Experiencing Italian Culture as seen through the eyes of three expatriates

Johannes Goethe in the Italian 'Campagna' (painting by Johann Tischbein 1787)

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SIETAR EUROPA
637 bd de la Tavernière
Residence l’Argentière - Bât E
F - 06210 Mandelieu la Napoule
Tel.: +33 4 93 93 36 59
communication@sietareu.org www.sietareu.org
when adapting a constructivist worldview, we automatically take responsibility for the social contract that generates power relations. (see page 15)

Our correspondent Dan MacLeod continues in the tradition of Jean de la Fontaine and wonders what a bear — who doesn’t eat fish, only looks at them — might make of their world...and what they represent to his. (from page 17)

After the last issue, a few readers made some critical points concerning Richard Lewis’ piece “SIETAR Russia” and it stirred up some necessary reflections, critical examinations of our purpose and role as a journal, and thoughtful exchanges among a number of SIETAR members. Here, we want to thank those who have made the effort to write to us, who care and who were so generous to share their feedback with us. It made us better. We hope that in the future we can continue to listen to each other, see each other and remain open to all that we may not yet see. For that, your feedback is invaluable. So, thank you again.

To finish, we want to wish you all a wonderful holiday season and happy 2020.

Patrick Schmidt, Editor-in-chief

Italy: a state of intoxicated self-forgetfulness?

“We are all pilgrims who seek Italy,” Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote in a poem in 1789 after a two-year stay in the land he and many northern Europeans had long dreamed of. He was positively taken aback by the passionate, vivacious Italians as compared to his demanding, rational German background.

The experience was so powerful that he asked himself, in his report Italian Journey; if he was literally going crazy: “Naples is a paradise; everyone lives in a state of intoxicated self-forgetfulness, myself included. I seem to be a completely different person whom I hardly recognize. Yesterday I thought to myself: Either you were mad before, or you are mad now.”

In this issue, three expatriates — American, Russian, British — have written about their immersions in the land of la dolce vita. I’m happy to report that none claim to have gone mad, but their intense quest to understand the unique Italian way of life reveals to us a similar transformation in their minds. (starts on page 8)

Newly-elected SIETAR Europa president Tamara Thorpe is our interviewee for this issue. Reading about her experiences, thoughts and vision gives a clear idea of the dynamic American, living in Ireland, who wants to make the SIETAR Europa organization known to the world. (from page 3)

Milton Bennett makes an interesting contribution with his piece “Power and Paradigms”. He argues quite persuasively that,
Interview with

Tamara Thorpe

The newly elected and enthusiastic President of SIETAR Europa

In studying the history and social background of the United States, you’ll find that what makes the country unique compared with previous civilizations is the profound belief you “can achieve anything that you set your mind to”.

You could go so far as to say this oversimplified trust in everyone’s potential, blended with a belief in the “pursuit of happiness”, is what forms the American character: optimistic, spontaneous and pro-active. And this last trait explains why many Americans want to take the initiative, to be at the forefront and lead.

But what are the traits and skills of those who lead? Research tells us they have a positive attitude towards difference, a desire to create change and help others move forward. An effective leader encourages a team to perform to optimally at all times, which drives organizational success.

One person who incarnates this is Tamara Thorpe, the newly-elected President of SIETAR Europa. Raised in the city of Los Angeles, she discovered early on that leadership is the key to realizing one’s potential. At the age of 14, she began creating her first leadership training programs, understanding that the capacity to lead was something that had to be learned. And her first experience abroad taught her that travelling and experiencing cross-cultural differences enhanced one’s sensitivity and potential for leadership.

Take a quick look at her website and you can’t help but feel the bursting energy and bubbling enthusiasm. Expressions like “kickstart”, “launch” and “change-makers” describe a no-nonsense mover who precipitates renewal and transformation. I was most curious to learn more about her background, what makes her tick, and her vision for the future.

How did your interest in interculturalism begin?

My intercultural journey really began when I was in high school. Our director had a home in Majorca and, in the summer, she’d bring students for an immersion experience. When the opportunity came for me to go, it seemed like something not to pass up. I was 16 and to be able to travel to Spain was a privilege which ended up being a transformational experience.

While I was in Majorca, I remember telling her, “I really think I want to do this travel thing forever. What could I do that would put me in that position?”

“Well,” she said, “you could teach English as a second
language; that would allow you to go anywhere in the world." So I left Spain quite determined to teach English and travel the world.

After graduating, I did a six-month semester-abroad in France, as I'd been studying French for a very long time. Then I went to the University of California, San Diego to get a linguistics degree with a specialization to teach English as a second language.

It was a theoretical program—we looked at the components of linguistics, what forms language, the role of culture, all of which was very interesting to me. We also had classes in anthropology and political science which focused on understanding world cultures and societies. I continued my studies in French and Spanish as well as Portuguese, then earned my Cambridge TOFEL certificate and took a job in a language school in Seoul, South Korea.

What was the experience like?

Quite challenging. Besides the different language, people and culture, it was my first time travelling where I found myself illiterate. It wasn’t the same experience when I was in Spain or France. Korean culture was a new ball game.

So I took Korean classes—learned the alphabet and the basics—Once I could read and speak some Korean, the students were generous about sharing cultural information. When you start learning another language, you learn a lot about other people, their mind-set and approach to the world. It’s really a nice entry point, learning about or adjusting to a culture.

