

Reframing

Inter

cultur

ality



## Hello

The card game *Reframing Interculturality*<sup>12</sup> is an invitation to engage with and gain a more differentiated understanding of the subject of interculturality in the context of international development cooperation. In essence, interculturality is the daily business of everyone who works in international development cooperation. When we take a closer look at the intercultural aspects of international development cooperation, we are confronted with our own mental models, beliefs and value systems, as well as our social status. They inevitably influence our actions and interactions.

**Starting with myself:** I am a white, female artist, choreographer and cultural manager. I have Swiss and Italian nationality and two passports, which grant me many privileges. I grew up with perspectives and opportunities, including the ability to see the world and travel without hesitation or major restrictions, always knowing that there is a safe place I can return to. My privileges are shared by a rather small proportion of the global population. I grew up in Europe, within a Eurocentricity-driven context. Nevertheless, I have taken the chance to expose myself to realities other than my own, embracing the experience of being and feeling like a foreigner. I have used moments of discomfort to question my assumptions and biases. Art has always been an important vehicle in this regard, challenging me to reexamine my habits and step out of my comfort zone. For me, art and cultural awareness are practices that should be experienced rather than learned. I believe that a clear awareness of one's privileges, an individual approach to perceiving the world

and a robust strategy for coping with reality are the prerequisites for acquiring intercultural skills.

Our conscious and unconscious ways of processing and interpreting **cultural origin, social norms and conventions** in both professional and private contexts act as a kind of protective cloak, a cognitive filter through which we make sense of information and thus feel secure in our perceptions. They can form a comfort zone that legitimizes our values, ideas, attitudes and actions. Intercultural encounters are often characterized by dissonance as we are compelled to confront **the other(s)**<sup>3</sup> with their distinct geopolitical and historical backgrounds and individual experiences. In the history of development cooperation, the intention of wanting to bring about **'only good'**<sup>4</sup>, of showing 'openness towards the other/the foreigner,' has been both a driving force and a contradiction, as openness and understanding cannot be achieved without encountering and resolving friction and conflict.

We are social beings who, intentionally or otherwise, find ourselves entangled in social relationships that challenge our preconceptions and reveal the power imbalances between us.

One way of dealing with such contradictions is through building **intercultural competence**<sup>4</sup>. It can be fostered through encounters with others and an understanding of how these encounters reflect back on oneself. This approach to developing intercultural competence is interpersonal. As such it is both cognitive and physical, analytical and pragmatic, demanding and mindful at the same time. An interpersonal approach to interculturality presupposes human connection and connectedness and does not separate the self and the other.

The card game *Reframing Interculturality* encourages players to adopt an **interpersonal approach when dealing with others and also with themselves**. The game's aim of building intercultural competence is achieved through the playful interaction between self and other. The game format was chosen to avoid any sense of lecturing. Instead, learning happens through playfulness, openness and a sense of collective exploration around the topic.

For many of us who will play this card game, such an approach to intercultural understanding will challenge and question our dominant Western mental models and our ethnocentric ways of studying **culture, identity and communication**<sup>6</sup>. Approaching interculturality in this way requires us to interrogate our present situation by taking into account historical events and ideas. It is a responsibility that we must take on both as individuals and as a society. History is present in everyone and everything. It is shaped by the **interconnectedness of bodies and beings**.

There is growing evidence that the global societal, environmental and economic concerns of our time are too complex to be resolved by the West alone – let alone by an approach that is characterized by whiteness and privilege and has shaped our ideas of knowledge production, economic growth, wealth creation and language use for far too long already. Today's issues go beyond local concerns and do not conform to the logic of individualization. On the contrary, they very clearly show the interconnectedness of systems, humans, politics, economics and nature. Global and individual responsibility are one. As a result, there will be a growing **need for interdisciplinary and intercultural working environments.**

*Reframing Interculturality* aims to support the development of such environments by inviting its players to identify the nexus between intercultural dynamics and **decoloniality**<sup>7</sup>. The card game is interactive and emphasizes the players' physical presence, their shared sense of togetherness. In doing so, it reflects on the individuals who constitute this togetherness.

