Accommodating International Students Successfully

Chinese students studying in France
Editorial

A quality label for international studies?

Study-abroad programs have grown to become a massive industry for universities around the world. In 2017, almost five million students travelled around the world, eager to take part in an intense intercultural experience. Yet, most international education systems weren’t prepared for this sudden surge in exchange students. Faculty, administrators and residential students often lack the necessary skills to facilitate the proper accommodation of their foreign guests.

Three researchers decided to look into this issue more closely, focusing on Chinese students in French higher education. Their report “Accommodating international students successfully” provides a clear diagnosis of the weak points in international programs and suggests establishing a quality label to make intercultural education a win-win situation for all parties concerned. Starts on page 9.

After gaining its independence from England in 1781, the U.S. had the opportunity to try a unique experiment — build a nation where all men were considered equal. New immigrants were expected to adopt the American way of life, to “become American”. Anyone could evolve from rags to riches, it was said, and millions of poor immigrants did move up the social ladder. There was little questioning as to whether other cultural forms could be an alternative.

Although Edward Hall, an American, is the innovator (some go so far as to say, “the Godfather”) of modern interculturalism, the field itself has not been as important in the U.S. as it as in Europe, if we compare the number of SIETARians on both continents. Why is this so? As is often the case, it takes a foreigner — Rita Wuebbeler, our interviewee — to provide thought-provoking insights. Begins on page 3.

As the U.S. continues to arrest non-criminal “illegals” who have built productive lives in the country, Dan MacLeod thought of a friend, deported after 11 years of public school in Texas to a country he barely remembered — a Mexican who was no longer Mexican. The result is “Osmose”, a metaphor about how people are changed by living together and how couples, in becoming “one”, change each forever. See page 13.

Lastly, we have an unusual article on how SIETAR Europa got together with SIETAR Russia for a mini-congress in St. Petersburg. A wonderful story of bettering our understanding of one another and of our cultures. From page 15.

Wishing you an enjoyable read for the holiday season.
Interview with

Rita Wuebbeler

An energetic and challenging interculturalist

On a visit to northern Germany, it’s easy to see the linguistic and cultural characteristics that link the area to the Netherlands, Scandinavia and England. Much of the land is flat, Pils is preferred to Weizenbier, and meat, vegetables and potatoes still feature prominently in many kitchens. People tend to be reserved and take a while to open up to strangers. But one of the biggest differences is in the use of Hochdeutsch ("high German"), which demands clarity and precision.

Northern Germans tend to say things with as few words as possible — which may account for their über-directness — whereas southern Germans often draw out sentences and "sing" vowels, muddying the waters of communication.

Someone who personifies the northern mindset is Rita Wuebbeler. Born in a conservative rural area to a middle class family, Rita grew up with a thirst to understand why people think and act differently and how differences can be reconciled.

In her mid-twenties, her destiny would bring her to the U.S., where she gradually fell into the field of interculturalism. After creating Interglobe Cross-Cultural Business Services, Inc. in 1990, she’s become an actively sought-out facilitator throughout North America.

Highly upbeat, she goes beyond the typical American-German trainer to become more of a global facilitator, conducting cultural awareness programs, global team development workshops, executive coaching and Mindful Leadership courses. Intense — and often over-booked — she balances her schedule with meditation and a heavy dose of cycling (often for AIDS organizations). The physical challenge of riding a bike gives her sense of personal accomplishment.

I asked her when she first came into contact with differences among people...

My first formative experiences were growing up in a village of 90 people in northern Germany, near Bremen. My surroundings were very agricultural, not at all industrial. The area was very homogenous and everybody was known to me; I called them all “uncle” and “aunt” though they weren’t related to me. While that provided some comfort, I felt it was a little bit limiting.

My first exposure to difference was the arrival of Turkish guest workers in our area. They moved in quietly and took menial jobs. They looked and acted very differently and the women wore head-scarves. I was curious but the message I got was, “don’t talk to these people”. Not so much in those words, but there was no interaction with our community — zero.

The second instance of difference was that I grew up in a little diaspora of Protestants in a majority Catholic area. I went to the Protestant elementary school. We had two communities,
two churches of almost equal size, but we didn’t mix. It wasn’t until I was about 12 that I realized there was a group of kids down the road who were Catholic, who I’d never met before. It was astounding.

My very first boyfriend was from a Catholic family that my mother knew very well. Although my family wasn’t religious, my mother was upset because he was from “the other side”.

Thirdly, growing up in West Germany in the ’70s and ’80s meant having no relations with the East unless you had family in East Germany which we didn’t. In middle school we learned about East Germany, took an obligatory trip to West Berlin and crossed into East Berlin for one day. It was very interesting but it also seemed somewhat threatening to me. I remember thinking “Oh, those poor people in the East.” I felt they were oppressed in some way. At the same time, I became more aware of our recent history, of Nazism, the Third Reich and World War II. I questioned my mother about what she did as a young woman during that period. Her stand wasn’t as clear as condemning the Nazis. I would call her an innocent bystander, growing up in a fairly “protected” area, which prevented her from having any real analysis of the horrible crimes the Nazis committed.

Other differences were more private — age and gender in my family. I grew up with my grandparents, parents and a younger brother. It was very traditional and the men usually got to serve themselves first at meals. I rebelled against that sort of hierarchy and had awful fights with my brother about it.

My mother was ten years older than my father, which generated another family dynamic. As I grew up, I saw it was a big deal in this conservative area of Germany. My mother had a strong personality, worked at a bank, was very outgoing, sort of a community-connector. She was very important to me and I always admired her strength and power.

