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Cultural Climate Change & the Cross-Cultural Reflexivity

"…every social and global issue of our day is a business opportunity, in disguise, just waiting for the entrepreneurship and innovation of business, the pragmatism, and the capabilities of good management" (Peter Drucker)

A slightly old-fashioned, humanist and rhetorically garrulous abstract in three parts with a conclusion

Diagnosis
One does not need to read Ian McEwan's latest novel "Solar" in order to understand the impact of the failed conference on global climate agreement (Copenhagen, December 2009) upon the perception of three main proposals to reduce the carbon dioxide emissions (Kyoto protocol, Al Gore, Sterne). Reduction of the industrial pollution should become one of the stepping stones in driving the sustainable options of increasing the quality of life of more human individuals than ever before. But preaching, like the US or British politicians, to the emergent producers and consumers in India and China that they cannot go on behaving as if they were belated US Americans or western Europeans, does not carry much of a moral authority – and neither does it carry an international political clout. Those excluded from access to clean water, sufficient food, solid education, profitable employment and decent living and working conditions - do not take those sermons seriously.

Hypothetical remedy
Cultural climate changes follow instant communicative connectivity of individuals in all human societies, including those previously rendered invisible by the multimedia infotainments. They demand a voice, and our hype-connected societies empower them communication-wise to spell their views out, more often in flash mobs than parliamentary debates. Tragedy of the commons has become a commonplace in all democratic societies, which suffer from democratic deficit. Unacceptable. Cross-cultural reflexivity is necessary both in deconstructing politicians (Polanski's "Ghostwriter" is a recent case in point) and we should expect the growth of BRICollages of global scenarios.

Practical consequences of cultural tsunamis..
Detecting value changes before they sweep inhabited institutions away is crucial. Humanities should come back. In science - at the expense of the neopositivist and neobehavioral scientific research paradigms. Science is not the only stage, on which cultural climate changes produce earthquakes. Art, or religion, experience

similar tectonic, and climatic tensions. Examine avant-garde visual, literary or performing arts in order to understand the impact of the ongoing cultural climate change upon the emergent renegotiation of values, evaluations and comparative assessments. The Warhol wars and the Hockney virtualized art at your thumb meet Wodiczko's "vehicle for homeless people" and night projections on city walls in the latter's "hidden life of buildings" project. Not only aesthetics but ethics follow. Value judgments are back at the core of our knowledge production and dissemination, which adds a pragmatic concern. "How professors think" (Michele Lamont) follows "From Higher Aims to Hired Hands" (Rakesh Khurani) and "Reason's Neglect" (Barbara Townley) follows "Making Our Way in the World" (Margaret Archer), all of them strongly suggesting that a cross-cultural reflexivity gradually catches up with cultural climate change.

Conclusion

The "humanities" are back: so is the need to renegotiate the cultural inputs into an ongoing discussion about sustainable futures subjected to individualized meta-reflection and cross-cultural comparative assessment.

A more classical and modest abstract

Ecologists alarm public opinion trying to prevent a global warming – nobody wants to trade glaciers for deserts. From Kyoto to Copenhagen, governments and businesses pay at least a lip service to our natural environment. Why is there no comparable alert with respect to our cultural environment? Nobody warns anybody about a global warming up of cold wars and nobody tracks the build-up of hot hatreds before they explode. Media panics are no substitute for a prognosis, prevention and proactive attitude. Huntington was wrong. Civilizations don't clash. Individuals who have been socialized within cultural civilizations - do. Organizations, which pattern individual and collective actions - do. Clashes result from increased frequency of cross-cultural encounters. More individuals are exposed to images of the lives of other individuals than ever before. More individuals actually encounter entirely different individuals. Most of them would have never met without contemporary mobility. Clashes are also a byproduct of growing complexity and sophistication of our multicultural organizations and networks.

It is time to do business as unusual. We should be preventing clashes (resulting from diversity and shock of cross-cultural exposure). We should be doing so ahead of the populist politicians, who exploit and misuse them. We should be exploring high potential of social development and growth, which the increased diversity opens up before our very eyes. From **minding differences** (Hofstede's "do's" and "don't's" in professional organizations) businesses can and should go over to **mining diversities.** Mobilize flash mobs, don't add an institution. Use crowd sourcing, don't privilege think tanks. Acknowledge local knowledge, don't view natives as raw material for theoretical mills of the richer states Could new

experts, versatile in diversity management, contribute towards the manageability of the old and new inequalities? Could cross-cultural competence[1] become an Esperanto of professionals in a multicultural workplace?

