

# SIETAR JOURNAL



Photomontage by Jacquelyn Reeves

## Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?

### Contents

(for quick navigation, click on the desired article)

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23



### Impressum

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# SIETAR Journal

## Editorial

### Multicollectivity

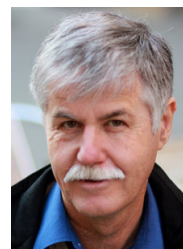
"There is a profound and enduring beauty in simplicity, in clarity. It is derived from so much more than just the absence of clutter and ornamentation. It is about bringing order to complexity."

This quote from Apple's chief designer, Jonathan Ive, is probably what best summarizes our interviewee, Professor Dr. Stefanie Rathje. As keynote speaker at the SIETAR Europa Congress in Valencia, she dazzled her audience with a simple and clear talk about how intercultural training can exacerbate problems like stereotyping and adversary group dynamics. Whereas by teaching people to perceive common membership, interculturality disappears.

Keying on the fact that most people today are part of numerous social groups, she developed the notion of multicollectivity to make cross-cultural situations less daunting. See the feature-interview on page 3.

Dan MacLeod follows up on that theme — the regenerative multicollectivity of his own aging and dispersed family — on the way to analysing Donald Trump's effect on the American political scene. Read "Black Lives Matter", starting on page 8.

Our title page gives you a hint about the ways Americans and Germans are dealing with a new "globalized village".



SIETAR member Jacquelyn Reeves takes an unconventional look at how our public and private spaces are being turned upside down by the Internet revolution and comes to some startling conclusions. Read more on page 14.

Last June, one of SIETAR's most influential members, Maria Jicheva, passed away. It was a shock for all those who knew her. She was a woman of poise, compassion, determination and excellent humor, traits that she used to transform SIETAR Europa into a strong, united organization. We offer here some tributes to her legacy, starting on page 19, that you learn more about this remarkable woman.

Patrick Schmidt,  
Editor-in-chief

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23



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# Stefanie Rathje

## An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker



*Innovation is defined as a new idea, a more effective device or process applied to meet changing requirements. As globalization began to have an impact on us all in the '80s and '90s, new ideas were required for the contemporary needs of an increasingly multicultural world. Pioneers like Hofstede, Trompenaars, Hall, and Bennett generated intercultural concepts and built a new field of social science.*

*Fast forward to 2015: a new generation of interculturalists seeks more refined frameworks, and new explanations, to help diverse groups achieve more together. Enter Stefanie Rathje, a young professor at Berlin's University of Technology and Science, with a straight-forward, yet sophisticated explanation of how different people connect. In this interview, she talks about universal "us-against-them" thinking, the perception that others don't belong to our group. She also shows how this can be countered by the notion that each individual is influenced by multiple cultures due to her or his multiple group memberships (multicollectivity) and that we can transform a potentially negative cross-cultural situation into normality by finding common membership.*

*Her background is quite different than that of most interculturalists. Educated first at a classical German university, she received a heavy dose of American pragmatic*

*thinking while doing her MBA at the University of Chicago. She then began working as a management consultant specializing corporate strategy. In one of her first projects, a Spanish-Finnish joint venture, she saw how eventual failure was caused not so much by cultural differences but due to a power struggle. The experience made her wonder about the interconnectedness of culture and collective conflict, which became the basis of her PhD thesis.*

*Today she's busy with research and lecturing at the Berlin University of Applied Sciences. But she still finds the time to moonlight as a singer in a classical trio and a rock band.*

### **Let's begin by talking about your early years.**

I grew up in a small town called Brunsbüttel, about 100 km northwest of Hamburg, where the Elbe river meets the North Sea. There was not much there and I always felt the town was a bit confined, everybody knew one another. As soon as I got my *Abitur*, I went off to Berlin and enrolled at the University of Arts in communication sciences.

### **Why communication?**

Early on in life, I asked myself why some people communicate well but it's so hard for others. I wondered how conflicts arose when people tried to work with each other. I wanted to understand this.

<b>Editorial</b>	2
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23

# Stefanie Rathje

## — continued

*She did her MBA at the University of Chicago, where she learned the American pragmatic way of solving organizational issues.*



I finished my degree at 23, but felt I was still too young to go to work. I had the idea that I could improve communications in companies if I had a deeper knowledge of how organizations worked. I decided to do an MBA at the University of Chicago.

### **Why Chicago? Why not a university in Germany?**

This was in the mid-'90s, MBAs weren't that common in Germany. You had to go to the motherland of MBAs, the U.S.A. I received a German scholarship and was accepted at Chicago.

### **Upon arriving, you probably went through culture shock.**

It wasn't easy. My English wasn't that good and had no idea of American daily life. I was pretty naïve and overwhelmed by everything. But, funny enough, I didn't really think that much about it in terms of culture because I was so focused on studying and performing in this new academic environment. Country cultures weren't really an issue. I had a very diverse group of friends – American, Indian, English, Dutch – but we were all fixated on the immense amount of work we had to do.

I spent two years in Chicago, then went into management consulting in Europe. I was based in Berlin and had a lot of international projects. That's when I first discovered the im-

pact of culture, working on a Spanish-Finnish project which failed miserably. Some seemed to think it was because of cultural differences but to me that was just the surface. Underneath was a strong rivalry between the Spanish and the Finnish organization. Simply put, it was a power struggle and the cultural differences were just a symptom.

### **So, for you, collective conflict lies more in power dynamics than cultural differences?**

Often organizational conflicts are attributed to cultural differences but below that you can almost always find collective rivalry. And this really got me interested in the interconnectedness of culture and collective conflict. How to create corporate culture in an organizational setting where you have distinct groups of employees from different countries. I studied this at several German subsidiaries in Thailand. I wanted to find out if and how it is possible to create something like a common corporate culture with a Thai workforce and German managers. At the time I was influenced by the traditional literature on interculturality, looking for differences between the groups.