What did you study at university?
I studied applied linguistics and business at the University of Mainz in Germersheim. I went abroad twice, one year in England at Loughborough University, near Leicester, and four months in Spain to do my Master’s thesis on sixteenth-century explorers Cabeza de Vaca and Francisco Vazquez de Coronado. They both travelled across the Southwestern U.S. (Cabeza de Vaca on foot for seven years) looking for the Seven Cities of Gold. It was an absorbing time for me, studying old documents in Madrid archives and learning to speak Spanish as fast as the Spaniards spoke it.

After my degree I taught German at Leeds Polytechnic, then took a job at the University of Vechta, near my home, as a foreign language coordinator. After two years, I realized that wasn’t what I wanted to do long-term. I found a work-study program in
Rita Wuebbeler — continued

Atlanta, Georgia is where Rita has set up her home in North America.

the U.S. with the Carl Duisberg Society in Cologne. They gave me a scholarship and said, “You’re going to Atlanta, Georgia for three months of college and 18 months of work.”

After a term at Georgia State University, I found a job with a German incubator company. My boss, who is still my mentor today, had launched the German-American Chamber of Commerce in Atlanta before setting out to help German firms get started in the U.S. After the 18 months he asked me if I’d like to stay longer and I said yes. I felt that Atlanta was a place I could live so I became an “accidental immigrant” and, without realizing it, an interculturalist.

How did you get involved in SIETAR?

I had been working for the incubator company for almost four years when I saw an article in the paper about three women in Chicago who had formed a company to help expats prepare for overseas assignments and thought, “I could do that.”

I did some research and found out there was a conference a week later in Kilkenny, Ireland, organized by some group called SIETAR. It all sounded very intriguing. I decided to take the chance, hopped on a plane and arrived at the congress!

What I experienced was electrifying. The exchange of intercultural ideas and the diversity of the people was amazing. And lots of learning — being able to put theory into practice. I knew that, from then on, SIETAR would be my home. This was in 1990. I started my own company, Interglobe (with a friend and colleague at first who later dropped out), a few months later. I also heard about the Intercultural Communication Institute (ICI) in Portland, Oregon and went the next year.

Intercultural training in those days was not easy, it was simply not well known. My ex-boss was very supportive and rented us an office for just $50 a month in a very prestigious office building downtown Atlanta. I’d saved $5000 and thought that would be enough to get started, but it wasn’t. I barely managed, teaching German at the Goethe-Institut, doing translations, a job here and there, going to SIETAR congresses...

It took some time before my activities took off. In 1992, Hewlett-Packard asked me to help their U.S. employees interact with their Latin American offices more effectively. Although I spoke Spanish and had studied Spanish culture, I felt I needed somebody who was from the culture. I found a Puerto Rican colleague, who’d done some training in intercultural communication and we embarked on a 2-year joint business venture together delivering programs for HP.

My big break was the Olympic Games in Atlanta in 1996. All of a sudden people said, “We’re going to host visitors from xyz country, can you help us avoid cultural mistakes?” After the Games, I began working with a large Atlanta-based company...
which is still one of my main clients. They had me do all sorts of programs: pre-departure, relocation, multicultural groups. I haven’t stopped since.

From what you just said, you fell into the intercultural profession. But reading your newsletter, I get the feeling that you do less intercultural training and more group dynamics and enhancing productivity. Am I correct?

Yes, you’re right. Our globalizing world is continually changing, including when it comes to training people. Many younger participants have travelled extensively, probably already studied a year abroad and are proficient in global thinking. They have an assumed or perceived basic cultural competence. So there’s a different need for cross-cultural competence-building these days than 10 or 20 years ago.

At the same time, there’s not as much demand for country-specific programs such as Doing Business with Germans anymore. Business people have German counterparts and, at the same time, interact with three or more other cultures.

And there are generational and gender culture differences. Culture forms a much more complex picture these days, which means we need to offer our clients new concepts and new frameworks. And at a certain point, obviously, you want to develop yourself further and do something else. You’re never going to lose your foundation — I’m always going to be an inter-culturalist — but I’m interested in coming up with what I would almost call Cultural Competence 2.0, looking at how we can use new approaches in sharpening our overall competence.

My training programs have evolved to include the lens of mindfulness, becoming more aware of unconscious biases, learning to attend to our judgments about what we see and how we’re thinking and acting in the moment. What “baggage” do we carry? What triggers certain behaviors in us? How are we being perceived? How do we perceive others? It’s all about sharpening our sense of self.

Now I understand what you mean with cross-cultural competence 2.0. With that in mind, how do you personally see yourself in this global, unsettling world?

I’m very aware of myself in my current location. I’ve lived in the U.S. for the biggest part of my life, and also four years in Canada. Although on the inside, I feel German, I’m bi-national. I have a U.S. passport. I vote here. Depending on where I’m at, I try to fit in, as many of us do.

But I’m very aware of the challenging position many of us interculturalists find ourselves in, especially under the current administration here in the US that seems to be very US-centric and does not value the interconnectedness of people from different cultures. When I talk to my colleagues, friends, partner, there’s a lot of hopelessness, frustration and confusion right now.
The complexity is overwhelming people, I feel. It’s easy to go into a place of hiding, a place of despair or sadness. I have bad moments, too, but I still try to stay positive, and mindfulness helps me build my resilience. I sometimes find myself today in the role of motivator, trying to help others see that we’re connected and that this is hopefully a phase that’s going to come to an end soon.

