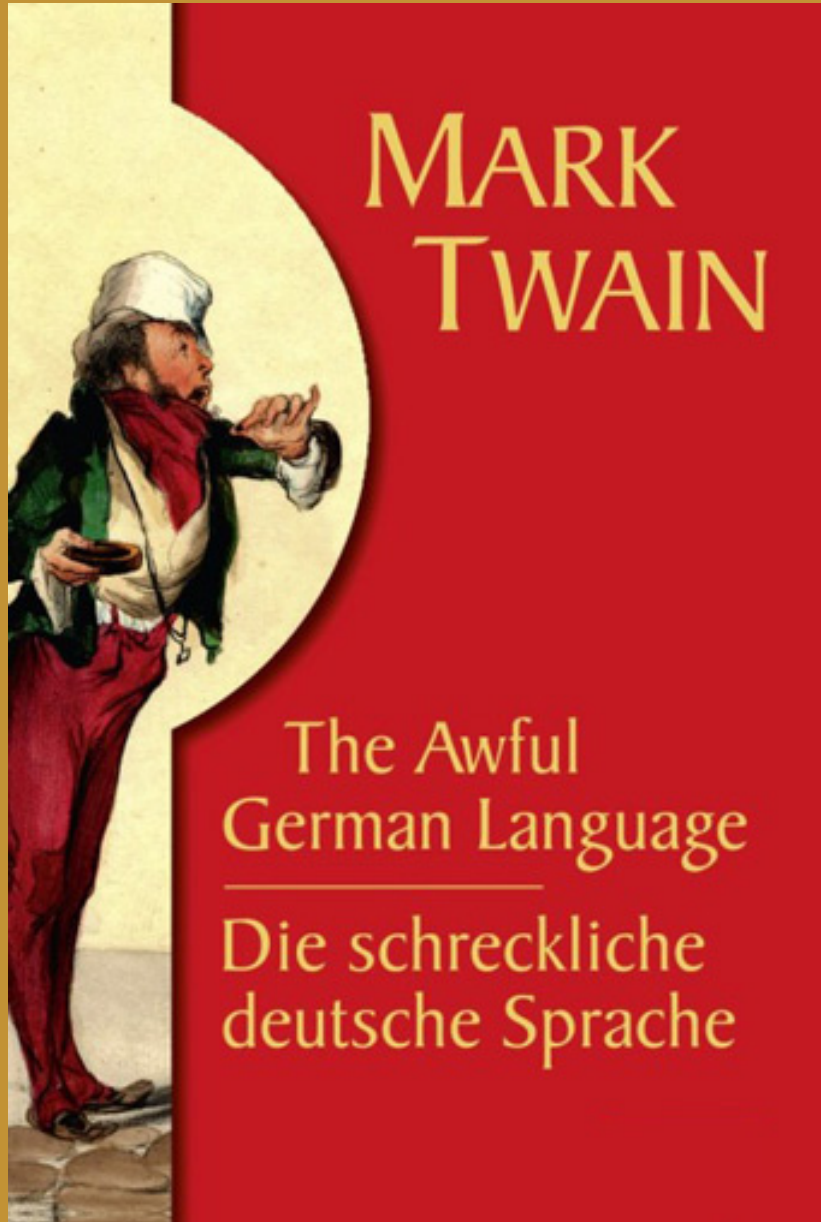


# SIETAR JOURNAL



## The Awful German Language

*An updated  
rewrite of  
Mark Twain's  
most famous  
ethnocentric essay*

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SIETAREUROPA

### Impressum

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# SIETAR Journal

## Editorial

### Mark Twain's Culture Shock in Germany

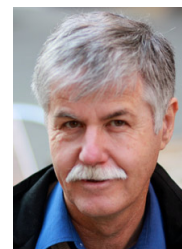
Mark Twain gave his country a voice by writing in the idioms and rhythms of the people. Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer--two characters he created out of the clay of Hannibal, Missouri--are beloved all over the world. But "father of American literature" was not a full-time novelist; he spent as much time writing short stories and satirical essays, one of the funniest being *The Awful German Language*.

Twain was trying to master the "devilish tongue" in Heidelberg and his frustration found an outlet in mocking the overly-complicated grammar. On a more profound level he was in culture shock, dealing with a radically different pattern of thought, and his proto-linguistic critique was the happy result.

In fact, he enjoyed learning German and eventually became somewhat fluent. Years later, while living in Vienna, he was granted a private audience with Kaiser Franz-Joseph. Twain planned to impress the emperor and prepared a speech in German. Unfortunately, when the big day came, he froze in the imperial presence and was unable to remember his lines!

Three-quarters of a century later, my own attempt at German was similar enough to Mr. Twain's that I decided to reprise his infamous essay. (see p. 8)

SIETAR is dedicated to the development of intercultural



relations and George Simons is one of our most idealistic members in this regard. His background as a religious counselor, college professor, international business consultant and author has given him a wealth of cross-cultural experiences. He offers thoughts on our organization and the role of interculturalists in the globalized world (see p. 3).

The Occupy Wall Street movement has, in two short months, lit a spark heard 'round the planet. It's a true American grassroots revolt against the injustice of 1% of the population owning 40% of the nation's wealth. Non-partisan and, in fact, apolitical, this is a call for socio-economic change in the tradition of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. (see p.10)

The Christmas season is approaching and we thought this quote from Australian peace activist Margaret Holmes would be appropriate: *At Christmas, all roads lead home.*

A very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from everyone at the SIETAR Europa Board!

Patrick Schmidt  
Editor-in-chief

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# George Simons



## An interview with one of the most active members and supporters of SIETAR

The 13 American colonies were founded by northern European settlers, mostly from Great Britain, fleeing religious persecution. Known then as the white, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon group (WASP), they laid the seeds for individualism, self-initiative and 'time is money' which was to shape a new nation known as the USA. As Irish, German, Polish, Italian immigrants came later with their Catholic faith and collective behavior, confrontation was the inevitable result. As sociologists tell us, when the dominant group feels threatened by the ways of a minority, it often leads to resentment, defensiveness and anti-immigrant behavior.

George Simons grew up in such an environment. Born and raised in the small town of Bedford, just a few miles out of Cleveland, Ohio, his family was of Polish and Austrian immigrant background. Although the languages of Old Europe were often spoken during the meals, it was made clear to him early on that to be a good American, you had to speak English. Without even knowing it, this language clash along with the conflicting values within and outside his family laid the foundation for him to become an interculturalist.

In college he immersed himself in philosophy, writing, theology, anthropology, psychology and foreign languages. His curiosity on how people develop led him to become a university chaplain and lecturer in comparative religion and personal development. Subsequently, he did his doctorate on

the psychological dynamics of small group learning.