But there was an incident that led me to another path. I was invited to a dinner party with German and Thai guests. I expected it would be easier to talk with Germans but I wasn't really getting along with the ones next to me so I began talking with a Thai employee. After a couple of minutes,

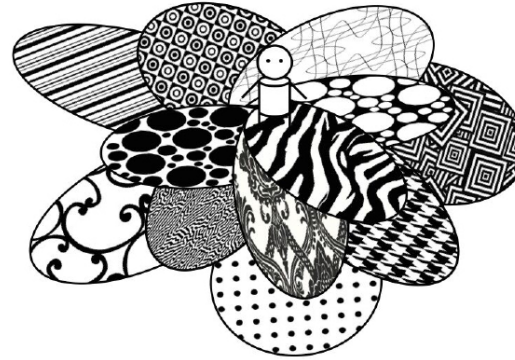
<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23



# Stefanie Rathje

## — continued

*Her concept of multicollectivity, that all people are made up with numerous social groups, effectively challenges the traditional cultural paradigm of homogenous groups.*



we realized we'd both just seen the same movie and we'd both laughed hard at a joke that no one else in the theater seemed to get. I suddenly felt so close to this person and it became clear to me that human connection and understanding haven't anything to do with where we come from. It got me thinking whether problems attributed to cultural differences might be more basic.

### ***Perhaps it was the chemistry between the two of you, somehow it clicked between you?***

For me it wasn't just the chemistry. It was realizing that, despite our different backgrounds, we apparently had the same sense of humor. In that moment, I didn't see this person as Thai anymore, but just as an individual that could become my friend.

### ***So that gave you the impulse to look into communication that it is sometimes beyond cultural differences.***

Not just sometimes. Observing and researching more in this area, I came to the conclusion that most of the time it's not objective cultural differences that lead to conflicts. It's more a question of membership, where we feel ourselves as part of the group. Whenever we think another person is not part of the group, it's more likely to create rivalry and conflict.

This touches on our understanding of culture. The tradi-

tional way of looking at culture has been to assign every human being to one group, i.e. country. You're American, I'm German. We also thought that culture must be homogenous, something consistent that has a strong influence on the individual. Then individuals from one culture must be similar, and distinguishable from people from other cultures. I think this is wrong.

Wrong because of the notion of multicollectivity, a term that I have adopted from Klaus-Peter Hansen. Every human being in modern society is part of numerous social groups on different levels and all these groups produce culture. For example, I am part of my country. But I'm also part of a professional group, I'm a professor. I'm a woman, I'm a musician, I'm a constructivist thinker who maybe approaches culture in a certain way. All these social groups have cultural influence on the individual. If we use the notion of multicollectivity, we begin to perceive that everyone has a unique combination of membership in different groups and their cultures. Just knowing what country someone is from doesn't predict what this person is or thinks or feels. Nobody is predictable.

### ***But if everyone is part of so many groups and cultures, how would you then define interculturality? Does it still exist?***

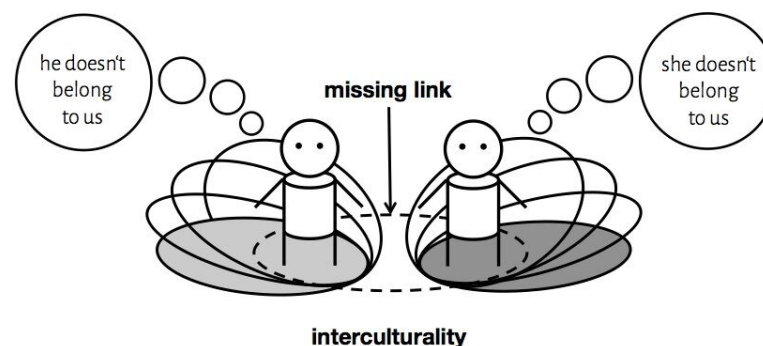
I think it still makes sense to use the term interculturality.

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23

# Stefanie Rathje

## — continued

*Interculturality, according to Dr. Rathje, is when people have something to do with each other and perceive the other as not belonging to them.*



But we should use it in a different way. A situation is intercultural when people who have something to do with each other perceive the other one as not belonging to them. Or you could say that it's intercultural when those of my memberships become activated that I don't share with other people involved.

So it depends on our perception. We always thought: Here's this person from Germany and this one from the U.S. They're from two different countries so it must be intercultural. We cannot say this anymore. Rather, we need to examine how both perceive their respective memberships. If you get them to activate a common membership, the situation of interculturality disappears. I know what I'm saying is radical and it goes against other models that are currently out there.

### ***If interculturality is based on perception, what makes a person interculturally competent then?***

We used to think intercultural competence meant dealing with real and objective cultural differences. It's nice if you know a lot about other countries but that doesn't necessarily lead to competence. To me, it's the skill to understand the constructive nature of interculturality – to understand it's a perception and to transform this perception into a situation that's normal. In short, you can say someone who's interculturally competent is a "normality maker".

Now, the question is, how do we create normality? I think we have two ways. One is to look for membership that we have in common with the other person. That makes it easier for our little brains and hearts to practice inclusion, to divide power and resources and work against rivalry. Or, if we can't seem to find anything in common, we can try to systematically construct a common membership, we can initiate new habits, invent new symbols, new wordings. And that means nothing else than producing new culture.

### ***Culture production. Generating commonality in order to create a new reality?***

Yes! Whenever you have two people, you never have just two cultures interacting because everyone is always part of a multitude of worlds, of cultures. And we can draw from this to find something in common.

### ***With the concept of multicollectivity, you're trying to articulate something new on how and why people interact successfully?***

Well, the notion is not new but it was more on the periphery before. We were focusing so much on country cultures, thinking of them being consistent. And that doesn't really help us advance the field anymore. We need to remember that all of us have different cultural make-ups coming from all the different groups that we are a part of. That's why we have to fundamentally change the way we look at culture

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23

# Stefanie Rathje

## — continued



*Stefanie firmly believes that a good graphical representation is a function of the clear thinking behind it.*

– it can never be homogenous. If we look at all the habits that exist in a social collective, these habits are created by all the members and these members, themselves, are part of so many other collectives that they constantly bring in new ways of doing things. We can use the trendy word “diversity” and pretend it’s something new but it isn’t. Diversity has always been an inherent characteristic of culture. I think this is a new paradigm that we have to understand.

***Turning to another topic, visitors to your web-page can’t help but notice that it’s beautiful, the graphic design is far better than most sites. One gets the feeling aesthetics are important to you.***

The interest in graphics has always been in me. I’ve always liked to draw and even thought of becoming a designer at one point in my life. A picture helps me make an idea more clear. There’s a connection between the logical value of an idea and the clarity of its representation. We often make presentations with PowerPoint but the graphics don’t help us get an idea across if we haven’t thought it through enough.