I offer the same to people in a business context. One of my clients is a pharmaceutical company, mid-size, global. The whole industry is under a lot of pressure so to help them manage stress enhance performance, I offer “mindfulness at work” classes at the company. I teach my participants different forms of meditation and other mindfulness practices. Mindfulness allows them to be self-compassionate, address their biases and manage their stress better. That’s very well received.

Could you go more into detail of how mindfulness works?

I meditate every day. And research shows that if you practice mindfulness meditation regularly, even just five minutes a day, whatever shape or form, you tend to be less reactive and more resilient. You tend to get less upset about things, or you recover more quickly if you do. Mindfulness meditation can reduce the power of the “amygdala hijack”, where the emotional part of the brain “imprisons” the logical part so to speak.

People sometimes say to me, I don’t know what you do but you seem so calm. Although I might overschedule, be hyper-intense, I can get back to a place of calmness much more quickly than I used to. Whether you call it stillness, awareness or mindfulness, it’s a place of pausing, where you can reflect, where you can actually build up resilience, so that the amygdala can take a rest for a second so to speak and you’re not hijacked by it easily. But that requires a certain commitment to practice. If you are able to cultivate stillness for even 5 minutes a day, it does make a difference.

Turning to another subject. I’ve always felt Germany is more interested in intercultural awareness than the U.S. I base this on the fact that SIETAR Germany has about 700 members, with a national population of 81 million, whereas SIETAR USA has about 300, with a population of 320 million. Germany has four times more interculturalists per capita. Your thoughts on this?

Why people in the U.S. seem to have less interest in intercultural sensitivity in general has to do, in my opinion, with several factors, including history, size, and the fact that it’s a country of immigrants. When people first arrived in the US from Europe, for instance, many simply wanted to fit in, become Americans, get on with their new lives and chose to leave their home culture behind, later on that changed and we now talk about “hyphenated Americans” but initially many people focused on commonalities rather than differences perhaps.
rope when they travel. I might be crossing a state border but not a national one, so the focus is not on differences between national cultures — but instead on domestic diversity elements, such as race, gender, age, physical ability, etc. This might be simplifying it a bit but I think size and geography do matter.

Now we have these almost parallel tracks of diversity awareness and interculturalism, where everyone’s goal is to understand and bridge differences, but coming at it from different angles. And many SIETAR members and diversity & inclusion practitioners have tried to combine efforts — but in the end, the two worlds are not overlapping that much and Diversity and Inclusion work is here to stay, whereas intercultural communication programs seem to get absorbed more and more into other disciplines.

Another aspect is the extreme pride Americans have about their country. When I get back to the States, people tell me, “Wow, you’ve been away so long. Why did you leave such a great country?” Implied in the question is that there must be something wrong with me.

That’s American exceptionalism for you, i.e., the belief that America is somehow “special”. That’s one of the reasons why the current president is so popular, in my opinion. He wants to “make America great again”. With globalization, by definition, America had to lose some of this “exceptional” status. President Obama represented this new trend of being more globally focused. But many Americans felt lost and left behind. They see the current president as their “savior” and voted for him out of fear. And here we are. Rising nationalism and divisiveness.

For its future, SIETAR should take on a more disruptive strategy.

How do you see SIETAR in the future? I may be biased in my opinion, but I have the feeling the SIETAR movement isn’t as dynamic, as enthusiastic as it was, say 10 or 20 years ago. I believe that, in SIETAR we need to wake up and make ourselves relevant in new ways. Let’s put aside the old ways, move into the 21st century and focus on the disruptive side of things.

I don’t want to be partial here but I think SIETAR Germany is moving in that direction more quickly than other national chapters. At its last forum in Bonn, they had a BAR-Camp format and encouraged participants to disrupt themselves, examine agile management approaches, mindfulness and other practices. Those are the areas we need to be focusing on. This is, in my opinion, our chance to become more relevant again.

Take Germany. I have optimism about what’s going on now concerning the integration of refugees and migrants into society. Yes, there are huge struggles at the political level. But I’m feeling hopeful that people will find ways to live together peacefully.

As interculturalists, we need to remain visible, insert our ideas, new approaches and alternatives into the discussions and practices and not shy away from difficult conversations. If we can do that, SIETAR will still have a place in this globalizing world.

Interviewed by Patrick Schmidt
Accommodating international students successfully

Research study carried out by Inès Jourde, Alison McCheyne and Pascale Schmidt-Dubois

Travelling abroad today has become a mass phenomenon, whether it be for leisure, work or studies. And with increased mobility, universities all over the world are recruiting more international students as well as sending more of their own abroad, attaining more than 4,600,000 students in 2017. But are universities really prepared to accommodate these students? Are the students equally equipped to integrate and adapt?

If “France is back” as Campus France reported in April 2018, referring to President Macron’s slogan and more specifically to the 12.2% increase of foreign students in France, the country is about to face stronger international competition from other countries in Africa, the Middle East and China, where student enrolments are growing at a spectacular rate. Although France still maintains 4th position world-wide as host country for foreign students and first among non-anglophone countries, it will need to change policies if it wants to be a leader in the game.

With increased privatization, pressure to fend for themselves, along with national (even world) rankings, universities now find that they are being forced to act more like companies and treat students like clients. It leaves them with no other option than to stand out from the crowd and attract as many students as possible, resulting in a situation where higher education is functioning like a mass industry.

On the other side of the fence, there are grumblings from university lecturers, students and administrative staff about the “low language level” of international students, many of them not understanding the rules and regulations or participating in class or social activities.