Some years later, while lecturing in Germany and Poland, he noticed subtle, but important differences in way people behaved and thought. It was then he became fascinated with intercultural communications and joined SIETAR France in the 90s. Since then, he's been an active and most generous member of SIETAR, organizing congresses, trying to bring professional standards to interculturalists as well as setting up a group that discusses all sort of intercultural issues.

Probably because of his upbringing, his manner of speaking reminds one of the folksy dialogue you might find in Mark Twain's 'Tom Sawyer'. But don't be fooled by his simplistic talk; he's a prolific and profound thinker, having written over 10 books, not to mention countless articles and books reviews. His writings reveal an intensely observant and vivid mind, whose spare, tightly written prose could be compared to that of an Ernest Hemingway.

He also possesses a natural American entrepreneurial spirit promoting many business ventures, his most successful one being the creation of the award-winning diversophy games for developing diversity and intercultural competence.

Wanting to find out more about what makes him tick, we talked to him in his home in the southern French town of Mandelieu.

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# George Simons

— *continued*



*The main street of Bedford is a small, typical American town of 10,000 people; it is where George Simons received his cultural roots.*

**George, you are one of the pioneers in intercultural field – you’ve been intercultural trainer, educator and consultant for over than 40 years. How did your adventure with intercultural work start?**

My adventure with the intercultural, I would have to say, began with being born into an immigrant family. My mother’s father Stanley Domanski was of Polish blacksmith who served in the tsarist army at a time when, as he loved to put it, “Poland was crucified between two thieves.” He was in fact a man who could create and build almost anything you asked him to.

My other grandfather, Anton Simonovich, better known as “Tony the Tailor” was a journeyman couturier who came to New York to study fashion, decided to stay, and moved his wife and daughter to the small Western Reserve town of Bedford, Ohio, where he set up shop for the better part of his life.

This mixed heritage thrust me into the struggle of acceptance into a sometimes immigrant-resentful and anti-Catholic local American society. While Polish and German were liberally spoken at family gatherings, there was also the prevailing attitude, “Don’t teach the kids this old country stuff; let them be Americans.” In all of this we learned that somehow to be ashamed of our origins, and while Grandpa Tony could speak six or seven languages quite fluently, I would have to wait a good while and pay in both time and money to learn the

languages that I now know. Everyday life as I was growing up was an incredible mixture of different nationalities, full of both discoveries and frictions.

By the way, while some immigrant names got changed by the immigration officers at Ellis Island who could not spell them, our family name became Simons, when we got tired of hearing “Simonovich the sonofabitch.”

Many years later I am still discovering the multiple tensions created by cultural bifurcation. For example, in my extended Polish family, the attitude was, “If everybody cares for the other person, then everybody gets taken care of.” Entering into the dominant culture of US Protestant capitalism, I was supposed to learn, “If everyone takes care of number one (him or herself), everybody gets taken care of.” Somehow this realization came to me only in my 50s when I was invited to lecture at the University of Warsaw – my first trip to Poland. I broke down in tears when boarding a crowded tram, a teenage boy stood up and offered me, as an elder, his seat. The flood of memories about the kind and familial habits of my Polish family came flooding back to me in an instant.

When I was a kid, my dad’s weekly fishing buddies were not just Poles, Slovaks, Czechs Germans, Italians, Greeks and you name it. My father had insatiable curiosity about life and the return from our fishing excursions on Lake Erie

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# George Simons

— *continued*

*The Austrian immigrant grandparents of George Simons, along with his mother, taken around 1943 in Bedford, Ohio.*



would inevitably include having dinner at one of the many possible ethnic restaurants that were part of the melting pot of Cleveland Ohio. He encouraged me to “try everything at least twice, because the first time might be a fluke.” My dad also encouraged me to choose a high school to my liking, so in fact I wound up in a boarding school on the East Coast of the United States where I lived and studied with classmates from all over the country and various parts of the globe. I learned, in the words of novelist Thomas Wolfe, that, “You can’t go home again,” but I also discovered in my immigrant spirit the ability of making myself at home wherever in the world I found myself.

These were pretty much my unconscious intercultural learnings – in those days I had never even heard the word “intercultural,” though I was living it. Consciousness came in my college years when social issues became realities and there was racial and ethnic conflict in the streets. In graduate school I was part of a group that organized interracial home visits, encouraging families across racial lines and learn about each other. Intergroup relations was an important theme of my work in my years as a neighborhood pastor and as a university chaplain and lecturer in comparative religion and subjects of personal development.

Additional breakthroughs occurred when I won a Danforth Fellowship which took me to the West Coast to study

for a doctorate in psychology. There I met people doing international consulting and training and was asked to join in projects abroad in both the business realm and the human potential movement which was strong at that time. Cross-cultural psychology was a novelty but also a hot topic.

I began to travel to many countries. I stayed for longer periods in Germany leading workshops and Gestalt psychology and living in a commune, as well as frequently lecturing in communication at Management Center Europe in Brussels. There I first encountered the work of Geert Hofstede, which was just becoming known and discussed at that time.

It was also a period when the emerging feminist movement led lots of us question our gender culture. With a friend I established a men’s center and conducted regular weekend workshops for men, both in the USA and abroad, entitled, “How to love an angry woman.” I still believe that gender is not a sub-culture but an urculture. I have coined this word to describe those deep and often transcultural social constructions that unconsciously define our world, and live on the bottom of the cultural iceberg, where they go unnoticed and unchallenged, and are rarely studied by interculturalists. Other examples or urculture are the economic system, religious assumptions etc. Mircea Eliade had it right, I believe, when he said, “You can’t understand the culture unless you understand the religion that gave birth to it.”

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# George Simons

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*Hippie psychologist in the 1970s*

To sum it all up, I came of age as an interculturalist at a time when there were no intercultural studies programs or workshops to define the field, being so to speak, grandfathered into the profession. The formal studies which I feel contributed to my intercultural education were my courses in philosophy, psychology, anthropology, history, foreign languages, linguistics and theology. However, I attribute my ability to benefit from them to the “street sense” that I was immersed in while growing up.

## **What’s most fascinating about that work and what are its biggest challenges?**

At times it may not pay well, but you can rest assured that cultural issues will provide work and opportunities indefinitely into the future. From a professional point of view, I would identify a number of major challenges – and to answer the other part of the question, they are also the most fascinating features of the work.

First, there’s the issue of decolonization: interculturalists are beginning to realize that many of the models, patterns, and dimensions that exist in the boilerplate of our field are largely Western intellectual constructs, often abstractions. While they lead to some initial understandings of difference, they also provide major obstacles that keep us from adventuring into otherness and seeing the world as others see it let alone letting us see ourselves as they see us.