The graphics are always the test for me. If I’m not able to come up with a clear picture of what I want to say, I know I still haven’t fully understood it myself. Only if the thought is crystal clear is it possible to draw it in a clear and con-

vincing way. A good graphical representation or design is a function of the clear thinking behind it.

***Did you receive any formal training in design or did it develop naturally in you?***

It’s more a hobby. But I learned a lot in management consulting about the visual structure of presentations. As a consultant, you have to come up with solutions to problems and exhibit them as clearly as possible. At the beginning, you’re only allowed to develop one slide. Then they talk about it, say what’s wrong, explain what they’re looking for. You gradually learn how to produce an entire presentation. It’s hard, but good training.

***How do you see the future for the intercultural field?***

I’d like to encourage intercultural trainers to question what they’re teaching right now and to invent new ways to deal with collective rivalry. We need to be bold and convince companies and organizations that the source of problems most often doesn’t lie in objective cultural differences but in the perception of missing collective membership. When we cross this barrier and are able to see the person in front of us as an individual, only then are we able to act normally and address potential problems in an adequate way. Bill Clinton became famous for saying, “It’s the economy, stupid.” As an interculturalist, I’d like to make a variation and say, “*It’s about membership, stupid.*”

*Interview conducted by Patrick Schmidt*

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23

## Reporter's Sketchbook

### ...an American in Montreal

# Black Lives Matter...

by Dan MacLeod

The first thing I should say is, my mother married a black guy.

I came down from Canada for the wedding and it was cute, she said “I will” instead of “I do”. That’s what they say in England. I know because of a song from the Beatles’ “White Album” called just that: “I will”.

The marriage wasn’t in a church, it was in a hotel in Boston, what you’d call a Grand Hotel, but the ceremony itself was in a fairly non-descript room. Afterward, we’d be going downstairs to the fancy dining-room for a High Class supper.

When I was a kid it was a priest but now it was a Unitarian minister and, not only that, she was a female. Also, it turned out Unitarians weren’t just another Protestant sect like Methodists and Evangelists and Calvinists and Lutherans and Baptists and Pentecostals. The prayer was more a sort of poem about the universe and the Creator, as opposed to a specific God. As an atheist, the word “creator” makes me nervous but I can certainly get behind the universe.

My two-year-old nephew wore a tuxedo — my brother found a place where you could rent them for little kids — and, in terms of perspective, it was hilarious. The original plan was he’d be ring-bearer but he was at a phase where he didn’t necessarily want to give things back.



For a black-and-white wedding, there weren’t a lot of black people. The groom didn’t have much family, a brother and sister only, who came up from Florida, where he was from. He’d made it out of the South 35 years earlier thanks to a Kennedy-era program called *Upward Bound* and a Jewish family from Tampa who sponsored him from Andover Academy to Tufts University to a business career Boston. If not for J.F.K. and the Busanskys, he’d never have met my mother.

The latter were there in force — the parents from Florida, the kids and spouses from Washington and New York, I think. As far as “family”, the groom’s was 75% European-Jewish.

As far as us, it’s a mix of Irish and Italian, typical Boston, but there weren’t many Irish in attendance; that side of the family drifted away after my mother’s mother died, either by moving or, mainly, by dying themselves.

It’s all Irish on my Dad’s side but he was adopted so, no info. He, himself, wasn’t invited, of course.

As far as Italians, there weren’t that many either. My mother’s father and aunts and uncles were in their eighties, her cousins in their fifties and sixties.

Part of it was the couple’s age, part was American migratory patterns and how acquaintances have come to replace rela-

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje	3
<i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23



# Black lives matter...

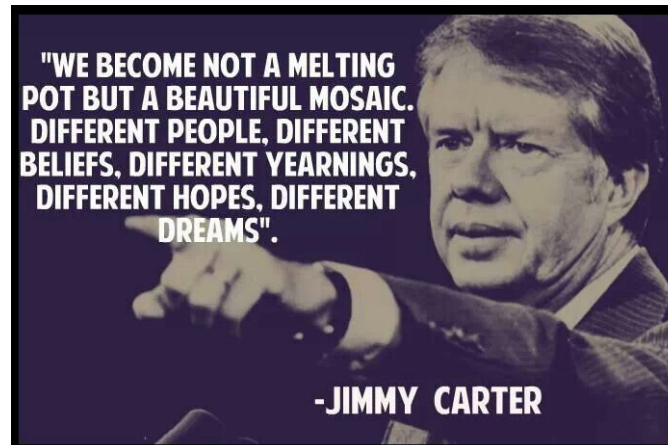
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tives in day-to-day life, but half of the guests were friends and, of these, only a handful in the known-each-other-since-childhood category. The invitations reflected decades of professional life — my mother's in advertising, her fiancé's in banking — and that mostly translated into more middle-aged whites. Plus the women from my mother's "writers' group": post-menopausal Jews and Boston Brahmins.

I was at the center table, which did look like that of a black-white wedding — four black people out of ten, because my youngest brother's wife is also black. If I forgot to mention that, it's because she was raised whiter than us. The first time my brother met her family, hoping for an immersion in *blackitude*, he found himself at a garden party surrounded by people dressed for tennis, sipping iced tea and talking about the stock market, more or less.

Her father ran a hospital or something; he once had his picture on the Front Page of the "New York Times" and her wry comment was "Yes, but beneath the fold." Meaning the picture wasn't visible if the paper wasn't unfolded.

My English and Irish friends would have come up with the same line but it would have been ten times funnier. *Taking the piss*, the working-class practice of teasing as a way of giving a compliment or showing affection. Irony in its benevolent form, its primary form.



It becomes it's opposite when co-opted by snobs: a desire not to celebrate communally but to diminish and, somehow, dismiss.

...

I no longer got "home" very often, I'd been 25 years away.

Earlier, in the lobby, I hadn't recognized Aunt Jean, my mother's aunt. I felt bad so I told her how, when I was a kid, she always reminded me of the "Sun-Maid" Raisins' girl — a real *paesana*. She said that was interesting since she was 100% Irish, her maiden-name was Coughlin. She winked, said "It's your Uncle Louie who's Italian."

And another thing happened like that. After the ceremony, before going down to dinner, there was a reception, with most of us standing around in the hall outside. The elevator doors opened and another woman from the writers' group appeared. She wore a lumberjack shirt, dungarees and hiking boots (she wasn't staying for dinner). She was around 60 and funny — my brothers and I talked to her for half an hour — even if the outfit seemed a bit *lesbian-political*. "Oh," said my mother later, laughing, "she's not a lesbian, she always dresses like that."