It was in this context that we set out to do a research study on this intercultural issue, focusing on Chinese students in French higher education. With around 30,000 students in 2017, China represents the second largest nationality after Morocco, demonstrating that in order to keep attracting foreign students, France needs to address the issue of accommodating these students by offering the best conditions for success.

France - China: Historical partnership and cooperation

To establish the attractively of France for Chinese students, we first took a look back at the historical partnership and cooperation between France and China. France was one of the first countries to “visit” China in the 16th century with the arrival of the first Jesuit missionaries. Strong ties were woven and were later extended under the reign of Louis XIV with emperor Kangxi and then again with de Gaulle who was the first western President to recognize Mao’s China in 1964. In January of this year, President Macron addressed Xi Jinping, renewing the wish for France to reinforce bonds, in particular through language and academic exchanges.
Accommodating...
— continued

Chinese students are frequently confused by western teachers’ writing when reading numbers, such as 4 and 7.

**Results of study carried out in 3 universities in France**

Our research took place in three grandes écoles and we established three main factors which are essential elements for academic success of international students. Without surprise, the first factor was the language level (either French or English), not only of the foreign students, but also of the teachers and members of administration, the ability to adapt to different teaching/learning styles and finally the social integration of students.

**The language gap**

It has been said that the main difficulty of learning another language can be estimated by the size of the difference that lies between one’s mother tongue and the target language. Below is a sentence in both languages:

“L’enorme distance interlinguistique entre la langue de départ et la langue cible…”

Not only the fact that they look different, the actual process of reading Chinese is also diametrically opposed to that of reading French. As Michel Sauquet in his book *L’intelligence de l’autre* writes, “Reading a Chinese character is like recognizing someone’s face and putting a name to it, whereas when you read a name written in alphabetic script it is like pronouncing the name in the hope of evoking a face”.

This particular language gap goes much further than vocabulary and understanding; it involves a completely different thought process. In *Learner English* Jung Chang explains how French or English words appear extremely long for a Chinese student who is used to reading just one character at a time.

“The way the information is spread out in each word seems cumbersome for a reader used to the compact ideograms of the Chinese. Individual words may take a relatively long time to identify and (since words take up more space than in Chinese) the eye cannot take in so much at a time. Chinese learners therefore tend to have relatively slow reading speeds”.

Another problem that came out of our interviews was the difficulty in reading the handwriting of the teachers. When Chinese learn English or French vocabulary, they learn mostly from books where the print is very clear and often in small letters. They know the capital letters but are not used to reading whole words in them. As one Chinese student pointed out: “Sometimes the teacher only writes in capital letters. ABCD. This is very difficult”.

The interviewees also mentioned how complicated it was to read numbers. “Our teachers here have strange ways of writing the numbers 4 and 7.” For a native speaker, it is hard for us to imagine how misleading a single stroke can be. But if we take a look at two simple words in Chinese on the next page, we can understand why.
Host universities and their teachers should be aware of these differences so that they can adapt accordingly. Simple changes, such as teachers providing lesson hand-outs of slides, giving students extra reading time or paying particular attention to writing clearly on the board, can make a great difference for these students.

The adaptation to different teaching styles
Another main issue we identified was the difference in learning styles, making it hard for international students to understand what the teacher expects from them. Both students and teachers alike might experience feelings of confusion which can lead to misunderstandings at best, or prejudice and negative judgment of the other culture, perceived as illogical and senseless.

The Chinese education system today is based on the Confucius vision of learning: first, the transmission of traditional values is mostly through memorizing knowledge. Second, the relation between teacher and students is highly hierarchical: teachers expect great respect due to their status, and students are expected to listen, read and learn by heart. They usually come to class prepared, i.e. having read extensively on the subject, often written by the teacher. Contesting what the teachers says or interacting with teachers and classmates is not common in the classroom.

Almost the opposite is expected in western society where a “good teacher” is respected not only on knowledge, but also for their skills and their ability to transmit knowledge. A “good student” is participative, eloquent and is capable of critical thinking. They like to learn in a non-judgmental environment where they can express themselves freely and appreciate a personal connection with the teacher. Both teachers and students aspire to a more equal teacher-student relationship.

Another major misunderstanding is copying/plagiarism. In China, learning equals copying, whereas in western culture copying equals plagiarism, a serious offence, which could exclude a student from exams and potentially jeopardize their whole professional career.

The social integration
The third factor that we esteem to count as essential in the success of international students is their social integration. Adapting to university life in a foreign country in another language and coping with a new culture is a hugely challenging experience. All these things need to be considered and students should be prepared as well as possible in order to have a successful stay.

During our interviews, some students told us how their lack of language fluency affected their confidence and consequently their identity. “Sometimes when I speak French,
they just look at me. They don’t understand me and so I don’t speak. I feel stupid. I can’t say what I really want to say” (Wu). “People always ask me to repeat what I say. I don’t feel comfortable because I don’t feel good enough. In China, this never did happen” (Yi).

These same emotions can be read in François Cheng’s book *Le dialogue*. “Possessing only a rudimentary knowledge of the adopted country’s language, he was reduced to feeling like a young pupil in the eyes of everyone else. Stumbling over words and approximate sentences, unable to narrate clearly and coherently, he gives the impression of lacking thought or even feelings”.

It is not, however, only the students who are ill-prepared to integrate and adapt but it is also the universities who are not ready or equipped to face this new diverse student body. If a university wishes to operate effectively in a global context, then they too must prepare their teachers, administrative staff and native students to to welcome international students by meeting their needs in order to study in the best conditions.

