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Knowing How to "Make" Intercultural Diplomacy

Abstract
Intercultural Diplomacy embodies the richest part of the possibilities offered by international relations (public and private) through dialogue, kind assertiveness, and truthfulness. It means identifying potential syntheses between different cultures and working together with the aim of rediscovering oneself in the Other, living purposefully in the Other, accepting oneself and accepting the Other more fully. Intercultural Diplomacy involves an area of action ranging from politics to trade, to development cooperation, culture, communication, solidarity, and the creativity of law. But more than anything else, there is a need to develop a permanent, natural, fluid, intercultural attitude that can avoid (or at least suspend) judgment, and push us to better understand surrounding realities, by savouring and metabolizing more effectively. Deepening some of the functions of the human psyche that are part of every person's world of behavioural responsiveness (such as understanding, knowledge, vision, organization, experimentation, determination, synthesis) can greatly help to achieve these goals, allowing us to appreciate everyday life as a continual and fertile discovery of what is new.

Keywords: Intercultural Diplomacy, Interculture, Competence, Soft Skills, Dialogue.

1. Intercultural Diplomacy: Essence and Definition

The *making* of intercultural diplomacy by an operator/professional of international relations (therefore not only a diplomatic agent but a professional figure in close contact with diverse cultures) implies the capacity to observe in detail the "other" reality of the countries in which he conducts his activities so as to delimit the operative areas in which he can perform his work in an inclusive fashion, with the main goal of achieving the highest level of performance of the topic at hand, with "maximum gain to the maximum number of persons."

In a previous publication[1], seven professional matrixes were outlined through which the forces of intercultural diplomacy should be directed: politics, economy and commerce, culture, communication, solidarity—defined as active participation in the dynamics of civil society from the host country—and cooperation with development and law.

With the intention of not seeming too "esoteric", the present contribution seeks to go deeper into the subject and to identify some personal characteristics or behavioural functions (that every human being can find within himself, at least latently) that necessarily underlie every action interpreted in an intercultural sense, therefore "with an intercultural mind"[2].

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[1] Lobasso (2017).
[2] The expression is taken from Balboni (2007).

In part, some interpersonal competences[3] – participatory observation, *exotopia*, empathy, active listening, reformulation, cultural feedback, functional de-centring, emotive withdrawal – were stages already identified in a previous work[4] as forming an operative and experiential base for an international relations professional carrying out his duties with intercultural lenses.

2. The Choice of Interculture

The next step in the journey yields the discovery that the intercultural attitude of a human being (and therefore not just of a diplomat) does not derive from a divine assumption, nor from a *Grundnorm*, let alone from an exclusively natural inclination to include diversity. Interculture is a choice.

In this regard, the double meaning of the word *crisis* that the Greek language offers is very useful. For the Hellenics, *crisis* also means choice[5], and this gives us an important advance on what will be explored later, namely that an intercultural choice imposes a serious acknowledgment, often tiring, whose reward is an impetus towards the future, beyond the shallows of the forms and meanings of the "old world".

Perhaps even before becoming a choice, one can say that interculture is an inner impetus that somehow pushes the human being first to feel uncomfortable in the network of small, personal interpretative keys used to read external events, and subsequently to flag the desire to deepen the knowledge of otherness, not in order to interchange fleeting sorties of judgment, but to also share and bring into play parts of oneself, of one's own cultural world and values' paradigm, of one's mental and emotional hardware, in order to provoke a deeper comparison and, therefore, a fuller and richer metabolism of the "other" reality.

And, in fact, interculture does not mean having to change oneself to embrace the other, much less to be constrained to an irrational "métation"[6] in the name of a hyper-acculturation of which there would be no awareness, and that would not rest on a solid rational basis.

Interculture, rather, means the suspension of judgment and the genuine appreciation of diversity. It is defined by the conscious comparison and acceptance (one underlines: acceptance, not necessarily sharing!) of what is different. Interculture means the absence of "pre-judgment"[7] (and prejudices), instead looking for higher points of synthesis in the course of personal and professional growth that can enrich, precisely because one has come into contact with "otherness" and has fully lived it, without fear.

Although it may seem abstract and philosophical, intercultural living has incredibly practical value in everyday life, especially for those who work in international contexts with regularity[8], for it helps avoid attitudinal and communications-based crises with others, especially when they bring a diversity

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[3] Lobasso (2014).

[4] Lobasso (2017).

[5] The verb "krino" reflects both the action of deciding and that of separating.

[6] Colourful expression, sometimes "strong", often used in sociology and intercultural pedagogy, but which gives the idea of a cultural meeting particularly imprinted and, in some ways, unforgettable.

[7] The hyphen is not random: one means a premature, hasty judgment.

[8] In addition to international relations professionals such as diplomats or officials of intergovernmental organisations, NGO staff stationed in remote areas of foreign countries can certainly benefit from interculture.

that displaces or negatively affects one's deepest cultural roots. Interculture enriches life with new meanings, and it stimulates self-understanding through the breaking down of emotional or mental barriers that prevent us from seeing beyond the "comfort zone".

Ultimately, thinking and living interculturally colours our evolutionary progression by opening the walls of our perceptive capacity, freeing one's internal space to know (and know oneself) better, but also to better reflect, better confront, better change (or not change), and basically to live better.

3. Seven Entrance Doors

As outlined above, interculture is a realization; all human beings possess the interior features and "on board instrumentation" to choose the development of an intercultural attitude in everyday life.