So: a black-white wedding where nothing was as it appeared. Most of the groom's family weren't related to him, my Italian

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje	3
<i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23

# Black lives matter...

— *continued*

*For many frustrated, white Americans,  
the answer is a circus huckster.*



aunt wasn't Italian, the lesbian wasn't a lesbian, my black sister-in-law was an ex-debutante and a third of the guests were Jewish. I looked around the room and realized that this was my family now, and the friends of my family. Twenty-five years was a long time to be gone.

Later, waiting for dessert, my brothers and I went out to the lobby; there was an ashtray next to the front desk. Doug was smoking again, Glen wasn't but I gave him a cigarette to hold and occasionally put in his mouth. We hadn't been together in a while and might never be again. As we talked, I glanced across the lobby at the wall-sized mirror and saw the three of us standing there in our rented tuxedos in this Grand Hotel, thought *Tonight we're the kings of the city.*

...

## Black lives matter

My mother married a black guy I barely knew and then his life intersected with ours and made my mother's life better, all of our lives better. He made our family stronger. It was he who gave the eulogy when my youngest brother committed suicide eight years later.

Even though he and my mother divorced after ten years,

they remain friends and he's still very much part of the family, my family. He e-mailed me the other day to get my thoughts on Donald Trump. Ironically enough, I'd been thinking of that very subject, was planning to write about it for this month's magazine, had read a bunch of articles.

I wanted to answer him as concisely as possible — his eyes are not at all good — but also make it worth his while to read. I struggled over each word. When I was done I realized I'd just written my column.

*Just as the Tea Party showed how bigoted so many Republicans are, Trump shows how Nixon's famous "silent majority" is just another demographic. The 24% of Republicans who support Trump represent 10% of the country, extrapolated.*

*You have to feel bad for them, being so frustrated with their own lives. They feel "powerless" even though they're almost all middle-class whites. They're looking for magical solutions having nothing to do with reality, are the kind of people who'd vote in a Hitler or a Mussolini.*

*Trump won't be there at the end but, in the meantime, he's burying the Party by shining a light on the Republican base and showing that **all** of their would-be emperors have no clothes.*

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23

# The Power of (Visual) Storytelling

by Joanna Sell

As intercultural trainers, coaches and consultants, we often jump into deep cold water when trying out new methods or showing new models of culture, transition stress, etc. We can never have the guarantee that our message will come across the way we have intended. Too many generalizations reinforce stereotypes, too vague comments give the impression of relativity.

A possible way to make sure our message comes over clearly is to share a particular culturally related story and describe the cultural context of that encounter. This is when we become storytellers and by doing so, encourage our participants to change perspectives and reframe their situation. But more powerfully, we can encourage them to exchange their own stories and shape the storytelling in an interactive manner.

## Why Storytelling?

*"The soul never thinks without a picture."* Aristotle

Our brain simplifies the world – that is our strategy to survive in the ocean of data and facts. That is the reason why stereotypes and bias exist and why we create the black and white scenarios within seconds while dealing with other people. I call that process „drawing“, as we open the drawer, put the person inside and might have the feeling that we know what to expect from her or him.

But, as soon as the other person shares with us the story

*All humans have the need to tell and listen to stories.*



that is meaningful and true, as soon as we feel connected with the essence of this particular story and the feelings of the storyteller are authentic, the drawers loose their meaning. That person still is part of different groups and communities but the story gives us an insight in her or his unique world of values. It gives us the “emotional explanation” what and why is important to the person who is willing to share the story. That is the real power of storytelling.

As Anette Simons highlights in her book *The Story Factor*, “Storytelling moves us into the place where we trust what we know, even if it can’t be measured or validated empirically.” The secrets of storytelling reside in the creative side of you (in your „right“ brain).“ Accordingly to her there are six types of stories we can use: „Who I Am“, „Why I am here“, and „Vision“ Stories, as well as „Values in action“, „Teaching“ and „I Know What You’re Thinking“ Stories. All of these types of stories can however intertwine and mingle.

## Why Storytelling in the intercultural learning setting?

Stories in the intercultural learning can be used as bridges, which join two banks of differing world understandings. Stories exchanged in the open and safe surroundings can definitely lead to the personalization of the intercultural training or consulting. Additionally, stories encourage self-reflection and the will to exchange with others. Above all, they awake emotions by moving beyond facts and data. The stories shared in

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23

# Storytelling...

## — continued



*Stories can bridge cultural gaps.*

the intercultural trainings should highlight not only the culturally related misunderstandings and conflicts (which, unfortunately is often the case). But good stories can motivate and encourage participants to deal with cultural diversity.

Stories find their own unique way to successfully communicate with people from other cultures, not because they have to (you need only to have a look at numerous critical incidents and case studies), but because they want to. The power of positive stories and best practices can and should be used in any form of intercultural learning as well.

As Marscha Rossiter highlights in her article on storytelling “Stories enable us to engage with new knowledge, broader perspectives, and expanded possibilities because we encounter them in the familiar territory of human experience.”

### The ABC of storytelling

The following offers a guidance on what to observe while picking a story and sharing it with the others:

A – stands for **Authenticity** and the will to tune in with the audience

B – stands for **Building a Relationship**, as only that way we are able to establish the atmosphere of trust and respect

C – stands for **Courage** – the beginning of every powerful story, because while sharing emotions and fears we make ourselves vulnerable.

### How can visual storytelling be used in the intercultural learning?

*“The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low, and achieving it.”* Michelangelo

I would like to highlight the importance of the visual storytelling as we do not only tell and exchange the stories; we also show pictures, maps, diagrams and movies and therefore create the “cultural reality” which is part of the reality seen from our perspective, and just our perspective. Our participants can do the same, being aware of the fact that any attempt to describe a phenomenon as complex as culture is subjective and its perception always depends on the observer.

In our field we still struggle with coining new metaphors and drawing new models depicting the complexity of cultures. Icebergs are melting, onions lost the taste of novelty and the trees with the „cultural roots“ are used in so many other disciplines that they start to lose their visual power. Therefore, I have encouraged my participants in my intercultural trainings to use their own metaphors of culture and activate the creative right brain.

