces and so forth.

At a theoretical level there is an idea proposed by Professor Edward Lazear from the Stanford Business School where integration is a function of group size. If you have small immigration most people around the new arrivals are going to be natives, and so finding your place in society is just a gradual social process: interacting with your neighbors, working with other people, absorbing their values and learning the language. Once that group becomes very large then you have an issue of critical mass where if you don’t want to integrate you can just live in the immigrant community, working and interacting mostly with other immigrants, not having to learn the language and so on. And you don’t integrate as easily.

ET: What you are saying is that any integration issues are
not so much due to a lack of effort by the Swedish autho-

rities, but rather driven by the sheer scale and size increase of

the immigration population in recent decades.

TS: That’s exactly right. Any society going to have an absorp-
tion capacity given the size of the labor market, schools, econom-
ic prospects, housing and so on. With a smaller number this is
quite doable, but with many more immigrants it becomes much
more difficult. And this is a cumulative process. It has been going
on for three decades now.

I like to look at things like gaps in employment, income and school
results. If we start with the first one, in the age group 20-64, 82%
of native born Swedes are employed compared to only 58% of im-
migrants. That is a huge gap right there. It has remained constant
going back to 2000, and even slightly increased compared to 1990.

We see the same thing happening with income, in that immigrants
on average earn 40% less than the natives, which is also worse than
in 1990. And if you look at school results, you find a massive gap yet
again: 9% of the natives don’t qualify to go to high-school after 9th
grade, compared to around 30% for those of immigrant origin.

So you have these major gaps that have been very persistent
over time and rank among the highest in the developed world. If
you look at the employment gap, it is the highest in the OECD,
and because the group keeps growing as a percentage of total
the problem for society becomes bigger and bigger.

ET: Do you have a projection for the immigrant population as
a percentage of total in a generation, say by 2050?

TS: That’s a very good question. It strongly depends on immi-
gration policy. Even if the rate of immigration has accelerated, as
everyone knows, basically to levels never experienced by any
modern welfare state – ever – the government has recently done
a huge U-turn and all but closed the borders. So that makes it very
difficult to forecast what will happen going forward.

Let me make an attempt nevertheless. I think we will go back to medi-
um rates of immigration that we used to have 10 years ago. They were
high but nowhere near as high as right now. The non-ethnic Swedish
group is about 22% of the population right now, including second gen-
eration, and it might perhaps reach 35-40% within 30 years.

ET: But in major cities they will become the majority right?

TS: In Malmo, Sweden’s third largest city, it’s already almost 50% of
the total. So that’s where Sweden could be going to be in a genera-
tion because Malmo started to take immigrants earlier.

Stockholm, the capital, is a bit of a segregated city as it’s difficult for
immigrants to move there given the higher cost of living. The ones
who do tend to be the well integrated immigrants. Actually it could
even go the other way because you could see a very strong “white
flight” from towns that are becoming dominated by immigrants.

Research shows that the tipping point for that flight to occur is very
Will Sweden be able to resolve all the problems associated with immigration?

low: after 4% of non-European immigrants the native Swedes start to move out. This is arguably an even worse segregation problem than in the US. At the same time, there is a fascinating study that shows that if you ask the average Swede if it is important to live in a multicultural neighborhood most of them say yes. Actually, the ones who moved away from those neighborhoods are even more likely to respond positively.

ET: With all the gaps and demographic imbalances we talked about. Is Sweden then close to the brink?

TS: No, I don’t think we are close to the brink yet. Adam Smith, the famous economist, replied to a concerned British friend after the breakaway of the American colonies that there’s a great deal of ruin in a nation. This means that well organized nations can quickly recover. You can do a lot of damage but you can recuperate.

Sweden’s future is in the hands of the Swedes. Yes, there has been a huge mismanagement and we are going to have an ethnic class society to some extent. That’s inevitable. I hope somebody solves it but it’s extremely unlikely and to my knowledge when this poverty problem established itself no country has been able to eradicate it.

The question though is about degree. We’re economists, we like to measure things. You know, we had 160,000 refugees, some will be sent back but on the other hand some will bring their families so net based on historical experience you are talking about maybe 160-170,000 in total once the dust settles. So that 160,000 is a big problem but it will not break the back of the country. But if you have this number each year then we will be in trouble. And in that sense it’s the Swedes who will decide on this.