Who is playing? Is there diversity in the group? Which perspectives and viewpoints are heard most often and how do they shape the dynamic of the game? What does this say about the environment that the game is played in?

The playful and interactive framework of the card game is an invitation to **start a conversation with ourselves** and **enter into discussion with others**. *Reframing Interculturality* invites us to expand our thinking. It requires players to use their agency and urgency to go beyond their comfort zones, beliefs and value systems.

Let's **listen carefully**. Let's **accept others** as we do ourselves. And let's **find new modalities of being together, talking to each other, collaborating and cooperating** in order to engage with society and cultural diversity in a different, more inclusive and empathic way! ■

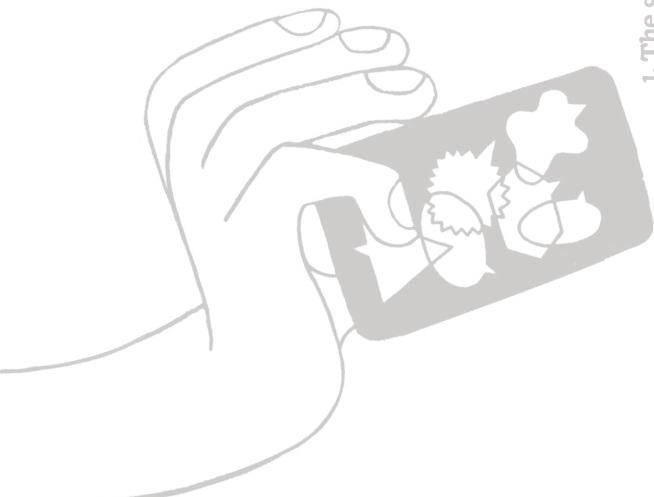
**Let's start with ourselves – a very obvious but also complex place to start.**

- 1 According to Csaba Földes (2009), interculturality is not a fixed quantity but a dynamic and inter-disciplinary concept that tracks the development of conditions, possibilities and consequences of interaction between cultures. In the context of this game, interculturality is therefore understood as a dynamic process that occurs between people of diverse cultural backgrounds.
- 2 The game aims to create awareness around interculturality, helping players to become sensitized to social diversity (including cultural, linguistic, gender, religious, physical and cognitive diversity). Interculturality can take place on an individual as well as on an organizational and societal level. *Reframing Interculturality* does not attempt to redefine the term, but opens up a space in which players can experience, discuss and potentially redefine their own understanding of it. The game encourages players to critically reflect on individual and social living and working conditions and on the political, economic, cultural and religious environments that shape and influence these conditions. Going even deeper, it considers how the living and working conditions of individuals and cultures have been shaped by historical events that have led to the present moment and still influence current behaviors, mental models, value systems, use of language and structural organizations. As such, the card game *Reframing Interculturality* stimulates critical thought on the nexus of interculturality and decolonization, facilitating discussion on the underlying processes of cultural interactions and systemic conditions.
- 3 The concepts of *Others* and *Othering* can be found in the postcolonial writings of Edward Said (1978), who defines the *The Other* as everything that lies outside of *The Self*. *The Self* is the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and *The Other* is the strange (the Orient, the east, 'them'). The discourse on *Othering* and identity formation as a systemic theoretical concept was first introduced by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in 1985. According to Spivak, the term *Othering* describes the process through which imperial discourse created an *Other* that was excluded from exercising power. The term has since been used in several philosophical and theoretical traditions. *Othering* has established itself as a key concept in postcolonial theory and is strongly influenced by Hegel's dialectic of identification and distancing in the encounter of the self with the other. In this context, 'othering' can function both as a psychological and a political concept.
- 4 'only good' refers to the desire to act in a way that is beneficial to others, while also trying to avoid any form of conflict. However, the process of deciding of what is 'good' and beneficial for others often takes place in situations where there is an imbalance of power. The people who are 'in need' of something are often not included in the decision making process. Others define what is 'good' for them. It is therefore easy to misinterpret what it means to 'do good' and to legitimize the victimization of people in need. See also the problematics around charity, the imposing of mental models and colonial mechanisms in the history of international development cooperation (cf. Cole, Teju (2012)).