The results were amazing. A bowl of curry depicting India, a field of plants showing Germany, a light bulb, showing China, a map of Turkey highlighting the regional differences of that

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23



# Storytelling...

## — continued

*The advantages of storytelling*



country and the Kota Mask representing the culture of one tribe residing in Gabun are just some examples. All of them included the two “layers of the culture”: 1. perceptas – the reality perceived with our six senses and 2. conceptas — the world of values and norms providing the explanation for the observed behavior. Groups concentrating on the visualization of cultures were constantly in dialog, asking questions and adding numerous examples to highlight the complexity and fuzziness of their respective cultures.

The powerful pictograms by a Chinese artist based in Berlin — Liu Yang — are one more example how the visual storytelling might be shaped in an interactive way. Instead of creating black and white scenarios, the participants use the pictures to create a square of values or start their own story and ask the others for the possible endings.

Another possibility of encouraging participants to exchange and „shape stories“ is to ask them to create and arrange an exhibition entitled “Europe’s Faces”. Depending on the group I use the memory game *History of Art or Famous Portraits*. The aim of this project is to awake the reflection on cultural roots of Europe of the past and today.

The discussions that emerge are very valuable and the participants exchange stories during the project. The face of Europe nowadays shows automatically its diversity and gives

an insight into the history of the Old Continent, seen as the history of migrations and movements. Last but not least, I would like to mention the story cubes “Once upon a time”, which can be used for multicultural teams as a creative problem solving tool.

### Summary

“Zooming-in and out” - concentrating on details of a single story and at the same time watching the cultural setting from the bird perspective can be very challenging. We balance between relativeness and generalizations, which might result in the stereotypes reinforcement. During the process in choosing visual stories, we need to keep in mind that all the visualizations, such as photographs, videos, infographics, graphic recordings, maps and memes should be used with a certain diplomacy and tact as we interpret the stories through our own cultural background and visual stories might be easily misunderstood.

While we may have doubts if we really contribute to the learning process of our business clients, expats, migrants and students, and to their individual development of the intercultural communication skills, we can ponder on the following sentence, dating back to Ancient Greece: “*Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.*” Aristotle

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## Contents

(for quick navigation, click on the desired article)

<b>Editorial</b>	2
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23

# Are Germans better prepared culturally for living online than Americans?

by Jacquelyn Reeves

Our personal and professional lives are now inextricably woven into the bundles of cables we call the Internet. Internet use, interest and the hype surrounding it continues to grow. The world is networked. ELearning proficiency is now a must for trainers and consultants. We need to be proficient in using WebEx, Gotomeeting, Lync and other platforms in order to stay competitive for work. Data security is the next frontier and control over our information and where it is harbored is uncertain.

The challenge is clear, but are we all equally equipped for it? We are living on a new plane of existence. Add to this the unseen and hard to decode world of national culture, the implications of history and expectations transferred to the digital world. In this case, it takes form as the passionate debate over public vs. private space, or freedom of speech vs. security and the countries that are impacting this world and its direction the most are the United States and Germany.

These are pressing questions that concern all of us, whether executives tasked with protecting client confidentiality to parents trying to decide how to guide their children's Internet access. Frameworks yet to be defined are: am I safe on the Internet? What is Internet safety? What are security and safety? What is the value of staying well-informed versus the value of shielding the rights of private citizens? How can I avoid being swept up in data or metadata trawl-

ing? And most of all, are we powerless or is there something we can do to steer the public discourse, fear and paranoia of the unseen information collectors?

Although every country is involved in its own intimate discourse, the USA and Germany have the most extreme positions and passionately compelling arguments: the US is impacted by 9-11 and Germany by its history of surveillance and societal damage as a result.

## What is YOUR value of privacy and freedom of speech?

In order to examine the question more thoroughly, we must back up a few steps to look at the *Sphere of Influence* model or the 'Peach and Coconut' in training circles, developed by Kurt Lewin and revised by Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner. The model shows that Americans live more of their lives and direct more of their speech to the public. Examples: "How are you?", "And the kids?", "Are you new here?", "Gorgeous weather", "The cheapest gas is always at the corner." Germans have a much smaller selection of the same, expressed in a more reserved tone.

These extreme variations of the same theme identify many core values and behaviors of these societies.

- US values = transparency, information sharing (= good intentions, friendliness)



<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje	3
<i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
<b>Book Reviews</b>	<b>17</b>
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23

# Are the Germans ... — *continued*

*Americans live more of their lives to the public, Germans far less so.*



- German values = discretion and reserve, share the least possible amount or required information (= respect)

And their effects transfer too: mistimed and misjudged overtures of friendships leading to hurt feelings and of betrayal – a powerful model. What is perceived as friendly can turn into friendless and worse yet, networkless in a country of endless networking in the both business and social arena.

Ta the model deeper and it is a cultural indicator of the American “Freedom of Speech” and the German right to privacy in the age of online surveillance:

**US:** Some surveillance throughout history in various areas. Information sharing, transparency, welcoming strangers. Trust is given immediately, can be lost later. It permits flag burning and no prayer in schools (separation of Church and State). Freedom of speech is taken for granted in some ways. In others the value is personal responsibility (you do you– and protect yourself).

**Germany:** History of surveillance and deep suffering as a result in the 20th century (very recent). Freedom of speech not taken for granted. Highly emotional. Information sharing not a cultural value, trust must be earned. But, there are demonstrations, taking to the streets.

## Who has privacy now?

So, how does this all shake out? When we ask the hard question: “Am I safe on the Internet?”, the model has transferred to the Zuckerberg (founder of Facebook) peach, or a hyper peach:

Social media platforms tend to be American and as such, reflect the Peach value system: Exchange is good! Sharing information is good. And who can argue? Exchange IS good! We have interacted and shared information with people from all over the world, to two decades back, from TED talks to HR recruiters, all from the couch.

But in the question of security, safety and freedom of speech, the leanings have already been established by “the Right to be Forgotten”, the EU initiative against Google.com (Google’s US site). The US does not want to remove information and the EU does, in order to protect the right to privacy.

The US view is: “Why do you deserve privacy?” News is news and society has the right to know: the touchstone of critical thinking and decision-making at the individual level.

The German view is that private citizen’s rights come first. News is not simply news, especially when people cannot live their lives reasonably and in peace. Situations are nuanced. For example, if people have paid their debt to society (legal

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23

# Are the Germans ... — continued

*Paradoxically, the Americans are more fragile online with the 'Zuckerberg' peach model.*

convictions, etc.) and are not public figures whose movements and activities affect groups of people, whose business is it?