**Introducing a quality label**
We believe that by introducing a recognized label, international students will be reassured, knowing that they are going to an establishment that is recognized world-wide as being apt to accommodate and help them with their integration and adaptation. We have named this quality label PIA and structured it around three main components:

**PREPARE:** Before arrival, the school prepares its staff, teachers, providing intercultural training and access to all necessary information corresponding to the needs of the students in order to avoid social, academic or cultural shock.

**INTEGRATE:** On arrival, the school welcomes students in the best possible conditions so that they feel comfortable and supported throughout their stay. At the same time, the school announces a dedicated support plan.

**ADAPT:** Study programs - all issues concerning comprehension cultural differences and learning styles are addressed in class by the teaching staff.

A positive experience abroad is linked to having a policy which accommodates students academically, linguistically and interculturally. Measuring this accommodation of students is the first step to a better international cooperation in the future.

PIA aims to give establishments the tools and certification to become better prepared to welcome international students as well as increasing their attractiveness. Moreover, the PIA quality label will make it easier for students to assess a school’s ability to accommodate them in order to assure an environment with the best conditions for success in their studies.
Il était une fois...

Osmose

by Dan MacLeod

The first thing was the way she always looked behind her when she got up from her seat on the métro.

They took the métro together every morning, she to go to her courses at college, he to be with her; they held hands under his coat as they rode. And when they got up she'd always take one step and turn her head to take a snapshot with her eyes, that pause, then go on as if leaving the past behind.

He found it cute, no, adorable. He found himself doing it after a while.

Although he'd never seen anyone do that before her, he'd come to count on it, like she was doing it for both of them. When he took the métro alone, or a bus, he'd get up, take one step and glance back.

It didn't matter that he had nothing with him, just what was in his pockets. Without that gesture, that reassurance, something was missing, a needless need was left needed.

So now he couldn't stop himself doing it and, now that she was gone, it not only made him think of her, it made him feel as if she gotten inside him.

The second thing, months later, was the telephone.

She'd always had anxiety about talking to people she couldn't see, disembodied voices. You feel exposed by not being able to use your eyes. And it's always there, the phone; anyone can call anytime, as if they beamed into your home.

His take was more positive, he still thought of the phone as a neat invention. All the years he was studying, he hadn't had one so, when he talked to his mother/father/brother/aunt/friend back in his home country, he'd talk for an hour. He chatted up receptionists, joked around with total strangers, noticed accents, attached anecdotes. Back when he was a reporter, an Israeli diplomat told him, long-distance from Washington, “It’s nice to make a friend over the phone.”

But now, having been with her every day for four years, he didn’t really talk to anybody else. And now, with her no longer there at all, there was nobody at all to talk to.

Two or three old friends, a couple of calls each. He asked them about themselves, mostly. It wasn’t that he talked too much, about her or otherwise, but that, for him, it was water to thirst. They had other lives. And the only member of his family he could have talked to about her was dead.
So then he didn’t talk at all and the silent phone was like an insult on his desk, an enemy. All it could do was ring when it wanted, maybe wake him up, and then it would be a wrong number or a robo-call. And by no longer talking on the phone he began to be not good at it, disconnected, a beat behind.

Even when she called, because mostly she didn’t. Would say she would but wouldn’t for days. So days waiting, staring at the phone, and he became the way she’d been before, tense every time it rang.

Always made sure to have a glass of water, a pack of cigarettes, an ashtray and a lighter on his desk before going to bed.

…

The bedroom was now neither his nor theirs, more theirs than his if he thought about it. Some of her things were still in the closet, waiting for her to either pick them up and leave or leave them there and stay.

What the bedroom was now was a cabane. It was a word he’d learned from her, she redefined it for him. She’d put sheets up in the kitchen, create a space, a secret room. It was her word for where they’d live someday, a cottage with a potager near the sea.

It was where he lived, mostly, in the bedroom, a separate part of the apartment, a secret compartment. Apart from her things in the closet, the walls themselves were full of three years of her, her sound and smell.

His cabane but it was she draped the invisible sheet across the open door, her space still. He retreated there to read, to maybe sleep, make the day go by, time go by, and maybe dream.

At night he slept on her side of the bed and dreamt. A lot.

Navigating complicated subway systems in vaguely European cities, sometimes with her, sometimes alone. Mixing in with groups, finding food, a place to sleep. Jumping gates at airports, always enthusiastically, always believing. Living.

Outside of the cabane isn’t as warm, is emptier, and outside the apartment is worse. And maybe the phone will ring while you’re out.

The day dreams the future present; in night, dreams are present and past as one.
An unusual international congress — SIETAR Russia and SIETAR Europa

The East-West Event

by Pari Namazi and Yvonne van der Pol

The East West event organized by Sietar Russia and Si- etar Europe that we just participated in was a rather un- usual congress. Why? To start with, it was located in three places: the old Russian part of Helsinki, the cruise ship Anastasia and the ‘actual’ congress location in Saint Peters burg. Moreover, we encountered various intercultural surprises on the way.

The idea to do a different type of congress was born back in 2016 in various discussions with the SIETAR Europe board and congress committee on why do we do the same congress every year? Let’s try something different! And indeed this was different!

Six SIETAR adventurers coming from Washington DC, Moscow, Vienna, Nice, Amsterdam and Jyväskylä met each other at the beautiful art noveau Helsinki railway station to start the congress.

Greeting us at the door of the railway station, were four tall somber looking statues, reminding us of the perseverance and steadfastness of the Finns. Perhaps they were also reminding us that this was no ordinary adventure that lay ahead of us.