- 5 Using the definition proposed by the “Guide to intercultural competences applied to the development of public administration projects” by MATIZ Association, I understand intercultural competence as the sum of all the cognitive, affective and behavioral skills that enable a person to interact appropriately with people from other cultural backgrounds.
- 6 Culture, identity, and communication are interlinked. Cultural identity refers to the sense of belonging by an individual or a social group to a certain cultural collective (a society, cultural milieu or subculture). Cultural communication refers to the use of language as verbal and non-verbal communication, including how it is used and what is expressed through it. Humans can have many different cultural identities, depending on a variety of situations, encounters and attributes. They can be enduring or short-lived and changeable. Being aware of cultural identities leads to better cultural communication. Intercultural encounters are therefore crucial. They act as catalysts, providing experience of different cultural identities. Encounters are highly physical, personal events that require communication and listening skills. They can foster cultural competence, provided that participants adopt an open and unbiased approach to cultural difference and are willing to communicate.
- 7 In this context the term ‘decoloniality’ refers to the process of examining unequal power structures that have emerged during and after the period of colonization. Moreover, it examines how these dynamics have enduring effects and privilege a Eurocentric perspective from which several marginalized groups are excluded (cf. Paige, Shannon et al. (2021)).

# 1. The game

The game encourages players to work together, elaborate on ideas, be provocative and learn about interculturality in the context of development cooperation. The cards in the game are divided into four categories: **tasks to ask**, **quotes and facts to crack**, **let's discuss** and **body of questions**.



The cards constellate a variety of set-ups for players to engage in group tasks, shared discussions and individual reflection. In order to play, participants should come together (physically) as a group in a shared space. The group then becomes the center of the action, revealing connections, interactions and interdependences.

## 1. The game

The game provides no simple answers, no general advice and no hidden truths. It offers four distinct entry points through the four card categories. Its outcomes depend on the group's level of commitment and on the individual players' sensitivity, openness towards others, responsiveness and reactions to the cards they pick. There are no winners or losers. There is no fixed duration; the group can decide how much time to spend playing the game.



## 1. The game

The game can be used flexibly – for example to bring together **diverse group**<sup>8</sup> constellations – and can be played in a work context, in higher education institutions or as part of a workshop. The cards can also be used separately as sources of inspiration, for reflection or in any other way that may be useful. ■



8 A diverse group refers to a group of people with different ethnic, racial, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. There might be differences in age, physical ability, sexual orientation, political beliefs and religious practices. It also implies that there is a wide range of experiences, interests and lifestyles in the group. The members of such a group take responsibility for explaining and adhering to the rules of the game, while taking into account differences of language or previous experience. They see their diversity as a strength. A sense of togetherness is of huge importance in this game.

## 2. Preparing the game

**Get together!** Invite your work colleagues, university peers or friends. It is best to play the game in a group of four to six people.