## **The Peach is Fragile**

But back to our big question: Who is prepared for life online? We have seen the communication styles, the cultural perceptions and tendencies. One is of reserve and of "less is more" and one of "information is all".

At the very core of this discussion comes the American small talk values and assumptions. This style is based on privacy too, though an outsider may not recognize it. And that is just the problem, you see.

Americans share information in a very precise way based on the expectations of the small talk conversational partner. In order to share this kind, amount and level of personal information, both partners have to know the "small talk game". In essence, they protect each other in this special kind of ping pong. It is intimate but innate in its knowingness. And it is context-dependent.

The Internet, on the other hand, decontextualizes. On Facebook or other platforms, you may not know who you are sharing information with, making all assumptions of small talk rules void. And as in most cultural assumptions, the user doesn't have the awareness to know he/she is ac-



tually doing it, making the situation a dangerous one, and the conversation a dangerous place to be: online predators seeking money, being just one example that the Americans already are victims of on a larger scale than other national cultures.

Americans are often perceived as being unsophisticated and socially clumsy, and without context and an equally informed communication partner, that is exactly what they are. Their view and use of small talk is fragile and individualistic. Without individual choice, knowledge and control of context, it cannot work successfully and they can be in a position of manipulation, exploitation and prosecution where the laws are still seeking alignment across the US.

The loss of this mobility and flexibility within the protected context has profound implications on communication styles, on human rights, on free speech, on the right to privacy and leaves many legally protected rights (drinking a beer at a party) open if this issue is not proactively recognized and put into an open (!) discussion by American leaders in all sectors.

This article begins with a provoking title and the answer can be found in the respective communication styles: The Germans are better prepared for living online by their legal system, cultural preferences and behaviors. The Americans much less so.

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23



## Book Review

### Fields of Blood:

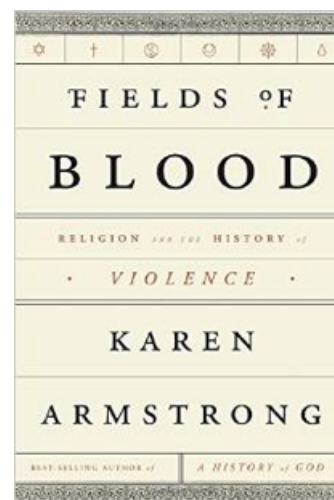
#### *Religion and the history of violence*

by Karen Armstrong  
U.S. \$20.95, 528 pages  
Published by Knopf

*Fields of Blood* is a deeply researched exploration of the history of violent human behavior and its relation to religious thinking and belonging. Although close to 40% of the text consists of notes and references, the volume is a good read despite the incessant bloodletting necessarily described in exploring the topic. Those who need simple answers or who resent their religious upbringing may all too easily look at religion and attack or dismiss it as the perpetual source of violence and inflicted pain. Armstrong unambiguously demonstrates that the question is far more complex and anchored in the context of the development of civilization(s) from their prehistoric agrarian roots to the many present-day industrialized economies.

Important insights of this historical narrative include:

- The concept of “religion” took time to emerge in human consciousness and has mutated over time to what it is today in Western thinking. What existed in pre-modern religion was justified as the law of the cosmos — no matter how it was played out on the population, inevitably it was in favor of riches and power, and exploiting the rest to procure these, in essence, “organized violence and theft.” We have passed through “*Cujus region, ejus religio*” (ruler imposed religion), to the ideal that one’s religion is something chosen with the god(s) of personal preference.”
- That what is experienced as sacred is not limited to a religious experience. The experiential auras of play, “holy” warfare, ecstatic camaraderie in the face of death, etc., are a few examples of this.
- There is an abiding ambiguity in the perpetration of violence in



the sense that the warrior, the soldier, the agent of violence, has commonly been made both a hero and a pariah with (generally, “his”) hands stained by blood, both flouting and tainting maleness.

• Perhaps best stated in the author’s own words: “Every state – even our secular nation state – relies on a mythology that defines its special character and mission. The word ‘myth’ has lost its force in modern times and tends to mean something that is not true, that never happened. But in the pre-modern world, mythology express the timeless rather than a historical reality and provided a blueprint for action in the present.” The author observes that French revolutionaries, having overthrown the ancien régime, immediately set about creating a new national religion, while doing their best to erase the vestiges of the old.

• Glorified, often largely fabricated identity stories, such as the biblical Exodus easily generate or support divinely sanctioned “holy” wars perpetrated by a “chosen people” (Israel, England, USA, etc.), that included imperatives for the extermination of populations or, more recently, of colonization that saw the global market as God’s plan for redeeming the non-Christian world – perhaps a tool still in use in what we call globalization.

From an intercultural perspective, Armstrong’s work pushes us to explore the creation, perpetuation, and often violent consequences of our identity stories, and the worlds they create, whether related to ethnicity, nation, region, cult, class, or other divisions. Our work, in this regard, has hardly begun.

*Reviewed by George Simons at diversophy.com*

## Contents

(for quick navigation, click on the desired article)

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje	3
<i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23

# Book Review

## Geschäftskultur Frankreich

By Isabelle Demangeat  
Euro 11.95, 120 pages  
Published by Conbook Medien

Living together and working together across cultures can often be two different things, only partially related to each other. In this slim but informative handbook Isabelle Demangeat, veteran interculturalist and coach, provides a far better quick look than many other publications of this nature, particularly in its focus on worklife and organizational collaboration.

While all too often cultural exposés purport to be all things to all folk, Demangeat’s book in German feels like it is written with the German reader in mind, and when it is read by one who is neither German nor French, but with living experience in both cultures, gives insights into both cultures simultaneously.

The understandings of habit and motivation are critical in collaboration. Frequently I have had to deal with German-French project teams who largely deal with each other in English, generally a second language to both. Demangeat has noted elsewhere how subtle distinctions of understanding can undermine what seems on the surface to be quite straightforward. When Germans and French use the English word “team” for example one would expect harmonious understanding, but in fact the undertones only come to surface when one understands what Germans mean by “Mannschaft” and the French experience as “équipe” and the expectations they are most likely to have of each other in either case.