To this end, seven introductory doors—or seven instrumental components—can be identified that in different ways find projection in the everyday psycho-behavioural activity of individuals; they can help us inhabit the (admirable) complexity of living using intercultural lenses. These keys are: *understanding, knowledge, vision, experimentation, organisation, determination,* and *synthesis*. It would be a serious mistake to think of these characteristics as watertight logical compartments in logical succession. Interculture dwells in the dimension of human activity and reactivity, where the physical, the mind, and the emotions (and why not, the spiritual sphere) intertwine, sometimes collaborating, sometimes conflicting, creating a productive and enriching exchange that allows us to get to know each other better.[9] As a result, even the classification just made (the seven doors) should be considered as a whole, or a perimeter, in which the various components alternate with each other, as pearls of the same necklace, where one can replace another in endless exchange.

a) Understanding

The acquisition of an intercultural attitude derives from the experience of an initial moment of *understanding*.

This abrupt formulation is offered not by chance, but intentionally. There is a discomfort in recognising that one's life view has a sort of constrictive grip, and that it is only outside of this grip that one begins to perceive the possibility of living and becoming aware of not one but multiple meanings for every form of daily occurrence.

As in a prism, or kaleidoscope, that offers different experiential possibilities by changing perspective, understanding (also in the form of awareness[10]) appears, makes its way, asks for attention. Basically, it is about love for oneself, a love that manifests in giving oneself the possibility of expanding daily life beyond the information and meanings stored in the course of life and (wrongly) considered the only possible reservoir to interpret what appears to be the "other".

Moreover, a positive feeling towards this "other" develops, an impetus that starts from within, but expands lovingly towards the otherness of external reality and begins to generate interest beyond a

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[9] It is similar to the concept of an "emotional intelligence" that traces a path of functional collaboration of all the components of our personality, a theme so well introduced by Goleman (1995).

[10] I am well aware of the terminological simplifications continually carried out in this work. They are functional to make the language more fluid, while still respecting correctness and substantial truthfulness.

fleeting pre-fabricated recognition, dictated by meanings pulled out of our mental and emotional drawers.

It is not unlike the difference there may be between reading a *haiku*[11], enjoying only the brevity, the *poetic vis*, the glimpse of imagination, and reading the same text but trying instead to be in tune with the author, sensing the unwritten, trying to listen to the silence, imagining the source beneath the words, imagining new meanings as compared to those immediately evident.

So, understanding is also this: empathy[12], participatory listening[13], curiosity for the unexplored, an act of love-courage which tends to arise naturally, but which must then necessarily be guided towards possible worlds and that, until only a few moments before, seemed impossible. Empathising and actively listening are not unattainable goals.

The human being tends to confuse sympathy with empathy[14], and thus commits a basic gross error: he does not change his perspective, he does not suspend judgment (even if he believes he does), thinking that to experience feelings of (even strong) commonality based on the recognition of the experience of others through their interpretative keys is already an excellent result, in fact, the best result obtainable to accommodate otherness. In truth, such an effort, on the road to true intercultural understanding, yields only minimal results in terms of seriously experiencing the "other" and "enriching with diversity".

Empathy can be induced. One begins with the imagination, asking questions about the other just when one of his feelings is not immediately recognisable to us because it is not experienced directly or not experienced through the sensorial keys of the other. At the beginning, one will have the impression of wandering without a goal, but in reality, one is only turning the knob of one's frequency mode, a bit 'to the right and a little to the left', to be better in tune with the other. To better illustrate the matter, I will turn to a more personal illustration.

I happened to discuss the Fukushima nuclear plant disaster of 2011 with a Japanese colleague on several occasions. At first, his sense of remorse, according to my own experiential standards (regarding how much an individual should grieve for such a tragedy, and consequently how much his face should contract), did not seem enough. A hasty judgment, in the first instance, led me to think that my interlocutor was not particularly participatory of this disaster. The conclusion that then emerged in regard to my Japanese colleague was that he was a cynical and individualist diplomat. It is precisely here that the choice of *knowing-making* interculture must intervene: one must learn to make space, to go further, to imagine beyond what one has felt, and what one has seen, and above all to wait. In fact, following the subsequent interlocutions on the subject, the embarrassment of the Japanese colleague had grown. I perceived some nuances in his words that brought me back to a broader view of feelings

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[11] "A poetic form born in Japan in the seventeenth century, generally composed of three verses for a total of seventeen morae (and not syllables, as is commonly believed), according to the scheme 5/7/5." [Free translation from the Italian Wikipedia entry]

[12] One cannot mention the concept of empathy without feeling the need to provide the reader with an admirable source of in-depth analysis, the contribution of Edith Stein, known to many in Italy through Costantini's works, see Costantini (1985).

[13] Also in this case the considerations of the previous note are valid; an additional source of excellent and further knowledge is Sclavi (2003).

[14] And therefore to think that having a sentiment (pathos) in common (in-) is the same thing as feeling the feeling of others (en-).

within the Japanese culture, in particular the feeling of shame. A sentiment that, set in terms of the Fukushima disaster, might be unknown to many Western cultures ("why should I be ashamed if I'm talking about an event whose blame belongs to others and not to me?"). All of these considerations notwithstanding, it is a very present feeling in the collectivist society of Japan, in which the group and its interests prevail over the individual.

In short, I had judged my interlocutor too soon. His apparent detachment should have been understood as embarrassment[15], shame for having made a mistake as a Japanese citizen, and not only as a simple individual.

The same concept of *know-make* interculture is valid for active listening.