Key words

cross-cultural competence, manageable inequalities, diversity management

1. Breaking and making of the codes of cooperation and change and their dependence on cross-cultural competence.

The idea of a cross-cultural competence as most of the ideas in the realm of social sciences and the humanities, has been developed under the double theoretical protectorate of Darwinism and linguistic turn. Let me begin with the report on a personal experience in the first decade of the 21st century. When driving through the Keys from Miami to Key West, watching the Atlantic Ocean to my left and the Gulf of Mexico to the right, I have noticed a couple of jets writing something in the skies above me with their traces of condensed air. When they were done, everybody who cared to look up, could read "Jesus loves you". Upon arrival in Key West and a visit in a local bookshop I had noticed a book, which somehow looked as a response to this heavenly message – "Darwin Loves You, (Too)".[2] Symbolically, the jet inscription fading away among clouds and the title printed on the cover of scholarly book represent the earlier and the later, the older and the younger patterns of the management of meaning in over-organized societies[3].

From our point of view, from the point of the inquiry into the management of inequalities in a multicultural world, what matters is the attempt to understand the sociocultural coevolution. The role of diluted "Darwinism" saturating our theories of social (e.g. political, economic, urban), cultural (e.g. linguistic, artistic, communicative) change is in providing the guiding metaphor for the change – namely, a "coevolution" understood as a sophisticated and ongoing process of interactions between components ("inhabitants", "populations", "clusters") of various levels of life forms. The main outline of the process, if diluted, popular, "vulgar" "Darwinist" metaphor is to be explained, consists of two basic components. First, a random "genetic" drift. I have put "genetic" into inverted comas of quotation marks, since it is not only genes that shake and regroup as genes do sexually reproducing species. "Memes" (subcomponents of social memories) or other items also do. Second, a "natural selection" mechanism, which let's some combinations of randomly changing genes live on, while extinguishing the others. This "natural" or even 'unnatural' selection mechanism has never been equally well documented as the randomizing one. In fact, the latest critique of the attempts to repeat Marxian import of biological into historical and to build a theory of an evolutionary selection mechanism

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[1] Cf. Magala, S., 2005, Cross-Cultural Competence, Routledge, 2005. The Polish translation ("Kompetencje miedzykulturowe") will be published by Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warsaw, in 2011

[2] Levine, George, 2006, Darwin Loves You. Natural Selection and the Re-Enchantment of the World, Princeton 7 Oxford, Princeton University Press

[3] Magala, Slawomir, 2009, The Management of Meaning in Organizations, Basingstoke & New York, Palgrave Macmillan

spanning the genetic, the molecular, the behavioral, the social and the cognitive, including scientific realms of social flows, demonstrates that increasingly influential segments of the academic research communities are decisively rejecting it. Social Darwinism and sociobiology (with sentimental idealization of ants and bees) are wrong in assuming that solving the puzzle of survival of the fittest under changing environmental pressure is the privileged "key" opening the doors to perception of the "core" mechanism of universal change. There is no such mechanism – there are many contexts, constellations and mechanisms, which work on different levels and with different clusters of components ("participants"), and some of them acquire a more pronounced role in the course of history. However, sociologists have to do without a comprehensive, all encompassing theory of "society" – very much like the linguists have to do without a universal grammar and biologists without a universal theory of evolution, comparable to the diluted Darwinism mentioned above.[4]

In considering the pragmatic need for a cross-cultural competence in increasingly frequent and complex interactions between unpredictable agents, actors and other entities, we are looking at the possibilities of a quick and effective translation. Spanish into Russian. Polish into Dutch. Spanish, Russian, Polish and Dutch into English. We assume that communicative tools should be built out of the inventory of natural languages, with due diligence accounting for the cultural backgrounds of cooperating/interacting communities and with an elementary awareness of the context, which is perceived as historically changing, perhaps even evolving. Those considerations already result in a number of new, unexpected alliances and re-combinations, re-clustering of the representatives of academic research communities. Let us take, for instance, the eight international conferences of EVOLANG (participants publish papers on, for instance, "grammatical equivalents of Paleolithic tools" and use our computing powers to simulate the emergence of syntax and phonetic structures from the "soup" of sounds surrounding the presumable inventors of the oldest human languages), whose participants try to account for the co-evolution of;

- regular, syntax-based speech communications,
- organized, cooperative communities;
- sophisticated tools used to produce other tools
- growth of brain, (but also perfection of the hand grip, gradual leg adjustment to enable humans to run, etc.).