French team members may value informal reaction and ex-

change before working together as ways of learning about others and building camaraderie in a collaborative relationship; German team members may prefer to start working together in order to create confidence, trust and ultimately solid on the job relationships. The degree and style of interaction may also differ with the French looking at the big picture from all sides and including a broad range of related issues before making decisions or initiating procedures, whereas their German counterparts may focus on precise definition of tasks and measures as the prerequisite for closure and action.

This is not my first encounter with the *Geschäftskultur Kompakt* series, and I have solid respect for its approach and its authors thus far for providing excellent cultural mediation and solid and interesting factual information. The layout of short, incisive chapters, each followed by a quick look overview make them substantial to chew on as well as easy to swallow. An excellent new feature is the web access, not just connecting to footnotes or additional text, but to brief video explanations and explorations by the author herself. This is accomplished without often repeated printed *urls*, the bane of many publications seeking to create online connections and depth. Here once the connection with the resource is established, further references consist of a simple six-character code printed in red in the text.

If on the way to France from across the Rhine, whether traveling virtually or really, don’t leave *Haus* without it!

*Reviewed by George Simons at diversophy.com*



<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23



## In Memory of Former SIETAR Europa President Maria Jicheva



Sietar Europa was deeply saddened to hear of the passing away of Maria Jicheva, who passed away last June 13. Attained by a cancer, she struggled with such courage and dignity, without moaning, showing or complaining; with so much courage that to some of us, unaware of the suffering she has been facing, so fiercely hidden behind her smile, her warmth, in Sofia and elsewhere, her much too early departure comes as real shock, and unprepared as we were will take time to realize.

Our deep sympathy goes to her two daughters, her family, her friends and her colleagues. We share your grief and your sorrow.

Our sympathy goes to Francien from the Netherlands, to Alexander from Germany who were presidents of SIETAR Europa just before and just after.

She was a very remarkable person, a good friend and a reliable, motivating and inspiring colleague to many of us, serving as Sietar Europa president from 2004 to 2007. And yes, the "Queen of Diplomacy" was a title she truly deserved." The Queen of Diplomacy, thus she will be remembered. Please be assured that we DO share your grief

Our sympathy goes to our and her colleagues, our and her so many friends from Sofia and from SIETAR Bulgaria, she

was such a very active contributor; and to her colleagues in the UK, where she had settled in 1995.

Our sympathy also goes to the many Sietarians from all over who worked, shared, built with Maria – "She was so generous, so inspiring" -contributed to her many a project, adding stepping stones together to a better understanding and to higher respect of mankind.  
PEACE be with her!

**Claude Bourgeois, President of Sietar Europa**

### Maria Jicheva, a charismatic force of nature

As we mourn the passing of Maria Jicheva, we may take a little comfort from our memories. There has been a unified expression both about the shock of her sudden passing and of the positive and quietly influential woman that she was.

She was at her most visible as president of SIETAR Europa and when leading the committee and volunteers to putting on an important and memorable Congress in Sofia, Bulgaria – a country that was significant to her in many ways.

The extraordinary thing about Maria was that she was accepted by trainers coaches, academics and business pro-

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23

# Maria Jicheva



*A charismatic force of nature!*

professionals alike. If you take a minute to think about it, this cannot be said about most people.

My experiences with Maria were mostly set in the context of SIETAR UK. Here she provided solid support and advice for her successors – Stephan Dahl, Robert Johnson and myself.

In meetings and conference calls she would be the soft articulate voice of wisdom, suggestions and common sense. When we were lost Maria would have an answer. When we had a problem Maria had a solution.

Other obituaries have mentioned her honorary title, “the Queen of diplomacy.” This is true and was really put to the test prior to the Bulgarian Congress. Through no fault of her own, a rather critical comment about the “father of culture”, Geert Hofstede, in an e-mail chain had reached the esteemed professor’s office and caused a minor explosion. It is the sort of nightmare that no volunteer President ever wants to face – that of having the most prominent figure in your field completely upset with the volunteer organisation promoting the values of that field.

We know the outcome – shuttle diplomat Maria calmed the waters, facilitated the seeing of reason and offered the esteemed academic a public space to expound his central theories. Few know how close we came to a different out-

come. Continuing the Hofstede theme, Maria introduced Prof. Michael Minkov, first to SIETAR via Bulgaria and then to us at SIETAR UK. His hotly debated theory was later adapted to become an additional Hofstede dimension.

Her successful long-term partnership with Caroline at Coghill Beery saw her flying to many countries and delivering training and coaching to some exceptional senior executives and high-powered teams. Here she was professional, credible and had the depth and persona to deal with the egos and challenging behaviours that she encountered. Not only did the offices of Coghill Beery have just about every book published on culture (normally by Nicholas Brealey) but one sensed that Maria had read, understood and remembered most of them too.

As well as being charming Maria was also tough. Her success in committees came not just from her smile. When a principle was being violated Maria was a charismatic force of nature. Her legacy is a more mindful and caring SIETAR. It is a standard of principled integrity that was shown to us by an extraordinary exponent of coaching, training and leadership.

For us the spirit of Maria continues with every Congress and, in a way, every training and coaching session. Thank you Maria. You have been heard.

**Matthew Hill, former President of SIETAR UK**

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje	3
<i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23



# Maria Jicheva

*Maria at lunch with Francien Wieringa and Alexander Scheitza.*



## The “Queen of Diplomacy”

Maria Jicheva was an example of how commitment to voluntary board work for SIETAR can be combined with an outstanding professional career in the intercultural field. SIETAR has benefitted a lot from her talents as a listener, a mediator and a bridge-builder.

“I would agree with any location you suggest. Let's have fun and work!” This short e-mail text of her reveals a lot about her. She had sent it to us after the three of us had volunteered at a General Assembly meeting for working out a proposal for an amended version of the statutes and guidelines of SIETAR, which, 14 years after its foundation, no longer seemed to fit to the growth and development the organisation had taken.

These two sentences in her message reveal a lot about Maria: her global nomadism, her openness for the ideas of others, her deep desire to make other people feel comfortable, her work ethic, but also her readiness to engage in close relationships and share joyful moments with others. The three of us embarked on two years of very close cooperation. We did spend many intense weekends working for SIETAR, discussing broader professional and personal dilemma's we had to deal with in work and in life, had confrontations, became precious friends and, yes, also had a lot of fun. We continued having these meetings even when no one of us was a board member anymore.