It consists in assuming a posture that is consonant with "*com -prehending*" the other, savoring carefully words, tones, adjectives, pauses of others that are nothing but habits that can be acquired with patience, experience and, again, with initial imagination. On average, the human being is not endowed with an innate gift of listening. How often has one forgotten the name of a person who has just presented himself because the mind was already placed in "delivery" mode, and not in the "receiving" mode, all too ready to command the mouth to pronounce one's name? On the contrary, with the passage of time, by training for and feeling passionate towards this experiment in deeper listening, the perception of the richness of the speech of others greatly increases. Alongside the image one presents to the listener, the embrace of being an object of understanding will be felt, and one will see—through one's own efforts—the walls of expressive potential[16] expanding.

b) Knowledge

An approach to surrounding events based only on sensations, emotions, and feelings would be incomplete, and would risk conveying the wrong message. Instead, it is a cunning alliance between emotions and intellect that makes the experience of every event (or the study of a phenomenon) more complete, rich, and the experience of living more fruitful. It is here that *knowledge*, in the form of study, research, analysis, and any activity aimed at acquiring information, filling gaps or settling doubts, enters the "instruction guide"[17] of the diplomat (or in any case of the individual) who has decided to live the experience of interculture.

In one of my past studies on the experience of diversity as lived by young officials at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the occasion of a major international conference that presupposed a

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[15] It is difficult to imagine how embarrassing the Fukushima tragedy - which has exposed Japan for weeks before the entire international community as a sort of global environmental polluter – could be to a Japanese person who has been told since childhood that the Japanese race is elected and that the islands of Japan spring from the tears of the Goddess Amaterasu.

[16] To share a positive personal experience in the diplomatic field, I have found this capacity for maximum concentration and attention in Angela Merkel, an individual with the highest level of communication skills. In an international conference as important as the G8 in Aquila 2009, I had the pleasure of speaking with her briefly and could not fail to note with admiration that, despite the commitments and position of President Merkel, those two minutes of exchange were exclusively devoted to our conversation. President Merkel maintained constant and genuine eye-contact, giving the impression of being sincerely interested in the issue (in this case, the beauty of the island of Ischia) for the full duration of the (albeit) fleeting conversation.

[17] The term "toolkit" is borrowed from Bennett (1998).

few days of work in close contact with dozens of foreign colleagues[18], the most interesting results emerged from various interviews in which the priorities of the interviewees were at the top of the list, namely, knowledge of: the country's history of foreign colleagues, the rudiments of their language, their habits and customs, and of course the most important courtesy protocols. All this had been outlined with the aim of immediately establishing a positive and trusting interpersonal contact.

These needs are certainly compelling but, on the other hand, they show the clear experiential gap of young diplomats regarding a deeper intercultural encounter, which instead necessarily directs interpersonal relationships to other levels, not only mental, but also emotional, communicative, attitudinal, non-verbal, even physical-postural.

The results obtained from the interviews and the shared stories of these young colleagues unveiled the need for "greater enlightenment" knowledge, knowledge from all points of view and in its varied forms, knowledge impossible to ignore in the preparation for an intercultural meeting.

Going deeper necessarily yields the insight that there are further possibilities of acquiring knowledge, not only of a notionistic-literary type, but one that is exquisitely experiential, the kind of knowledge that is achieved by observing, through participation, the deepest dynamics present in the "otherness" that comes to meet us. To give an example, a diplomatic (or international) official would certainly be well-equipped on an intercultural level if in the process of starting a medium/long-term work experience in a particular foreign country, time was given to learn the founding pillars of its culture, its language, its history, its values[19]. However, deepening the knowledge of interpersonal channels, not immediately visible in that country, could be of substantial help to him in reaching higher levels of knowledge.

It is precisely these channels that increase the quality of any experience of diversity, and which—in non-exhaustive terms—may correspond to the following strategies: listening and interacting with autochthonous people with experience; using the "storytelling"[20] offered by natives as a key to interpreting the country; observing family dynamics and power/hierarchies, such as the relationship with the elderly, the societal gender balance, the social, tribal or clan-related subdivisions, and the interconnections among society and religion(s) of that country. Deeper investigations can be made into the dynamics of civil society, identifying the community areas where greater vulnerability of the population can be found, and understanding the true motivations of that same vulnerability.

This path could be pursued nearly indefinitely. The aforementioned are just a few examples of areas of observation and study, where knowledge penetrates the deeper aspects of society, mixing and interacting with "other" values, offering comparisons without (pre-) judgment, and thus allowing for a greater enrichment of one's own cognitive framework. As an example, within this mindset, for an individual convinced of the value of the inviolability of human life at the hands of others, it would be useful to acquire detailed information on the reasons for which in a given country the judicial system allows the death penalty. And this without reaching hasty conclusions through premature comparisons with one's own convictions, and without triggering one's own possibly contrary feelings on the subject. This is a process of metabolism that would lead an individual toward active listening,

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[18] Lobasso, Petri (2010).

[19] To understand the value element of the intercultural communication, Hofstede (2004).

[20] In Italy, one of the pioneers of storytelling, and its useful use in complex organisations, is Andrea Fontana, http://www.andreafontana.org/pubblicazioni.php?id=309.

to "*com-prehend*" the "other" motivations in a deeper way, perhaps even through a painful passage without running the risk, however, of losing the founding reasons of his own belief. In fact, on the contrary, he may well gain greater security in his own convictions precisely because he was able to suspend the rootedness of his perspective for a moment, to genuinely study the other, and then (re)turn more firmly to his beliefs (in the example, the inviolability of human life at the hands of others)[21].