But my biggest challenge was the loss of anonymity. When you’re in a homogeneous culture, such as Korea, you really lose your anonymity. Walking down the street, everybody knows who you are, is interested in who you are. And that loss of privacy was rather overwhelming.

I stayed one year in Korea and then returned to California for five years to teach English as a second language at San Diego State University. It was a wonderful opportunity to develop professionally; I was on a college campus working with students from all over the world at different stages in their lives.

At the same time, I got more involved in leadership, coordinating and developing short-term programs. That was the first time I saw the value of professional associations and the potential of networks, after becoming an active member of TESOL in 1997. And I became involved in

Teaching English in Seoul, Korea was a new "ball game", a dramatic cultural change from Tamara’s life in Los Angeles.
Tamara was heavily involved with the Children’s International Summer Villages, which exposed young people to international cultural differences.

TESOL’ International Black Professionals and Friends Caucus, and was chair from 2000 to 2003.

Eventually I worked for another non-profit institution, the Amity Institute, which coordinated exchanges for foreign-language interns to come to the U.S. and support foreign language programs in K-12 schools and universities. We were a small organization with a relatively large impact, placing about 100 interns a year across the country.

There were real cultural-adjustment issues, such as placing a young person from Senegal in Coon Rapids, Minnesota. We redeveloped on-site training programs to help both the interns and the host families. We also had an outbound program sending U.S. students abroad. This is where I got to apply my leadership and program knowledge about how teams work and how organizations run more efficiently. I was there for five years.

Finally, I relocated to Victoria, British Columbia in 2003 as an accompanying spouse, and there I attended Royal Roads University to earn my Masters’ in Leadership and Training.

**What was your Master’s thesis on?**

I looked at the connection between international education and leadership development. The huge selling point universities offer is to send your kids abroad to have a transformational experience, become local leaders and make the world a better place. I was quite curious what the connection was, if any.

I collaborated with CISV Victoria, a peace education program for children and youth and conducted an action-research project as part of my thesis. I found that young people who are exposed to cultural differences via an international education develop a more global mind-set. They gain skills in facilitation, a positive attitude toward differences, a desire to create change in their community.

I concluded that these fundamental attitudes and basic skills need to be fostered through additional programs. This idea that a one-shot, three-week foreign experience will sort of magically produce a leader is not really what happens. It’s more the idea that the transformational experiences can be furthered by continuing to exercise attitudes, skills and knowledge.

But is a three-week experience abroad going to generate a transformational change? I would think a young person needs to spend at least six months to a year abroad for real, profound change.
Well, the CISV International has been running international programs for over 70 years now. They are camp-based experiences for children aged 11 to 17 who spend three weeks interacting with people from 12 to 15 different countries, cultures and languages.

Those exchanges are pretty transformational for young kids and act as a catalyst that can lead to something lasting. What's important is how those experiences are understood, debriefed, and then channelled into further training to enhance potential leadership development.

How did you get to know about SIETAR?

While I was doing research for my Master’s, I came across Milton Bennett’s work on the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity and, through that, learned about SIETAR. I attended my first congress in 2006 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I was very excited because, at last, the work I was doing had a name! It was the beginning of a deep dive into intercultural communication as a field and a profession, as well as the start of my own business in leadership and intercultural training.

After some years in Canada, I returned to the U.S. and moved to Albuquerque. I continued to do some work around cultural adjustment but my real passion was leadership and the relationship with cultural intelligence, cultural competence.

In 2012, I re-branded my business to focus on millennial talent, helping young professionals develop their leadership skills and growing organizations create cultures that are innovative and agile. I became known as someone who facilitates and drives change. I remained an active member of SIETAR USA heading the scholarship committee for five years.

I moved to Ireland one week before the Dublin Congress in 2017, was flattered when Livingstone Thompson asked me to take on SIETAR Ireland. At the time, they had — no Board, nor members, and no programs nor activities.

We rebuilt SIETAR Ireland by hosting small monthly meet-ups and that’s when it became evident to me that there’s a large international migrant community looking for opportunities to connect with other people. Most of our members today are not people who would identify as intercultural professionals, but people who do intercultural work in their respective fields.

Whether HR professionals, tech entrepreneurs, police of-
ficers or teachers, they’re part of SIETAR Ireland, a place to share and learn from one another. For example, one of members, John Lee, founded a tech company called Culture Mee. John and his partner Dee created an app that shares the power of culture with business travellers. It just doesn’t give travel information but also the cultural insights.

We’re also having a nice local impact, bringing together active people who are passionate about migrant communities. Concepts of inclusion are coming to the forefront as Ireland becomes more culturally diverse.

Now that you’ve become President of SIETAR Europa, what are your plans and vision?

For me, the SIETAR Europa (SE) Board is an unexpected opportunity. It wasn’t something I’d aspired to. When I joined, it was clear to me there’d been a strong desire over the last five years to improve the way the Board functions and delivers on its mandate. But there seems to be no collective agreement as to how that change should occur.

Every member of the Board has to wear two hats. I can be a member of SE and think about what our mandate is but also represent SIETAR Ireland and what it needs. They are extremely different things. One of my visions is to make it an association that is able to help national SIETARs build capacity. As it stands today, SE isn’t equipped to do that.

This vision is not necessarily my own but one I’m trying to carry forward from those before me. I want to help SE become an organization with the impact it deserves, both in supporting national SIETARs and promoting intercultural consciousness, raising awareness of our profession, being recognized for our expertise.

