Intercultural Competences and Self-Initiated Expatriates’ Self-Perceived Effectiveness:

A case study of European expatriates in Brussels

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ABSTRACT

With globalization there is increasing international mobility among professionals. However, intercultural and international settings are challenging, in terms, *inter alia*, of cultural adaptability. It is expected that individuals who have proven to be able to navigate among significant cultural differences have developed intercultural competences, cultural awareness and sensitivity throughout their experiences. Indeed, as a result of growing international mobility, certain capabilities, competences, and personality traits such as adaptability, flexibility and low ethnocentrism have been identified as important success factors. Intercultural individuals may therefore be more successful and efficient internationally and would be ideal candidates for cross-cultural assignments. However, there is little research yet testing this possibility. Drawing on a study of nine self-initiated expatriates evolving in the multicultural, multilingual and multinational bubble of Brussels, this thesis describes, characterizes and analyzes the self-perception of those individuals upon their level of intercultural skills and their relation to their wellbeing both at work and in their personal and social lives in that city. This feeling of happiness across cultures may further lead to hybrid identities and therefore a third-space, in which intercultural individuals interact, is created.

**Key words:** expatriate, intercultural competence, self-perceived effectiveness, multicultural setting, third-space, hybridity
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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Problem

Globalization has led to a significant increase in cross-cultural and intercultural interactions and the effectiveness of international assignment is becoming an important source of competitive advantage for many organizations (Lee & Sukoco, 2010). Additionally, European citizens are offered many opportunities to work outside their home labour market as one of the fundamental freedoms the common market provides for is the free movement of people and workers, and the enlargement of the Union increases the chances throughout the European Union. Therefore people are willing to transfer within but also beyond the continent for various reasons such as employment (Howe-Walsh and Schyns, 2010). As a result, notions of culture which categorize people into homogeneous groups are outdated and increasingly inappropriate (Jackson, 2010).

For the purpose of this thesis, the description of globalization by Inida and Rosaldo (2002) is preferred. They portray it as “spatial-temporal processes, operating on a global scale that rapidly cut across national boundaries, drawing more and more of the world into webs of interconnection, integrating and stretching cultures and communities across space and time, and compressing our spatial and temporal horizons” (p.9). In short, as defined by Macionis & Plummer (2008), globalization is “the increasing interconnectedness of societies” (p.42). This process of interaction and integration amongst people, companies, and governments of different nations indeed affects culture and this dynamic and complex environment leads to a mixing of cultures and the rise of hybrid, fluid identities in which cultural traditions intermingle (Jackson, 2010). Hence, a ‘third-space’ is created, within which ethnicity and national identity is no longer a factor for exclusion.

Moreover, in today’s competitive global business environment, one can witness a growing international geographic mobility of employees – also known as expatriates. Their experience and effectiveness is challenging to assess. Indeed, efficiency of expatriates is often measured according to their turnover rate or to their ability to adapt their managerial attitude with their new team in the country they were sent to. However, it could be argued that their assignments abroad are increasingly made easier thanks to globalization. In fact, different cultures are getting together on an everyday basis and more and more people from different cultural, ethnic, religious, social, etc. backgrounds interact regularly whether it be at work, home, or in any public space in society. Nevertheless, there are still many factors that can push them to repatriate prematurely, such as a lack of adjustment in the host country or/and of capacity to adapt their relational, behavioral or managerial skills. Indeed, one of the reasons could be the inability of an expatriate to adjust to the host culture’s social and business environment which, is costly in terms of management performance, productivity, client relations, operations efficiency for the organization and loss of self-esteem for the employee and can result in an early repatriation (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). In order to counter these negative experiences, many researches have been carried out to find what could help expatriates to efficiently adapt to the process of expatriation and acculturation and as a result, be more effective. For instance, the dimensions of Expatriate Acculturation: self-oriented, others-oriented, perceptual and cultural-toughness dimension (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985); the Big Five (stable personality traits) and specific behavioural competencies (cultural flexibility, task and people orientations, and ethnocentrism) (Shaffer et al., 2006), the four acculturation strategies discussed by Berry (2005): integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization; etc.
Furthermore, there is an expanding tendency of individuals who decide independently of an organization to migrate to another country in search of work. This new phenomenon of self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) is under-researched and this group needs to be further studied as reference to them is extremely limited in the international management literature available (Thomas et al., 2005; Berry and Bell, 2012). It is argued that these people usually relocate internationally with the aim of building a boundaryless career. Several distinctions between traditional and self-directing expatriation are recognized besides the initiation of departure, such as, for instance, the time perspective which is often uncertain and not predetermined for SIE, but also all the pre-departure training, the compensation package and support in non-work issues (Howe-Walsh and Schyns, 2010).

In this research, this group of expatriates will therefore be investigated to contribute in filling the gap in the literature. Indeed, Hu and Xia (2010) argued that these expatriates already have a “global mindset and are more culturally aware and adaptable” (p.173). Consequently, in the view of these scholars, SIEs may be more efficient on an international assignment than traditional company employees.

Thus, nowadays, individuals willing to build up a global career have to be culturally adaptive and interculturally competent. In order to achieve this, people have to develop their personal competences but also enhance their communication and negotiation skills in order to create their global networks (Johnson, 2004). In other words, by being interculturally efficient. In the vein of this research, efficiency is only determined by an individual’s self-perception. Indeed, wordings such as efficiency, effectiveness, success, etc. can be considered differently depending on the perspective chosen. For organizations, for instance, success abroad is often characterized by a low turnover of expatriates. Nevertheless, the emphasis of this work is put on individuals’ self-perceived effectiveness, which is portrayed by feelings of wellbeing, happiness and personal fulfillment which enable the person to live and work contentedly. In order to achieve such satisfaction, it is argued that a successful intercultural interaction is based upon understanding and respect of the cultural viewpoints of others. Furthermore, the term appropriateness is also referred to and implies the use of behaviors and communicative tools not only in a linguistically correct way but also in a socioculturally appropriate manner in order to avoid any conflict and gain respect and trust of others. Nevertheless, many gaps persist in understanding the factors influencing expatriates’ efficiency (Sri Ramalu et al., 2011).

Therefore, as a result of increasing international mobility, certain capabilities, competences, and personality traits such as adaptability, flexibility, low ethnocentrism (Abe & Wiseman, 1983; Bennett, 1986) and the ability to communicate (Hammer et al., 1978; Sudweeks et al., 1990) have been identified as important success factors (Caligiuri & Tarique 2006). Diversity is everywhere, either in other countries or within an organization. It is therefore crucial to have the capacity to interact effectively with others. Experts argue that an individual with a high cultural intelligence can remodel his own identity and therefore may adapt more easily to new cultures and situations. According to Alon & Higgins (2005), organizations need to develop training programs in cultural intelligence (CQ); they stressed that CQ is an essential intercultural capacity that expatriates on international assignment should possess. Moreover, such CQ may contribute to a better adjustment and effectiveness of the expatriates’ work abroad. It is likely that employees with an intercultural background have developed intercultural competence such as a cultural awareness and sensitivity throughout their experiences.
1.2. Research Goal and Question

As evidenced by the findings of previous research focusing on minorities, international and intercultural individuals may be more successful and efficient globally and are ideal candidates for cross-cultural assignment (e.g. Pattie & Parks, 2011). However, there is not much empirical evidence on that possibility, especially in the self-initiated expatriates’ literature. Following from the aforementioned, the aim of this research is twofold. First, its ambition is to investigate whether the expatriates themselves consider intercultural competence to work as a positive factor in their assignments in a multicultural environment. Indeed, the focus of this research is based upon self-perception of individuals. Through this I would contribute to the international human resource management as well as the cross-cultural management literature by offering the individual’s insight into the meaning of being interculturally successful and the factors facilitating this sentiment.

A further factor added to this research is the exploration whether intercultural competence and skills of employees are actually considered as one of the selection criteria for employees in international organizations. However, this part has been tremendously reduced from the initial purpose as the researcher did not receive the opportunity to cooperate with recruiters; therefore the analysis of this factor from the perspective of recruitment officers is mainly based upon policy documents and the experience of only one participant in the study.

As a final remark, it is necessary to mention that the research is based on the self-perception of European self-initiated expatriates living in the multicultural, multinational and multilingual city of Brussels. Indeed, a majority of existing researches on intercultural competence and expatriates’ effectiveness focused on firstly traditional corporate expatriates and secondly on American multinational companies sending employees to their subsidiaries in Eastern countries. This investigation therefore uses a slightly different perspective on the intercultural effectiveness literature.

Hence, the following research question and sub-questions are formulated:

<table>
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<th><strong>Self-initiated expatriates: How do intercultural competences impact upon the expatriates’ self-perceived effectiveness in a multicultural environment?</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>1. How are intercultural competences achieved as perceived by self-initiated individuals abroad?</td>
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<td>2. Is there a correlation between international mobility and the development of intercultural competences?</td>
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<td>3. Are recruiters aware of the possible (dis)advantage of skills, capabilities and behaviors related to intercultural competence?</td>
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<td>4. Are evidence-based intercultural competences explicitly considered during selection processes or as merely an implicit guideline? And if so, what actual weight do these have in the recruitment process?</td>
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1.3. Relevance of the Research

The scientific relevance of this research lies in the contribution to the international, European and cross-cultural management literature as well as the expatriate literature. Indeed, a lot has been written about the experience of expatriates and the variables that may influence their efficiency during an international assignment, however, even though there is a growing tendency of self-expatriation due to globalization and the opening of borders between European member-states, not many research has been directed towards this new group and people’s mobility across Europe. This research, thus tries to fill the gaps left in the literature by concentrating on the intra-European experience.

Furthermore, lots of empirical studies have been developed in order to measure and assess the level of intercultural competence of individuals, but as far as the author knows, there is no research focusing on the global efficiency of Europeans living in a multicultural environment but still within the European continent. Besides, this investigation is interested in the self-perception of people through analysis of their personal experiences. This insight could enhance the validity of current definitions of intercultural competence and help design tools to measure the level of such skills of an individual.

1.4. Outline of Chapters

Following this introduction, the necessary theoretical background for this research is presented in chapter 2. Then, the research design strategy, sample strategy, data collection and analysis and research quality indicators as well as a few words about the main organization in which the data was gathered, namely the European Commission, are discussed in section 3 (methodology). Next, the results of the study are presented in chapter 4, in which the sub-questions are answered by bringing together the partial findings. This is followed by chapter 5, in which the main research question is summarized. In section 6, a discussion critically evaluates the examined findings of this study and links them back to the existing literature. Finally, in chapter 7, the limitations, implications and recommendations of this research are outlined.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Intercultural Competence

We have to be aware of the dangers of presenting “a culture” as if it were unchanging over time or as if there were only one set of beliefs, meanings and behaviours in any given country and we should not think in terms of encounters between different language and culture systems, but rather of encounters between individuals with their own meanings. (Byram, 1997, pp.39-40).