Nobody expects promising results soon. But the attempts to "crack" (as in "cracking the code of change"), or rather to reconstruct (as in reconstructing the causal bonds, which had led to emergence of Latin or English as preferred linguistic tools) at least some of the co-evolutionary "strands" or clusters of components have already reached interesting, if still mainly speculative, proportions[5]. The prevailing, though still highly idiosyncratic,

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[4] Fodor, Jerry, Piatelli-Palmarini, Massimo, 2010, What Darwin Got Wrong, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux. The authors also quote approvingly; Wesson, Robert, 1991, Beyond Natural Selection, Cambridge MA, The MIT Press.
[5] Cf. Weinberg, Steven, 2010, Lake Views: This World and the universe, Camridge, MA, Belknap Press - Harvard University

emergent, improvised and intuitive, view is that the introduction of individualized, mobile, digitally enhanced and satellite-transmitted communications, is changing the very nature of social interactions, making dreams of multicultural societies with "thousand flowers blooming" something more than a shrewd ideological slogan of a political dictator. The change is towards growing individualization of *competence* and *competition*. Social differentiation – which means increasing inequalities in many dimensions at once – increases, but so do chances for individual upward mobility. This means that the clustering of individuals (as in a street demonstration or attractive job market, on a beach, sunbathing or in front of a presidential palace, mourning), their mobilization for audience (as in a rock concert in a disco or a holy service in a church), constituency (as in voting in political elections or in a popular referendum) or cooperation (as in collecting money for charity or studying at the university or "chatting" for action) undergoes changes as well. Individuals have less respect for hierarchies (they are used to immediate access rather than gradual granting of access through layers of gate-keepers) and for the attempts to impose authority, any authority, on them. Individualized masses are – like Queen Victoria – not easily amused.

2. Fascinating sustainability of gross inequalities and the role of virtual "imaginization" in breeding and cultivating cross-cultural competence.

Sociocultural co-evolution (with identifiable, though very diverse equivalents of "genes"), which increases and exploits inequalities, is both fueled by the evolution of "meanings" and "images" communicated in streaming media and – the reverse causal relation – influences and shapes those very media. Hence the linguistic and the iconic turns in contemporary social sciences in general and in the humanities in particular, should come as no surprise. First, the introduction of mainframe computers prompted the structural linguistics of Harris and Chomsky, and led to the fomalization of research programs in phonetics and syntax, though not yet in semantics. The first mobile digital multimedia "wikipedization" wave had already involved semantics and pragmatics of communication. Meanings become increasingly openly negotiated, and authorities trying to dominate the process are negotiable as well. If we were to use a metaphor, we might say that social communications in contemporary societies resemble a modern architectural construct, say a Parisian building, which houses the cultural center Pompidou/Beaubourg and has all the pipes, wires and other "connections" on the outside of the building's inner spaces, perfectly visible as they hum and sing conveying water, sewage, electric current, digital messages, hot steam or cold air. Likewise, our communications are not hidden inside the letters read by isolated individuals nor tucked away inside the closed rooms where selected audiences look at the cinema screens.

Our communications are worn on a sleeve, like hearts of the extravert individuals – images and sounds, words and sentences are broadcast and stream around us, accessible to most individuals (in fact increasing numbers of city buildings are being transformed into giant screens, "live" billboards, which "speak" to us in languages of iconic image and whispered or flashed word). The necessity to provide cultural contents to these massive communicational environments leads to a reiterated recycling of the inherited,

traditional, past images and ideas – to the *pidgization*, *creolization, bastardization* of meanings and images.