The first step we have taken is to bridge the communication gap between the doers and the Board, and to lighten the load of the Board by expanding our committee structure. Bastian Küntzel, the Vice-President, is a tremendous person, and has already been instrumental in moving the organization forward.

I feel extremely fortunate to have worked with the people on the Board last year and equally fortunate to have a wonderful group of people on the Board this year. We all share a similar vision for SIETAR Europa to become better and accomplish more. We look forward to bigger resource-building so that SE can truly fulfil its mandate.

From the bottom of my heart, my grand vision is to leave the SE organization better for my having been there.

Interviewed by Patrick Schmidt
An American living in Italy
Beyond the rose-colored lenses

by Alessandra Veronesi

Many often wonder if I’ve lost some marbles when I mention that after living in New York for twenty years, today I am gainfully employed in Faenza (Italy). Leaving a city of 8 million people for one of 58,000 can sound a bit mind blowing.

The story goes like this: two years ago, following careful consideration of risks and rewards, I took a one-way flight to Italy. Against my better logic and judgment, I did not arrive with a job. Who would want to hire an economically fortunate, child-rearing aged, relatively entitled American in a country where the average salary is 24K? The answer is no one, because I tried for two years and no one hired me in advance. (I must mention I was particularly equipped to do it as my father is Italian, being born in Milan gives me dual-citizenship, had previously lived in Italy ten years of my childhood and I am bilingual).

I arrived in early August when of course everything is shut down. This is something I’m still getting used to, as it includes daily conveniences such as the gym, pharmacies and doctors’ offices. A forced vacation was the last thing a type-A anxious, results-driven, Uber/Hello-Freshing individual like me needed, yet you know what? 20-day vacations are something everyone should look into.

When September came around it was an uncertain time, but a heroic time of sorts looking back. After twenty-four meetings with exactly twenty companies, where a considerable amount of hiring managers snagged a kiss from me on the cheek, by the end of November I had valid reason to believe I would be employed soon.

I’ll spare 98% of the drama that happened during my experience working in wealth management, as the only traditionally Italian aspect I seem to have experienced during this time were inconsistently late payments.

As of today, a bit more than a year later, I’ve accepted another job, in a different industry, where I am responsible for leading international marketing at a software company. Generally tense, power hungry episodes are no longer a part of my daily life, though I’ll miss being one of only four women at a conference breezing to the bathroom.

Relaxing a bit into this new role, I find myself in Faenza, which is a provincial city famous for its ceramics and proud Faentina culture. Women parading around town are elegant and certainly know how to whip up a delicious batch of tortellini. Homes are clean, laundry is tidy. By Italian standards it is a dignified city, and people here are honest and proper and good.

It’s not one of the top places people visit when they come to...
An American living...  
— continued

Italy, let’s be honest, but people who live here are satisfied in their households and tummies. Which, based on who you talk to, could very well be the definition of success.

Oh, Faenza. The sweet smell of piadine (typical Romagnolo bread which for all intents and purposes is basically pita), Sangiovese, and summer festivals on hay stacks while slapping mosquitos off each other's limbs and faces. The city all its satisfied citizens would describe as, “It has everything! There is even a Decathlon, what more do you need?”

I can’t help but chuckle. There are at least fifty sports stores just in Manhattan (according to my casual Google search now), and a wide array of bike messengers in-between their casting auditions, willing to deliver any of your recently purchased merchandise to the high-rise of your choice (for a nominal tip). The value and convenience of $7 almond-milk-lavender-infused lattes, today have turned into entire meal budgets for me.

Though we are just scratching the surface, below are some macro-categories that feel noticeable to me in this wave of life:

**FRIENDSHIPS & RELATIONSHIPS**
This year, nine friends from New York came for a visit and we had a marvelous time. I couldn’t help but notice that seven out of nine were single, and absolutely loving it (we are in our early thirties).

Contrast that with my partner’s Italian friends, who’ve all been coupled for years (going on over 5) without ever asking themselves what’s out there on the other side of the river. No two-year deadlines, or difficult “the talk” conversations. Loyalty is a carefully drawn out process that is glued together with stability with your family, friends forever and hometown pride. Weddings are afterthoughts, in fact the past wedding I went to was announced in the following way: “After being together 11 years we figured it was a good time to get married in June”, that was it, six months before the wedding.

Needless to say, relationships in Italy are cautiously cultivated over time and people do not tend to integrate outside their comfortable platonic nuclei. There are designated sets of friends from the towns people grow up in as children and never a need to look elsewhere for amplified exchanges.

**LA FAMIGLIA**
Another difference, is that a vast majority of people here have someone in the background constantly taking care of them, their super moms and super-local families. You’ll never run out of food because either your mom made you too much to bring home, or your uncle brought you agricultural...
An American living in ...
— continued

goods from his or his friend’s farming activity, and if you’re lucky, you may even know someone who straight up gives you wine and olive oil.

Those who have grown up in the United States, and surely a few other countries outside of Italy, remember a time in their lives when they suddenly became responsible for their own laundry, cooking and cleaning. I for once, distinctly remember my freshman year of college when my parents asked if I intended to keep coming home every weekend. It happened to my friends too, we just kind of grew up one day because it was expected.

Not to sound bitter, but thirty-something friends of mine here occasionally still bring their laundry home, and do so, in a mode of self-sacrifice to actually keep their mothers happy, as most mothers here live to feed their kids and launder their clothes. It’s their love language, they traditionally like to feel needed. And I like receiving bundles of local food packages so we all win.