Interculture is a return trip. But it is a magnificent return, enriched by the awareness that there are many and often diametrically opposed convictions on subjects (in the aforementioned example, capital punishment) in which an ethnocentric attitude would risk making us assume the role of banner-bearers of an (illusory) absolute truth. This way of approaching the other is undeniably useful for those who find themselves working or living in countries where the differences regarding their values and the natives' abound and force them to negotiate their identity and deep values.[22]

Nevertheless, this kind of negotiation often terrifies individuals living abroad, surrounded by profound cultural diversity. In particular, there is a tendency towards an erroneous assumption that even just beginning to question important parts of oneself is "the beginning of the end", that is to say, a risky loss of identity, of one's own cultural bases, of knowing how to recognise oneself in something certain[23].

This is a dangerous and misleading alteration of the effects of the experience of diversity. To be clear, *to know* does not alter one's equilibrium; if this were to occur, it would mean that there were recessive parts of oneself that no longer kept pace with the evolution of one's identity. Every minute that passes, one is something new, even without wanting it, sometimes without even feeling it. On the path of human evolution, it is normal that some psycho-behavioral clothes wear out or shrink to such an extent that they are no longer adequate to what one is becoming.

This is more prevalent in the world of international relations and, specifically, in the diplomatic sphere. The profession itself calls for a widening of knowledge (and consciousness) that is not contained in the mere specialisation in this or that field or, worse, avoiding contact with the deepest experiential reality in a destination country, only for fear of living something new from the inside.

The knowledge of religious values, for example, is extremely enlightening for this evolutionary path. An instructive example could be the encounter of a Catholic Christian with Islam, in a country where the diplomatic agent was sent and where, therefore, a long stay in a country of Muslim faith is planned. If this were a country with a strong Muslim tradition, "sharia"[24] would likely apply. Only by being passionately interested in the Muslim dimension, by studying, knowing, talking, discussing with natives and non-natives would it be possible to live with serenity the many stimulations (especially the

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[21] I have personally experienced this cognitive journey, exploring and questioning the position of an "other" on more than one occasion, including in the example given of the death penalty; in a long conversation with an American diplomat colleague, I listened to an extensive recounting of his motivations for accepting the death penalty.

[22] Some years ago, I understood, for the first time, the concept of negotiating identity, during a convivial event with an Italian journalist serving in Japan, who shared his impressions as an individual who painfully managed to absorb the Japanese culture internally, and who constantly found, in everyday life, occasions of personal and interpersonal stress.

[23] A good example of the above comments can be found at the political level: the reluctant attitude of the European Union to accept Italian aid signals in terms of migratory welcome.

[24] Defined as an intensive normative regulation of all aspects of daily life based on the precepts of the Qur'an and the Sunna.

negative ones) coming from the diversity that comes to meet us. It is not enough to read a book, or to scan websites. The profound knowledge that allows one's intellect to better penetrate the "other" dynamics of cultures different from one's own is what consolidates the experience, the one that generates interculture. Knowing how to "make" Intercultural Diplomacy means equipping oneself with intercultural competences, to identify cultural and value areas where one feels more uncomfortable, explore them with passion and openness (again, with a positive attitude), to act in a proactive way, *living* the hosting country, its people, and its values in a balanced way[25]. Only in this way will one's personal and professional growth "abroad" avoid obstacles to continuous progression.

c) Vision
Understanding and knowledge usually binds (quite naturally) the desire to expand the creative space to look at more aspects of daily life as a whole, no longer with analytical but rather with inclusive lenses. That is *vision*[26].

Vision does not coincide with the reading of the single event, with the single perception or the single data, nor with the first small experience. It germinates from a set of events, perceptions and experiences that can be interpreted through an intercultural perspective, and that generate a scenario full of long-range possibilities in time and space, and a more complex construct that takes its own form of spatio-temporal continuity.

Additionally, one precisely enters the world of time and interspace, and that is the world where understanding and knowledge, experimented with love, awareness, study and courage, are extended to become necessity, rule, habit, repetition: in a word, vision.

The individual experiences a sort of perceptual expansion on a continuous basis, he senses the existence of new and richer possibilities, to the point of creating in himself a world in which diversity and events can be better known, in a richer and more fertile fashion. Always.

Upon reflection, it emerges that one cannot disengage the ability to create an intercultural vision in one's life from a good dose of idealism. But even the latter is not only the product of a spontaneous inner motion: it can be built step by step, discovery after discovery, confirmation after confirmation.

One must be (or become?) at least a little idealistic[27] to believe in an intercultural worldview, an idealism that in some measure gives us passion, courage, and strength in the belief that one can really participate in the creation of a better world, even if in a small way. One must believe also that new causes can be introduced into daily living to produce new effects. But these causes and effects are no longer rooted in a vision of isolated compartments—i.e., multicultural, separatist, isolationist—but are instead firmly enshrined in the opposite belief that dialogue, fertile exchange, interpersonal harmony,

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[25] Just to give some examples, specifying that this is an individual path and is therefore subjective, I am thinking of sensitive topics such as capital punishment, balance in gender relations, freedom of expression and information, the rule of law, the protection of human rights and of fundamental freedoms, all issues that could be the object of internal agitation for the foreigner in a cultural-religious dimension of Muslim origin, where the interpretation of these could differ greatly from what he/she thinks it "should be".

[26] In this work, my interpretation of the term "vision" is not aligned with that of the business environment, particularly evident in the English language, where it is almost a synonym of *mission*. My concept of vision is precisely an overall overview, one that reaches high functional levels of inter-activity between all its components, including all the details that are part of it.