Here we arrive at the very significant difference between a biological and sociocultural evolution. In sociocultural evolution, "memes" of social and individual memory work "backwards". Lawyers have a principle – "lex retro non agit", that is, that the law does not work backwards and nobody can be judged according to laws established after he or she had committed an act, for which he or she is to be held responsible later on, ex post, in the light of a younger legal act. In our contemporary history this rewriting of the past is a rule rather than an exception – the artists, politicians, journalists, columnists, commentators, critics, media professionals, rebels, marketing and PR wizards, amateur archeologists, historians, all of them are continually busy with re-writing our collective past(s) and imagining and re-imagining what happened and what it actually meant, means and could or should mean to us, or to some of us. The Polish visual artist, Zbigniew Libera, whose imitation of a Lego do-it-yourself kit invited the audience members to construct a concentration camp, has grasped this idea and expressed it in his exhibition of carefully enacted "imitations" or "pastiches" of world famous photographic images – the crying Vietnamese girl running away from the burning village bombed with napalm by the US air force, the dead Che Guevara on a stretcher in a Bolivian jungle surrounded by the Bolivian army officers and CIA agents, the Wehrmacht soldiers removing the road barriers painted in white and red on the Polish border crossing on September 1, 1939, and the like. He gave them a twist when setting the stage for their duplicates – and called them "Positives", because, as opposed to their originals, they do not convey the message of suffering, death and aggression. A girl is smiling, not crying, Che is lighting a cigar, not lying dead[6], the cyclists are resting after a trip, not occupying another country. The artist seems to be saying – look, do not trust your visual memories. I have manipulated them – and see, how easily they could have been different! How do you know they had not been manipulated the first time round? Are you sure they correspond to historical reality, that they had not been staged as easily as mine? Are you sure that managing inequalities, making masses believe this or that, did not inform the visual communicators' hands?

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[6] I have used this image for the cover of my previous book: Magala, Slawomir, 2005, Cross Cultural Competence, London & New York, Routledge
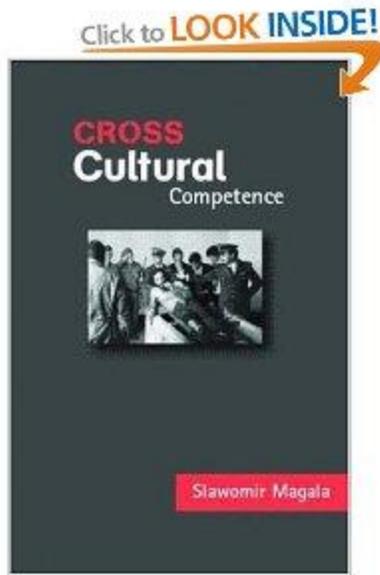
Libera is not the only artist to use this technique of ironic visual pastiche. An anonymous British street artist, Banksy, does the same. But his remake of the original photograph of a suffering Vietnamese girl is a different one. He does not transform it into a comparable photograph, pretending to be the real historical record. He makes it into a propaganda graffiti aimed against the dominant position of the "Americanized" culture. His billboard-like visual image is based on a selection of the naked girl as a single, isolated, innocent suffering child (cropped cutoff from the photograph placed in the center of the presentation). The child is led by hand on both sides – by Mickey Mouse and by Ronald McDonald, the symbols of the seductive power of the US entertainment industries (Disneyland, Hollywood) and of the successful, ubiquitous fast food network globalization (McDonald's restaurants). The message of Banksy is less abstract and emotionally cool, it is less subtle than is the case with Libera. We are not asked to ponder our gullibility and vulnerability to image manipulation, we are not invited to imagine the alternative, more positive, pasts. We are faced with the benevolent aspects of the US exports – namely with the cultural icons loved by children all over the world. But these benevolent icons are not dancing with a happy child who ate a big Mac and went on a roller-coaster ride at the Disneyland – they are leading a girl, who suffered from a less children-friendly US export, namely from an air raid of the US warplanes. Banksy is pronouncing a visual indictment of the American imperialism and questions the benevolence of the capitalist corporations, which profit both from supplying napalm to be dropped all over the world and from seducing children consumers – to be entertained and fed, also all over the world. Have a look at the original photograph (Nick Ut) analyzed in Sontag's last essays[7] .