BELLA FIGURA
Finally, we mustn’t forget about the bella figura (the good impression)? Although money can be tight, remember also that no one leaves the house thinking comfort first. It’s about making sure everyone sees you at your best in case you see someone you know. In the States we dress well for ourselves (our style is sometimes debatable, but that’s another point for another article) whereas in Italy, you dress well for others. It’s a form of good manners.

Bella figura is not just about fashion. As you embark on your daily galivant around town as an Italian, remember also to never be too personal. If someone asks how things are, answer vaguely and stoically. When food shopping, strange questions such as “Why does this scallop look like it has an orange tongue” are not something the fish vendor answers comfortably. Shrieking in delight over the freshness of the bread you are about to buy is also extremely uncalled for and underappreciated. In other words, don’t be extra.

To conclude, as anyone may intuit, this is but the tip of the iceberg and there is much to expand upon when it comes to these anecdotal tidbits of personal observation. Workplace culture, politics, transportation, traffic, family honor, gender dynamics, bureaucracy, fear of the unfamiliar, particularly when it comes to other races, ritualistic eating habits, career expectations, to name a few. The benefits and beauty of this country are clear, but if you’re planning on living here, be prepared for many more nuances of assimilation.

Alessandra Veronesi is currently responsible for international marketing at her company in the tech field. She can be reached at: ak.veronesi@gmail.com
Russian - Italian misunderstandings

A classical case study on the “fluent fool” phenomena

by Oxana Timakova

Are we always interculturally ready for our life in a new city? How we adapt depends on our habits, culture, the novelty of the situations as well as our experiences in our native hometowns.

I was born and grew up in Moscow, Russia, and for some years now I’ve been living in Milan, Italy. I started studying Italian before coming here, and now speak Italian fluently, having no problems with understanding the language. But sometimes, there is something more in communication than the literal translation of the words. In the last years I have learned much about the Italian culture, but it still doesn’t help avoid misunderstandings. And some are impossible to anticipate. But I should say that living in the country helps being prepared for cultural misunderstanding.

During my first years, I had to have a small operation and I went to the doctor’s. He checked all my documents and records and told me:

“Great, we could do everything in one month (it was May and I was thinking of completing everything before the 21st of June),”

The doctor looked at me with surprise in his eyes: “Why in one month?”

Then it was my turn to be surprised. What was my mistake, I knew about seasons’ difference! My Italian husband helped me and said:

“Dear, in Italy ‘before the summer’ means before August.”

And here all my theoretical knowledge was useless. In fact, in Italy August is the month when most of the Italians have holidays. The 15th of August is a national holiday and sometimes it’s considered as mid-summer holiday. So in Italy, summer means August.

For me on the 15th of August summer is already finished. There are several Russian proverbs I grew up with that point to this. Like “Пётр и Павел час убавил, Илья-пророк два уволок” which means Peter and Paul reduced the hour, Elijah, the prophet, dragged (drew) away two.

This proverb talks about two orthodox holidays. One is Feast of Saint Peter and Paul on 12th of July and second one is Elijah’s day on 2nd of August. So the meaning of the proverb is simple:
**Russian - Italian ... — continued**

*In Russia, the nights are generally colder and longer in August than in June and July.*

12th of July, when the feast of the apostles Peter and Paul is celebrated in Russia, the sun should go its way from horizon to horizon one hour faster than on the longest days of June 21st-24th. And the 2nd of August, the day of St. Elijah, the duration of the light in the sky must be reduced by 2 hours. Which is actually correct only in the northern part of Russia, but communicates the idea that the autumn is approaching.

The second one is “На Илью лето до обеда, осень после обеда” - On Elijah’s there is a summer before lunch and autumn after lunch. Also this proverb tells us that the 2nd of August is the turning point between summer and autumn.

When I was a child, we used to spend summer in the village with my grandmother. She told me that after the 2nd of August I could not swim in the lake. The nights were colder and longer than in June and July and, even if it was hot during the day, the water didn’t have time to be heated after the night.

There is also a proverb which recalls what my grandmother told me: “До Ильи мужик купается, а с Ильи с рекой прощается” – Before Elijah man bathes, but with the Elijah says goodbye to the river.

All these proverbs show that by the 2nd of August summer is already finished. And it’s not only a matter of proverbs. For example, my parents like visiting me in August and we go to the Italian seaside together, as a way to extend their Moscow summer.

So, for me, who grew up with the idea that August is summer, but with a slight smell of the coming autumn, receiving a reply “before summer” with the idea that it meant “before August” was quite surprising. It was not a problem of a language misunderstanding. Awareness of how seasons are perceived in Russia and Italy didn’t help me communicate effectively. And even though we were talking in English, for my doctor “before summer” meant before August and for me before the 1st of June.

Now I am living in Italy and I teach Russian as a foreign language and intercultural communication. This episode is always vivid in my mind when I advise my students not to trust too much the literary translation of words. Culture is much more than literal translation.

How can we avoid such misunderstanding? In my opinion, first we should be aware that misunderstanding may occur in any communication (even in our mother tongue) and in case of doubts, asking questions is always a viable option. And second, learning to ask the right questions is one of the most useful skills in communicating in any language.