Then, there’s the lack of historical perspective: a lot of cultural phenomena cannot really be understood unless we know how they came about and the role they have been playing in peoples’ self-identification. All too many interculturalists have not been exposed cultural history nor have they been encouraged to develop an interest in it. Religion, as I have already noted, is likewise a missing perspective.

Another important issue is denial: given the focus on change and desire to avoid conflict, there is a strong tendency on the part of an increasing number of us to deny that culture and cultural values are at work not only in our clients and students but in ourselves. Denial often occurs because acceptance of one’s cultural identity or identities has or has had some pain attached to it, and not attending to this pain leads to ignorance about who we are. There is a tendency to see cultural characteristics as something that belonged to the previous generation, something that we have overcome, or must overcome in the process of individuation, rather than resources that we can call into service for mutual understanding, relating, and meeting new challenges. We can’t stop being who we are but we can grow into many cultural personalities.

From the commercial side, there’s branding, marketing, and buzzwords: intercultural services tools inevitably become commodities, which many of us use and sell to

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# George Simons

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*“As the depredation of environments and resources impoverishes many, will interculturalists dare challenge the status quo?”*



make a living. This in itself is normal, but we need to be aware of the degree to which the practices and pressures of the competitive capitalistic economic urculture can limit and distort our work, our self understanding and need for collaboration as interculturalists. Some years ago, in a SIETAR Congress in Budapest, we adopted the theme, “dare to share.” This theme is as urgent today as it was then. We need to understand and be responsible for the culture of interculturalists.

Finally, it's going beyond: Finally, beyond commercial and academic platforms for what we do we need to create an understanding and application of intercultural competence in the larger social consciousness, in politics, international policies, and above all in environmental consciousness. Our world is in deep stress on so many levels and, while we do not have all the answers, we do have some of the tools and ideas that can make a difference. Cultural savvy can add to our ability to live much better with much less, for example. We need to understand the culture of power and fears which drive and support it. At the SIETAR Europa Congress in Kraków we started to take a look together at how virtually interconnected worlds are both driven by and drive culture. We need to learn how to both understand and employ the tools and dynamics of this new world of possibilities.

**How do you think the intercultural field will develop**

**in next years in Europe in terms of the profession of interculturalist, products and services, clients' needs & requirements?**

One of the themes identified for the SIETAR Congress in Kraków in September was that of “The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe.” Currently Europe is under significant stress. Financial and political disasters have led once again to blaming people who are different for our problems. We see politicians to play the ethnic and racial cards to amalgamate and conserve power. Whether we embrace our role in alleviating this climate of fear or not, will largely determine whether we continue with business as usual. Currently we watch revolution after revolution trying to topple repressive governments. Given the trajectories of economics and politics, we dare not look at this as something that Arabs do, but as something that will continue to spread as the depredation of environments and resources impoverish many. Will interculturalists dare to challenge some of this?

When it comes to our interventions, can we make what we do relevant to human needs despite budgetary constraints obsession with ROI (return on investment). We are expected to do more with less on an everyday basis. In the past 25 years, for example, I have watched training programs shrink, first from five days to three, then three days to one day, and often now to half a day. Interventions which at one point were capable of producing significant insight and change

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# George Simons

— *continued*



*As this logo for 'diversophy' suggests, head, heart, hands and the people around us symbolizes what interculturalism is about.*

of behavior in learners and trainees no longer have the absorption time and level of interpersonal connection to do so. Therefore, in Europe as elsewhere we need new heights of imagination and skill in using the tools we have in fresh ways and developing the tools and media that can significantly further cultural competence. French writer Dominique Wolton insists that "communication is cohabitation." That is the challenge, living together with those unlike ourselves, not just peddling our wares in the marketplace and pushing our ideas into other people's heads.

Of course I am preaching and not predicting here – I am not really answering your question. In fact I would prefer to leave it open to the rich imagination of us all to identify what is needed in our world, find the avenues and market niches in which to explore it and exploit it, while developing an increasingly acute consciousness of who we are, what we value, what we can be, and how we can serve.

**You are an author of many books and award-winning game 'diversophy'. Could you tell us a little about the game, what's unique in such a form of learning, how this game supports development of intercultural competence?**

Maybe the best way to answer this would be to take a look at the logo we created for one of the most recent of our diversophy games on Cultural Competence. This logo consists of head, heart, hands, and the people around us. In other words, how

we think, how we feel, what we choose to do, and how we can connect to the communities in which we are embedded. Diversophy, far from simply being a quiz game, immerses us in a new context, one in which challenges, questions, risks, wisdom and sharing are all a part of learning. Questions come flying at us from all directions. In diversophy we play in a group and learn from each other in the classroom or training room, and now we can play these games with others or by ourselves on a computer or portable phone. That's the big picture. You can of course see what we do, sample it, etc., on our website at [www.diversophy.com](http://www.diversophy.com).

**For many years you've been an active member of SIETAR supporting the organization with your skills and knowledge. You are also a great friend of SIETAR Europa helping to develop the organization. You were one of the sponsors of our first SIETAR Poland Congress; you have given to our library a lot of valuable books. You are willing to share your expertise with us. Why do you do that?**

It's just the Polish family attitude, which I mentioned earlier, "If everybody cares for the other person, then everybody gets taken care of."

**Thank you for the interview.**

Thanks for inviting me.

*Interviewed by Marta Nowicka and Patrick Schmidt*

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# “The Awful German Language”

*Mark Twain’s most famous ethnocentric essay revisited and updated*

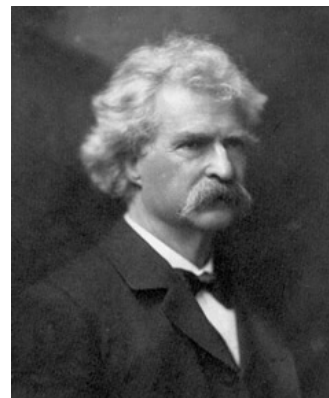
*by Patrick Schmidt*

**O**ne can learn much about the thinking and perception of a culture through the study of its language. That is exactly what Mark Twain did back in 1879 while learning German in Heidelberg. His hilarious essay “The Awful German Language” was an immediate hit worldwide and paradoxically, it was most popular in German-speaking countries. Remembering my own surprises while trying to become proficient in German, I felt that his brilliant study of German logic deserved to be updated.

Many people wanting to learn German as a foreign language have absolutely no idea what the proverb “*Deutsche Sprache, schwere Sprache*” really means. For the foreign student trying to master this language, it often seems like a mysterious logic of communication designed to go against every rule of good common sense.