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[7] Sontag, Susan, 2003, Regarding the Pain of Others, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux. The Polish translation (which I had made): Sontag, Susan, 2010, Widok cudzego cierpienia, Krakow, Karakter

Compare this original Nick Ut documentary photograph of the horrors of war to Libera's transformation…

… and to the Banksy remake:

Cross-cultural translation in case of Libera concerns the abstract level of methodologies of visual communication in politically sensitive context of mass visual communications. Che Guevara is a romantic icon of the anti-imperialist movements, whose followers see him a s a more "human" face of the Cuban revolution than the face of his comrade and iconic rival, Fidel Castro, who grew to become the longest ruling dictator in Latin America. Che's icon is multiplied on T-shirts and posters all over the world. Libera toys with the idea that the monumental Pieta-like scene might have been staged by the Bolivian army and CIA for the propaganda purposes. In reality, so runs the implied suggestion, Che might have been killed by bribed villagers and brought to the government soldiers to collect the reward. Libera voices this abstract doubt, but in his work there is no much commitment either to pro-Che or counter-Che political forces. In case of Banksy, the cross-cultural translation leads to a much more ideologically politicized message. Banksy's ideal audiences are not interested in the methodology of the photograph (billboards do not work this way) and the artist "quotes" only single (concrete, not abstract, but already iconic) individual suffering child for a strong visual impact – staging her simplified cropped print in a context, which points the accusing finger to the US capitalism, imperialism and cultural monopoly in communications. Inequalities are illustrated by a naked suffering child on the one hand and omnipresent, superhuman, monopolistically garrulous "super-icons" of the globalized world dominated by the United States of America.

3. In praise of open-ended hybridization as the most democratic variant of cross-culturally competent prevention of ideological monopolies

Libera opened a way to question the methodology of visual communications as abstract, formal actions undertaken by manipulating visual contents of multimedia communications. He is, to a certain extent, a translator. He translates the asymmetries of the communication process into an exploratory strategy for an active, responsive, proactive "receiver" (reader, viewer, listener, citizen). To think that the image does not necessarily tell a story, that it does not necessarily convince us to do what the authors and editors and other media wizards sending it out wanted us to do − is the first step towards the new role of the reader, viewer, listener, in short, an active, even proactive receiver, who demands access to a co-creative role in sociocultural communications. We are probably heading towards more open, more egalitarian, more participative, more critical, more "proactive" and "fair" structuring of our multimediated communications[8]. We must learn how to hybridize in order not to get caught in iron cages of grammars and inequalities defended as a clas and caste privilege.. Parody is not the only way of doing so. The inequalities Libera demonstrates by manipulating the visual "memes" of our collective memories are inequalities of access to the production and interpretation of images – the "manipulators", the "hidden persuaders", the "engineers of human soul" - are ahead of the audiences, which take time to become critical and talk back to the screens, but − hopefully - not much.

Banksy opened a way to question the ideologically anchored − through the dominant position assumed by the "mental" capitalism[9], so to speak - contextual embeddings in semantic association fields of visual communications in multimediated environment of our daily lives. His inequalities are inequalities of the market-oriented world system with strong democratic deficit, in which the USA with Canada and the European Union make some space available to honorary "whites" - the elites from outside of these regions (the Japanese, the Singaporeans, the Hong Kong residents, the South Koreans), while pretending they are open-minded and egalitarian and fair to everyone. The BRIC countries, namely Brazil, Russia, India and China, would probably tell another story of elitist exclusion and outright abuse of monopolistic position, but they are not asked, and when asked, they tend to play the game of reluctant tolerance and inclusion in the UN and WTO, which – as the game played by political and economic top - brings profits to their elites. What should we do in order to keep inequalities manageable?

Cross-cultural competence, which allows for "translation" of problems into the best available and pragmatically effective idiom, should have been invented long ago. But it hasn't been. Why needs to be done?

First, we have to become aware of the fact that contemporary multimediated sociocultural communications are in fact an equivalent of a Large Hadron Collider constructed under

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[8] Cf. Castells, Manuel, 2009, Communication power, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press
[9] One would like to know that there is already a study of "mental capitalism", though it went un noticed when published recently in a German-speaking world: cf. Franck, Georg, 2005, Mentaler Kapitalismus, Eine politische Oekonomie des Geistes, Vienna, Hanser Verlag (Edition Akzente)

Geneva by the CERN scientists in order to accelerate elementary particles and investigate their clashes at high speed. In CERN, very large investments of energy are needed in order to trigger the reactions, which otherwise would have remained inaccessible to our direct inquiry and observation. In daily life, the huge investment of energy has already been made by all of us, human individuals, who have been seduced by connectivity and who – all of us – are currently filling the enormous spatiotemporal "containers" with cooperative messages, responses, reflections, corrections, renegotiations, and the like. When we talk on mobile phones, watch TV, comment on films, "e-mail" and "skype", "google" and engage iPods, iPads, eBooks, "kindles" and the like – we accelerate the speed of evolution of future forms of socialization.