**Oxana Timakova** is an intercultural and language trainer. She can be reached at timakova.oksana@gmail.com
Does Italy still have strong local identities rather than a national one?
Apart from when the national football team is winning, there is generally a strong sense of Italian identity. People still have a strong local identity. Regionalism is very strong and people often have a strong sense of their roots. They have a network in their home environment and their family unit is still very closely linked together. From an intercultural perspective, Italy is a relatively high-context culture, in which people rely on friendship and extended family networks in order to get things done.

Can most Italians communicate well in English?
The younger generation has developed a reasonable level of competence and confidence in English. I don’t think as many people get to the level of English mastery people acquire in places like Germany. People also believe they can just get by. This is part of the Italian cultural assumption that they can improvise — do quite a lot with very little. They have a strong belief that they are very communicative, very relationship-oriented. They believe they don’t necessarily need to focus on textual accuracy. What they need to get across is their commitment and enthusiasm.

Generally, however, if you’re talking to people working for multinationals in Italy, you can almost always have a discussion in English. Where Italian becomes useful is in coffee-machine conversation. These “offline conversations” are important. The negotiating table is maybe where northern Europeans think the deal is done but, fundamentally, Italians are looking also at wider issues such as: “How much can I trust you?” and “Who do we have in common?” this kind of conversation happens offline. Always accept a coffee, and always accept an invitation to lunch or dinner, because in those informal moments, you’re going to provide many — not all — Italians with what they need to trust you.

How important is food culture?
A couple of months ago, I was involved in a team-building process with a group of Americans visiting Italy. In the evening, we had dinner and the Italian CEO wanted the Americans to have a great experience of Italian food, particularly his local regional food, and we went to the best place in town. The Italians spent most of the evening talking about food: the food that they’ve eaten, how their mother cooks it, recipes and whether the food on the table was up to standard or not. I think the Americans found themselves a bit lost, wondering especially about how long this conversation, this focus on food, would last. It lasted two and a half hours. Yes, Italians have a great fascination with food.

Are Italians generally direct communicators?
When I first came to Italy and ordered coffee in a crowded bar, I’d try to form a queue. You shouldn’t do that. In my broken Italian, I would say, “Excuse me, I was wondering if you could get me a coffee when it’s convenient for you?” They thought I was taking the mickey. You can go to an Italian bar and say Un caffé! For most Brits, that would be considered
When Italians modify ...  
— **continued**

In the UK, the politeness needs to be actually stated, otherwise it’s not there. For Italians, politeness is the context, and the context is the relationship between the customer and the barman.

Italians are famous for being excellent waiters. That is because they treat every customer as though they’re special. I did a one-on-one programme in Cambridge with an Italian manager and at the end of the programme, he said: “That was great, David, Do you do that for everyone?” I said, “Yes, of course. We aim for that high standard of quality for everyone.” “Wrong answer: he said. If you’re dealing with Italians, everything is special, everything is for you, everything is customized for you. You’ve got to make the customer feel special. An important word in Italian is *particulare*. It means “special” or “particular”. Italy is a highly individualistic culture.

How do Italians deal with the more direct Germans?

We have a simple email activity where we get people to ask for information that has not been provided. A German colleague might write “urgent problem” in the subject line and include somewhere “to be clear”, because clarity is perhaps a much stronger value in Germany than it is in Italy, where there is an assumption that the world is grey, not black and white. There can be misunderstandings about the need for clarity on the German side, and the need to maintain — and certainly not to damage — the relationship on the Italian side.

When things don’t go as planned, Italians want to modify their plan at the last moment in order to adapt to an evolving context. Italians learn very early to constantly adjust and adapt to what’s happening. The slightly stronger requirement in Germany to reduce anxiety by creating the illusion that you have prepared for the future through a plan causes clashes when there is mutual planning between Italians and Germans.

Is Italy’s reputation for corruption fair?

In places like the UK, Germany, Denmark and Sweden, you have a relatively strong sense of trust in institutions — and the belief that rules, processes and procedures are there to help you. In Italy, people are generally allergic to rules, simply because rules historically were introduced by invaders. Even paying taxes was considered paying taxes to the invaders. It was not seen as particularly bad not to pay taxes. It was often considered positive. With a lack of institutional trust in Italy, who do you rely on? Who do you trust? It’s your extended family, the people you have relationships with, your network. Because you favour strong networks above broader universal rules, you’re going to get favouritism to some extent — with the potential for nepotism and corruption.

*Interview by Paul Wheatley*

David Trickey, a British citizen, has lived in Italy since 1980 and is a senior partner and co-founder of TCO International, a global consulting group. He can be reached at: d.trickey@tco-international.com


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The Feeling Italian Photobook

The “Feeling Italian” book uses the photographic language to explore the multicultural identities and global citizenship. 89 images selected from an international jury, together with personal stories and narratives (Italian and English), show the complexity of the Italian identity in the global context today.

“Feeling Italian” allows to reflect on the dynamic, fluid and plural concept of identity. The book offers an innovative stimulus for intercultural dialogue and a useful tool for intercultural education and training.

180 pages with 89 photographs completed by photographers’ narratives and short essays in Italian and in English, written by the book’s editors Maura Di Mauro and Bettina Gehrke, and the members of the Scientific Committee, Milton Bennett, Sergio Di Giorgi and Matteo Balduzzi.

Cost is 25 Euros, shipping costs excluded outside Italy To place your order for a limited edition / hand-numbered copy, section sewn binding, 20 x 20 cm, please contact: project@feelingitalian-sietar.it.