For example, to be taken seriously in the German language, one needs to conceal the meaning of a sentence by placing the main verb at the very end. Read the following excerpt (literally translated) from a recent newspaper article:

*“The government announced today, that the Finance Minister the new income tax system because of its new format with a self fill-in procedure, which many outside observers it fairer describe, and its simpler write off system, already in other European countries applied, from the first of January of the new year introduced be will”.*



Although it is supposed to be eloquent, it sounds more like Teutonic verse gone amok, leaving the foreign reader both confused and stunned.

This may explain why Germans have a tic, “temporary paralysis”, frequently noticed by foreigners. It seems when Germans are listening to someone, they are intensely waiting for the speaker to tell them the last word. And when it is finally announced, you see an expression of climactic relief on their faces. However, should the iPhone ring or the baby start crying before the verb arrives, they often miss the meaning of the sentence. Then the poor German is left hanging with a large, incomplete sentence in his head, frustrated in not knowing what was said.

This obsession with the verb at the end leads to comical situations. Imagine the following. A young man, let us call him Hans, is declaring his love to a young woman. The phrase “*Ich habe mich in dich verliebt*” goes something like this: “Gretchen, my feelings are so strong that I for the reasons of the beauty of your eyes, your little rosebud mouth, your thoroughly-trained, sporty body and last but not least your sexy Marlene Dietrich voice, with you in love fallen have.” Unfortunately, Gretchen had to answer the ringing doorbell midway through this rambling discourse, and never heard the magic verb. Tragedy strikes again.

But if that isn’t bad enough, the German language com-

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# Donaudampfschiffahrts- gesellschaftskapitän

## The Awful German Language

— *continued*

pounds the problem with the large number of verbs. The general rule, as far as I can make out, is the more the merrier. Therefore, German sentences have lots of “*haben sind gewesen gehabt worden können geworden sein.*” It really sounds like a musical merry-go-around, allowing Germans to make themselves sound self-important, but it is not supposed to be taken at all seriously.

Even more awkward is the German habit of putting many words into one. The words “*Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaftskapitän*” or “*Endbindungsstationsschwesteraufenthaltsraum*” are gigantic, mumbo-jumbo sayings, whose sole function is to terrify the unfortunate foreign language student into thinking that the learning of German is a hopeless cause from the very beginning!

The German language’s handling of the gender, or how nouns are classified according to sex, is total chaos. Take, for example, the noun *Sonne* (sun), which symbolizes power, destruction, force. For some inexplicable reason, it has the feminine gender *die*. The noun *Mond* (moon), on the other hand, which is the symbol of tranquility, intuition and passivity is given the masculine gender *der*.

But the biggest surprise is the classification of the nouns ‘young girl’ and ‘heart’, which are given the neutral gender *das*, presumably to indicate that they are not supposed to



The first page of Mark Twain’s German book. Little did he know how difficult it would become to master the language.

have any sex at all! How the poor foreign student is able to detect logic in this ridiculous classification system is beyond me.

However, the ultimate tragedy of a language system gone mad are the word endings. When someone wishes to express something in German, each part of the sentence must first be thoroughly analysed, so that the word endings have proper inflections. To understand the system requires a monumental intellectual effort that only a masochistic genius might want to attempt. Take the simple phrase “the big hamburger”, which in German is “*der grosse Hamburger*”. If this is in the accusative case, then it becomes “*den grossen Hamburger*”. Using the preposition “with”, it changes to the dative and the endings change - “*mit dem grossen Hamburger*”. “The catsup of the big hamburger” is the genitive case or the possessive, which in German is “*der Ketchup des grossen Hamburgers*”.

At this point, the person attempting to speak German begins to feel a sense of numb horror. But dealing with the plural is even worse, further traumatizing the already linguistically battered student. Rather than to continue tormenting your mind, it is better to enter a MacDonald’s restaurant in Germany and give your order for a big hamburger in plain simple English than to stumble around in this grammatical hodge podge.

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Reporter's Sketchbook

...an American in Montréal

# We are the 99%...

by Dan MacLeod

Jimmy Stewart's life turns into a nightmare in "It's a Wonderful Life".



Everyone in the Western world should watch "It's a Wonderful Life" this year and they should do so in March or June or October, any month but December. How this disturbingly philosophical masterpiece of American cinema became trivial family fare for the Holidays is beyond me...

Or actually not. The film lost money in 1946 (due to being disturbingly philosophical) and sat on a shelf until someone forgot to renew the copyright and it became cheap to show on tv. Because the story takes place on December 24th, marketing was obvious. Director Frank Capra "didn't even think of it as a Christmas story" but it became part of the end-of-year television line-up next to Dickens' *Carol*, Sues's Grinch and Rudolph of the Red Nose.

No matter that Jimmy Stewart terrorizes his children, breaks furniture, gets punched out in a bar, punches out a cop himself, manhandles his defenseless uncle and very nearly commits suicide. No matter that social claustrophobia, economic injustice and existential despair are shown in Hitchcockian "extreme close-up" portraits of panic, bitterness, hatred, rage and insanity. No matter that this *Nighttown* version of Americana is far more realistic than the fairy tale narrative in the foreground.

And so it is that the eternal capitalist engine of a something-for-nothing profit-margin--cynically rebranded--is why "It's a

Wonderful Life" became a Kristmas Klassic and I became a social-democrat at the age of 12.

Jimmy Stewart, the in-spite-of-himself defender of the unwashed masses, confronting the businessman who "owns" the town, says: "Just remember this, Mr. Potter, that this rabble you're talking about... they do most of the working and paying and living and dying in this community."

...

Socialism is a relative term. When I was a kid in Kennedy-era Boston it was called democracy: *true* "American exceptionalism" combined with basic Christian tenets and Yankee common sense.

In post-Reagan America--from coast to coast, except both coasts--it's come to mean godlessness, homosexuality, baby-killing, condescending science and Enemy-of-the-People treason.

But there's something in the famous "99%" that rings as true in the Bible Belt as in New York or San Francisco. As Mr. Obama would say, "It's math." Because within that number are many others.

First, the 9% who are officially unemployed. Closely followed by "real unemployment", guesstimated at 18%. The "underemployed" (involuntarily limited to part-time work) swell the figure to around 24%. Which is barely half of the real cut-off point: 47% of Americans don't earn enough to pay income tax.

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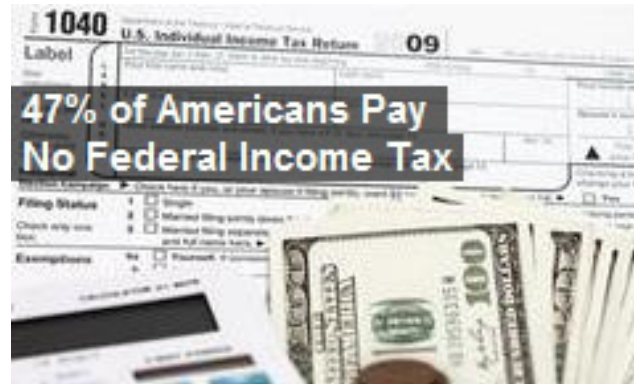
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# We are the 99%...