Second, we insert more conscious, cultural, reflexive inputs into historical processes of social change. We are busy with bottom-up approach to the evolutionary constellations – and this is the underlying trend, which is responsible for acute crisis of contemporary world politics, in which – as Sheldon Wolin has rightly observed, there is a democratic deficit everywhere, because democracy seems to be too simple for complex societies and too complex for simple societies (the distinction between "simple" and "sophisticated", like between "emergent" and "developed", "young" and "mature" - is echoing the older distinction between the "colonizers" and the "colonized", "the West" and "the rest"). Today nobody would dare to compare the younger nation-states of Africa to "mankind's children" who have to look up to the European and US "adults" in order to learn what should be done. Even if we want to preserve the feeling of superiority – we have to cloak it in another idiom, not immediately exposable, open to criticism. Thus we translate – most of the time, in most of places, and we try to solve the problems of inequality by acknowledging them – or fail to solve, if we fail to acknowledge and deal with them. The recent Climategate or the collapse of global negotiations on the climate control issues in Copenhagen (December 2009) contrasts sharply with the relative optimism of the previous climate summit (Poznan, 2008) and the early enthusiasm for the Kyoto protocols.

The difficulties surrounding further international collaboration on climate control are linked to a number of issues. First, we do not quite understand the causal connections between our economic activities (primarily burning of fossil fuels) and changes of the world climate. A suspicion of a general warm-up is not a naked inconvenient truth but one of the possible conclusions from complex and ambiguous evidence. A coherent policy aimed at the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions is not the best and the brightest solution to our environmental problems, but one of the possible courses of action with uncertain outcomes and dubious financial consequences. So much for the cognitive uncertainties. Academic researchers differ with respect to the validity of data and soundness of reasoning, not to mention the assessment of the rationality of proposed courses of action. There is more.

The Kyoto protocols are formulated for nation-states as members of the United Nations Organization. The climate summits are also organized around the core state participants. However, nation-states represent the interests of their elites and there is also a very distinct pecking order separating the richest and the most powerful states from the poorer

and less well armed ones. There are also many NGO's of all sizes and hues, which represent a bottom-up interest of the poorer segments of various populations, some of which are recognized and invited to the conferences on Kyoto agreements and some of which are not. The Danes decided to discriminate against the NGO's and allowed them to sit only in the outer ring of participants, preventing their member delegates from entering the meeting grounds, isolating them in front of screens transmitting proceedings from the assembly hall, where the state representatives worked. They had also changed the rules of the game, and rejected previous agreements about proceedings, yielding to the pressure exercised by the US. Sensing lack of opportunity of a positive media image of the world savior, Obama cut the deal with the Indian and the Chinese government delegations and left without much ado. The rest would be history, if not for the very obvious dilemma, which had almost been noticed by the media (it had not – because, like the movie "Slumdog Millionaire", it's introduction to the awareness of mass audiences might damage policies based on discreet cultivation of inequalities).

The western countries claim that entire world should limit CO_2 emissions, introduce "cleaner" technologies and limit the use of car as a dominant means of transportation. China and India, whose populations have just started acquiring access to cars on a broad scale, point out that the western world was not concerned about pollution of natural environment when it was industrializing and selling its products to them. Only when the world manufacturing moved to China and world office work had been outsourced to India – did the western countries start asking for more environmentally friendly policies. Let us get richer – is the tacit assumption of the governments of India and China, whose support is dependent on growing wealth of individual citizens (of which car ownership is a recognized symbol), and then we shall see if we can accommodate your demands, – i.e. the demands of the western political elites. This points to a real dilemma, which has to be translated into a real bargaining if we are to expect real solutions. Inequalities become unmanageable not only because of the unequal distribution of wealth – also because of the refusal to acknowledge and face real dilemmas and real choices. It is to acknowledge and face them that we need cross-cultural competence. This is why it is worth acquiring and developing.

Preston, June 2010