For more information
https://lnkd.in/gg57TxW
I suppose most readers of this publication will agree that the current political situation in the US constitutes an abuse of power. What to do about it is less clear. Arguments are made for and against impeachment, or for one counter-narrative over another. What we are not doing is considering the idea of “power” itself.

Power is a slippery concept. People talk about it as if it is a tangible thing that you either have or don’t have, but it is not a thing at all. Power is a description of a relationship. People in that relationship agree that one or more of them have a dominant position in some context and the others are subordinate. In some cases, people agree on institutional rules that determine dominance, such as winning a majority of votes in the electoral college. In other cases, agreeing to power dominance is more visceral, such as children fearing a schoolyard bully or people acquiescing to a charismatic cult leader. Sometimes, as we are now seeing, the institutional and visceral forms of power coalesce in demonstrably dangerous ways.

In a contest of power, people who believe that power is a thing will usually prevail. The reason for this lies in the knowledge paradigms that we all use to make sense of the world.

If their worldview is based in a relativist paradigm, people still think there is a real reality, but they believe that everyone’s view of that reality is constrained by some context. Power is the imposition of the views of one context on other contexts, for example through colonialism, imperialism, assimilation, or ethnic/racial/gender dominance. In a relativist paradigm, any such exercise of power is automatically illegitimate, since it interferes with the right of each context to exist on its own terms. Arguments against positivist power abuse based on relativist principles mostly fail, however, since they challenge the positivist assumption of a natural hierarchy of civilized people dominating savages. Relativists tend to think that charges of racism and bigotry will be taken seriously, when to positivists they seem unrealistic or meaningless and thus look like contrived attacks. It doesn’t help that relativists sometimes do try to use institu-
Einstein (the original modern relativist) is purported to have defined insanity as “doing the same thing over and over again and hoping for a different outcome.” Relativists have been attacking positivist exercises of power as racist for decades, to little avail. They keep on doing it for the same reason that positivists keep on ignoring it – both groups are doing what another physicist, Max Born, called the most dangerous thing on earth: believing that there is one truth, and one’s self has it. The insane result is a political impasse that is more susceptible to foreign influence than it is to conciliatory dialogue.

To take a more effective stand against both abuse and insanity, we need to position arguments in a new paradigm. That paradigm is constructivism. People with a constructivist worldview think that reality is socially constructed, and that we are necessarily responsible for the social contract that generates power relations.

This means that our collective acquiescence or antagonism to certain conditions is a central factor in their existence. For instance, when we acquiesce to the idea that it is all right for business leaders to be narcissistic and even sociopathic, it is likely that political leaders will follow suit (and vice versa). By implicitly selecting for those traits, we support their exaggeration, like nature selecting for colorful feathers and generating a peacock.

The constructivist argument against abuse of power is to redefine the social contract that supports exaggerated displays of power. Minimally, this means we must vote for leaders with humility and support every effort to enable others to do so. Democracy is not a thing; it is a social contract that is constantly being rewritten by the people who vote. There is no such thing as our vote “not mattering,” even if we live in a gerrymandered district or a polarized state. Did we vote for the state government that controls the voting district boundaries? Did we vote for the school board members who control whether critical thinking is taught in the schools? You get my point.

In addition to voting, we should be more critical of our own social activities, all of which combine to form the social contract. Do those activities include watching and commenting on reality television shows that exploit exaggerated competition? What about shopping at stores owned by well-known abusers of power? Or investing in companies run by charismatic leaders who think they are masters of the universe? Of course it is impossible to know and act upon every incidence of pathology in the social contract, but having it as a goal is an important part of critical awareness. Like voting, there is no such thing as “not mattering” in the social contract, since it is nothing else but us.

Milton Bennett is one of the leading thinkers in the intercultural world and the creator of the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). He can be reached at: idri@idrinstitute.org
Il était une fois...

Wishes like fishes...

by Dan MacLeod

Edward Bear was a very smart bear, an idealistic bear, idyllic bear.

Unlike other bears, his cave had posters on the walls.

Winnie-the-Pooh, Smokey-the-Bear, Yogi and Booboo with a pic-a-nic basket.

Edward liked to look at that picnic basket when he was in bed, he thought of it as his dream, then dreamt of it.

Edward dreamt a lot, even when he was awake, perhaps especially then.

For example, he did not like fish. He was a very nuts-and-berries dessert bear but what he liked best was meat, meat of any kind, meat-meat-meat...

Rabbits are habits hare de riguire, raccoons are boons of fat, beavers are leavers of watering mouths and porcupine are fine, but deer, oh deer, my dear! Deer are the dearest of all...

was a song he sang to himself as he sang himself to sleep.

And in sleep, he’d dream and he’d dream of fishes, bouncing upstream in silvery flight, rows of fishes all in a line, a river of silver above the blue river descending in waves of white.

Edward Bear did not eat fish but he liked nothing so much as to watch them plow upstream with the whole river against them.

Edward knew that the fish did not know a world existed beyond their own watery one. They were too busy struggling upstream to look from side to side. And it didn’t look like they liked oxygen either, all they wanted to do was dive back into the water that was pushing against them.

Like life itself, thought Edward.
Although he had no idea what that meant. It was something he’d heard a human say in the park where he went looking for picnic baskets when he had nothing better to do.

He also had no idea why the fishes wanted so badly to get upstream. It was like they’d all forgotten something, had to get back home à tout prix.

He didn’t know why he thought that but somehow he knew the fishes must have been there before. Why else would you work so hard against a whole river except they knew where they were going?