[27] In the Jungian sense of the word, referable to his theories on the Psychological Types.

the genuine desire to know each other and to live fully the experience of the diversity others, can improve one's life (and others theirs). The idea is move beyond the walls of solipsism where people are frightened by certain individuals, tribes, ethnic groups, to move beyond forms of human aggregation that favour a restrictive existential mode like "ingroup", and distrust what is "outgroup" because it is considered a potential threat to the status quo[28].

Idealism, if not rooted in an inclusive intellect and "body", receptive to an "inter-"open exchange, can generate obtuse distortions of the reality of the "other" that surrounds us, and generate expectations whose failure risks leading us to a comparative reactivity with respect to diversity. A better world is a world that includes a "multiperspective", even when it means the forced acceptance of points of view that one does not wish to share. Accepting, dialoguing, including, do not necessarily imply sharing. A healthy position for knowing how to "make" interculture, and therefore intercultural diplomacy, means being able to recognize the presence of the other, of his right to have different interpretative keys, different evolutionary timeframes, different communication skills.

A classic example of idealism in international relations is provided by the great number of intercultural clashes based on different interpretations of human rights or fundamental freedoms[29]. However, also in this context, it is one thing to be convinced and to promote one's convictions and it is another to exclude *a priori* and not to grant the right of an opinion, regardless of how inconceivable or objectionable it may be to us.

For example, some important research in the field of interculture[30] helps illuminate how the differences in socio-cultural structuring (and the consequent dynamics of power) of a country or a geographic area can lead to completely opposite views on issues that (from an ethnocentric perspective) one would think could be objective. In particular, a cultural dimension of the "collectivist" type (one imagines a large portion of the eastern extremity of the globe and therefore a "Confucian" vision of life) will place the welfare and dominance of the group as the fundamental and priority pillar of survival, putting the group's reasons over those of the individual. On the other hand, a highly individualistic cultural society will tend to always defend the right of every single individual to disengage from the chains of group conditioning to affirm himself. This contrast can quickly be understood by comparing the American formulation of the "right to the pursuit of happiness" as outlined in one of the most important institutional documents of US society[31], to an orthodox Muslim view of happiness, which sees it as an element not attributable to the will of human beings but to Allah. In short, knowing how to make intercultural diplomacy is always a matter of perceiving reality in an "and, and", (almost) never "or, or" mode.

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[28] An unquestionable pioneer of the seventies on the theories of belonging to social groups and, therefore, the possibility of incarnating roles as an *ingroup* and *outgroup* member is Henri Tajfel, known in Italy to the general public as Tajfel (1999).

[29] It is no surprise that in the last fifty years, the planet has produced American, European, Onusian, African, Asian, Latin American and European charters of Human Rights in countless international conferences marked by cultural confrontation and by the formulation of precepts often proclaimed in open conflictual reaction to the same formulations from other areas of the world.

[30] Cfr. Hofstede (1991)

[31] I refer, of course, to the United States Declaration of Independence of July 4, 1776.

d) Experimentation

The process of acquiring knowledge, which is enriched and mixed with that of understanding, contributing in itself to create a functional alliance in the human being between the emotional and mental spheres (an alliance that would hopefully tend to evolve into a broad-spectrum and long-term *intercultural vision*), also needs confirmation, and therefore *experimentation*.

It bears repeating: the line of minor defence of the international relations professional who has decided to undertake a journey into interculture is always something personal. More specifically, the experience of interculture could be: 1) a "top/down" experience that begins from a positive mental predisposition towards the concept of "inter-" and gradually moves towards the area of feelings, emotions (of the "body"), for the purpose of greater rooting; or, b) a "bottom/up" inner inspiration, that starts from a positive emotional impulse (for example, a moment of empathic emotion that surprises with its novelty) that the individual then wishes to further illuminate, acquiring data, information, and enriching the lived experience with the help of the intellect.

Regardless of the modality of approach, living interculturally presupposes a repetition for experimental purposes that, in one way or another, the individual will have to indulge in order to more solidly root the encounter with diversity while making it continuous, natural, a *modus vivendi*.

As stated above, there are no universal experimental recipes. However, the intercultural dimension has attracted the attention of scholars and researchers for at least twenty years, therefore one can easily say that anyone who decides to try his hand in better developing their intercultural skills, or in orientating his attitudes towards an intercultural way, would have plenty of options.

Models of intercultural competence; models of intercultural communicative competence[32]; tests to ascertain one's level of intercultural aptitude / reactivity; studies on the most significant components of the intercultural dimension (such as values, language, verbal and non-verbal communication, written communication, the influence of rules and communication keys on an intercultural event), are all areas of experimentation that can lead those who decide to deepen the issue through interesting evolutionary stages aimed at improving their lives and those of others.

One should not forget that living "with an intercultural mind" has an extremely practical value: it helps one to be able to exchange winning messages in the presence of an "otherness" to which one could be initially unprepared; to make one live the world of others with greater wealth, generating greater respect for what is the "other" for the mere fact of having a better awareness of him (net of concord/discord on this or that particular issue); to make one discover larger and richer aspects of oneself, forced to break down the walls of the "already seen" and the "already known" to embark on a temporary shift from prior perspectives that were once considered untouchable, if not unique.

Experimentation produces confirmations, makes us more confident on the path of intercultural discovery and harmoniously links us to the previous characteristics, expanding our consciousness, thanks to the "inter-"experiences, and activities that presuppose a "give/take" outcome.