The aim of the East-West event was to open discussions on how to build bridges between cultures, especially be- tween Europe and Russia and how to foster dialogue be- tween international relations and the intercultural space. Wasn’t the exploration of such a grand theme by foot and ship a unique approach? The six of us thought it was.

Here’s our story.
The first challenge (or adventure, it depends how you look at it) for all of us took place weeks, if not months, before the event. It started when we tried to get a visa for Russia. Tourists are allowed to have a 72-hour visa if they’re part of a tour, or an event in our case. However, you need to arrive and leave by cruise only.

The challenge lay not only in getting the visa but in getting accurate information on how to get the visa. Before the event, some of us formed a Whatsapp group, sharing information on what we found, what the embassy website said, what the visa agency said, what the cruise website said or did not say, what kind of visa we needed, and so forth.

Finally visas and return cruise tickets in hand, we met each other live for our walking tour on ‘Finland as grand duchy in the Russian empire’. The weather a mere +1 degree, wind and rain kept teasing us as we walked through the old Russian section of Helsinki and listened intently to Diane Ashworth as she shared a very interesting account of the geography and history of Finland and its relationship
The East-West event...  
— continued

with Russia. Buildings that were originally constructed in the era of the grand duchy (1809-1917) for the czars were in use now as governmental buildings.

To our surprise we even found a statue on the Senate square of Czar Alexander II. Since he had initiated several reforms to increase Finland’s autonomy from Russia he had been perceived as the (only) good czar until today. The independence from Russia after the 1917 revolution even had a foundation in this and related earlier commitments. Although the weather was miserable, we ended our tour with a better awareness and understanding of the deep and tense relationships between East and West.

Making our way to the harbor to board the Anastasia, was another adventure. At the harbor, visas were checked and boarding was relatively smooth. The Anastasia is a large cruise ship on 8 floors, decks 2-3 for cars, decks 4-6 rooms and decks 7 and 8 are recreational levels.

On the cruise ship we reflected on the tour, our east-west experiences and what we as interculturalists do to bridge gaps. Comparing our work contexts and challenges provided us with rich material that only cumulated over the days.

9am Saturday morning, we arrived in St Petersburg. Disembarking from the cruise ship was another adventure, where 3 decks of people had to pass through one (only one!) door in single file and by showing your boarding pass for the cruise ship. This caused some confusion and panic, especially for people who felt claustrophobic in small confined spaces.

Then came passport control, another adventure. We forget that we travel through Schengen areas and borders so easily, but visas and passport controls can be rather harrowing experiences, even when you have the right paperwork.

The SIETAR Russia volunteers were there to greet us as we came through passport control with a SIETAR sign and warm friendly smiles, it felt like we were SIETAR “home”. Onwards to the next adventure, as we boarded the shuttle bus to Isaac Square to meet other colleagues.

Little did any of us know that there was a marathon in St Petersburg that day, so things took a little longer and there...
were unexpected turns and twists to the day. We finally arrived at the Higher School of Economics (HSE) campus in Pushkin (and again a surprise, as some thought we were staying in the St. Petersburg campus and not the Pushkin campus). But finally we arrived and the program began.

We heard so many interesting presentations from our Russian colleagues, on traditional Russian drinks, how nick names are chosen in Russia compared to the US, levels of cultural pedagogy, the integration of migrants from CIS countries, Russian women on Tinder, Russia and the world cup, and on and on.

We ended the day with a tour of the Kochubey Mansion and a gala dinner held in the mansion. Over wine, vodka, a lovely elaborate dinner, we continued sharing intercultural stories.

Although the dinner tables were divided by language, we did manage to make a toast and clink glasses and say "Na zdorovje" to each and every person, also a way of bridging bridges. As our night ended and we went our separate ways, some continued toasting and sharing stories at a local bar, it had begun snowing…

Sunday started at a crisp -4 degrees. We began our day with a tour of the Imperial Tsarskoye Selo Lyceum. We walked through the beautiful gardens of St Catherine’s palace, chatting, exploring, learning, sharing and discovering more about Russia, Europe and how to improve our intercultural communication.

From our walking tour, we continued our discussions and exchanges back at the HSE and closed the first ever SIETAR Russia conference with some delay in the early evening hours. Although it was dark and cold outside, there was light and warmth in our farewells.

As all SIETAR conferences, we started as strangers but within the space of two days, we managed to learn, share, build and foster relationships.

Those of us who came from SIETAR Europa, although there were many things which were unclear to us about the Russian culture and style of communication, there was a feeling that we had taken one step closer as had SIETAR Russia, to improve and better our understanding of one another and of our cultures.

It was indeed an adventure, and we each had to be prepared for the unknown, but that is the beauty and spirit of an adventure — keeping an open mind, keeping a positive attitude and making the best of each situation.
No president in the history of the United States has ever caused more shock than Donald Trump. People all over the world are asking how it is that such an erratic, ill-tempered person could ever be elected to the highest office in the country.

Just as important is the question of what makes this man tick, whose mental health is openly questioned. It's no surprise that a well-known Washington, D.C. psychiatrist undertook the challenge of deciphering the person who calls himself “a very stable genius”.

Dr. Justin Frank's method was simple: he examined the president's patterns of thought, action and communication and applied theories of psychoanalysis. The technique was first used during WWII, when British and American authorities asked psychiatrists to examine Adolf Hitler's behavior, providing a comprehensive portrait of a highly-disturbed personality.