— continued

*Almost half of the U.S. population is too poor to pay income tax.*



This is the fatal number. A quarter of the country can't get work and another quarter works plenty but earns so little they're explained away as "the working poor".

Half the country's citizens are poor and more of them are white than black, Latino and "ethnic" combined. And those whites are more than likely from right-wing states which spend virtually nothing on public schools and universities.

Half the people are poor and, according to government statistics released in November, nearly one in five lives below the "poverty line". Not a convincing demonstration of capitalism as a healthy, self-renewing system; more like the economic cannibalism common in Third World paragons of democracy like Mexico and the Philippines. That's who the U.S. ranks with as far as "income equality" (behind more than 40 countries, according to the U.N.).

...

Ironically, the same 47% is the fatal number for Republicans too, except they don't see out-of-control financial inequality as anti-democratic. After deadlocking the government on a tax increase for millionaires and (in fact) billionaires, they want to re-write income tax codes so "more people pay their fair share".

This cynically dogmatic disconnect is why downtown parks and squares across America were occupied by protestors. Nothing has changed since the Crash of 2008. In 2009,

afloat in \$3 trillion of bail-out money (the greatest transfer of public funds to private enterprise in the history of the planet), Wall Street executives gave themselves \$ 18.4 billion in bonuses, a figure which reached \$20.8 billion last year.

On the presidential campaign trail, Texas governor Rick Perry boasts he's "created a million jobs, more than the rest of the country put together!" But Texas also has the most people who depend on food banks to feed their families, the most without health insurance, the most undocumented workers.

Mitt Romney, ex-governor of Massachusetts, boasts he'll "get the country working again"; he was a successful businessman before going into "public service". But his business was to take over companies, liquidate employees and out-source, often abroad.

Republicans vow to throw the "socialist" out of the White House and Europeans would be hard-pressed to appreciate the hatred of the American divide. G.O.P. debates feature "patriotic" spectators cheering capital punishment, or that people without health insurance should die untreated. Or jeering a soldier speaking from the battlefield...because he was speaking about being gay.

...

During the Vietnam War, Boston's "yellow" tabloid painted the enemy as godless, without souls; the mothers of Viet Cong soldiers supposedly didn't cry when their sons were killed. I was only ten but I knew it wasn't true. I sold papers at

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# We are the 99%...

— continued

*When losing jobs, homes and dreams, Americans are like 99% of everybody else, they think of their families first.*



the train station for two hours every morning and, sitting on my wagon, read all three. The "Record-American" was photos and headlines, full of crime, sex and sports and read by morons. The "Herald-Traveler" was for Protestants from the rich part of town. The "Globe" was read by everyone else.

Forty years later Boston, like the rest of the country, is reduced to the "Globe" and the "Herald-American". The former offers diverse points of view, left and right, and seeks to be objective within the journalistic tradition of democratic inclusiveness. The latter is not really a newspaper at all.

Nearly-identical tabloids are published in every city and echoed nationally on radio and television. The pamphleteer's potion of finance-and-industry propaganda, jingoistic "patriotism" and Christian fundamentalism written by and for populists who see not only a "socialist" in the White House but, most of them, a Negro.

As television host Jon Stewart (America's unique combination of Mark Twain and iconic newsman Walter Cronkite) points out, National Public Radio and Fox News simply aren't in the same business.

...

The principal difference between Americans and Europeans is the latter know the difference between an arts-and-culture network and a 24/7 fear-and-loathing machine. Or, stated another way, French workers understood shared interests and joined

students in the Mai 68 protests. Whereas American workers backed Dick Nixon on flag-waving grounds and routinely beat up student protestors (referred to as "hippies" or "Combies"). Or, in 2011, middle- and lower-middle class Germans who'd benefit from a tax-break say no "in the national interest".

In the U.S., Republicans recently submerged the country's credit-rating to make a political point: there's no going back on the Bush tax cuts. Their presidential candidates go further, saying the corporate and finance sectors need to pay out even less before there'll rehire anybody. This isn't part of a national conversation about troubled economic times, it's a threat. If the Occupy Wall Street movement has done anything this fall, it's recast the American divide in terms more modern than Left and Right.

Unemployment, underemployment, "under-water mortgages" (the house worth less than you owe), bank foreclosures, bankruptcies due to uninsured health problems...George W. Bush's economic implosion has hit grassroots America harder than anyone.

Flag-waving and Bible-thumping can only go so far. When it comes down to losing jobs and homes and dreams, Americans are like 99% of everybody else on the planet, they think of their families first.

"Family first!" A Republican slogan if there ever was one but it's why America will re-elect the "socialist" in 2012.

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A journalist's impressions of

# SIETAR Europa's Congress in Krakow

*A professionally organised  
conference for professionals*

*by Stéphanie Stephan*



A jam-packed programme with highly interesting key-note speeches, presentations and workshops – this was the reason which attracted around 280 interculturalists from Europe and other parts of the world to come to the culturally rich city of Krakow in Poland in the 3rd week of September.

Many participants greeted each other like old acquaintances and friends. It seemed as if they had met very recently while in actual fact most of them had seen each other three years ago on the first SIETAR Global Congress in Granada/Spain or even back in Sofia/Bulgaria on the SIETAR Europa Congress five years ago.

As at times of new communication technologies it is normal to be reachable around the clock at all parts of the globe, the majority of the participants was up to date of the latest development in their professional or private life. Besides the old hands a considerable number of newcomers, in particular from Poland, participated in a SIETAR Europe Congress for the first time. They can be very proud of their young association SIETAR Polska having been founded only in 2008. They were an excellent host and the motto of this 18th Annual SIETAR Europe Congress 'Interculturalism ahead – transition to a new world?' hit the nail on the head. It was meant as 'an attempt to address the issues raised by transition to, and our own transformation within, a new virtual world and a new Europe.'

Keynote speaker Dr. Olga Kovbasyuk, Professor and Associate Dean for International Relations at the Khabarovsk State Academy of Economics and Law in the Russian Federation and founder of the East Russia Global Learning Center was a vivid example herself as to how it goes if people only meet virtually. A couple of months ago she didn't even know anything about SIETAR as she admitted nor did she know anybody of the association. And yet she stood at the opening in front of a highly competent audience of interculturalists as if she had been working with them for years explaining how global learning can be facilitated by using 21st century tools.

On the basis of several projects which she had initiated between various universities in the US and her own students in the far east of Russia she pointed out that when working together in virtual space crossculturally, the personal element plays a key role. Therefore asking as many questions as possible is a foundation-stone in any virtual dialogue and interpersonal relationship is an essential prerequisite for building trust.

