

Interculturalism is a dangerous field. After all, it is next to impossible to talk about a country and its culture(s) without resorting to generalizations and stereotypes. While the latter might characterize at least some of the locals, generalizing inevitably fails to reflect the complex multicultural realities that are common to our modern societies. This fact does not have to wipe out the value of analyzing cultural traits, though, as long as you take the resulting insights for what they are: clues rather than recipes.

Approached with this attitude, Richard Hill's *We Europeans* can be fascinating reading. Originally published in the early 1990's, the book has been out of print for some time but is now available electronically by Europublications, a Brussels-based publisher. It is not only a valuable guide to dealing with the continent and its people, but also entertaining reading.

While giving a brief history of Europe, describing many of its individual countries and their cultures, and looking for common denominators across the continent, Hill often employs generalizations that give valuable insights. At the same time, he strives to discuss the plurality of countries, regions, counties, townships,

and clubs, of class systems and subcultures, as well as influence factors such as age, wealth, or family background. Cultural traits are explained with the help of many examples of national habits and tendencies. The perhaps most valuable part of the book is the final section, in which the author analyzes, often in humorous ways, what some or all of the European cultures have in common and what sets them apart.

Though he spent much of his life living and working in Belgium, Hill is your proverbial British storyteller. His book is full of entertaining anecdotes, witty quotes, engaging stories, and subtle messages that may at times be hard to decipher for those unfamiliar with the cultures described.

Given that the book was first published about 20 years ago, is it fair to assume that its content is somewhat dated?

The answer is 'yes and no'. The ever-strengthening forces of globalization undoubtedly left their imprints on Europe's countries and cultures. Accordingly, culture-specific behaviors and practices are constantly evolving and changing. On the flip side, one should never underestimate the tenacity of cultural values and fundamental beliefs, which tend to change at an almost glacial pace, if at all. This explains why *We Europeans* still feels fresh: in many ways, the continent Hill competently describes is still the Europe of today.



Lothar Katz is the founder of Leadership Crossroads. He has a wealth of experience in helping clients achieve productive cooperation across cultures and drive business success on a global scale.

A seasoned global executive, he regularly interacted with employees, customers, outsourcing partners, and third parties in numerous countries around the world, including many parts of Asia. Mr. Katz is the author of "Negotiating International Business – The Negotiator's Reference Guide to 50 Countries Around the World".