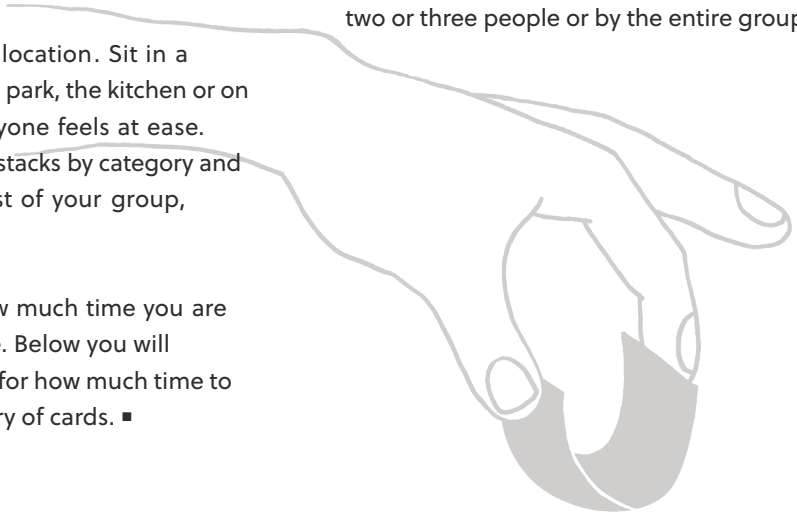
Choose a comfortable location. Sit in a circle, at the table, in the park, the kitchen or on a sofa. Make sure everyone feels at ease.

Sort the cards into four stacks by category and place them in the midst of your group, illustration side up.

Decide beforehand how much time you are dedicating to the game. Below you will find recommendations for how much time to allocate to each category of cards. ■

## 3. Playing the game

The game begins when one person chooses a stack, picks up a card and reads it out to the group. It may be a card that is played alone, by two or three people or by the entire group.



### If you pick a card...

- for the entire group, everyone commits to playing the card together.
- for two or three people, it is up to the group to decide how it will split itself up. The constellation may change each time such a card comes up. The time that should be spent in pairs or sub-groups is indicated on the cards.
- from the series *body of questions*, all participants will pair up and play the card with a partner. If the group consists of an uneven number of people, there can also be a group of three. If several cards from this stack are chosen one after another, an interview setting is constellated.



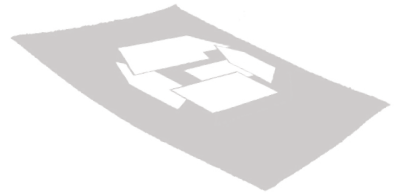
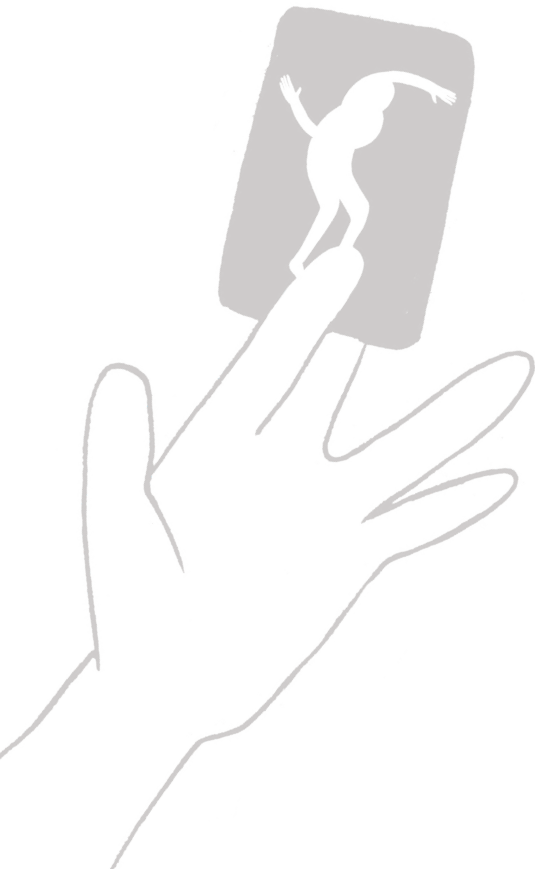
The cards allow for a flexible game structure. Even though each card belongs to a specific card category, there is no fixed order in which they should be drawn. It is also possible to leave one or more card categories out of the game entirely. This flexibility allows different groups to adapt the game to their needs and interests, as well as to potential time constraints. ■

Keep paper, pen close to you.