Experiencing, progressively metabolising what has been learned, experienced, perceived, is not a "lazy" activity, and certainly cannot be thought of in terms of discovering a mathematical formula to be used on any occasion, or to solve intercultural problems, such as communication and comparative crises. Experimenting means developing the 'stomach', to make oneself aware of 'crossing the desert',

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[32] In relation to the intercultural communicative competence, I have often been inspired by the "Balboni model". For an updated version see, "Balboni-Caon", Balboni, Caon (2015).

a continuous search that finds its *raison d'être* in exploration itself and in the fact that in the apparent cultural chaos it is possible to draw ideas, analyse, understand and basically move forward. It is by feeling at ease in that interpersonal chaos[33] that one makes progress in understanding the other, opening possibilities, enlarging walls. Interrupting the chain of experimentation, giving in to the atavistic and chromosomal resistances of one's individuality, would be a very serious mistake that would give room to fear and the desire to defend oneself, by resorting to the fallacious exclusiveness of one's interpretive codes of reality.

Over the years, I have observed many colleagues and professionals of international relations indulge in judgments and self-judgments of responsibility simply due to an unawareness of their capacity to resist, succumbing to the sirens of preventive closure towards customs, myths, legends, and 'other' habits which, apparently, required too painful an effort to adapt and metabolize. In this regard, another brief personal experience can serve to illustrate the point. On one convivial occasion, I witnessed a conversation between two Italian architects visiting Khartoum, in Sudan, who had completely opposite visions of the concept of beauty in the urban layout of the Sudanese capital. The first, despite having spent months there training university students, living in a local guest house and sharing the deep and inner habits of the Sudanese, could not understand their "total lack of harmony in the primordial ideation of areas and neighbourhoods", concluding that the Sudanese were destined to "remain in a state of disharmony", as if talking about a missing enzyme in the organism of the citizens of this country. The second, on the contrary, could not stop pronouncing the ingeniousness with which some districts of Khartoum had been built, acclaiming a unique Sudanese sensibility which resulted in making some areas of the city extremely comfortable and adapted to the needs of the inhabitants.

Projections.

One is in the presence of pure and personal projections of how reality 'should' appear according to one's private meanings. At stake is a (more than legitimate, to be sure) diversity of opinions deriving from the personal elaboration of intimate constructs, belonging to their evolutionary progression, through which everything is filtered, especially abstract categories and multidimensional concepts such as beauty.

In truth, the key is not to find who among the two litigants may or may not possess the absolute truth. There is no absolute truth. Or rather, the only absolute truth is that there is no absolute truth, but that the human being paints the world with the colours he has somehow inherited.

What is worse, very often one does not care to observe those colours, to blend them according to one's needs, or to change them when one feels too old for what one is becoming. It is not unlike the difference between a palette of standard poor quality crayons, bought at the supermarket or in a toy shop, ready to use, and the result produced once used—mixed, confused, chaotic, with the colours mutually lost in search of new 'pantones'—that best express what one feels and wants to create. It is in

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[33] The concepts of chaos and navigation have been expressed in a very clear way by prof. Ronald Heifetz (1994) in his essay "Leadership without easy answers", Harvard University Press. A leader who decides to develop a critical issue into something innovative and usable, must know how to 'navigate the chaos'. As an apprentice of the intercultural sciences, he will be able to experiment patiently, noting mistakes, reactions, contradictions, in search of a dynamic balance that, nevertheless, will progress.

the latter, I propose, that the response to one's intercultural discomforts and to the inability to overcome the laziness of one's comfort zone may be found.

e) Organisation

Knowledge, understanding, vision, and research may not be, however, enough to organise an entire existential scenario, live it in continuous mode, and adapt it to personal and professional growth needs.

The international relations professional who would like to commit to intercultural lenses through which to view his path of activities will have to learn a certain degree of *organisation* in the process of classifying (lived or to be lived) experiences.

A conscious experiential repetitiveness becomes necessary, almost assuming the form of a pseudo-automatism that leads one towards a true intercultural "state of mind". Every moment of communicative and interpersonal exchange becomes a unique part of one's own intercultural journey. To use an image that is not too fanciful, it is like having a notebook and pencil in one's pocket to write down fragments of one's intercultural experiences and reorganize them as one goes[34].

In this sense, organization means giving room to the perceptive, sensory instruments of diversity that each of us considers when comparing our way of living to the experience of the other. As universal recipes do not exist, intercultural competence cannot be taught, at most stimulated; nevertheless, simple guidelines can be formulated that seem common to many intercultural approaches. For example, in relation to the experience of diversity, especially when "forceful", each individual should be able to learn to organize himself by regularly posing some introspective questions, namely: "How did I feel?"; "What kind of feeling did I feel?"; "How did I react?"; "Which inner rope has vibrated as a result of this or that experience?"; "Was I afraid of that experience? And if so, why?"; "Do values exist in me that stimulate greater reactivity in the case of questioning them? And if so, why?[35]"

The organisation resulting from the responses and the map drawn step by step, experience after experience, are elements that refine one's attitude and one's intercultural competence and reveal unknown worlds, both in others and in oneself.

It is like visualising yourself in an elevator, continuously moving to bring body and mind in contact, the right and left brain hemispheres, heart and intellect.

The beginning of this process, especially for people who do not naturally live the organisation experience, can be tiring. Similarly, its continuation moves along a descending path. Interculture is discovered. Discovery is energy, and an intercultural energy tends to self-perpetuate, like a dynamo that never runs out of *fuel* to recharge itself, like endorphins for an experienced athlete.

