

## Diversity competence, Cultures don't meet people do – A Review

As a whole, “Diversity competence” is a comprehensive piece of 352 pages all together covering first the various concepts of culture, then what competence is all about, including up-to-date notions of power and ethics, and finally putting the various facets of the TOPOI-model into (new) perspectives, including hands-on applications. It deals with the vast context of globalisation on both the macro and micro levels, identifying two scenarios that relate to cultural diversity: first, the idea that globalisation leads to a homogenous world at the end and second, that of realising superficial changes only. Both processes are taking place, indeed, and they offer new opportunities when dealing with intercultural communication and competence as a whole.

As specified on p. 19, the main approach of the book is a special focus on intercultural interaction and not on the common cultural transition. The subtitle of the book reminds us indeed that people meet, and not cultures. This is emphasised by the front cover of the book featuring South-African painter Marlene Dumas’ “Coloured Drawings”, which consist of portraits of people with various ethnic background. They all prove unique in their context, and one can easily imagine meeting them in reality: a cross-cultural journey through the painting with a clear link to reality. This journey is exactly what the whole book is about: a comprehensive, inspiring and exciting voyage through our world of diversity!

Edwin’s own TOPOI model takes up an important part of the book. And quite rightly so. For those not familiar yet with it, the acronym is derived from the Greek *topos* (place, *locus* in Latin) in its plural form. The letters stand for Tongue (a.k.a. language), Order, Persons, Organisations and Intentions. It concretises areas where differences can appear, so not only on the intercultural level. The model aims at preparing for differences in communication and interaction in various settings. It also offers a framework for reflection during or after encounters. In the case of miscommunication, the model provides answers away from the pure micro-cultural context, but more broadly at a macro level. See for details p. 125-134 (and especially the scheme on p. 129-130).

The book is intended for a broad range of readers, or perhaps better users, from educators and learners to practitioners in the field, including those dealing with intercultural issues in business or non-profit organisations across borders (NGOs for example).

Didactically speaking, the book is well-organised in clearly outlined chapters with detailed contents easy to work with, and it offers a generous amount of theory (including the classical dimensions and Hall’s vast contribution on non-verbal language), as well as study assignments for those readers in education. It also provides a companion website linked to the publisher: [www.coutinho.nl/diversitycompetence](http://www.coutinho.nl/diversitycompetence) There, one can find extra study material, i.e. study assignments (ordered for each chapter), case discussions (a 35-page

document about the last chapter) and finally TOPOI cards (as a rendition of the model). All items with free access. No doubt this digital, didactic part adds to the total value of the book.

Technically speaking, the book contains a large referred bibliography, worth noting that it is multi-lingual, an aspect I enjoy in books written by Europeans! It also includes a (subjective?) list of related websites, a useful item, even if it is short and may quickly outdate. Then follows a solid index, with the main concepts in alphabetical order. All together a very practical help in using the book sporadically as reference or intensively as course book.

To conclude, “Diversity competence” is not a compilation of old stuff with an ancient model from a new perspective, but a comprehensive (course) book explaining a model that has proven its validity through the years, now positioned in a new context and addressing current business and societal issues. In brief: a relevant addition to the collection of serious stuff an interculturalist must possess (not for on the shelf, but to use, of course!).

On a personal note, let me first congratulate both authors for this achievement! No doubt they have contributed a new stone to the on-going construction of our field. And finally, let me express some personal feelings: indeed, while reading and reviewing the book (partly on a plane between Asia and Europe – a real journey) I also had some regrets: although Arjan and Edwin are dear colleagues I first met long ago, I now have also realised that I did not get the chance to work more often with them and hence become inspired by their insights and dedication. May this beautiful book help me with this now!

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