2.1.1. Culture

In order to understand what intercultural competence stands for, it is interesting to have an insight on what culture is. In fact, the discussion about intercultural competence is based on an understanding of culture and its meaning for individuals. Nevertheless, only a brief discussion on the essence of culture is done here as a thorough debate is beyond the scope of this study.
Culture is a difficult concept to grasp and thus has never really been defined consistently according to Adler, Doktor and Redding (1986). Globalization can lead to outsourcing of companies, joint ventures, mergers, but also movement of the workforce around the world and with the transnationalization of culture, the world is no longer organized into separate ‘cultures’ that would exist next to each other. Although such processes have already taken place in the past, they are now enhanced by technological advancements in means of global communication and transportation (Jackson, 2010). As a matter of fact, culture crosses borders thanks to radio, television, internet, etc. These technologies can, through the connection to the internet, bridge wide spatial and temporal distances, leading to a shifting perception of time and space (Steger, 2009). Consequently, local communities and cultures are increasingly affected by external issues, which transform localities into a larger global interconnectedness. Indeed, nowadays, most companies, societies, etc. face cultural diversity, mixing diversified people with different ideas and origins and as Stolcke (1995) referred to, using a well-known Yiddish proverb, “the whole world is a town” (p.14).

The increased international assignment carried out by an organization’s employees can have great impact on their identity and culture. Globalization is at the front of the need for research on cross-cultural studies as it brings together various cultures. This has positive and negative effects. On one hand, globalization is about people, goods, capital, etc.; it is the free movement from one place to another. It facilitates the marketing of standardized products and services to global consumers. However, this influence from everywhere also threatens the traditional lifestyles and values in countries ( Cavusgil et al., 2008) and within the organizations. Furthermore, Siebers (2004) argues that in this time of globalization, “individual people cannot simply be understood as members or representatives of ‘cultures’” (p.303).

Additionally, there are two main approaches on culture, a modern/classical or a post-modern approach. On one hand, the former understands culture in terms of a bounded, homogeneous system, drawing a strict line of separation between one culture and another. Furthermore, members of one culture are assumed to think and behave consistently. Culture is thus embedded in a nation and in a person’s beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and behavior. As Stuart Hall (1986) states, culture is “the actual grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific society” (Hall, as cited by Barker, 2008, p. 7).

On the other hand, a post-modern view on culture suggests that culture is a dynamic process that cannot be measured and which is not confined and limited to a specific company, community or country. “It is about the process of meaning-making of groups of people characterized by contradiction, contestation, non-sharing, tensions, conflict, discordance, heterogeneity” ( Featherstone et al., in Siebers, 30.08.2011, slide 10). Hence, as indicated above, national borders, which had traditionally defined the boundaries of some (national) cultures, are fading away and a rising combination of various cultural elements is taking place in people’s minds, blurring the fixed ideas of what defines and frames certain cultures. Those two opposite approaches on culture can be used on both the individual level, which is the purpose of this work, and on the social level.

### 2.1.2. Interculturality

The term ‘intercultural’ can be defined as a relational process coming from the interaction of two distinct cultural groups implying a complexity of relations in reciprocity of exchanges. Thus, even if close to terms such as pluricultural, multicultural, transcultural, etc., the intercultural concept goes
further than just acknowledging the existence of various cultures living close to each other. The dynamics of exchange occur in varying degrees. Indeed, an intercultural society is broadly characterized by a heterogeneous, complex, diversified and evolving culture and involves contacts and interaction between people. This term implies a reality ‘in between’ the diversified cultures and therefore the acknowledgement of cultural diversity but also the understanding and acceptance of these cultures (Avanzini, 2001). Interculturality involves being open to, interested in, curious about and empathetic towards people from other cultures.

Interestingly, the concept of interculturality can be related to third-culture building. Indeed, when multiple cultures interact and influence one another, a sort of different, hybrid form of culture may emerge. This ‘third’ culture may bear characteristics of all the intermingling cultures and will become a new, hybrid form of culture comprising a mixture of many different features rather than simply become the result of additive processes, as argued by Casnir (1999).

Indeed, in Alred, Byram and Fleming’s (2006) viewpoint, being intercultural “involves questioning the taken-for-granted conventions within which one lives, seeking to empathise with the experience of others, reflecting on the impact of this upon oneself and one’s own identities, allegiances to and experiences of one’s various groups […] it challenges us to be willing to become involved with Otherness, to take up others’ perspectives by reconstructing their perspectives for ourselves, and understanding them from within […] it does not imply abandoning our own perspectives but rather becoming more conscious of them” (p.2). They further emphasise that being intercultural involves “the capacity to reflect on the relationships among groups and the experience of those relationships […] it is both the awareness of experiencing otherness and the ability to analyse the experience and act upon the insights into self and other which the analysis brings” (2003, p.4).

As expressed above and below, interculturality entails a number of basic competences (cognitive, skills, and behavioral) leading to effective interaction among culturally diverse people. In the following section, knowledge of cultures, skills and personality traits such as curiosity, openness, empathy, sociability and behaviors ranging from ethnocentric to ethnorelativistic are investigated.

### 2.1.3. Intercultural Competence

The term ‘competence’ is widely used in the literature on interculturality. It refers to a broad concept that can encompass many attributes such as knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes (Stone, 2006, Spitzberg & Changnon, in Deardroff, 2009). In other words, it is the capacity of acting effectively in order to deal with unfamiliar situations that we cannot control because of both a lack of necessary knowledge and the ability to use that knowledge in order to identify and solve the problems, while also respecting the cultural viewpoints of all people involved. In order to successfully interact in a multicultural situation, a range of so called competences are encouraged to develop. That is why this notion is relevant to this research.

The intercultural competence (IC) literature has emerged in several disciplines such as anthropology, social and cross-cultural psychology, linguistic and communication theory, business management, human resource management and so on. Due to the increasingly complex and multicultural world that we live in nowadays, the field of IC has becoming more and more relevant and examined (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Jackson, 2010). Indeed, the term is regularly utilized in business, government and human resource speeches in response to globalization and internationalization. In
practice, intercultural competence is a multidirectional and multidimensional concept in which various factors may be successfully combined in order to function effectively in different cultures.

Nevertheless, so far, no consensus has been made among scholars in order to give a clear, unique and perhaps universal definition to IC as interpretations of the researchers varies across fields of research (Deardorff, 2006, Stier, 2006), therefore leading to many models attempting to investigate and describe IC, its development and various aspects and dimensions (Rathje, 2007; Stone, 2006). Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), in their attempt to conceptualize intercultural competence classified the various existing models into five types. (1) The compositional models, which identify the multiple components of IC without specifying their relations. These models encapsulate merely a list of adequate knowledge, skills and attitudes one should possess to be interculturally competent (e.g. Hunter et al., 2006). (2) The co-orientational models which emphasize the communication process during intercultural interactions as well as the way intercultural perceptions, meanings and understandings are built through such interactions (e.g. Byram, 1997, 2003, 2009; Byram et al., 2003; Rathje, 2007). (3) The developmental models describe the stages over time through which IC is matured (e.g. Bennett, 1986; Black & Mendenhall, 1991). (4) The adaptational models focus on the manner the individuals adjust and adapt their attitudes, understandings and behaviors when interacting with culturally different people (e.g. Berry, 2005). Finally, (5) the causal process models are the ones that assume specific interrelationships between the various components of the IC (e.g. Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005). As the objective of this study is not to go deeper into all the existing frameworks associated with IC, it is relevant to indicate these categories in this section in order to give the bigger picture.

As demonstrated above, it seems that IC is a difficult concept to grasp, encapsulating many components and dimensions. This lack of specificity is highlighted by various other terms used relating to that concept such as ‘global competence’ (Hunter et al., 2006), ‘intercultural communicative competence’ (Byram, 1997), ‘cultural intelligence’ (Earley & Ang, 2003), ‘intercultural sensitivity’ (Bennett, 1984; ‘intercultural effectiveness’ (Stone, 2006), etc. It is thus argued that there is a need for clearer definition of the notion of IC (Deardorff, 2006). That is why in her efforts to identify a set of components of IC Deardorff (2006) conducted a research study in collaboration with 23 intercultural experts, resulting in an agreement (80% or above) between those experts regarding about 22% of the constituents of IC. She then synthesized the resulting data into two models, a pyramidal model of IC and a process model intended to give direction for the preparation of globally competent graduates. In the latter, she identifies key internal outcomes, namely adaptability, an ethnorelative attitude, empathy and a flexible mindset as well as external outcomes associated with appropriate behaviours and communications systems in intercultural situations. Furthermore, the definition for IC that received the highest percentage (85%) of approval - which consequently is decided to be the most applicable definition for this thesis - is “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Deardorff, 2006, p.247). This proposed definition is chosen for this study as it seems to encompass all the relevant elements assumed by the researcher to be part of IC but also because it is important to maximize a shared understanding of IC, which seemed to relatively be the case among scholars for the above definition. Furthermore, as this current research emphasizes the self-perception of SIEs, it is interesting to see whether the latter describe IC similarly to the above academics specialized in the field. Besides, in addition to the factors mentioned in the introduction,
efficiency is also considered as an ability to communicate with people of another culture in a way that does not lead to conflict but that enables communicators to earn each other’s respect and trust; a capacity to adjust one’s professional skills to fit local conditions and constraints and the aptitude to integrate personally and socially so that the individual is happy and at ease in the host country.

In the following, components of IC are explored according to what is currently available in the literature. Yet, it must be noted that one chapter on the complex concept of IC cannot possibly appreciate the full extent of all the existing models and framework.

2.1.4. Components of Intercultural Competence

As aforementioned, many elements have been argued to be associated with intercultural effectiveness (see e.g. Bennett, 1986; Early & Ang, 2003; Cui and Awa, 1992; Hammer, Gudykunst & Wiseman, 1978; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Ruben & Kealey, 1979; Deardorff, 2006; Byram, 2009; Jackson, 2010). In this study, the various constituents are divided into three main categories: knowledge/awareness, skills/personality traits, and attitudes/behaviors.

2.1.4.1. Knowledge/Awareness

Many authors insist firstly on the cognitive aspect of intercultural competence (e.g. Byram, 1997). The knowledge factor “refers to the prior learning that can be recalled of remembered” (Stone, 2006, p.346). In other words, it relates to the mental process of learning and demonstrating factual knowledge of the history, beliefs, habits, traditions, adequate nonverbal behavior (gesture, posture, adequate greeting, etc.), others world-views, taboos, norms and values, practices and convention of different cultures as well as the role and impact one’s culture has on one’s behavior (Earley & Ang, 2003; Stone, 2006; Deardorff, 2006). When applied to the IC dimension, it is indeed relevant to be aware of (1) the notion of culture and understand what it means (Tung, 1993), (2) one’s own culture (Lainé, 2004), and (3) the other culture one interacts with (Tung, 1993; Caligiuri, 2000). It can consequently be seen as a static dimension (Stier, 2006) and is often originally based on positive or negative stereotypes. Additionally, it enables the individual to plan and organize his insights in accordance with the culture he/she is in (thinking, learning, and strategizing) (Earley & Ang, 2003). Nevertheless, individuals can expand their knowledge through e.g. education or actual experiences (Stone, 2006).

Moreover, Stone (2006) argues that there are several aspects of the knowledge dimension. He describes them as (p. 346):

- “declarative knowledge (e.g., knowledge that certain things exist or behave in certain ways);
- procedural knowledge (knowledge about how to do things, which underpins skills);
- culture specific knowledge (e.g., knowing that a particular culture expects certain protocols in certain situations); and
- culture general knowledge (e.g., about generic dimensions of cultural difference, such as collectivism-individualism, short- vs. long-term view, power distance, etc.).”

2.1.4.2. Skills/Personality traits

Even though the knowledge dimension of IC is necessary to become transnationally efficient, the ability to acquire and process that knowledge is essential too. Some skills are needed to be an effective individual in an international environment. In 1960, Cleveland, Mangone and Adams
mentioned four crucial factors that should be taken into account when selecting individuals for international assignment. According to these scholars, people working abroad and facing different cultures should “be resourceful and buoyant”, they should have “environmental mobility” in their background, they should have “intellectual curiosity” and have the capacity to “build institutions” (Cleveland et al., 1960, pp. 172-173, Cui and Awa, 1992, pp. 313-314). In the ensuing years, many studies have examined the personal characteristics expatriates should possess.