She referred to Professor Nancy Adler who had stated recently, that "the world needs people to learn how to play nicely." According to the keynote speaker the students from Khabarovsk became much more aware of their own culture during the project, their intercultural competence grew considerably and by now at the end of the global

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# The Krakow Congress...

— *continued*



*Two former presidents of SIETAR Europa, Maria Jicheva and Francien Wieringa in discussion during the lively gala dinner.*

learning project, they are on their way of becoming globally orientated personalities.

After this encouraging speech participants were offered a choice of six sessions. Yet it was not always easy to make the right choice. Therefore it was highly appreciated that at the end of the congress many of the presentations were summarized – and criticized by volunteers who had taken part in a session one had missed.

### **What is culture?**

Statements like “Cultures are not true or false, good or bad – they are just different” or “Cultural knowledge does not equal intercultural competence” or “Culture is a dynamic process” could be heard more than once during the congress. They were analysed and elaborated with regard to the inconsistencies of intercultural business routines in many of the fifty presentations during the three-day congress.

A workshop not to be missed was the one conducted by Dr. Milton J. Bennett. He talked about ‘Interculturalism in a Virtual world of Multiple Absolutes’ exploring different intercultural approaches to the traditional mass media and the new internet media with regard to two major questions:

1. How can the media be used to convey experience of cultures more effectively ?

2. How can they be used to facilitate the development of intercultural competence?

In the evening, on the initiative of the IDRInstitute, specific questions such as ethical implications of interculturalism, concepts and tools of intercultural coaches were deepened in a more relaxed atmosphere. In a worldcafé format, different groups moved within 15 minutes from one flipchart to the next while doodling, drawing and writing down their ideas with regard to four topics:

- What is the most useful intercultural concept in your work?
- What unique thing do interculturalists have to offer?
- Intercultural knowledge versus intercultural competence.
- What are the ethical implications of interculturalism: It's neither good, nor bad, it's just different?

A very inspiring exercise which led to more heated discussions long-time after the worldcafé had come to an end.

### **Interaction – highly appreciated**

“Whenever there was interaction in a session, it was very motivating for me,” said a participant who had been to a number SIETAR congresses before. Interaction was guaranteed during the session of Bjorn Eckstein and his assistants presenting the *Diversity Icebreaker* – a demonstration for cross-cultural training.

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*Film directors and editors, Sergio Di Giorgi and Kevin Booker, give some pointers on making an intercultural movie at the Film Festival.*



The concept builds on a questionnaire identifying degrees of the colours red, blue and green. According to the answers of each participant three groups were formed who had first to characterize themselves and then their counterparts. The groups realised during the exercise that they needed each other. They experienced not just an intellectual process, but a mixture between behaviour, emotions and thinking. The *Diversity Icebreaker* is meant to provide a positive starting point for virtual communication and virtual teamwork development. It is often used as a kick-off in crosscultural trainings. The ambiance during this workshop was great and participants really enjoyed the dynamic session.

All in all the atmosphere during the congress was sparkling with energy. An energy and dynamism which hadn't been felt so strongly during former SIETAR congresses as many interculturalists pointed out. And participants had fun, a phenomenon which hardly can be observed on serious events like this.

It was also evident that the high quality of the presentations had an impact on the conversations between the participants during the various coffee breaks. And not to forget: networking had absolute priority.

Also, the city of Krakow with its historic buildings, charming cafés and restaurants as well as its friendly people had

somehow an inspiring influence on the mood and motivation of the participants.

"If I only take back home one single idea from all what I heard on this congress", concluded another participant, "it was worth my while having come here."

The congress in Krakow made clear that the world can't be seen in different national groups anymore. It also became evident that interculturalism will be moving very fast into a virtual scenario. If we want to keep pace with this breathtaking development our cultural sensitivity must be constantly under the microscope.

This can be put to the test in two years' time when interculturalists will meet again for a SIETAR Global Congress in Tallinn, Estonia

## VIDEO FILM

*about the Krakow Congress*

The following link is a short video about the various people from different cultures engaging in these types of robust and fun exchanges at the congress. It was filmed and produced by film festival editor Kevin Booker.

[http://www.linkedin.com/groupItem?view=&gid=2740568&type=member&item=75681030&trk=sae\\_i\\_a\\_sd\\_dh](http://www.linkedin.com/groupItem?view=&gid=2740568&type=member&item=75681030&trk=sae_i_a_sd_dh)

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## Some photographic memories of Krakow



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# Language under the Gun

*The obsession with guns and its influence on American thought*

by Joe Lurie



When I was a Peace Corps high school teacher in Kenya, my students' stunned reaction to the assassination of Martin Luther King triggered my first consciousness about guns in America. There I was in a village classroom, trying to explain to my students and myself how such a killing could occur in a "civilized" country.

Reflecting on the "cross-hair," "target," and "reload" rhetoric of gun control debates in the US, I'm reminded that our language is "shot through" with gun metaphors and associations. And perhaps it was my Peace Corps experience that helped me understand that language usage is often shaped by a culture's history and preoccupations.

Now, more than forty years later, I've learned that guns are in at least half of all American homes and that 6 percent of US high school students say they have brought a gun to school at least once. Each year, about 30,000 Americans are either injured or killed by gun fire. And according to the Brady Campaign to Prevent Violence, in one year there were 17 murders in Finland, 35 in Australia, 39 in England and Wales, 60 in Spain, 194 in Germany, 200 in Canada and 9,484 in the United States.

As I click through tv channels, watching left and right wing politicians and pundits battling in a "cross-fire" of blame, each side looking for a "smoking gun" to explain or cast

blame for horrifying gun-related catastrophes, I've become increasingly aware of how we US Americans unconsciously use gun language to express ourselves, even during the most innocent "shooting the breeze" interactions.

In conversation, we often value the "straight shooter," yet are wary of those who "shoot their mouths off," those who "shoot from the hip" or glibly end an argument with a "parting shot." We caution our friends and colleagues to avoid "shooting themselves in the foot," and counsel them not to "shoot the messenger."

At home, without suspecting what drives our language, we are "blown away" by adorable photos of loved ones; and at the movies, many audiences enjoy "double barreled action" and watching car chases where actors "gun" their engines.

I often ask friends to "shoot me" an email, or have encouraged job seekers to give an interview their "best shot" and to "stick to their guns" if principles are at stake during salary discussions. And if a job is offered, I might congratulate them for doing a "bang up" job.

In other kinds of sensitive business negotiations, I've advised patience, urging colleagues to avoid "jumping the gun" and to be aware of "loaded" questions." When the moment is right

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# Language under the gun...