Given all the immigration we have taken in recent years there’s a strong argument to have somewhat of a pause to absorb all the problems that have been created. In the long run if Sweden regulates immigration and returns to reality and sanity, then it will not become a failed state.

Anyhow, in the short run you will continue to see shocking headlines from Sweden. The recent inflow has overloaded the system to a point where we are experiencing a crime wave. And absurd things are happening, things nobody has almost seen before: mass assaults on women by large gangs of men, lots of fighting with knives or scolding water, murders, acid thrown in faces of women, rapes, abuse of minors, rapes of young boys... Headline after headline of horrific stuff.

Swedes always like to say that “we don’t want it like the United States”; I joked it’s almost becoming too late for that, now the best Sweden can hope for is “we don’t want it like the Game of Thrones”. The inability of the European leadership to deal with the crisis is at once surreal and fascinating, almost like witnessing a Donald Duck version of the fall of the Roman Empire in real time.

If you wish to read the full interview, click on the following link:
Book Review
The Global Career Workbook

By Angela Weinberger
Neopubli, 140 pages
Euro 19.99

Here is a very useful tool for jumpstarting a career when one’s normal trajectory has been lost. Weinberger specifically addresses again and again in this publication the situation of the trailing spouse in expatriation. Uprooted and torn from one’s everyday occupation and familiar circumstances, following the career move of one’s partner has been proven hazardous both for the individual and the relationship. While we frequently hear warnings of this peril, we rarely see solid processes and good advice for the individual caught in such a move. However, you do not need to be a trailing spouse to find yourself in a significant career shift in order to take advantage of the advice and tools offered here.

True to the author’s Swiss environment, Weinberger frames the work one needs to do in the metaphor of hiking mountain trails – one leaves the home base of a familiar career for a new destination. Switzerland also is the setting of many mini-case studies in the text, though again it is important to note that the dynamics of uprooting will be somewhat similar, whatever the reader’s destination.

Much of the hacking that one needs to do in a job search today will be done on the Internet. This should not be a random exploration but an organized approach, exploiting what is most relevant in one’s background, skills, and desires. Given that we live in the age of branding, there is good advice on presenting oneself as well as cutting through the rhetoric of recruiting profiles to see what is really being sought and required.

Being a long addicted to journal keeping, I was impressed by the activities of self-reflection and research found throughout the volume, whether one does them with traditional pen and paper or contemporary online tools. The plethora of online social networking opportunities of course raises questions that each person must answer for him or herself, viz., what is personal and private and what belongs to one’s public persona, and how does each feed into the other. Such a contemporary workbook benefits by being supplemented by flexible downloadable templates, rather than providing limited size work pages.

Whether one is a trailing spouse in a new country, or simply expatriate from one’s previous career, one is opening the door on a new culture, requiring one to perceive the differences and deal with their impact, often described as culture shock. At this point the author offers a variety of practices and techniques for maintaining mental and emotional balance, reducing stress and finding support. A good deal of this is set in the Swiss context.

While one can take advantage of this work as an individual, using it with a mentor or coach can add significant value. Expatriation trainers, counselors or coaches might also want to introduce this workbook for assisting their clients. If their context is other than Switzerland, they will need to be the ones who provide relevant cultural information and advice about the new location comparable to that which the author does for the Swiss context.

Reviewed by George Simons
There are all too many pop psychology approaches that claim to fix what’s wrong, missing, or incomplete in a person’s life. The fact is that many of these are useful, but hardly the unique solutions to everything that ails us or fails us, as too many of them claim.

The benefit of Barbara Mattison’s book is twofold. First, it draws on and integrates the many useful and available paradigms, models and tools for personal development and worldly engagements that have been generated in recent years. These largely began with the human potential movement in psychology and extending into the present day, although it is obvious that too many of the things we see advertised today are re-brandings of stuff that’s been around for many years.

Mattison begins with the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory and takes us to the use of smiley’s in contemporary digital communication, with many stops in between.

Secondly, the book is written in simple, clear, understandable French, unlike most literature in this field written in French. I suspect that a good part of this suit to the synergy of the author’s mixed Franco-American roots, one of those synergies that we are hoping will start multiplying as the numbers of third culture kids multiply. Likewise, the lion’s share of technologies suggested and the research that is cited is of US origin. In any case, the author’s long-standing practice as a consultant, Interculturalist and coach is evidence of her ability to transfer this across cultures in understandable terms.