Some core skills can be clustered into interaction skills (e.g. building meaningful relationships with culturally diverse people, conflict resolution, sociability); respect and understanding of different cultural backgrounds (e.g. cultural empathy, sense of humor, open-mindedness); listening and observation skills; tolerance of ambiguity and stress management skills and communicative and language skills; adaptability and flexibility (Medenhall & Oddou, 1985; Hammer, Gudykunst and Wiseman, 1978; Cui and Awa, 1992; Caligiuri, 2000; Deardorff, 2006, Fantini, 2006; Shaffer et al. 2006). According to Sinicrope et al. (2007), the acquisition of such competencies can provide professionals with the capabilities necessary for promoting successful collaboration across cultures.

As aforementioned, numerous variables related to an individual’s personality and skills can be identified as playing an important role in this person’s effectiveness in a multicultural environment. It can therefore be argued that the possession of some personality characteristics can be seen as a major factor in the success of an expatriate in their international assignments. Several researchers have focused their studies on finding the adequate individual abilities needed in order to best integrate to a host culture and thus developed many models or validated the existing characteristics (e.g. Goldberg, 1990; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985; Hammer, Gudykunst and Wiseman, 1978). However, van Woerkom and de Reuver (2009) argue that models such as the Five-Factor Model of Personality (Goldberg, 1990) are maybe “too broad to cover traits aspects that are relevant in multicultural contexts” (p.2016). Therefore they suggest the use of the concept of multicultural personality, which was developed together with a multidimensional instrument to measure multicultural effectiveness, namely the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) (Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven, 2000).

This model seeks to fit more adequately the multicultural situations as it is crucial for expatriates to have a feeling of wellbeing in the environment in which they operate. Therefore, this research will investigate whether some of the skills stated above are actually recognized by expatriates to have an influence on their self-perceived efficacy when living and working in an international setting. The five dimensions of intercultural competence considered in the aforementioned model are: cultural empathy, open-mindedness, emotional stability, social initiative and flexibility (Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven, 2000).

‘Cultural Empathy’ is defined by Ruben (1976) as “the capacity to clearly project an interest in others, as well as to obtain and to reflect a reasonably complete and accurate sense of another’s thoughts, feelings, and/or experiences” (as cited in Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven, 2000, p. 293). In other words, it refers to one’s ability to empathize with the feelings, thoughts and behaviors of individuals from different cultural backgrounds by being willing to learn about cultural matters and developing awareness and understanding towards sociocultural differences (Lainé, 2004; Cui and Awa, 1992; Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005). This dimension is closely related to intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1986) and values kindness and interest in difference.
'Open-Mindedness', as mentioned in the Five-Factor Model of Personality, relates to the ability to be unbiased and keep an unprejudiced attitude towards individuals from other cultural groups, their traditions, norms, values, and behaviors (Deardorff, 2006). An open person will most probably be creative, imaginative, and curious and have a broad range of interests. Furthermore, when exploring diversity it is important to encourage non-judgmental reactions towards differences by acknowledging that it is likely that people from different backgrounds have different ways of “thinking about or categorizing phenomena [...] issues and ways of living” (Stone, 2006, p.347). This factor also comprises the relational skills one may use when interacting with others.

‘Emotional Stability’ refers to the capacity to remain calm and relaxed when dealing with stressful and ambiguous or unknown situations, leading to perform efficiently under stressful circumstances. According to Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000) the importance of this psychological dimension was already identified by several scholars, but literature using that factor in relation to multicultural effectiveness is scarce (e.g. Hammer et al., 1978; Goldberg, 1990). Nevertheless, it is usually mentioned in the adjustment or acculturation process and the stress resulting from it (e.g. Berry, 2005) or is better known as tolerance for ambiguity (e.g. Byram, 1997; Hunter et al., 2006; Deardorff, 2006).

‘Social Initiative’ including the ‘Orientation to Action’s construct and ‘Extraversion’ factor refers to one’s capacity to take initiatives and be focused on the goals to be reached. These traits suggest that individuals with good social networking and social skills will rank higher on their intercultural success as they will increase their relationship capital (Hunter et al., 2006). Furthermore, the relational dimension of having the ability to establish and maintain relationships is essential for one’s wellbeing.

The ‘Flexibility’ dimension refers to the willingness of people to experience new things and to pursue challenge into exploring unfamiliar circumstances and by doing so, to be able to modify their behavior accordingly, in order to handle various intercultural situations (Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven, 2000, Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven, 2001, van Woerkom and de Reuver, 2009; Fantini, 2006). Interculturally competent people are considered as being curious, adventurous and embrace experiences with different cultures. Moreover, it is argued that the ability to learn from one’s mistakes and learn from experiences is important (Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven, 2000).

2.1.4.3. Attitudes /Behaviors

Intercultural communication abilities have been acknowledged as playing a key role in international situations (see e.g. Cui and Awa, 1992; Graf, 200; Peltokorpi, 2010; Deardorff, 2006) and can be described as the capacity for verbal or non-verbal interaction between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. It is also the ability to engage in adaptive and appropriate behaviors when interacting with people from various cultural backgrounds in multicultural settings. In fact, having the capacity to exhibit a flexible communication style can have a positive effect on an intercultural interaction as linguistic styles or body language such as tone of voice, pacing, directness, formality, greeting styles, how to react when receiving a gift, etc. may vary across cultures (Peltokorpi, 2010). An individual with high behavioral cultural intelligence has a wide and elastic repertoire of behaviors both in verbal and nonverbal capabilities (social mimicry, and behavioral repertoire) (Earley & Ang, 2003).
Additionally, it is interesting to analyze the discrepancy between what the individuals know to be interculturally competent and how they actually act when facing intercultural situations. Indeed, as argued by Ruben and Kealey (1979, p. 19):

*It is not uncommon for an individual to be exceptionally well-versed on the theories of cross-cultural effectiveness, possess the best of motives, and be sincerely concerned about enacting the role accordingly, yet still be unable to demonstrate those understandings in his own behaviors.*

Consequently, specific behavioral competencies frameworks such as the Behavioral Assessment Scale for Intercultural Communication Effectiveness (BASIC) have been developed (e.g. Bennett, 1986; Siljanen and Lämsä, 2009; Chen and Starosta, 2000; Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman, 2003). For instance, Ruben (1976 in Sinicrope et al. 2007) argues that communication competences are required for intercultural interaction and he gathered seven basic communicative behaviors and attitudes that can impact the intercultural effectiveness: (1) display of respect, (2) interaction posture, (3) orientation to knowledge, (4) empathy, (5) role behavior, (6) interaction management and (7) tolerance for ambiguity.

The model that is considered in this research is the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1986), which is a dynamic model developed to pinpoint the emotional response of an individual to cultural differences and to understand the evolution of those emotions when the individual is interacting in a culturally diverse environment. This model is chosen for this study as it encapsulates all the stages one can go through when facing diversity and the phases in which one will consequently affect his/her behavior and motivation.

The DMIS consists of six stages, representing a linear continuum between three ‘ethnocentric’ stages - in which phase an individual assumes that his/her vision of the world is the actual central worldview - and three ‘ethnorelative’ stages – based on the hypothesis that one’s culture is one among many others and that they all are equally valid worldviews. It is worth noting that the stages continuum is dynamic and not static as the individuals may evolve or regress depending on the circumstances. The three ‘ethnocentric’ phases are defined as ‘denial’, ‘defense’, and ‘minimization’ (Bennett, 1986; Siljanen and Lämsä, 2009; Hammer, 2008; Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman, 2003). In the next three stages of ‘ethnorelativism’, difference is not seen as a threat anymore but more as a challenge and so individuals try to cope with it in three different ways to achieve adjustment to various intercultural settings. In these stages, cultures of people are seen as fluid and dynamic and no longer as rigid and static (Bennett, 1986; Siljanen and Lämsä, 2009; Hammer, 2008; Hammer; Bennett and Wiseman, 2003).

In conclusion, an individual who has the knowledge and skills but fails to exhibit the adequate behavior cannot be considered as interculturally competent and therefore reduces his/her efficiency in a multicultural environment. Indeed, the efficiency of an individual will not only depend on their ability to adapt, it is not simply a one-way process, but a multidimensional mode of mutual negotiation in a fluid, dynamic and interactional space encompassing many variables. This combination of knowledge, skills and behaviors may eventually lead to a ‘third culture’ perspective in which the individual creates a new, mixed, intercultural frame of reference or worldview.
2.2. Expatriation

Due to increasing globalized and flexible environment and market place, there is an expanding amount of people who circulate between countries. In fact, as mentioned in various articles on career management, international experience may be seen by individuals as an asset for their personal development and their career path. Furthermore, many companies, either multinationals or other types such as non-profit organizations, including non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations, are increasingly looking for employees skilled in working in a culturally diverse environment, with colleagues from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds or even abroad; in other words, a globally competent workforce (Siljanen and Lämsä, 2009; Kohonen, 2005). The international mobility and global career literature has been focusing mainly on corporate expatriation. Indeed, traditionally, expatriation consists of an individual working abroad in the subsidiary of a multinational company.\(^1\) Assigned expatriates are mainly driven by their organizational career and the motives for complying with the international job are typically financial benefits. Many scholars have already studied the critical success factors for effective expatriation of corporate employees in international environment (see supra). However research on the increasing phenomenon of self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), relating to individuals moving on their own initiative, has been overlooked. Only a few studies focusing on SIEs have been conducted so far, and they demonstrate that elevated quantities of expatriates are indeed self-directed (30-70%) (Suutari and Brewster, 2000; Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009).

But first, before going deeper into the available research on SIEs, it is important to make a distinction between ‘self-initiated expatriate’ and ‘migrant’ as the difference between those two concepts can be blurred and sometimes used interchangeably in the literature (Al Ariss, 2010). A few distinctions between the two groups have been identified. For instance, Baruch et al. (2007, p.99 in Al Ariss, 2010, p.340) argue that migrants are mostly people “moving from developing countries to developed countries”, whereas SIEs reposition within developed countries and explore international boundaries (Richardson and Zikic, 2007). Secondly, in the case of SIEs, people take the initiative to relocate to a country e.g. for work purposes (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010; Al Ariss, 2010), while migrants may move by necessity e.g. to seek asylum. Then, it is discussed that migrants usually settle in the host country on a permanent basis whereas SIEs, in principle, reside temporarily in a chosen country although they can also decide later for a long-lasting sojourn. Indeed, numerous academics dispute that SIEs often embark on global mobility “with no definite time frame in mind” (Tharenou, 2010 as cited in Al Ariss, 2010, p. 341). Finally, ‘migrants’ are usually thought of in a more negative manner and can be unwelcome and considered as a burden to society (Sayad, 2004; Al Ariss, 2010). Accordingly, it is worth noting that the terms migrants, corporate expatriates and self-initiated expatriates indicate varying rationale for their international mobility. The few studies on SIEs so far mainly emphasize these motives, together with the global path of a career choice, as to organizational career (assigned expatriates) and boundaryless career (SIEs) (Doherty, Dickmann, and Mills, 2011; Al Ariss, 2010; Jokinen, Brewster, and Suutari, 2008; Thorn, 2009; Cerdin, and Le Pargneux, 2000; Inkson and Myers, 2003). In the following, various types of SIEs are described. A

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\(^1\) According to The Blackwell Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Human Resource Management: “Expatriate assignment is a job transfer that takes the employee to a work place that is outside the country in which he or she is a citizen. [...] Expatriate assignments are longer in duration than other types of international assignments, and require the employee to move his or her entire household to the foreign location” (p.101).
framework by Siljanen and Lämsä (2009) related to SIEs and cross-cultural adaptation is also given, as little is currently known about the cross-cultural adjustment of SIEs (Froese, 2012).