Dr. Frank has done the same. He admits he's never encountered a personality like Trump’s in 40 years of work as a psychoanalyst. And for good reason – he discovered that Trump had emotional childhood wounds which were so massive that the such a person could never submit to opening his soul to another without experiencing a complete mental breakdown.

Trump was born rich but had the misfortune of having a distant, rather cold mother and an extremely authoritarian father, a disastrous cocktail for any child’s development. His mother, from Scotland, was the youngest of 10 children and her parents likely lacked sufficient time and caring to go around. Years later, she could not give to Donald what she didn't receive.

Also, when she gave birth to his younger brother, she nearly died, undergoing four surgeries. Her long absence likely left the then two-year-old traumatized, making it difficult for empathy to develop later on.

“One of the things that you do when you're feeling ignored and abandoned in some way,” Frank says, “is develop contempt for part of yourself. You have hatred of your weakness and you then become a bully and make other people feel weak, or mock other people to make it clear that you’re the strong one and that you don’t have any needs.”

To make matters worse, his father was demanding and critical, with a narcissistic personality. “When his father was there, he ran the house like a kind of tyrant, where there were so many rules and everybody had to do what he said. Donald was, I think, frightened of his father.”

Trump’s father was emotionally — and often physically —
Trump on the couch
continue...

Sigmund Freud would undoubtedly find Donald Trump a fascinating patient to psychoanalyse.

absent, creating in the boy, and later the man, a case of “father hunger”. This helps explain Trump’s adulation for dictators such as Vladimir Putin, Rodrigo Duterte and Xi Jinping.

When his father was present he would say, “You have to be strong. You have to be tough. Never apologize. Never complain. You have to learn to be a killer.”

Lack of empathy and a need to treat people disrespectfully offers little chance for the development of a balanced person. What did happen is that Trump became stuck in an infantile state, dominated by suspicion, the impulse to destroy, and irrational illusions of grandeur to compensate for feelings of insecurity.

The author not only discusses his emotional origins, he looks at resulting pathologies and devotes a chapter to each of the following: lying, narcissism, destructiveness, racism, sexism and misogyny and language. All are fascinating to read and the treatise on Trump’s use of language is especially perceptive.

Essentially, Trump uses the words of a real estate salesman, conveying emotion that serves primarily to call attention to himself. Take, for example, the word great. Dr. Frank writes: “In Trump’s usage, great is a wish and a sales tactic more than a fact. The word is so vague as to be meaningless, as in his victory speech: ‘First I want to thank my parents, who are looking down on me right now. Great people… I had truly great parents.’

“Trump’s inability to think of more specific adjectives to describe his parents speaks both to the lack of intimacy he shared with them as well as his own narcissism, which extends to the rest of his family as well.”

The author goes on to write that the lack of a wide vocabulary or the inability to correctly articulate feelings could signal that Trump suffers from dyslexia, a neuropsychological condition that affects emotional, cognitive and social development.

This, along with his difficult parents, could explain his disruptive behavior at school. And because learning was a struggle for Trump, he developed contempt for schoolwork, which we now see in his contempt for reading or, indeed, for facts.

Overall, the book has a multidimensional intensity that can boggle the reader’s mind. Dr. Justin Frank’s psychoanalytical interpretation of Donald Trump’s behavior is just not just believable, but breathtaking.

Reviewed by Patrick Schmidt
Ongoing research in neuroscience is doubtless revolutionizing our understanding of culture, how we make it and how it makes us. John Medina has furnished us a very readable and enjoyable, even entertaining introduction to our brains, their evolution and their functions. Medina spares us the overdose of technical terminology so often found in discussions of our cognitive system and the mapping of its functions. He gives us the lay of the land and marks the trails, providing an interesting and easy to follow route. This book thus serves as a very useful starting point for the layperson.

Fortunately, too, no hype. Medina is not part of the overly enthusiastic branding and marketing of this knowledge being done by so many self-help purveyors, would be gurus, teachers, trainers and true believers. He expresses a healthy respect for what we do not know and clearly calls our attention to it, which is, in the case of our brains, is an enormous continent of unexplored landscapes and functions. Knowing how our brains can jump to conclusions helps us not to jump to conclusions about our brains.

Whether educating ourselves or others, Brain Rules is a call to fully exploit the whole person in learning. We should not exclude but also not limit ourselves to words on a page, images and diagrams but exercise the panoply of media, functions and resources that lead to cognitive integrity in experience, feeling and communication.

The book is subtitled, 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School, thus echoing a common definition of culture as that which enables us “to survive and thrive in our various environments.” Culture is thus not an abstraction, but a living functional process embodied within us. We are culture, we live it and it lives in us, and our brains, are our cultural executors.
Book Review

Jesus in India &
The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam

by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad
Islam International

These two books came as a gift to me from a Muslim colleague who is currently a refugee seeking asylum, while at the same time assisting other refugees and asylum seekers. Both volumes are reprints of books authored and published at the beginning of the last century by an Indian religious leader, the founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at, a community to which my colleague belongs.

Frequently considered heretics in Pakistan and elsewhere, Ahmadis frequently suffer persecution and experience restricted religious and civil rights in various Islamic countries, making both their presence and return problematic.

Jesus in India which I read first, provided me with perspectives that were quite unfamiliar to me though I am somewhat a theology and history buff. I did my master’s degree in the history and practice of religious ritual and my doctoral work on the psychology of learning and human development. However, my researches were largely focused on Judeo-Christian and Western perspectives, so this was new ground for me and widened my outlook.

In essence, the author, who claims messianic status, maintains that Jesus did not die on the cross, but recovered from his injuries and went on to seek to preach to the Lost Tribes of Israel in what is today largely Afghanistan, influencing the shape of values and beliefs reflected in Islam and Buddhism.