So then he thought of them like wishes, each with a dream of its own.

Wishes like fishes... After an afternoon of berry-eating at the river, watching wishes float upstream, he’d go home and sleep and dream of wishes like fishes and fish in the sea.

Wishes like fishes and fish in the sea each one a dream for my honey and me...
each on a mission, each one a dream.
Wishes hoping to become dreams come true.

He said that to Edna and she agreed,
fishes were like wishes because
a glimpse into another world.

The fishes made them dream,
thinking of how many there were
in the world under water.

They loved the sun flashing on the shiny fish skin
when they jumped beyond blue-and-white waves.

The fishes would disappear to reappear an instant later
too far away to be believed, magic.

"Ah, that one smells honey, look at it jump!" said Edna.
"And that one! A pic-a-nic basket for sure!" answered Edward.

Edward Bear believed in magic,
had seen it in the sea with his own eyes,
which is always the best way to believe in magic,
by making it real.

He believed in wishes and dreams come true
and wishes become dreams come true.

Magic is only magic to those
who refuse to believe
and Edward believed
in the fishes
and in his dreams.
He sent his wishes to the fishes, both river and sea.

*Wishes like fishes*
in river and sea
carry the dreams of
my honey and me
and maybe they drown
and maybe they die
but they never give up
and always will try and
sometimes they succeed,
otherwise why would they do it?

he sang to himself in his head before he fell asleep.

Edward Bear wished Edna would eat one of the fishes
(she liked to eat fish, river or sea, it didn’t matter)
and hear his wish and drop by his cave for tea.

He dreamt of the two of them back at the beach next summer.
After a while he dreamt of picnic baskets.

— for Sidney Hall
Interculturalists are familiar with the range of approaches to culture in the social sciences and the intercultural field itself. Many of us started with the rather positivist and essentialist studies that provided initial insights, first best guesses into the behavior of cultural groups, but were also a slippery slope in the direction of bias and stereotyping.

Subsequently, we have been turning our attention toward the iconic, memes, linguistic, performative and social constructionist approaches and storytelling as elements and theories for understanding and using culture, as well as teaching about it and applying it to the challenges we face. These can often show up as disparate and un-integrated perspectives.

Mai Nguyen’s book could best be described as “turning the page” on intercultural research, learning and practice, not because it negates these earlier and continuing efforts but because it puts them into perspective. It clarifies both where they may remain useful and where they no longer serve us, or even fail us in the light of what neuroscientific research and cognitive science are revealing about the integral nature of human beings and how we function. We have landed on a “fresh page” in the face of long centuries of dichotomist thinking and credence that divided us into mind vs. meat, spirit vs. matter, body vs. soul, etc.

This can be hard to digest, but accepting our human integrity opens the door to a more holistic view of the genesis, development and creation of the elements of culture in and around us. Culture is the result and the agent in our unique capacity to create what we need on all levels to survive and succeed in existing and newly developing environments.

It is the unique, agile, adaptive human capability that has largely taken over from, though it interacts with the slow genetic evolutionary development found in us and in the rest of nature. This in turn offers us new levels of awareness and self-understanding, as well as fresh and effective ways of managing self, relationships, communities, organizations, commerce and the ecological environment we are immersed in. In the words of the author, “Culture is not just socially learned, but geographically influenced, genetically inherited, and neurally enabled.”

This is a large book with an enormous range of content, providing insight, consequences and tools for management of organizations, leadership, collaboration and even marketing, along with solid documentation and references. But it is far more than an academic publication or a business book, as it is able to identify the role of and integrate neuroscience into how we see globalization and manage diversity, how we motivate self and others and...
how we communicate and negotiate. The agenda is formidable. Going forward, there is much to unpack, explore and try out as we root ourselves in our new sense of human integrity. At the same time, we become alert to the power of investigative neurobiology and psychological ventures that will more and more involve artificial intelligence and elements that have already begun to “hack” our human systems.

We see a potential for great good, health and new potential as well as possibilities for manipulation, control and exploitation. As we navigate in both opportune and dangerous times, the understanding and support found in these pages make the book a “must read” for opening avenues for reworking our social, personal and work lives.

With the insights and tips furnished by the author, one can easily implement insightful approaches to communication and negotiation, creating new levels of understanding and more effective decisions and settlements.

For example, one highly functional model, STREAP-Be, offers a path that addresses the fundamental aspects of a change process. The acronym stands for: Safety, Trigger, Reward, Emotion, Alignment, People, and Behavior. It applies neuroscientific savvy, instructions for creating the trust, the actions, the motivation, the essential human reactions and social behaviors needed for solid progress in new directions. The model contains step-by-step the path toward effective change by paying careful attention to the simple human dynamics of perception, feeling, framing ideas, releasing energy, telling and aligning personal and cultural stories that provide a common context for facing and meeting a change challenge. STREAP-Be delivers the antidote to the lazy brain’s need to wake up, to its “control freak” resistance to the unfamiliar and the uncertain, and to its slothful tendency to replicate the past rather than innovating a desirable future.

When approaching culture as we seek to manage diversity, the book provides two very essential perspectives. First, we need to develop contextual awareness about how culture is created, used and interpreted. Context, not culture itself, is the software of the mind, the operational environment of culture’s interpretation, application and development. Secondly, in approaching intercultural learning and cultural competence, we need to assume a positive rather than a problematic perspective, curiosity rather than fear of mistakes. Culture, seen as an iceberg, is cold, formidable, a hazard.