Inkson, Arthur, Pringle and Barry (1997) are the first to discuss two models of international experience including SIEs: expatriate assignment (EA) and overseas experience (OE). The EA corresponds to the traditional sense of expatriation as stated above. Employees are assigned by their company to operate a job abroad in one of its subsidiaries. In order to do so, the individual must be deeply familiar with the company’s goal, strategy, procedures, culture, etc. Expatriate assignees are considered as intra-organizational transferees and once the international job is accomplished the expatriate may return to the home-country to another position in the same organization. On the other hand, an OE is initiated by the individual. According to Inkson et al. (1997), an OE is mostly associated with the individual’s desire and initiative to discover the world, visit new places, explore new cultures and increase personal learning. SIEs are individuals who take the initiative to find work overseas for reasons of their own. Contrary to the EA, returning from an OE results in the attempt to resume one’s career or search for a new job.

In 2000, following Inkson et al. (1997)’s work, Suutari and Brewster introduced the concept ‘self-initiated foreign work experience’ for the European context, in their study among 400 Finns working abroad. They established that SIEs is a heterogeneous group and that expatriate literature so far is not valid to SIEs. They suggested a division of SIEs into six subgroups:

1. **Young opportunists** represent young individuals with little work experience who are just starting their career. They usually believe that an international experience will positively impact on their career.
2. **Job seekers** are individuals lacking job-satisfaction and career progression in their home country due to e.g. difficulties in the country’s economy.
3. **Officials** are employees of international organizations such as the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and United Nations. Suutari and Brewster (200) mention that these people’s prime motives are economic benefits, personal interest toward internationalization and new experiences.
4. **Localized professionals** include former expatriates who took the decision to stay abroad for a longer time and may pursue a more permanent situation in the host country.
5. **International professionals** have great international credentials and are global specialists. They are not committed to one specific organization and are open to any job offers they receive.
6. **Dual-career couples’** subgroup covers people who relocated because of the spouse’s expatriate assignment and as the partner wishes to work as well, he/she also seeks for a job in that host country.

Banai and Harry (2004), focusing on the boundaryless career management on the international scene (as opposed to inter-organizational mobility) and individuals who may choose to follow that path, establish another classification of expatriates, which they name ‘international itinerants’ (II). They do not specify them as SIEs, but IIs appear to be seen as similar regarding the two scholars’ definition of such individuals: “professional managers who are characterized by a career identity that is independent of the employer, who unilaterally take charge over their careers, and who are employed
for their ability by at least two independent organizations in at least two different foreign countries” (2004, p.97). They classify the international itinerants into six types:

1. The *failed expatriates*, traditionally company expatriates, are individuals who are getting annoyed by the demands of their organization. They favor the autonomy and responsibility that a self-directed lifestyle may provide with.

2. Individuals with *unique expertise and talents* prefer to hop from one job contract to another and from one company to another, offering their technical expertise, across cultures as well when necessary. Indeed, these people are usually used to work in a multi-ethnic and national environment.

3. *Cosmopolitans* refers to individuals who enjoy interacting with culturally diverse others and living in an international environment. Those itinerants even consider a unicultural society to be boring after a while and would not want to live in such a homogeneous place for long. The cosmopolitans are really looking to work and live in cross-cultural setting as they can easily cope with cultural shock.

4. The *mavericks* group relates to people possessing specific personal and professional abilities valuable to the employers. These individuals are well appreciated for their ‘self-management’ capabilities and are used for a specific task based on a definite budget and timeline and then get rid of.

5. The fifth group encompasses people returning home after a period of expatriation. The *returning nationals*, who often are disappointed by their repatriation as they end up receiving a lower salary than expatriates, just because they are nationals. Therefore, these individuals tend to become international itinerants in neighboring countries so that they obtain the benefits of being an expatriate.

6. Finally, the *novelty seekers* represent people who do not feel closely attached to their home countries anymore as they consider belonging to a wider community. They really appreciate intercultural interactions and environments and aim at acquiring competences that would facilitate them to work in different cultures so that they can move around the whole world.

Finally, Siljanen and Lämsä conducted an exploratory research study in order to demonstrate the heterogeneity amongst the expatriates regarding the way an individual adjusts in a cross-cultural environment. They came up with four types of expatriates: global careerists, balanced experts, idealizers and drifters (2009).

1. The *global careerists* are focused on their work and the expertise they built up throughout their career. They enjoy working in a global and culturally diverse context and thus often execute international jobs as they feel confident in easily adapting to different places thanks to their various experiences abroad, flexibility and awareness of cultural dissimilarities between several countries. Furthermore, they mainly interact and construct friendships with expatriate colleagues and members of the international community as their social network is mainly based on their work relations.

2. The *balanced experts* relates to expatriates who travel to a country for a specific reason, either being purely professional or ideological, with the feeling of personal attachment towards the host culture and have a clear view on their career path. They have the ability to behave adequately and in a simple, practical manner with host nationals as a result of their
thorough study of language(s) and culture of the host society, but still consider themselves as foreigners in that country.

3. The third category encompasses individuals showing great optimism for the future even though they do not specifically have any plans regarding their career or personal life, they just seem to follow God’s will and feel strongly committed to that ideology. They usually feel satisfied by their situation while keeping superficial thinking about the cultural variation between their culture and the host culture, but recognize a certain spiritual, personal growth into the international experience.

4. Drifters are still in search of their identity, belongingness, hence being subject to frustration and discontentment by feeling either as a visitor or an outsider in the society. They try to integrate to the surroundings but do not seem to manage to do so, yet they succeed in working effectively and with satisfaction in that regard. The rational for their international career path is basically driven by the search of their self.

Throughout their investigation, the two scholars demonstrate that the expatriate international assignment is motivated by one out of three focuses of the individual, namely their career advancement, the local host community and a certain ideology, but they do not exclude other causes. Additionally, they contribute to the literature by confirming that several categories of expatriates exist, albeit the willingness to construct a global career is shared, and that the variance between company and self-initiated expatriates can sometimes be blurred as the initiative for travelling amongst the people they interviewed could be both coming from the employer or from the individuals themselves, therefore, implying the need to reevaluate the understanding of expatriation process and its outcomes (Siljanen and Lämsä, 2009).

In conclusion, as the current literature on self-initiated expatriates is very scarce, the choice to explore the three aforementioned models was deliberate in order to have a holistic approach on the issue. Nevertheless, the last categories of expatriates focusing on their heterogeneity (Siljanen and Lämsä, 2009) are the most relevant to this research as will be debated in the discussion chapter.

For the purpose of this research, few of the suggested self-initiated expatriates are of interest. Indeed, the groups referred as ‘officials’ as well as the ‘cosmopolitans’ and the ‘global careerists’ are particularly relevant regarding the profile of the participants in this study. Therefore revealing the adequacy of the three models developed so far about self-initiated expatriates.

### 2.3. Identity

As a result of the data collection process, an additional concept emerged and is worth being explored even though it was not part of the initial research purposes. Indeed, at first, it was not meant for the research to delve into the identity construction process but it was realized that the two concepts are quite interdependent to the extent that being an intercultural individual is considered as part of the identity of the participants in this study. In the following, the notions of identity, encompassing national identity and (inter)cultural identity and the concept of European identity are explained briefly.

#### 2.3.1. Concept of (cultural) identity

As for culture, identity can be seen in various manners. At one extreme, the modernist point of view is that identity is a fixed entity that similarly describes individuals from one group or one nation
Modern approaches such as the Social Identity Theory by Tajfel & Turner (1979) which assumes that self-identity, self-esteem and out-group behavior are strongly attached to a group identity, emphasize the need to belong to a homogeneous group of similar others. Therefore identity is recognized as a bounded system in which the two identities – of the individual and of the group – are merged and integrated into one (Kim 1994).

This perspective can relate to the multidimensional concept of national identity including language, norms and values, ideology and symbols shared by a country and thus by the individuals associated with that nation. The notion was born with the idea of nationalism originating from a territorialisation of a religion, the development of the Statehood, having cultural roots, a language, an economy and a common history within a country (Anderson, 1983). By installing such national identities, countries were populated with quite homogeneous citizens.

However, with globalization and the suppression of borders, for instance, between the European countries, these common identities are challenged and many settings, being at work or in one’s personal life are getting more and more diverse. In the European context this blurriness between such ‘national’ boundaries can lead to a new definition and construction of identity as described below and in the next section.

The other extreme, the postmodernist viewpoint argues that “all human experience is variable, malleable, local and particular, difficult to define in any general terms, and in constant flux” (Schwartz et al. 2006, p.3). Accordingly, a definition of identity is suggested by Siebers as “the ways people constitute & position themselves in the world and make themselves and their relations with others meaningful” (20.09.2011, slide 13). This is to say, identity is the quality, characteristics, feelings, goal, origin etc. of a person which are essential to determine who we are. The concept is as multidimensional as it is relational and deals with who one is in relation to another; meaningful in the sense that the relationship has to have meanings; variable in stability as it is difficult to be sure; contextual as it depends on the context in which people interact and finally interactional because it requires interaction between different people (Siebers, 20.09.2011, slide 14). Identities are socially constructed and evolving, changing over time and consequently new categories can develop, emerge.

This approach on identity is particularly relevant to this research. Indeed, in recent decades, the mobility of people has amplified, leading to individuals who were born in a country but moved to another during their lifetime (Schwartz et al. 2006), either temporarily or permanently. In the case of this research, this movement was always made by the individuals’ own choice. As a matter of fact, intercultural situations present a multitude of challenges and people who experience such circumstances may realize that behaviors, attitudes, lifestyles, etc. appropriate in one context may diverge in another culture (Hoersting et al., 2011), which in turn may lead to a continual re-shaping of oneself around numerous cultural knowledge, attitudes and behaviors (Kim 1994).

This cross-border mobility gives rise to a shift in the idea of cultural identity construction which has become even more international, fluid, mobile and open to change and variation towards an idea of ‘intercultural’ identity (Fail et al. 2004), namely the ability of people to integrate several identities. Nowadays, it is argued that one should have a “dynamic view on cultural identity, emphasizing continuing development beyond the perimeters of one’s ascribed or primary cultural identity” (Kim 1994, p.1). Indeed, intercultural individuals (Fail et al. 2004) may base their identities on their current
aims and objectives rather than on their backgrounds, as most of the things which can constitute a cultural identity (e.g. religion, language, discourse, education, profession, skills, activities, friends, political attitudes) can cross ‘national’ boundaries. In other words, one can develop his/her identity beyond culture, feeling comfortable in a variety of environments as well as belonging to several cultural realities simultaneously. As argued by Kim (1994, p.14):

“As an individual’s cultural identity evolves toward increasing interculturalness, that person’s definition of self and others become increasingly less restricted by rigid cultural and social categories. Instead, the person’s perceptual orientations become broadened and enriched by an increased ability to “particularize” his/her perception of each communicative event in the context of a specific situation”.

Hence, a third, hybrid form of identity is created.