Despite the title, the book is as much about making one’s place in the world as finding it. It begins by exploring what happens when one doesn’t “feel right” in various situations and starts looking for not just how do I fit and what can I do to engineer the fit in a way that uses rather than abuses my sense of self.

Various models and approaches are then introduced to help us face the individual tasks both internal and social, creating the confidence we need to be ourselves and use ourselves as well as the tools that will help us communicate, negotiate, and successfully socialize, all part of “finding my place.”

The book is available both in paperback and Kindle format. Having read the paperback version, I was particularly delighted with its attractive and easy-to-read layout and organization as well as with the many summaries, exercises, and tips that are boxed right within the text to help one both understand and put into practice what is being discussed.

Reviewed by George Simons
Intercultural Competence — the key to the globalised world of today

The Congress aims at exchanging good intercultural practices in the social and business arenas, and creating a forum for sharing ideas/experiences on effective cooperation in the globalised multicultural world. The intention underlying the organization of the Congress is to turn participants’ attention to current issues provoking heated discussions across countries.

Place: Wroclaw

Wroclaw has been chosen as the location for SIETAR Polska Congress due to the fact that the city was awarded the title of European Capital of Culture 2016. With this honour, SIETAR Polska would like to highlight the Polish contribution to European culture and heritage. All of these make the Congress an excellent opportunity for interculturalists to come to Wroclaw and discuss the challenges of globalization.

For whom?

We welcome the participation of a broader spectrum of professionals that includes not only our traditional audience of educators, trainers and academics, but also scientists, teachers, human resource, training and development, and other experts who have direct impact on people and communities. The benefits of this expanded sharing of information will be cross-fertilization of ideas, richer learning and development of best practices to reach all sectors of society.

SIETAR Europa Congress 2017

Themes and Tracks

Dublin, Ireland
22-27 May 2017

CONFERENCE THEME:
21ST CENTURY WAVES OF CHANGE.
CULTURAL DEXTERITY 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 educational 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
http://www.sietareu.org/seucongress2017

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

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Events, Workshops, Congresses
Dublin, Ireland
22 - 27 May 2017
SIETAR Europa Congress 2017
This five-day event will have as its theme:
This congress welcomes all those whose life and work puts them at the
temperate of culture, from the perspectives of economy, society, and
education with the aim of reshaping intercultural discourse, questioning
our current cultural paradigms and exploring new thinking to help us
navigate complexity in our emerging
For more information, write to: dublin2017@sietar.eu.org or click:

Wroclaw, Poland
25 - 26 November, 2016
SIETAR Polska Congress
This two-day event will have as its theme “Improving cultural competence – thus key
to the globalised world of today”. Wroclaw has been chosen as the location for the congress due to the fact that the city was awarded the
title of European Capital of Culture 2016, and for the year it will be the
cultural centre of our continent. There will be a cross-fertilization of ideas, richer learning and development of best practices to reach all

Events, workshops, congresses

SIETAR Europa Webinars
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”
Also you may click and watch 13 other recordings on the YouTube format from earlier webinars. More information at office@sietar-europa.org

Bath, United Kingdom
19-23 and 26-30 September 2016
Developing intercultural training
designs and Designing and delivering
intercultural training — these two
5-day courses are suitable for train-
ers who already have experience in
language training, communications
and management training as well as in
the intercultural field. Courses in
2016 may be eligible for EU funding
under the new Erasmus+ programme. More information at www.
lts-training.com/ICTTcourse.htm or contact adrian.pilbeam@lts-training.com

Vienna, Austria
September 10, 2016 9:00 to 17:00 CET
Tatjana Fertlemeyster: “Seamless
Facilitation for Intercultural Competency Learning”
This workshop will

Concentrate on a process as an essential component of a truly productive learning experience.
October 16, 2016 at 18:30 CET
November 25, 2016 late afternoon
Gert Jan Hofstede will talk about cultural dimensions and organizations. For more information, go to the SIETAR Austria website at the following address: http://www.sietar.at/de/activities/veranstaltungen-2016

Online Everyday
The SIETAR Europe group, discussing
Benefits of speaking several languages and how it affects your thinking
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

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