The book is written to largely provide historical and theological support for this version of the Jesus story and sort out the claims to messianic missions in Islam as held or proclaimed on the part of imams and prophets.

In addition to my deep Catholic upbringing and engagement, I also studied and experimented personally with Buddhist and Hindu practices and learned to respect their spiritualities through the teaching masters and gurus I came into contact with.

It was easy to recognize valid spiritual affinities that were shared by these traditions as well as being enriched by the fresh perspectives that each brought. Today’s many non-denominational spiritualities and therapeutic interventions are heirs to these traditions.

On the other hand, the second book, The Philosophy of the...
Teachings of Islam felt more familiar to me in the sense that it reflected the religious and moral framework similar to that I was raised in and accentuated the values and behaviors that were the familiar challenges of life as I have come to live it, imperfectly, but ideally.

The book is organized to address five questions:
1) The Physical, Moral and Spiritual States of Man,
2) The State of Man after Death,
3) The Object of Man’s Life and the Means of its Attainment,
4) The operation of the Practical Ordinances of the Law In this Life and the Next, and
5) Sources of Divine Knowledge.

What I found fascinating was the realization that current research and discoveries about human cognitive integrity and neuroscience might reflect and support, in particular, the concepts discussed in the first of the Five Questions, the one that the author most extensively deals with, “The Physical, Moral and Spiritual States of Man”.

Today’s evidence seems even more solidly in favor than the 19th century psychology, epistemology and philosophy available to the author in his time. It would be interesting to see this re-expressed in terms of our present understanding of the universe and the physics of nature.

Perhaps the successors of the holy man or followers of his tradition are currently doing so. In any case, we are discovering that insightful ancestors and contemporaries were in belief and practice quite aware, in their own terms, of the cognitive integrity now touted as fresh scientific discovery.

My purpose in so briefly reviewing these two books is primarily to share with my interculturalist colleagues the importance of understanding and responding to the religious diversity both within our belief systems and those differentiating us into diverse confessions. This diversity underlies many of the seismic cultural and political developments in today’s world and is frequently misused by brokers of power to divide, oppress and kill.

Sharing our stories on the level of faith and beliefs and learning to listen to them sympathetically is essential if we are to understand and find the antidotes to many of the deadly conflicts which infect us. I owe a debt of gratitude to my colleague who did exactly this, not only by connecting personally with me by sharing her experiences of suffering for her religious faith, but by giving me these two books to deepen my knowledge and understanding of her tradition and allowing me to relate my own religious story and beliefs to hers. Love, sharing and understanding are the jihad that both she the author would have us embrace.

Reviewed by George Simons
This six-day event will have as its theme

Building Dialogues on Diversity

towards a future of hope

The submissions for the pre- and post-congress workshops, as well as the practitioner and academic tracks are already closed. We will send out notice of acceptance by January 10th 2019. The Film Festival submissions are still open until the 6th of December.

More information at:
https://www.sietareu.org/
While globalisation with its quick flows of people, information and technology has been a fact for many years and many lessons have been learnt, the ever-increasing scale and pace nonetheless adds to the Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA) the world find itself in today, with the challenges posed seemingly increasing rather than decreasing.

The conference theme thus focusses on creativity and innovation as we want to explore new approaches and ideas to familiar problems that nonetheless present themselves anew every day.

Exploring these VUCA dynamics and how intercultural competence is and can be used to navigate these challenging waters therefore seems to be more important than ever. The conference aims to continue the dialogue between scholars, trainers and practitioners as all three groups will contribute valuable insights to this discussion and to explore together new and creative ways of promoting and embedding intercultural competence in organisations and to managing in a VUCA world.

We are looking forward to seeing you in Paris.

Conference Chairs: Grant Douglas (IESEG, France) and Barbara Covarrubias Venegas (IACCM and FHWien, Austria)

Web: iaccm-congress.ieseg.fr
Contact: iaccm2019@ieseg.fr
Events, workshops, congresses

SIETAR Europa Webinars

Dec. 10th 2018, Monday at 17.30 – 18.30 (CET)
Speaker: Dr. Michelle J. Cummings-Koether
Topic: “How psychological contracts work, and how they can influence the success or failure of international assignments”

CCC - Break

Dec. 4 2018, Tues. at 11:00 – 11:40 am (CET)
Moderator: Barbara Covarrubias Venegas
Topic: “What does persuasive communication in different cultural and professional contexts mean?”

Leuven, Belgium

27 May - 2 June, 2019
SIETAR Europa 2019 Congress
The theme is “Building Dialogues on Diversity - towards a future of hope.” More information can be found at https://www.sietareu.org/
Contact: congress2019@sietareu.org

Bath, United Kingdom

21-25 Jan, 25-29 March, 10-14 June 2019
Developing intercultural training skills
This 5-day course is for trainers wishing to learn more about theory and practice of intercultural training,
25-29 March,
Designing and delivering intercultural training
The more advanced course for those who wish to deepen their knowledge, both to integrate intercultural topics into their current training and also to deliver their own intercultural training courses. Exchange of experience with other participants
Information at: www.lts-training.com/ or contact adrian.pilbeam@lts-training.com

Some Funny English Phrases

Online Everyday
The SIETAR Europa group, discussing
How the Language You Speak Influences the Way You Think
on LinkedIn, has now over 8000 members. Plus it offers videos, articles, books, tools for the intercultural profession. To join, click here:
https://www.linkedin.com/groups/2740568

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

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