Finally, even though it has been argued that the individual evolving within culturally diverse environment may lack a sense of belonging or develop cultural homelessness in the classical perspective (Hoersting et al., 2011), this argument is rather outdated as one’s belongingness may simply shift from identification to a geographical place to identification to specific relationships (Fail et al. 2004).

### 2.3.2. European Identity

In Europe, spatial and cultural borders are becoming increasingly permeable (Checkel and Katzenstein, 2009). Undeniably, globalization and multiculturalism has led to pluralized societies no longer defined by unique, fixed, territorial cultures (Delanty, 2003). Europeanization has intended to promote a ‘European’ identity along the process of political and economic integration. Nevertheless, so far, it is difficult to determine whether there exists a European identification from people around Europe. Furthermore, the concept of identity in general is such a complex one, as explained above, that it is even more challenging to see the extent of its components and variables in the European context, in which linguistic, cultural and economic diversity is essential. Additionally, how could it be a definite explanation of what constitutes a ‘European identity’ when it is not even clear what means the word ‘European’? Nonetheless, it can be agreed that there are geographical, historical, and cultural elements incorporated in a European identity (Delgado-Moreira, 1997).

First, it is worth specifying that the initial project of the European Union regarding the need of developing a European identity was to pursue a specific purpose, namely to avoid military, social, economic and political “fragmentation, chaos and conflict” (Santer, 1995 as cited by Delgado-Moreira, 1997, p.5) and to help the accomplishment of cohesion, solidarity, subsidiarity, concertation and cooperation. Besides, as already debated by Delors, the European nations share an heritage and history and are built upon common fundamental values such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

In addition, even though the various countries embedded in Europe are diverse regarding languages, traditions, values and so forth, it can also be argued that they all share resemblance to some degree. As a matter of fact, the European culture and civilization is founded on the values of humanism and the principle of subsidiarity. Moreover, the emergence of symbols of ‘Europeanness’, for instance, an EU cultural policy, the euro currency, and scientific and educational policies are designed to heighten a consciousness of Europe among people (Delanty, 2003).
One opposition to the creation of a European identity is found in the current discourse concerning the reprimand of nation States that they would lose their national identity. However, as stated by Checkel and Katzenstein (2009) and Petithomme (2008), the construction of a European identity would not mean the replacement of one’s national identity. Indeed the Europeanization concept depicts a complex dynamic which results in the embodiment and interaction of both identities. Consequently, one can be Belgian and at the same time European, there is no obligatory ‘either-or’ option. In other words, as already discussed in the previous section, one person can have numerous identities or a mosaic identity based on many different variables.

In conclusion, the fact that there exists a European public sphere incorporating European media, European policy, European ‘workers’, etc. proves that a European identity is progressively developing. Still, in order to truly recognize the existence of a European identity, people must feel involved in the policy making and decision of the European Union and acknowledge the impact that the latter has on their lives on the micro level, therefore creating a sense of belonging with Europe. Yet, so far, individuals do not really have incentive to identify themselves as Europeans and to change that situation, it would be necessary to teach the European history, and encourage the socialization in a European environment in the framework of Erasmus programs and so forth (Petithomme, 2008).

This was just a very brief introduction on the reality and construction of a European identity. Indeed, much more could be said and several researches are done on that topic. However, the European identity is not the focus of this study and therefore it is not relevant to explore this concept in to deeper details.

3. Methodology

This section of the report outlines the research methodology employed in this study. In order to answer the research question and sub-questions, aiming at investigating the impact that the possession of intercultural competences may have on the self-initiated expatriates living and working outside their country of origin, and whether these influence the self-perceived effectiveness of the individuals, qualitative data are collected through semi-structured interviews. Indeed, qualitative research seems more suitable than quantitative research in order to really take the ‘emic’ perspective, i.e. analyzing the self-perception on that subject of people under study (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p.4). Since there is little literature concerning self-initiated expatriates and their effectiveness during international jobs and lives, this research will be inductive, interpretative and explorative. Indeed, interpretivism is applied in order to explore and understand the experiences and decisions of participants through their narratives (Bryman, 2008; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This chapter consists of the research design strategy (3.1.), sample strategy (3.2.), organization (3.3.), data collection (3.4.), data analysis (3.5.), and research quality indicators (3.6.).

3.1. Research design strategy

As mentioned above, the structure of the study can be characterized as exploratory as the aim was to investigate the relation between intercultural competences and self-initiated expatriates’ self-perceived effectiveness while working and living outside their native country.
Furthermore, according to Yin (2003), three conditions determine the best research strategy to follow. First, “the type of research question posed”, then “the extent of control the researcher has over the behavioral events” and thirdly, “the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events” (Yin, 2003, p.5). To address best the purpose of the research and the research question, this study has a qualitative, inductive research strategy built upon a case study within the European Commission (EC) but also dealing with other self-initiated expatriates, external to the EC, but also living in Brussels. This strategy enables to explore concepts and to gather information using various data collection techniques such as interviews and documentary analysis as explained below (Robson, 2011).

The unit of analysis is the individual because the study was based on the self-perception of people on their abilities to live and work in a culturally diverse environment (Bryman, 2008). In order to get demographic details of people willing to do the interviews, a questionnaire and interview guide were first designed on the basis of two existing ones – the one from the research project conducted by the Federation of The Experiment in International Living (FEIL) accessible online2 and one provided by the Intercultural Competence Assessment (INCA), with the forms available online3. The first topic list comprising a high amount of questions based on the literature review and existing questionnaires were summarized and the most applicable interrogations to my research were chosen to further explore interviewees’ experience with intercultural competences.

### 3.2. Sample strategy

This research was partly conducted in the European Commission, based in Brussels, Belgium. The Commission is divided into several departments known as Directorates-General (DGs). The researcher had the opportunity to collect data from two DGs - comprising agents from the 27 European Member States - namely the DG Communication and the DG Education and Culture which was slightly different from what was first planned. Indeed, at the beginning of this thesis project, a contact from the European External Action Service seemed interested in the study, which would have increased the scope of the study as it would have enabled the interview of international people in addition to European employees. However, the contact person retired in the meantime and from that point was not reachable anymore.

The invitation for participating in this research was e-mailed to 27 people in the DG Education and Culture and to 17 people in the DG Communication. For data protection reasons, the researcher was not given the details of the potential respondents and the email was sent by two intermediaries. From these 44 individuals, six positively reacted and agreed to meet for an interview – one of which was cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances. This represents a response rate of only 13.6%.

The interviewees were sampled by convenient sampling (Bryman, 2008, p.183) since they participated in the research on the ground of their willingness to do so and their availability for a one-hour interview. They were also offered the possibility to answer to an e-mail questionnaire – anonymously - in order to increase reliability of the replies, but this option was only chosen by one respondent who eventually also accepted to then join in a face-to-face interview. In order to ensure data protection, a listing of DG Communication and DG Education and Culture’ employees’ e-mail

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2 [http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/worldlearning_publications/1/](http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/worldlearning_publications/1/)
3 [http://www.incaproject.org/tools.htm](http://www.incaproject.org/tools.htm)
and contact details were not provided to the researcher. Instead, the two main contacts in those departments forwarded an e-mail introducing the research, the reason for conducting it and enquiring whether they would be willing to participate in such a study. Then, if individuals were interested in contributing to the research either through the filling in of a questionnaire or accepting to take part in a face-to-face interview they would contact the researcher directly. The listing chosen by the intermediaries was mainly based on two characteristics: (1) the nationality of employees, in order to reach a sample as heterogeneous as possible and (2) the arrival of these employees, i.e. recently arrived in Brussels. One limitation of this listing is that the previous international experiences were not taken into account right away. In the aim of increasing the response rate, the intermediaries were asked to send a reminder a few weeks after the sending of the first e-mail. Unfortunately, this attempt was not conclusive as no more employees contacted the researcher.

Therefore, to increase the amount of persons interviewed, an e-mail was sent to other people from various European nationalities (in order to stay within the scope of European self-initiated expatriates) living in Brussels – out of which I received four positive replies. These individuals were selected thanks to the help of a fellow student who previously lived in Brussels and knows self-initiated expatriates living and working in the city.

In the end, all together, the size of the population reached nine self-initiated expatriates originated from different European countries, specifically from Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Ireland, Romania (but from a Hungarian ethnicity), Spain, The Netherlands and one who is German but was born in South Africa and lived there during his childhood. The population differs on some characteristics, but still remains quite similar regarding their age range as eight are in their late twenties, middle thirties, only one is older as well as marital and family status since only two of them are married and have children. Since these differences can impact on the results, questions about the respondents’ background were asked.

### 3.3. Organization

At the beginning of the thesis process, it was decided to gather data only from individuals working in the DG COMM and DG EAC of the European Commission. Unfortunately, as mentioned above, not many employees (only five) agreed to take part in this research; that is why other European self-initiated expatriates in Brussels were sought. Nevertheless, as still half of the participants were from the EC, and that the part on selection of employees is mainly drawn upon the documentary information relative to this organization’s selection procedure, it is relevant to give a few words on this NGO.

> “The European Commission is one of the main institutions of the European Union. It represents and upholds the interests of the EU as a whole. It drafts proposals for new European laws. It manages the day-to-day business of implementing EU policies and spending EU funds.”

The European Commission is divided into about 40 Directorates-General (DGs) and services and is based in Brussels and Luxembourg City but also has representations in every EU country and 140

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delegations and offices in cities around the world. Since 2007, the EC is made up of 27 Commissioners - one from each EU Member State – responsible for specific policy areas. The current President of the EC is José Manuel Barroso. This college of Commissioners usually employs three procedural languages: English, French and German, though there is no written policy in that matter and officially, there are 23 official working languages in the EU (Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovene, Spanish and Swedish). Finally, the EC holds four main functions: legislative, executive, monitoring application of community law and representative.

Firstly, the EC has the right to propose new laws to the European Parliament and to the Council of the European Union aiming at protecting the interests of the EU and its citizens. Then, the EC is the executive body of the EU and therefore once legislation is passed by the European Parliament and the Council, it is in charge of the implementation of the legislative acts adopted through the Member States or its agencies (e.g. the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, the European Food Safety Authority, etc.). Besides, the EC manages the EU’s annual budget as well as supervises and allocates funding for EU policies and programmes such as the European Social Fund (ESF) or the Erasmus programs. Thirdly, the EC is the ‘guardian of the Treaties’ meaning it is in charge of enforcing the EU rules contained therein and thus has to check that each Member State is applying EU law properly. If the national implementation is against EU laws, the EC may refer the dispute to the Court of Justice of the European Union which may impose sanctions accordingly. Finally, the EC represents the European Union in international institutions such as the World Trade Organization.

As mentioned previously, this research interviewed employees working in either the DG Communication or DG Education and Culture. First, the “DG COMM has for mission to keep the general public and the media up to date on EU activities. They coordinate the work of the Commission representation offices in the member countries. In partnership with member states and other EU institutions, they manage communication projects taking into account national specificities. And they monitor public opinion and organize EU information activities”. Secondly, in the field of education and training the mission of the European Commission is to reinforce and promote lifelong learning. “The Directorate-General's work on education and training follows a twin-track approach of policy cooperation with EU Member States on the one hand and the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Programme on the other hand”.

As stated above, half of the participants were not working in the EC, but as the research did not focus on the intergovernmental aspects of the organization, no data was collected regarding the other companies as it would not have added value to the research.