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An advertisement for gun training in Arizona

for getting the biggest “bang for the buck,” I’ve agreed to bring the “big guns” to the table. We look for “silver bullet” solutions, hoping for “bulletproof” results. And when success is in sight, we say: “Keep at it — you’re going great guns!”

We encourage entrepreneurial risk taking, despite suspecting the project doesn’t have a “shot in hell.” Just “fire away” when you make that “killer” presentation, and if your idea is “shot down,” don’t be “gun shy.” Just “bite the bullet” and go at it again, with “guns blazing.” Don’t be afraid to “shoot for the moon,” even if it looks like a “shot in the dark.”

Having worked as a university executive with students from more than 80 countries, I’ve noticed students from abroad are particularly struck by the violent language in our songs and video games, and they see it bleeding into our political discourse. Many have asked me in amazement why it is even necessary to state that guns and ammunition are banned from university residence halls. Yet, “son of a gun,” already 26 colleges in 3 states permit guns on college campuses. And gun liberalization legislation for colleges is under discussion in at least 9 more states.

I’ve heard staff and students alike stressed by an approaching deadline, instinctively describing themselves as being “under the gun.” Sometimes my colleagues have described emotional co-workers as “loose cannons” or having “hair

trigger” personalities. And from time to time, when a student has gone off ‘half cocked,” psychologists have advised employees to “keep their powders dry” and to review “bullet point” guidelines for handling volatile personalities.

In the same way that the US is flooded with millions of guns (there are 90 guns per one hundred Americans), so our newscasts — “sure as shootin’ ” — are exploding almost nightly with murder stories, reflecting the newsroom mantra: “If it bleeds, it leads.”

When the local story becomes a national tragedy, there is “new ammunition” for both gun control supporters and those who are opposed to fire arm bans in such places as state houses, the halls of Congress, or even the neighborhood bar!

The world of guns has had our rhetoric in its sights for a very long time. And our wounded language — now more than ever with a gun to its head — is telling us that our culture is on the firing line.

*Joe Lurie, cross-cultural communications consultant, trainer and university lecturer, is Executive Director Emeritus at University of California Berkeley’s International House, and a Cultural Detective certified facilitator.*

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## Book Review

# The Language and Intercultural Communication Reader

edited by Zhu Hua

U.S.\$ 27.70, 448 pages

Publish by Routledge

Language plays an important role in any communication as it is through language that we negotiate meaning and understand the world around us.

The book has twenty-two chapters divided into six parts, covering key topics in this field of study from language, thought and culture, theoretical considerations on cultural approaches to discourse and pragmatics, empirical examples of communication patterns across cultures, teaching and learning cultural variations of language use, interculturality, and intercultural communication in a professional context. Each part has an introduction that clearly sets out the tone for the chapters and briefly outlines what is to follow. Each part finishes with study activities and discussion questions.

Do we see the world the same way when we use a different language? There is an ongoing debate about the relationship between language, culture and thought. It is not about putting sentences together, but what to say in a culturally appropriate way, and when to do so that makes our communication effective and is key to successful intercultural communication. We may also come across pragmatic transfer i.e. carrying over meaning from our language background when using a foreign language.

I found the chapter on "The Silent Finn Revisited" (Sajavaara and Lehtonen), most interesting and useful. They point out the stereotypes people have about the Finnish communication style and how different nationalities perceive Finns. The authors



state a national image is a generalization embedded in memory and that the behavior that gives rise to stereotypes is true and real. They furthermore stress that it is the interpretation of the behavior derived from misguided expectations resulting from different cultural framework that leads the observer astray. The saying, "You speak only when you have something to say" - is shared with other Nordics. Therefore, if you don't have anything to say, you keep silent. They explain that Finns make silent observations to gather information rather than ask questions as some other cultures might opt for. The authors point out that the difficulty starts when people make use of their own conceptual categories to organize their observations about the behavior of others. They also say that the forms and topics of small talk in Finland are different, but it is not possible to say that there is less of it. Hofstede's indices tell us very little about this. They explain that speaking is controlled in Finland, like elsewhere, by various situational norms such as silence in church, constraints on 'chatter' at the dinner table, etc. In addition, Finnish cultural behavior also comprises a number of fundamental conceptions of appropriate behavior which give an outsider an impression of silent culture.

The *Reader* is useful for students and researchers in the field of language and intercultural communication. The conclusion discusses key issues for conducting research projects and it provides a wide resource list, not only books but also useful websites, professional bodies and organizations, etc.

*Reviewed by Katrin Volt*

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## Book Review

### My Estonia 2

Berry Junkies, Nordic Elves and Real Estate Fever

by Justin Petrone,  
U.S.\$ 15.95, 370 pages  
Publish by Petrone Print



Probably in an attempt to say, “Understand me!” my Estonian colleague gifted me with the second volume of US American Justin Petrone’s expatriation experiences in the dark winters of Tallinn. Petrone writes about his Estonian life with the turns of phrase of an expert and experienced novelist with street smarts. This makes *My Estonia 2* a pleasurable read whether intercultural affairs are of interest to the reader or not. The level of description gives the feel of really being at the author’s side as he reflects on everything from winter weather workplace politics to shopping for real estate.

The events recounted in the book reflect the year 2003. Much of the book concerns Justin and Epp’s search for a place to live in the city of Tallinn. The search for real estate reveals the class and economic structure of Estonian society and gives a first hand account of various living conditions and growing class distinctions in a society aping the West after its release from the Soviet sphere and pending its entry into the European Union.

One of the most telling events in the narrative is the visit of Petrone’s parents from New York to Estonia. This provides him with the dilemma of how to reflect on, explain and perhaps defend his choice of this remote country to his family. It also forces him to observe in his parents the US American habits from which he came, but now feels alienated from, given acculturation to his new Estonian home. His parents’ presence and behaviors as well as their ongoing expectations of him are a jolt of awareness of how much he has changed under the influence of his chosen expatria-

tion. His reaction is a mixture of familiarity and embarrassment, causing him to reflect and remark, “I had become the ugliest of Americans, the one who left America and didn’t feel particularly bad about it... I had betrayed my nation’s sense of universal superiority.” It raises the question of what we discover about ourselves and our origins when we live abroad for any length of time.

There is a lot of talk currently about the new generation’s relationship to mobility and difference as radically different from what we have become accustomed to in living and working abroad. Petrone, at least mentally, belongs to the “global nomad” tribe. At the end of some 350 pages, the reader is as uncertain as Petrone himself about where his future will be lived out, Estonia, Chile, India, Australia, or the Big Apple. His wife Epp is equally mobile in spirit. There is lots of rumination about what cultural context will mean to their lives, in terms of practicalities, but also in terms of what it is to adapt to and succeed in whatever the next chosen environment may bring.