After all, what is being questioned when one opens the door to an intercultural perspective is the kind of automatism that makes one react in a "*bovine*" way, unaware, robotic before, during and after the event that perhaps may have led to an intercultural crisis[36].

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[34] This image is also Balnoni's (2007).

[35] These questions are based off of a ten-year experience in intercultural matters, independently expanded on the number of questions to ask, starting from the base of Roysircar's work (2004).

[36] A pioneer behavior with respect to diversity of the concept of automatism in human, in the immediate post-war period, was Solomon Asch (1946).

Instead, it is precisely by organising a sensorial map based on the experience of each day, step by step, mistake after mistake, that it is possible to overcome the obstacle that the repetitive mechanism presents and to which one is inadvertently prey whenever one judges something exclusively from an ethnocentric perspective.

Another useful example is offered by the case of an international relations worker, who in the course of his working relationships in Sudan, to use the same example, after a sufficiently long period of time[37] stigmatizes with disappointment, and perhaps annoyance, the inability of his local partners to observe a certain precision in their daily activities (simple things like avoiding spelling errors in an Arabic/English translation, or organizing logistics without negatively impacting a public event). This attitude would be the result of falling into an ethnocentric error emerging from automatism and unawareness. In fact, after a while living and working with the Sudanese, those wishing to interpret the surrounding reality with intercultural lenses would understand with the utmost awareness that making these kinds of mistakes in that country (even at very high professional spheres, as in diplomacy), simply are not subject to the same stigma they would receive in a Western country, especially when values such as career, power, and hierarchy are at stake.

f) Determination

The decision to live interculturally, in a contemporary society increasingly obsessed with the security aspects of everyday life and that, therefore, tendentially leads to the withdrawal of oneself and of those who are capable of clearly interpreting (who therefore, instead, play it "safe"), requires *determination* now more than ever.

The achievement of a state of consciousness permanently oriented towards the inclusion of diversity and towards appreciation, "regardless" of otherness, is also, therefore, an act of will[38] . The will is a human function, present in every individual, and its ascertained immanence (even for those character types that would self-define as lazy or abulic) leads one to think that it is a key in one's toolbox, and that it shall be used if necessary.

The meeting with diversity is often painful and complex: it presents challenges. For example, thinking about what happens when a personal belief about a certain value is questioned by the encounter with individuals who have an opposite view of the same value. The example of capital punishment has already been addressed, noting the courage it takes to calmly accept the reasons of those who think in a diametrically opposed manner, with no need to marry the arguments and without any risk of losing oneself or one's beliefs. It is a fact that, when in contact with a very different reality, one's deepest roots can vibrate unevenly, placing us in a state of agitation and possible reactivity (and the reaction is often a harbinger of unmanageable haste and intercultural communication crisis).

Perhaps the most relevant argument, capable of inspiring the determination necessary to courageously pursue an inclusive intercultural path, is perhaps the fact that the alternative to a fertile dialogue, an enriching exchange, to the further discovery of oneself and of the other, today would consist in a sort of mediocre *stasis*, a forced maintenance of an existential *status quo*, a laborious and continuous

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[37] One thinks about experiential time, so very personal as a concept.

[38] There are many written works about the will in its manifold manifestations, especially as a symbol of determination and power. Indeed, the clarity of Baumeister, Tierney (2011) is particularly impressive.

separation through ethno-cultural conceptual and meaning barriers, that indulges the fear of uncertainty, an uncertainty that a genuine and unconditional opening to what is "different" requires. At this point the question is: in an era of glaring transfiguration of such cultural cornerstones as space and time; an era of human globalization moving so quickly that it eludes its very protagonists (think of the world of information) and projects towards the creation of unknown inter-space and inter-temporal[39] areas with the help of the telematic invasion of everyday life (communication, a key vehicle in the dissemination of diversity); in an era where interdependence at the cosmo-planetary level is no longer a choice but an immanence to be accepted ... is it still possible for the human being (and even more so for a professional of international relations who is always in constant contact with diversity) to defend himself from the "inter-"?

I believe that the answer is no. On the contrary, this interdependence must be ridden at all levels[40]. To do this it takes courage, it takes will, it takes determination. The determination of those who understand that life today could be represented as an inclined plane: accelerate uphill or risk skidding backwards.

The will is a psychological function available to every human being; it is immanent. Likewise, I do not believe that someone can claim to be chronically abulic from a genetic point of view. In this sense, the "will" may have a greater or lesser influence on human beings such that it determines distinct character peculiarities. This is why I do not deny the possibility that there may exist a comparative advantage in terms of will[41], but what must be strongly rejected, especially when considering intercultural interactions, is the idea that one cannot use a good dose of will to "decompose" one's otherwise rigid beliefs when faced with a strong experience of diversity. A function that supports one's inclusive vision, in which agreement and synthesis are better than walls or earplugs. The will, and determination can work as an "armed arm" of one's evolutionary and cumulative vision. To be well noted: I do not speak here of dull fury in the name of an idealism out of time and out of space[42]. Instead, I refer to the ability to remain firm in purpose, in the conscious aspiration that "inter-" is better than "multi-".

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[39] This felicitous redefinition of the two values of space and time can be frequently found in the many works of Mario Ricca, in particular Ricca (2008).

[40] I deeply appreciate the way in which this perception of the future was expressed by Ricca (2008), according to whom "When multiculturalism becomes perceptible, the interculturality of our vital actions and of our own identity is a fact that has already happened. If multiculturalism constitutes the perceptible present (...), interculturality (...) is the future in progress. A future that immediately knocks strongly at the doors (...) spreading pervasively between the joints of everyday life (...) " [translation mine].