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7 Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/about/what_we_do/index_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/about/what_we_do/index_en.htm)
8 Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/education/who-we-are/doc324_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/who-we-are/doc324_en.htm)
3.4. Data collection

For the purpose of this research both primary and secondary data were collected. Secondary data contributed to the formation of background information, thus inspiring the work through extensive literature study (books, journal articles, existing case studies...) available on hard copy or online (Collis & Hussey 2009). By perusing those sources, a niche that was in need of more empirical data and was lacking in evidence-based analysis was found, and consequently became the subject of my research, intercultural competences and self-initiated expatriates’ self-perceived efficiency. As stated above, it was first meant to be a research based on an international scope but ended on a European one, thus limiting it but on the other hand, contributing to the academic field of European Studies and European identity formation, but also playing a role in the international human resource management discipline by providing some key abilities for the selection of successful expatriate.

Primary data was collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews conducted both in English and in French with employees of the Commission and four unrelated other self-initiated expatriates living and working in Brussels. This data collection method suits the research goal, as face-to-face interviews enable rich data to be collected; it enabled the researcher to develop deeper understanding of the experience of expatriates and to see the extent to which the participants see themselves as interculturally competent individuals. Indeed, as argued by Seidman (2006), the purpose of in-depth interviewing is the importance given to “understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p.9). In other words, the interest and focus was on the individuals’ story.

Consequently, a narrative emphasis was preferred through extensive probing aiming to reveal the value of the responses of the interviewees (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 110) through their speech. Indeed a narrative analysis stimulates life span stories and episodes of interviewees’ experiences and interconnections between them. In other words, this methodology relates to the collection of data that explain the lives of individuals through their stories and experiences and meaning and then to the understanding of them. According to Connelly and Clandinin, “Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the story of the ways humans experience the world” (1990, p.2).

Importantly, the research was sought to be performed as objectively as possible, thus trying to ask questions in the most open way possible and without putting words or ideas into the respondents’ mind in order to increase the validity of the responses. In addition, participants were ensured that their anonymity would be guaranteed and that the data would only be used for the completion of the master thesis, thus only for academic purposes.

Below, the topics of the interview guide are mentioned and the full interview guide can be found in Appendix I. In addition to the following themes, probing about the individuals’ awareness of the use of some abilities was used.

1. Background information
2. Language proficiency
3. Relational/interpersonal competence
4. Personality traits
5. Intercultural abilities
6. Performance

Moreover, the research design evolved over the course of the study. It was initially envisioned to interview human resource managers in order to investigate whether they actually explicitly consider intercultural competences as selection criteria for international assignments, but through the process this was made unmanageable as no contacts from the human resource department were made available. Nevertheless, one former manager in the human resource department, now working in the DG Education and Cultural agreed to be interrogated and was able to share some of his knowledge of the human resources’ practices within the EC.

One limitation of the study is therefore the one direction of investigation, as the whole project circled around self-perception of intercultural competences of expatriates without recourse to more objective records such as assessment files acquired from recruiters or HR managers.

3.5. Data analysis

The acquired field data is projected to be interpreted and transformed into academic information. The audio-recorded interviews (with consent of the participants) were fully transcribed and then coded to be able to reflect the narratives the self-initiated expatriates talked about and include quotes in the results chapter.

In order to cluster the data collected into smaller, distinguished categories, open coding was applied. The transcript of the interviews were read carefully with the research sub-questions and main question in mind, going through the raw data to have a first idea of which codes to use. Then, axial coding, examining the relationship between the categories developed in the process of open coding, facilitated the combination of those codes. Finally, selective coding determined the topics of the various chapters of the final thesis discussing the analysis of data. The quotations of respondents were thus marked using the topics decided upon and relevant passages were identified and then structured in tables. The topics of the interview guideline ended up being those resulting from selective coding. The previous coding process is an effective tool as it will reduce the amount of data collected from broad to specific categories and show how these are related, leading back to the main research question. The data collected were then analyzed and conclusions were drawn based on that analysis.

After having conducted the nine interviews, it was challenging for the researcher to determine if data saturation occurred, however many similarities originated from the quotes of respondents regarding their opinion on intercultural competence and whether they felt in possession of such capacities, which in return helped them being efficient abroad. Consequently, the total of interviews was decided to be enough to answer the research sub-questions and question and data saturation was considered as reached. That is therefore, when respondents’ answers to the questions started to overlap, that nothing new came up, that it was decided to go on with next stages, namely transcribing, categorizing and systemizing the findings.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the research question was gradually adapted in a way not to include the recruitment and selection schemes and procedures as through the data collection process, it became clear that it would not be likely to interview HR managers, therefore leading to the suppression of the second research question that was initially designed as follow: “Is intercultural
competence of employees considered as one of the criteria during selection of expatriates for international assignments? If so why? And if not, why not?”. Besides, it appeared that abilities such as intercultural competences are not directly taken into account when recruiting in the EC as explained by one of the respondents, which will be outlined more in-depth in the results section. In light of these findings, the EPSO website, in which the selection process starts, was explored in order to have a better understanding of the recruitment procedure that operates within the EC, which will be detailed below.

As a result, the following research question sub-questions were designed:

**Self-initiated expatriates: How do intercultural competences impact upon the expatriates’ self-perceived effectiveness in a multicultural environment?**

Sub-questions:

1. How are intercultural competences achieved as perceived by self-initiated individuals abroad?
2. Is there a correlation between international mobility and the development of intercultural competences?
3. Are recruiters aware of the possible (dis)advantage of skills, capabilities and behaviors related to intercultural competence?
4. Are evidence-based intercultural competences explicitly considered during selection processes or as merely an implicit guideline? And if so, what actual weight do these have in the recruitment process?

### 3.6. Research quality indicators

To try reducing biases and enhancing trustworthiness of the research findings, quality indicators were used. Firstly, *internal validity or credibility*, referring to the question whether the instrument of data collection is appropriate to answer the research question, is enhanced by deriving the topic list from the existing theories. Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews encompassing many open-ended questions intending to get insight on one’s behavior, has an impact on the internal validity of the research, making it as high as possible. However, it is challenging to be fully confident in assuring whether the causal relationship between the variables studied, namely intercultural competence and self-initiated’s self-perceived efficiency in this case, holds completely true (Bryman, 2008).

Secondly, *external validity or transferability*, the degree to which one can generalize to a larger population is not very important for this research. Indeed, the findings were not meant to be generalized as they related specifically to the experience of self-initiated expatriates living in Brussels, which is a particular city on its own. Therefore the representational value of the respondents only holds true if a similar case study would be conducted in a similar city sharing similar characteristics such as the multiculturality, multilinguality and multinationality of the place. So it is in full awareness of the specific situation and group under study that it is known that what comes out of the findings is beforehand already limited and not representative for other cases. In addition, the small amount of respondents and the focus on European nationals instead of international people makes it more difficult to generalize the results to other situations. However, even though the
external validity remains low, findings could be transferred to other European organizations sharing similar organizational culture and policies as the EC. Findings of this research can lead to future research elsewhere concerned with intercultural competences and skills and the expatriates’ success rate abroad.

Thirdly, reliability, relates to whether one is able to anticipate biases in interviews and what is possible to do to prevent them. Reliability was guaranteed through the anonymity of participants which in turn reduced the probability of socially desirable answers. This effect has also been diminished as much as possible by making people feel comfortable during the interview and assuring confidentiality of their responses as the researcher is independent from the organization they work for, either being the EC or another one. Besides, respondents were explained the purpose of the research and its value, using extra small talk and avoiding too sensitive, unrelated questions, to build an atmosphere of trust in which the interviewees could express their experiences and opinion freely. Moreover, during the interviews, probes were utilized to ensure a deep and correct understanding of respondent’s experiences, repeating questions if necessary. Participants were usually able to understand the questions asked, but if needed, they were rephrased or explained and most of the time, the interviewees could back up their reply using personal examples. Reliability also refers to the repeatable aspect of a study. In order to increase the replicability of this research, the methods and process used throughout the study are detailed. However, as argued by Bryman (2008), it is impossible to freeze the uniqueness of a social setting and the context in which the initial study took place in order to exactly replicate it.

In this study, mistaken assumptions are perhaps made and throughout the research process, unexpected data that did not fit in the anticipated categories were collected. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, chance findings are therefore taken into account as well and consequently processed in the results section.

4. Results

In this chapter, the data collected through the interviews are explored, as the narrative approach was used. Since respondents’ stories are at the center of the subject, many quotations will be written down in order to give a full inside of people’s perceptions on intercultural experiences. The section is first divided into five general subgroups that were informed by both the interview topic list and by key concepts appearing regularly in the interviews. They are detailed in the following order: background information, language proficiency, intercultural competence, Brussels, and European identity. This data is presented in a semi-structured form in order to allow its richness as well as its patterns and commonalities to become evident.

The second part of this section is much shorter but its structure is determined by the initial sub-questions.

As already mentioned in the methodology chapter, nine self-initiated expatriates were interviewed. Seven interviews took place in English and two were conducted in French. Nevertheless, all the quotes are translated into English in order to keep consistency in the tables in which quotations are used and if necessary, the transcriptions of all the interviews are presented in Appendix II. Additionally, data was considered to reached saturation when patterns of answers were recognized and overlapping opinion were found, as stressed in the methodology chapter.
4.1. Background Information

Every respondent came from a different European country. The data was collected by interviewing nine individuals working either for the European Commission – five of them - or in another organization – the last four – but all working (except respondent E who is currently in search of a job) and living in Brussels. All interviewees – except for participant G - had worked in a country other than their country of origin before moving to Belgium. They thus had a solid background of previous international experiences. The following table provides the general information about the individuals and as we can see, the majority is single and represents people who have been living in Brussels for less than or slightly over one year. Moreover, most of them were in the same age category, i.e. in their late twenties early thirties. Only two of them have children. So that for them their family life situation had to be taken into account.

Table 1 Demographics of the respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Native Language(s)</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Function in the EU Commission/Work elsewhere</th>
<th>Period of Time living in Brussels</th>
<th>Previous international experience (work and/or live)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>IT external officer</td>
<td>Since November 2011</td>
<td>France, UK, Ireland, Germany, US, Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania (but Hungarian ethnicity)</td>
<td>Hungarian, Romanian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Policy officer, project manager</td>
<td>Since December 2011</td>
<td>New-York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>English, Irish</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Manager for Learning and Organizational Development</td>
<td>23 years</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>Bulgarian</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Communication officer</td>
<td>Since November 2011</td>
<td>Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>French, German</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>International Association of Public Transport</td>
<td>3 years and a half</td>
<td>Germany, England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Commission traineeship (internal security) until February 2012, no job currently</td>
<td>1 year and a half</td>
<td>Italy, Czech Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-Africa/Germany</td>
<td>German, English</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Trade association (ICT)</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>UK (+ South-Africa, Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>English-German Law Firm</td>
<td>Over 2 years and a half</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2. Language

All respondents speak languages other than their mother tongue. Four respondents grew up in a bilingual environment as seen in Table 1. Additionally, as demonstrated in the following table, the English language is common to all. Most of them are also learning French or Dutch as they are now living in Brussels. Furthermore, when asked about the reason why they started learning extra languages, it all came down to either work motivation or for personal growth and interest. Finally, one interviewee insisted on the fact that he enjoyed finding out how languages work

“what similarities is between one and the other, […] I enjoy to try and analyze and break it down, what could it mean and see the link with other languages […]” (See Appendix II, respondent E, 1).