**Let's get started!**

## 4. The four card categories

*Reframing Interculturality* consists of **38 cards** in four categories, which can be played independently of each other. →



The **10 cards** in the **tasks to ask** category prompt players to put their thoughts on interculturality into action. The tasks promote critical thinking and offer a shared learning experience. The idea is to set in motion individual stories, beliefs, and value systems. The tasks call for introspection as well as action, challenging players to step out of their comfort zone. Each person plays the same card but may approach it differently. The materials needed are pen and paper. Players should start by completing the task for themselves, followed by a period of sharing and discussing their answers with the other players. ■

**Time recommendation:**

5 - 10 minutes per card

**What you need:** pen and paper

The **11 cards** in the **quotes and facts to crack** category reveal much more than just unexpressed thoughts, unchecked statements or hidden truths. They also include other voices in the form of quotes. It is not about agreeing or disagreeing with their statements and thoughts. Cracking quotes and facts means exploring and discussing them as a group. One player will read the quote out loud and allow it to resonate and vibrate in the group. ■

**Time recommendation:**

10 - 15 minutes per card

**What you need:** pen and paper

The **8 cards** in the **body of questions** category invite introspection, with a specific focus on the body. Learning about one's body and developing the ability to perceive and be with it are crucial skills for improving self-care and other mindfulness practices. They are equally important in building intercultural competence. The more we are connected to ourselves, the easier it is for us to interact empathically with others.

Asking questions about the body can be intimidating at first. But give it a try! Start simply, with something that is obvious. Follow the practice of listening appreciatively to others and yourself. Embrace listening to your emotions and the sensations in your body. Maybe you will feel moved. Or the experience may be awkward or shocking. Listening is a precondition

for interacting effectively with yourself and others.

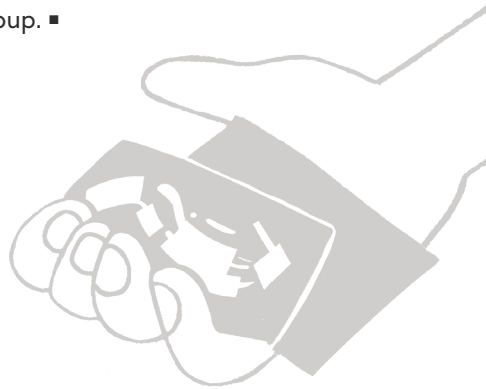
The *questions on the body* cards are played with one interview partner. One person asks the questions and listens whilst the other one answers. If several cards from this stack are played one after the other, this constellates an interview setting in which one person becomes the interviewer and the other the interviewee. The cards can also be played singularly, alternating with cards from other stacks. Partners should switch roles after each question / interview and discuss their experiences afterwards. Take notes on what resonates most from each card. Try to not to judge, neither yourself nor the others. ■

**Time recommendation:** 3-5 minutes per person per card

**What you need:** pen and paper

The **9 cards** in the **let's discuss...** category are designed to spark debate on the topic of interculturality in the context of international development cooperation. The primary aim is not for group members to agree with each other or to find easy answers; on the contrary, more questions might arise from the debate. Discussion is a social practice that involves the verbal sharing of unfinished thoughts. The action of expressing thoughts and ideas is often accompanied by non-verbal means of communication such as body language, facial expressions and gestures. Players are encouraged to observe these non-verbal forms of communication in each other and to notice the signals emitted by the bodies in the group. Allow your emotions to become involved too. And listen carefully to each other.

Playing *let's discuss...* leads to a deeper understanding of each other's viewpoints and experiences. In going beyond the initial question, the group co-creates and collectivizes its shared knowledge. Each card contains a specific task to be executed individually or in the group. ■



**Time recommendation:**

10 minutes per card

**What you need:** pen and paper

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