Maria's presidency started in a difficult phase of the organisation. There was turmoil on the board of the organisation, a long-lasting conflict between a national SIETAR organisation and SIETAR Europa which was about to destroy the organisation and there were different opinions about the role of Young SIETAR. At the same time new national SIETAR organisations started to form in many countries and congresses had to be organised. Some board members capitulated in view of the work that had to be done.

Maria had the qualities the board and SIETAR Europa needed. She had the skill to create a warm and appreciative atmosphere in a team, to stimulate and to empower people, to initiate and to steer processes in which all positions were heard, in which stubbornness was side-lined, common ground was found and, thus, conflicts could be resolved. People who were part of these processes gave her the nickname “Queen of Diplomacy” which she truly deserved. But only people who knew her very well could recognize how much energy this has cost her at times.

We have lost a good friend and colleague. And a role model.

**Alexander Scheitza, SIETAR Europa board member from 2004-2008 (representing SIETAR Deutschland), SIETAR Europa president 2007**

**Francien Wieringa, SIETAR Europa board member from 2001-2005, SIETAR Europa president 2002-2004**

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23

# Maria Jicheva

*With Svetlana Aladjem, Susan Morey and Vladimir Galabov, Maria at the SIETAR congress in La Cole, France.*



## Her presidency was a time of great inclusion

"Hello, I am calling from London. Checked your website. You've done excellent work." A silvery, resonant voice told me on the phone in early March of 2005. Within a couple of days we were already involved in SE. This is how, unexpectedly, my fairytale with Maria started. It went like this for the next ten years. I felt spoiled rather than mentored with countless emails and Skype talks. Wherever she was on the Globe she would talk to me. Two questions were always on the agenda: "How can I help you", "What can I do for SI-ETAR?" The only way of relieving her from new tasks was not to answer them.

Was our site so impressive – not so sure...Didn't she have enough on her plate even without some Bulgarian interculturalists? She sure did! Had she gotten to where she was so easily that she was ready to share everything? Not at all! She was just blessed with a plethora of capabilities, talents and love for people. And it seemed so easy to achieve anything with Maria! "I would like us to put Bulgaria on the Intercultural map." she wrote and we started working together on the congress in Sofia.

Her natural generosity meant she had to bring her native country to the SE family. Maria would meet all potential supporters - going from the university teacher - to the President of Bulgaria and talk them into getting involved.

"East Meets West" was the title of the SE Congress, 2007 and it was a credo of Maria's as well. Her presidency was a time of great inclusion of professionals from Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans and the fringes of the continent, for everyone who could contribute, and for those who could not afford the expense.

SIETAR Bulgaria was formed as a natural follow up step of the Congress. And again – Maria was supporting it at every step. She initiated events and paid a double membership fee so as to motivate others.

She is still helping. We learned so much about each other and about ourselves while grieving for Maria. May this experience make us and our organization more mindful, caring and inclusive!

***Svetlana Aladjem, SIETAR Bulgaria President (2008 – 2011) and SIETAR Europa Board Member (2008 - 2013)***

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23

# Events, workshops, congresses

## Bath, U.K.

21 - 25 September 2015

*Developing Intercultural Training Skills*

This 5-day course is for those, wanting to develop their knowledge and skills to design — deliver intercultural training into their current courses.

28 September - 2 October 2015

*Designing and delivering intercultural training.*

This 5-day course follows the above course, also suitable for trainers who already have experience in the intercultural field. Courses in 2015 may be eligible for EU funding under the new Erasmus+ programme. More information at [www.lts-training.com/ICTTcourse.htm](http://www.lts-training.com/ICTTcourse.htm) or contact [adrian.pilbeam@lts-training.com](mailto:adrian.pilbeam@lts-training.com)

## Milan, Italy

30 September - 2 October 2015

*Constructivist Intercultural Communication.* Milton Bennett expounds on the three major paradigms of science and the form they take in social science and provides the latest updates to the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity - its measurement and its application. This course is intended for both new and experienced interculturalists who wish to be more effective in their research, teaching, training. There is a 15% discount for SIETAR members. More information at <http://www.idrinstitute.org/>

## SIETAR Europa's Webinars

Monday, September 7th 2015 at 20.00 – 21.00 (CET)

Maura Di Mauro: "The X-Y integration - why and how for the success of the company strategies and results"

Monday, October 5th 2015 at 18.00 – 19.00 (CET)

Barbara Gibson: "Turning Failure into Competence: The Role of Response-to-Failure Patterns"

Thursday, November 12th 2015 at 19.00 – 20.00 (CET)

Alessandra Bonezzi: "Training in the Maghreb: not a catwalk"

## Vienna, Austria

1 - 3 October, 2015

*Contemporary Approaches in Training and Education for Cross-Cultural Competence* The IACCM, Sietar Austria and CEMS are organizing an international conference on contemporary approaches in training for cross-cultural competence. This conference brings together scientists and practitioners alike in order to foster dialogue between practice and theory. More information at [info@sietar.at](mailto:info@sietar.at)

## Valetta, Malta

1 - 3 October, 2015

*Cultural Mapping: Debating Cultural Spaces and Places* The Valletta 2018 Foundation will be holding the

Second International Conference on Cultural Relations in Europe and the Mediterranean. The event will seek to develop a better understanding of how various mapping practices are developing over time. More information at [research@valletta2018.2018](mailto:research@valletta2018.2018)

## Amsterdam, Holland

5 - 9 October, 2015

*Intercultural Communication: Diversity in Practice* CIC is organizing an international professional development seminar, in association with University Leiden. International professionals interested in updating their knowledge of trends and research, and in increasing cultural competence and strategies in their organizations: international HR, business, NGOs, coaching and education. For more information click on [www.cic-amsterdam.com/english/openseminar.htm](http://www.cic-amsterdam.com/english/openseminar.htm)

## Online Everyday

The SIETAR Europa group, discussing

**"Cultural acquisition? Can, should we shift the paradigm?"**

on LinkedIn, has now over 8000 members. Plus it offers videos, articles, books, tools for the intercultural profession.

For more information, contact George Simons at [diversophy@gmail.com](mailto:diversophy@gmail.com)

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>2</b>
Stefanie Rathje <i>An interview with an unconventional intercultural thinker</i>	3
Black Lives Matter...	8
The Power of (Visual) Storytelling	11
Are Germans culturally better prepared for living online than Americans?	14
Book Reviews	17
In Memory of Former Sietar Europa President Maria Jicheva	19
Events, Workshops, Congresses	23



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