Table 2 Language(s) spoken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Additional Language(s) spoken</th>
<th>Proficiency in those languages (in their own words)</th>
<th>Reasons for speaking/learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>English, Portuguese, French</td>
<td>Good command, Beginner, Very beginner</td>
<td>Work, Personal interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>English, French, German, Japanese</td>
<td>Fluent, Fluent, Some basis, Some basis</td>
<td>Acquired naturally, Acquired naturally, Subject at school, Personal interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>English, German, French</td>
<td>Fluent, Ok level, Learning</td>
<td>School + experience, Subject at school, Work + everyday life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>French, Dutch, German, Spanish</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>English, Italian, French, German</td>
<td>Proficient (C1 EU Grid), Proficient (C1 EU Grid), Basic (A2 EU Grid), Basic (A2 EU Grid)</td>
<td>Work and personal interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>English, Dutch, Spanish</td>
<td>Not mentioned, Learning, Some basis</td>
<td>Not mentioned, Living in Belgium, Personal interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>English, Italian, French, German, Czech, Arabic</td>
<td>Fluent, Fluent, Pretty decent, Pretty decent, Some basis, Some basis</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-Africa/Germany</td>
<td>Italian, French</td>
<td>Ok level, Learning</td>
<td>Lived in Italy, Living in Belgium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>English, Dutch, French</td>
<td>Fluent, Learning</td>
<td>Acquired naturally, Personal interest, Life and personal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


4.3. Intercultural Competence

The main research question of this study refers to the intercultural competence people can gain through their international experience and whether, in their view, the acquisition of those abilities has an impact on their efficiency in the host country or city. As reviewed in the theoretical chapter, intercultural competence can entail many abilities, capacities and the extent to which such aptitudes are beneficial to the adjustment process of an individual has not been well determined so far in existing research. For the purpose of this study, I was interested in people’s self-perception on their own intercultural competences and therefore did not make an exhaustive list of skills; instead, I investigated the interviewee’s narrative and personal view on that matter. I asked them about both cognitive, conscious attitudes and their behavioral responses in various intercultural situations.

I asked a few respondents if they had heard about and how they would define such ‘intercultural competence’ and below are their replies.

“I think that in order to adapt well, one has to be at a minimum curious and open-minded [...] but we can be open-minded, curious, etc. by still thinking that our own origins, nationality and culture are, I was gonna say almost superior to others. I mean, it is not this that will prevent me from going towards others and enjoy other cultures, etc. so I think that having good solid basis regarding one’s own identity is maybe an advantage as you don’t feel threatened by other cultures [...] obviously you have to remain modest”. (Respondent B, 1)

“I imagine it must be with how to deal with people from a different cultural background in a working environment, personal setting. I think you should be open-minded, tolerant, flexible, to notice when something is strange for someone or it doesn’t make sense to them, be able to talk and communicate and explain why you do things in a certain way.” (Respondent E, 2)

“It’s not a thing in itself, it’s a subset, it’s an aspect I would say primarily of communication, because communication has to do with transmitting information and receiving it and understanding it and sharing it. And some of that is let’s say, one level of linguistic, so you overcome that, there is something resulting which is called culture and some of the culture awareness and cultural competence it’s almost like an openness to doubt that even though I’m very clear with what I think, there might be other ways of saying it, there might be other ways of understanding it, and I might have to make an effort to understand the other persons in their point of view” (Respondent G, 1)

4.3.1. Awareness

One important feature of being able to build and utilize intercultural competence is to be aware of the behavior, attitudes and changes one makes in order to successfully engage in an intercultural situation. Furthermore, the acknowledgement of cultural differences is a step towards a more appropriate manner of dealing with culturally and ethnically diverse people on an optimal mode. In tune with the expectation of the researcher, the interviewees overall considered themselves as being open-minded and they recognized that their behavioral adaptation is predominantly conscious even though through their experiences it became an automatic as demonstrated in Table 3.
However, one respondent (E) pointed out that he did not spontaneously think that he has to modify his behavior in order to make the counterpart more comfortable. He added that he will try to adapt but wants to stay himself and does not want to act hypocritically regarding certain convictions, habits, ways or manners he may have.

Table 3 Quotations of respondents about ‘being conscious of adaptation of behavior’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Quotation of the respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>“I know that I do it and it’s automatic”. (A1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>“Let’s says that it is done automatically but consciously”. (B2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>“I would say I’m conscious most of the time, [...] but with my contacts on the work place, I’m conscious all the time”. (H1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>“I think I am, yes I guess I am”. (C1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-Africa/Germany</td>
<td>“I’m aware of it because it’s something against the way I would normally do things”. (Referring to a change of behavior in with his roommate, see F1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>“Some of it yes, and some of it not”. (I1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Copying without noticing, because I want to make the other person comfortable so you kind of get on the same terms in a way and some of it I guess it’s more conscious like when it comes to talking, it’s more conscious I would say”. (I1)

4.3.2. Relational/Interpersonal competence

The ability of interacting, building relationships with culturally diverse individuals is a paramount factor for successful work and life in multiple countries or within various ethnicities, cultures, identities, etc. Relational or communicative competence was considered as meaningful by many respondents in this study, endorsing the findings of previous researches as related in the chapter of theoretical background. As one interviewee nicely puts, “In the end it’s about what connects you more than what separates you” (E3). This sentence evidences that no matter what is one’s background, country of origin and so on, if they are willing to share their lives with others, they will pay attention and focus on the common interests they may have and whether these enable them to get along no matter what their ethnicity, skin color, religion, country of origin, etc. Another respondent emphasized the fact that if one is sympathetic, his/her nationality is not going to influence whether (s)he chooses to interact with him/her or not. Nevertheless one respondent (C2) recognized that there are barriers sometimes, which can make one uses stereotypes that one has about one nation but then, after a while, one often realizes that most of it is entirely incorrect and that the individuals themselves with their own personality will influence whether people will be willing to interact with each other or not.

An important factor of the relation competence relates to the ability to easily socialize with people from diverse cultures. All the respondents seemed to feel confident in their capacity to interact with someone else either being at work or in their personal and social lives. One interviewee (D) even insisted on the importance to make friends and that the relational experiences are really what enable him to be happy whereas another one emphasized on the importance of the genuineness of such relations. Yet, almost all respondents experience more interaction with individuals from the international community than with truly Belgian people in this case. However, one interviewee made this fact a generalization when stating that “in general it seems to be easier when you are abroad to socialize with the other foreigners than with the locals” (E4). Hence, contrary to my expectation, the
majority of respondents did not mainly stay within the expatriate community but usually try to meet and interact also with people from their work or outside their work who are not part of the expatriate community, but still remaining within groups of international instead of local individuals mostly. Only one interviewee (H) expressed that she tries to stay within the circle of people that have the same problems that she faces when integrating into a new country, namely other expatriates.

As mentioned later on, most of the communications are done using the English language even though several respondents (A, D, E, G, I) acknowledge the importance of knowing the host national language(s). Besides, one respondent claimed that even if they did not share a common language, they could still use gesture and other non-verbal behaviors in order to understand each other.

Another significant element of intercultural competence is the capacity to build strong intercultural relationships and being able to retain them through the years. As assumed by the researcher, all interviewees managed to develop a wide network full of people from all over the world. Noteworthy, it was declared that social networks such as facebook or twitter really benefit the preservation of international friendships (A, C, E, H). Some respondents even mentioned that the multicultural interaction became in a way more interesting to them than a ‘ unicultural’ world which they eventually regard as even boring (C, F).

Finally, I tried to investigate the emotions people go through when dealing with culturally diverse people. Regarding their reply vis-à-vis their capacity to build intercultural relationships, it was expected that they would experience positive sentiments. Those assumptions were indeed validated as almost all respondents talked about feeling very comfortable and enjoying those relationships. When a gap or a tension was experienced they express being able to manage such situation using negotiation skills or compromises, by being flexible (C, I, H). However, some have expressed that some subjects were intentionally avoided such as religion and political views with people they barely knew. This kind of exchange was usually shared only among close friends. Noteworthy, one more time, several respondents mentioned that the success of an interaction does not only depend on one’s culture (H, E, F) but it is often determined by one’s personality itself.

Below, in table 4, there are quotations of the respondents, but obviously only a few are written down as much more has been discussed during the interviews and can be found in the Appendix II comprising all the interview transcriptions.

**Table 4 Quotations of respondents about ‘relational competences’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Quotation of the respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>“At the beginning it was not very easy to socialize with people from many countries than your own country but I think after one hundred countries it’s really easy”. (A2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>“[...] I don’t have any a priority when I meet someone from another culture”. (B3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>“I think if you get use to the multicultural western city, you’re gonna want that all your life, it’s boring to be in a unicultural world”. (C3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Facebook helps a lot when you move somewhere else, you still have you friends on facebook to interact with and I have great friends from Brazil and NY and Columbia and God knows, Puerto Rico, everywhere”. (C4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I can’t name a nationality I’m not interested in”. (C5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.3. Personality Traits

As reviewed in the theoretical section of this study, the intercultural competences encompass some personality traits an individual should possess in order to be interculturally efficient. Indeed, a highly mobile individual may acquire many skills or abilities to interact in a diverse environment, while having to also possess some personality characteristics to make them sustainable in the long term. I argue that developing knowledge about culture and its components when traveling from one country to another is essential to the fruitful accomplishment of international assignments but it is not enough in order to ensure a positive effectiveness of the person working and living in those places.

This assumption was confirmed through the interviews, even though not always directly but more in an implicit manner with the help of the respondents’ narrative. The question about self-perception was the most challenging one to receive answers to, as the interviewees did not feel very comfortable replying to such self-assessment (e.g. C, E, F). Furthermore, when interrogated about how they thought that their colleagues, peers and friends perceived them, almost all the respondents could not give a confident response. Most of the time, respondents gave me very superficial qualities and mostly did not present themselves encompassing any of the personality traits I would have expected from international people, apart from the open-mindedness, flexibility and empathy. Table 5 procures the various traits expressed by the individuals.

Noteworthy, one respondent (B) specified that she was rigid, but still open-minded, in the sense that she is willing to adapt but always in a merely superficial manner and she confidently expresses that even though she shows flexibility, interacts with any culture easily, etc., she feels that in the end her own culture is as she said “not superior, but better” (B4).

Table 5 Personality traits expressed by respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality Traits</th>
<th>How many times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open-minded</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociable</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polite</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-prejudiced</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast thinking</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrogant</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of humor</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nevertheless, when referring to more specific attribute precise examples of whether they supposedly possessed those or not were gathered. The principal qualities investigated are presented in Table 6, together with a sample of each respondent’s reaction or practical examples in which they allegedly demonstrated such quality. Besides, some personality features can be inherent to an individual, if you feel you are born with it (H). But in the case of this research, the focus was also on whether previous international experiences had enabled the respondents to develop some traits that in turn, will help them operate efficiently in a diversified environment either being at work or in the everyday life situations. However, it is worth noting that being e.g. flexible, tolerant, open-minded, etc. can work only to the extent to which people are disposed to do so. Such willingness has to come from all the parties interacting in order to reach some kind of balance through, among others, compromise, as assumed by the researcher. The supposition that positively linked the aforementioned personality traits and intercultural efficiency was also established, as demonstrated in Table 6.