[41] Perhaps due to many aspects of one's growth/evolution, including the family environment, the primordial examples and the most meaningful positive or negative experiences in one's life.

[42] At international conferences related to the intercultural sciences over the years, I have had the pleasure of sharing interesting conversations with various scholars who have seemed particularly insistent on the theme of tribal mixing as a hopeful possibility towards a "métation"; the ideas is that with the passing of time, the evolution of the human being as a whole will, in a sense, contribute towards creating the conditions for recognizing more than merely roots, characteristics and peculiar traits, in the name of an undefined pan-humanism. It seems a very attractive vision, but perhaps not calibrated to the current *times* and, I submit, those of the future for quite some time. To offer a nutritional analogy, I like to think that the beauty of a fruit salad, sweet and varied but enjoyable for its parts and its dynamic and palatal combinations, is preferable to a shake, containing many different products but with only one partially recognisable flavour.

g) Synthesis

The intercultural dimension is a complex construct. It contains contradictions, denials, errors, uncertainties, inconsistencies.

The perception of diversity is not something comparable, objectively defined. There is no manual capable of regulating, at an optimal level, the meeting with diversity. All the more so at a subjective level, where the changeability of the time and space of the human conscience could surely lead us to a conclusion about what the "other" is, sometimes in a benign, sometimes in an antagonistic way.

The individual often uses the function of "tolerance" to deal with differences, especially when views are not shared. Yet, this function is not only not always reliably present; in the long run, the excessive (and prolonged) use of it drains energy from the personal reserves of individuals who must instead be able to find original interior responses to better manage contact with the otherness, in order not to always use the "patience-bonus" during an intercultural conflict.

Therefore, the cultivation of a personal synthesis is required. Emotions, information, reactions, behaviour, thoughts, certainties, and uncertainties need to find their harmony within a human personality who has made his "switch" in an intercultural mode. Synthesis is the "noble middle ground"[43], it is the awareness that the answers to diversity are not classified by including them in an archive made of shelves or numerical areas, but in a much wider "library" that is one's own conscience, one's own way of life, built moment by moment. Enchantment, surprise, curiosity, questioning, answering, dialogue, are just some of the manifestations of a harmonious synthesis that one must accompany from its emergence, transforming the repetitiveness of an intercultural behaviour into an "on" mode, always "in focus".

Understanding, *knowledge*, *vision*, *experimentation*, *organisation*, *determination* are all interactive elements that require a continuous synthesis, a *harmonic vis*[44] that in some way, in their mutual flow, makes them natural in the behaviour of the individual, moment by moment. The more so for an intercultural diplomat, for a professional in the encounter with diversity, who will find himself in contact with the difference exponentially, to a much greater extent than most.

Synthesis scares. One gets the impression that the "mingling" of a part of oneself that consciously embraces the other corresponds to a loss of one's own parts, to a kind of amputation.

Nothing could be more erroneous. Synthesis, harmony, create a superior and more complete element of knowledge, an expansion of one's consciousness, a new multi-visual perspective of those things in life that lead us to appreciate ourselves and others even more, through a process in which we "go out to the balcony",[45] and the walls of the possibilities widen and include new awareness by naturally, and in a richer way, adapting ourselves to the "other" reality that surrounds us.

Examples of synthesis can be found in everyday life across all continents.

Even seemingly trivial examples can clarify the idea: imagine an Italian pasta dish with tomato sauce, that, to please an American tourist on holiday in Italy, is weighed down by excessive (from an Italian perspective) seasoning, sauce and cheese; or again, like a shoe in the shape of an Italian moccasin,

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[43] To use an expression attributed to the Buddha.

[44] And, if I may be allowed a bit of national pride, who better than an Italian to interpret the concept of harmony within diversity?

[45] The expression " go out to the balcony " is borrowed from one of the best American interpreters of leadership theories, Ronald Heifetz, of the Harvard Kennedy School, Heifetz (1994).

covered, however, with fur and leopard-spotted skin, as might be appreciated by a wealthy Nigerian so as to simultaneously enjoy the elegance of the *belpaese* and the symbolism of slippers worn by the tribal chiefs. On closer inspection, behind the apparently frivolous nature of the examples cited, one discovers important occasions in which to observe the aforementioned *harmonic vis* in movement, and the ability of the human being to reach points of synthesis by abandoning a small/large part of one's own self to embrace a little more the other, attracted by the search for "us".

4. Conclusions

Today, speaking of Intercultural Diplomacy seems to lead us almost on a path of obstinate countertrend with respect to common opinion. There is a battle raging in the world between the forces of separation and those of inclusion. People are afraid, driven to close doors, to build walls, to dig ditches in the illusory belief that this has a protective value, on a physical, emotional, mental and spiritual level.

Nevertheless, a closer look at the history of humanity, reconstructions after the defeats, resurrections after the defeats, shows us an innate human instinct of communion, sharing, inclusion; an instinct that has yet to be subjugated despite the disasters that, for centuries, have persisted in the different areas of the globe.

Dialogue, listening, temperance, and an impulse toward community, are characteristics that keep the potential for togetherness intact in the human soul.

An intercultural attitude includes all this and uses these tools to sustain a fundamental concept: interdependence is an irrepressible element on the evolutionary path of the human being.

Interculture is the little flame of a stove at rest.

And what is today a little flame, can one day become a fire.

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