Petrone is kind enough to include upfront a map of where Estonia lies on the Baltic Sea, not a bad start, when we have all too many people on either side of the Atlantic who guess that Tallinn is in Italy, somewhere close to Milano.

This is a deliberately short review, hopefully just enough to encourage you to have a look and allow the author’s reflections to stir your awareness of your own experiences with diversity and to appreciate the strangers in our midst. *Reviewed by George Simons*

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# SIETAR Brasil hosts its first conference in Sao Paulo

by *Sven Dinklage*

**G**reetings from Brazil! As some of you may have heard, SIETAR BRASIL was founded in August, 2010, and has been bringing together, for the first time, Brazilian (or Brazilian-based) interculturalists and other academic experts of the field. We in Brazil and South America are glad to testify, one more time, the strength of the SIETAR name, which is able to gather professionals with the overall objective to contribute to a more inclusive and tolerant society and world!

It was with this spirit in mind that SIETAR BRASIL organized its first conference entitled “The Global Rise of Brazil: Intercultural Opportunities and Challenges.”, which took place in São Paulo on September 15/16th, 2011 with over 50 participants.

With her opening words, SIETAR BRASIL President Lucy Linhares highlighted the historic moment for the region and the positive energy that collective thinking in the field has been winning over individual interests. The first speech of the conference was conducted by Professor Marina Heck who focused on the OneMBA program coordinated by her, and on the impact it has had on the life of its international participants. Her presentation was followed by Vivian Manasse Leite, who focused on the image of Brazil in the world today and how it reflects in the local's values and identity. On a little more light tone, consultant Sven Dinklage spoke about using film and video in trainings, before colleague Ines Meneses took over to invite participants to discuss their mission and meaning as professionals of the cross-



cultural field. Randall Stieghorst made two interventions during the conference, speaking first on cross-cultural differences within Brazil, secondly stimulating a discussion on lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender cultures in the current Brazilian reality. Then came Marcela Soares Borges Luiz and Marcia Leão Hodson who talked about the local application of the Sensitivity Model of Milton Bennet. To finish the day, communications consultant Paula Zaidan Rodrigues focused on the “Influence of Culture on International Relations” after the Cold War.

On day 2, Lucy Linhares, presented an approach on “The Impacts of Deductive and Inductive Logic on Teamwork in Brazil”. Susana Bandeira and Rafael Guanaes, discussed the role of “guanxi” in doing business with China. Sergio Pereira spoke about the Brazilian business mindset and its importance on the world stage. Mariana de Oliveira Barros conducted her session on “Numbers and Interpretations of Brazil”, having a closer look at the different regional cultures present in Brazil. Finally, the closing speech of the conference was given by Professor Maria Ester de Freitas, focusing on organizational theory in Brazilian companies from an academic point of view.

In summary, this unprecedented conference was filled with the high energy of peers meeting up in discussions on “their” market in Brazil. We look forward to continuing this venture for our next conference (date yet to be defined) in Brazil – it would be our pleasure to also see SIETAR members from Europe there!

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# SIETAR News

## The Passing Away of Silvia Costanzo

*President of SIETAR France*

It is with deep sorrow that SIETAR France announced the unexpected passing of their President, Silvia Costanzo, in the early hours of Tuesday, October 20, 2011. Her bright intellect and warm personality will be sorely missed by all who knew her and the wider intercultural community.

Over the years Silvia influenced reflection and contributed to activities in her beloved field of intercultural communication around the world as a member of SIETAR France, at university and in the corporate sphere. Her heartfelt desire was to advance innovation and foster greater exchange across disciplines throughout the world. We at SIETAR France will do our best to continue the work she started.



## Geert Hofstede Honored by the Queen of the Netherlands

On 16th of September, 2011, Hanze University of Applied Sciences in Groningen, the Geert Hofstede Consortium and ITIM International organized a grand Hofstede Symposium. There were many workshops on applying Hofstede's dimensions in research and training as well as a lively "carousel" debate on the pros and cons of intercultural knowledge in the corporate world. This whole day event concluded with a speech by the Queen's commissioner, Petra van Wingerden-Boers. She informed the very surprised Dr. Geert Hofstede that the Queen of the Netherlands had decided to appoint him the *Knight in the Order of the Netherlands Lion* for his outstanding contribution in the field of intercultural comparative research. SIETAR Europa's President was present to congratulate the very happy Dutchman. You can view the video highlights of the event by clicking here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHWF\\_2MuvCM&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHWF_2MuvCM&feature=related)



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# Events, workshops, congresses

## Krakow, Poland

15-16 December, 2011

*Culture in the Era of (Post) Modern Migrations* SIETAR Polska and the Institute of Regional Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow are proud to organize this conference on migration. The objective is to discuss, analyze and exchange thoughts and points of view concerning processes associated with current migrations. More information at [www.isr.wsmip.uj.edu.pl/konferencje/migration/registration](http://www.isr.wsmip.uj.edu.pl/konferencje/migration/registration)

## Bath, U.K.

16-20 Jan. & 12-16 March, 2012

*Developing Intercultural Training Skills*. This is a 5-day course for experienced trainers in language and management training, who want to develop skills to design and deliver intercultural courses, or to integrate cross-cultural topics into their current courses. The facilitators are

Adrian Pilbeam and Phil O'Connor. More information at [www.its-training.com/ICTTcourse.htm](http://www.its-training.com/ICTTcourse.htm)

## Cape Town, S. Africa

28-30 March, 2012

## London, U.K.

25-27 April, 2012

*Leading and Coaching Across Cultures*. Based on Philippe Rosinski's highly acclaimed book, this seminar integrates the cultural with traditional managerial and psychological perspectives, and addresses challenges brought to the top of the agenda for leaders. 15% discount for SIETAR members. More information at [www.philosinski.com](http://www.philosinski.com), or contact Dina at [dina\(at\)philosinski.com](mailto:dina(at)philosinski.com).

## Konstanz, Germany

29-30 June, 2012

*Global Leadership Competence:*

*what it consists of— how to develop it*. Peter Franklin and a small team of world-known experts are offering an exciting conference on the competencies required to lead people in organizations across cultures. A wide variety of keynote papers and carefully selected workshops will provide approaches and tools for developing these global skills. More information at: <http://www.dialogin.com/index.php?id=224/>

## Online Everyday

The SIETAR Europa group discussing

### “Competence in Intercultural Professions”

on LinkedIn has now over 2100 members in the group. Hot topics: “Decolonization” of Intercultural Theory and Practice,” “Certification for Intercultural Professionals,” and “2011 The EU year of Volunteering.”

For more information, contact George Simons or Mirka Lachka at: [sietareu.volunteers2011@gmail.com](mailto:sietareu.volunteers2011@gmail.com)

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