It is easy to get frozen into the do’s and don’ts and catastrophic what if’s, rather than connecting via our sameness while recognizing difference as a trove of treasures to be explored, a bowl of cherries to be shared.  

Reviewed by George Simons
In remembrance of Claude Bourgeois

It is with deep regret and profound sadness that we announce the passing of a valued colleague and friend at SIETAR EUROPA, Claude Bourgeois, on September 12th 2019.

Claude was on the SIETAR EUROPA board, representing SIETAR France and served as President of SIETAR EUROPA from April until October 2015. Claude has greatly contributed to the intercultural field and will be deeply missed.

Claude Bourgeois also worked as an international relations manager in a Grande Ecole in Lyon for 20 years. She was then posted in Japan, Egypt and Morocco for 7 years for the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Back in France, she worked as director of small size companies in Paris, Strasbourg, and Vichy.

We extend our sincere condolences to her family and friends.
SIETAR Deutschland BarCamp
10 - 13 June 2020, Pommritz, Germany

Borders and perception
Dialogue and mindfulness
Community and sustainability

SIETAR Europa members are invited to take part in this exciting event which will be held from 10 – 13 June 2020 at a unique location in Pommritz, Saxony on the border between Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic. The main language will be German but sessions in English are also welcome.

What is a BarCamp?

‘A BarCamp is an ad-hoc gathering born from the desire for people to share and learn in an open environment. It is an intense event with discussions, demos, and interaction from attendees. Anyone with something to contribute or with the desire to learn are welcome and invited to join. When you come, be prepared to share with barcampers. When you leave, be prepared to share it with the world.’

What topics do we want to focus on?

We will focus on 3 areas: Borders and perception, dialogue and mindfulness, and community and sustainability. As is usual in a BarCamp, the final choice of topics for individual sessions will be determined by the participants themselves when they meet at the event.

Where will the BarCamp take place?

Pommritz is on the border of Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic. Pommritz is 34km from Görlitz and 79km from Dresden. The nearest railway station is a short walk from the seminar centre. Participants live and interact in the tastefully restored historic buildings. Accommodation is available in a wide range of categories from single, double and shared rooms to camping facilities in the park. The peaceful, rural setting creates an ideal environment for mindful dialogue. For more information about the location see: www.lebensgut.de

Where can I get more information?

Website: https://www.sietar-forum.de/
Contact: office@sietar-deutschland.de
The following four pages of advertisements are from the sponsors, who generously supported the Sietar Europa Congress in Leuven, Belgium.
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**Events, workshops, congresses**

**SIETAR Europa Webinars**

Dec 4, 2019, Wednesday 18:00-19:00 (CET)
Speaker: Kirsten Wähchter
Topic: “Challenge our perception: tools to overcome cultural stereotypes”

Jan 22, 2020, Wednesday 18:00-19:00 (CET)
Speaker: Dr. Elena Shilakhovchuk
Topic: “Level Up! Digital Games as an Effective Medium of Intercultural Skills Acquisition”

**Jan 22, 2020, Wednesday 18:00-19:00 (CET)**

Speaker: Dr. Agnieszka Ches
Topic: “Cross-Cultural Studies and Their Business Applications: Focus on the Arab Culture”

**CCC - Break**

Dec 12, 2019, Thurs 11:00 - 11:40 am (CET)
Moderator: Eileen Petzold-Bradley and Joanna Sell
Topic: “What tools can work in intercultural mediation?”

**Krems, Austria**

Dec. 5 - 8, 2019
Applying the New Paradigm to Intercultural Training* conducted by Milton Bennett at Donau University. Open enrollment in addition to students in the Intercultural Masters program.
Contact: alexandra.zeilinger@donau-uni.ac.at

**London, United Kingdom**

10 December, 2019
SIETAR UK Christmas Drinks
Venue: London School of International Communication, 15 Holland Park Gardens, London, W14 8DZ
Timings: from 6:30pm to 9:00 pm
More information at https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/sietar-uk-winter-party-tickets-67289704317

**Milan, Italy**

10-11 December, 2019
Embodied Culture: Discovering the Feeling of Self and Other in Cultural Context facilitated by Ida Castiglioni.
The course deals with the relationship between cultural identity and body awareness.
More information at http://www.idrinstitute.org

**Leiden, The Netherlands**

Feb. 21-22, 2020
Foundations of Deep Culture Learning
This 2-day seminar is the first of a series of seminars at the cutting edge of intercultural education.
Learn about deep culture’s influence on cognition, identity and emotion.
The seminar integrates the latest insights in mind, brain and culture into a rich learning experience.
The facilitators Joseph Shaules, Matthieu Kolleg and Yvonne van der Pol invite you to explore how these insights and research can be applied to intercultural training.
More info: https://japanintercultural.org/foundations-seminar/

**Pomminitz, Germany**

10 - 13 June, 2020
Borders and perception, Dialogue and mindfulness,
Community and sustainability
SIETAR Europa members are invited to take part in this exciting BarCamp event.
BarCamp means the final choice of topics for individual sessions will be determined by the participants themselves when they meet.
The event will be held at a unique location in Pomminitz, Saxony on the border between Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic.
The main language will be German, but sessions in English are also welcome.
For more information about the location see: www.lebensgut.de

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**Online Everyday**

The SIETAR Europa group, discussing

**Rethinking International Education**

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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