**Table 6 Attributes suggested by the researcher and respondents’ reactions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Quotation of the respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>“[…] in the end, like kind of negotiation, you have to give two steps to be closer to the German way and you have to wait till Germans do two steps in your way”. (A3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“This is something that I learned actually when I started living abroad because also to me being from a country that is not so well known, people have stereotypes, so I’ve seen how it works and this is something that I don’t like so I’m trying not to have these, even positive stereotypes, I’ve tried to set them aside”. (H2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“You always have to try of course […] you do a lot of compromises […] and if you realize that the difference is too huge then there is no point in struggling with it”. (C6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance</td>
<td>“I’m tolerant on anybody, any nationality, any religion, anybody except the fundamentalists”. (C7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Pretty much, yes […] I would respect people’s opinion”. (E7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We accept each other particularities”. (E8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“People today tend to be a little more tolerant than before and are more able to work with other cultures […] I think your first reaction to people is what you learned and then you, I think the tolerance comes in that, I don’t think it’s an inherent national thing I think it’s something that you are willing to say ‘yes, I’m gonna work to make sure that I…’ but I think that’s a conscious process that you go through”. (F4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“When I was younger I really wanted to be super tolerant but it doesn’t work for me. There are things which I can tolerate, not because I think it’s fine, but because it doesn’t bother me or because I have the feeling that it doesn’t harm anyone, but then, there are certain cultural traditions or characteristic almost,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
like believes which I just cannot accept because I feel it’s wrong or it harms someone, in my perception”. (I3)

“I’ve learned to be more tolerant, not to take some situations or certain behavior personally, not to approach people with stereotypes and not act offended if colleagues approach me with stereotypes and not to make conclusions hastily”. (Respondent H, questionnaire, question 29a)

| Sociability | “I think I am a really sociable person, then I’m able to speak with everybody, with anybody, without any prejudice or things like that and I used to try to help people, this is probably related to traveling abroad, because a lot of time I needed help and now, I use it to try to help with small things”. (A4) |
| Empathy | “I try to be totally open and try to be empathic”. (A5) |

“I think so, why not, I mean there is a good case […], the first time that the Maori party entered the New Zealand parliament […] I had empathic feelings towards him because I understood their struggle and why it’s important for their party to be representing their ethnical interests in this case”. (C8)

4.3.4. Adaptation

Contrary to the researcher’s assumptions, even in a multicultural city like Brussels, individuals do not necessarily adapt or integrate more into the host country. This reality is explained with many reasons in the existing literature but during this research, I discovered that the infrastructure of a city can impact that process as well. Indeed, several respondents (C, F, G) called attention to the ‘social/ethnic ghettos’ that are present in cities in which people stay in their ethnic bubble, as demonstrated in table 7.

Besides, still in the case of integration to Belgium by living in Brussels, it has been mentioned that if one is a European official, one cannot completely integrate. There are some limits as e.g. one does not belong to the economy (Respondent G). Also, one respondent (A) claimed that in Brussels it is quite difficult to know the ‘Belgian culture’, whatever this may be, and to interact with nationals arguing that Belgian working in Brussels usually live in the countryside and therefore just get to the city for their work and have their personal lives going on outside Brussels.

In addition, this community of international individuals leads to a more superficial sort of adjustment to the city. People (A, E, F, I) expressed that they feel comfortable and happy but that they do not have a strong circle of Belgian friends, even though they are in contact with them on a daily basis. In general this would have encouraged a foreigner to feel well adapted but not truly integrated simultaneously, possibly impacting of the expatriate’s effectiveness. This case of Brussels is discussed more in depth below.

On the other hand, one person (C) discusses that some internationals simply do not develop any interest in getting to know the country. He finds it difficult to explain that phenomenon and therefore argues that there is no point in avoiding the host country way of life and that people should try to find a balance between their habits and the ones in the place they live in. Another respondent (A) added that getting to know and accepting the host culture renders the life easier in the country.
Finally, a finding that I had never foreseen is that two respondents mentioned that for them, the most challenging barrier when travelling abroad is everything related to bureaucracy. Indeed conditions for, e.g. opening a bank account, trying to find a doctor, accommodation, subscribing to insurances, etc. vary totally from one country to another and that can sometimes make the adaptation process very difficult.

Table 7 Quotations of respondents about ‘social subgroups in Brussels’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Quotation of the respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>“I have Hungarian friends who don’t even get out of their Hungarian ghetto, they go to home parties only to Hungarians, they watch Hungarian TV only, and they don’t care about the surrounding very much”. (C9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>“[...] some people come and they live for years and years within their own cultural ‘ghetto’”. (G2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>“I guess the more established is this community, like this international crowd, that the more difficult it gets for yourself to get involved, because if it would be a village and just Flemish people you have no choice you have to get in contact with locals but the feeling that it makes it easier for you to have international friends, I don’t want to think that it makes it more difficult to get in contact with locals people because that’s not true but I think that naturally, most people just get to know international people and this maybe in a way makes it more difficult to get local friends but it’s still possible if you want to I think”. (I4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>“I think for most people I would like to have more Belgian friends and to know more people who are really coming from here but often it’s sort of a separate world [...] you mostly hang out with the international people [...] it’s probably a bit more difficult to get in touch with locals.” (E9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.5. Behavioral Competence

During an intercultural interaction between two persons from a different cultural background, people’s behavior and body language are essential as many cultural traditions are different from one country to another or even from one person to another as everyone has their own sense of morality and what is appropriate or not. When communicating with someone with divergent habits, one has to be careful not to be disrespectful or hurtful. Thus, the attitude to display should take into account each individual’s lifestyles.

Through the interviews, various questions regarding the interest that respondents may have had for foreign countries’ culture and customs and their ability to act in respect of those were explored. Firstly I investigated whether generally the individuals were genuinely curious about the various cultures they may encounter throughout their travels and sojourns abroad; and also whether they tried to learn more about countries’ lifestyles, traditions, norms and values, as well as the taboos, of one culture in order to ensure proper verbal and non-verbal behaviors. Typically, all respondents expressed their interest apropos unfamiliar cultural practices and aspects. However, the answers were rather mixed regarding their enthusiasm to learn those in depth when entering a country, as shown in Table 8. In fact, one interviewee stated that “it’s easier to know a city, to know a country if you know people knowing the country there” (A6). Noteworthy, a few respondents (A, C, D,) mentioned the difference of approaching a western country compared to, for instance, eastern one
such as Asian nations, and that it may be more difficult to offend someone more occidental as long as one remains polite, whereas the Asian culture would be more complicated to grasp.

**Table 8 Quotations of respondents about ‘learning cultural and behavioral aspect of a county’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Quotation of the respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>“I didn’t try to learn, I used to take a look at these web pages comparing ways of life and things like that but nothing else. My strategy is to go to downtown in every city I’m visiting and from there I start to expand and learn”. (A7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>“A minimum, but I don’t pay that much attention to it”. (B5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>“Not really I don’t very much I mean just let it surprise me, it depends on the country [...] of course outside of Europe, you have to read a little bit [...] because it’s better to know what to expect”. (C6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>“There really are countries where you have to be careful. In Europe, usually when you go somewhere there is no problem, except in some places [...] as soon as you get outside Europe, it is getting harder”. (D1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>“I try to understand some things [...] for instance I read the travel guides [...] understand the traditions and all”. (E10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-Africa/Germany</td>
<td>“I genuinely learn social things, I love studying about society, I love studying about individual history [...] For me it’s more about people, but I like to put together, I like to observe cultures, I like to observe how things work, and I do try to figure out why people do things in a certain way, hum how do traditions developed”. (F5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>“Just, I go and I start looking around [...] if there is something that interest me, I would ask you what you think or why [...] but I don’t really make investigation just for the sake of it”. (H3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I also was interested in knowing whether the interviewees were willing to adjust their behavior or sometimes their way of dressing when confronting people from diverse backgrounds. It has been expressed by all the respondents that except for work situation, in which the company would have a strict dress code, or maybe in certain specific situations such as entering a church, mosque or just being in some countries in which exposing your body parts is seen as inappropriate, they never experienced a situation in which they felt compelled to modify their clothing styles. This argument is demonstrated with quotations from the interviewees in Table 9.

**Table 9 Quotations of respondents about ‘behavioral/clothing adjustment’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Quotation of the respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>“I’ve been working for a [...] huge consultancy international and there we had really a strict dress code, we had to be in a suit every day, so I was related to change my dress code”. (A8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>“As long as I consider to be, let’s say decent, I do not want to compromise anything and in that situation I wouldn’t change my way of dressing”. (B7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>“If it’s worth it, if the experience is that rich, why not”. (C11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.6. Performance

As the questions were based on self-perception, only a few related to job performance were examined. All respondents seem satisfied with their current job performance. However, contrary to the research expectations, it did not seem quite evident that the adaptation – dealing with the adjustment to the daily things, in the country or city, thus Brussels in this case - influences the job performance of the individuals. Indeed, the answers were rather vague as shown in Table 10. Therefore, no generalizing conclusion can be made. However it still looks like a certain feeling of wellbeing in general works positively on the person’s performance as demonstrated in the table below. Two respondents (C, D), on the other hand, insisted on the adjustment to work more than on the adaptation to the country at large and argued that this feeling of comfort on the work place affects their work accomplishment. Finally, I asked the only respondent (G) who used to be working in a human resource department whether he thought that possessing ‘intercultural competence’, thus being able to deal and interact with people from numerous cultural backgrounds helped expatriates to be efficient. He confirmed that nowadays, in our modern world, it is a real disadvantage or disability not to acquire some of those capacities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Quotation of the respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>“I think that if you are able to, if you are adaptive, you will perform your work better”. (A9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>“I guess yes, if I was unhappy, that I didn’t want to go home at night, that I found the city shady, that I didn’t feel like going out, etc. it would be very likely that I wouldn’t be as productive at work, that I wouldn’t be as serene so to say. So yes, I think that could have an impact on my capacities to perform well at work”. (B8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>“Well, the adaptation to the work improves your performance at work, not necessarily the country [...] My adaptation to the Belgian society improves my private life, but doesn’t have much impact on my work”. (C13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>“I don’t know, well I suppose that the more adapted you are, the better, I mean you can concentrate on your work and not all the time you have to go out and do some stuff and think about things that really worry you, so in that respect maybe”. (H6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>“[...] for me personally, the relational is very important, people thinking only about work and being always in their work, it bothers me. [...] But then, if it is more relaxed, maybe you are less performing, I think it has an influence, if there is less pressure”. (D4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>“If you don’t understand your colleagues, you are going to have a hard time...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
working there. If you can’t relate to them, if you can’t communicate, if they don’t know what to expect from you, if you don’t know what they are looking for, then yes, it will influence your performance”. (E11)

South-Africa/Germany “I don’t know, I think the impact on my job is more of a personal development as opposed to an understanding of cultural”. (F9)

Austria “[…] me feeling comfortable here that it has an influence, an impact on my work, because I’m happy to leave work because I know I have things to do here, I have hobbies, you know, I know the city, I know where to go, I like to discover it, we have parties plan or some dinners or whatever, so you know this definitely has a big impact on my work”. (I7)

4.3.7. Training

One aspect of the acquisition of intercultural competence was to discover whether the respondents received any intercultural training before moving to another country for work. My hypothesis was that taking part in such preparation should help the international employees get prepared to a life in a different culture. Moreover, it turned out that none of them were given training beforehand, it sort of made sense as they all chose to move from their native country without being sent by any company. Therefore, one interesting piece of data recovered from the training question referred to the impression of self-initiated ‘expatriate’ that training is not essential to build up abilities to settle and find a job in another place. Nevertheless, respondents G and I expressed that training could at least raise awareness among individuals, possibly resulting in more open-minded attitudes and willingness to interact and learn about different cultures.

Worthy to note, interviewee A mentioned that previously he had followed an informal training offered by his former employer and that it can help if you are open-minded and willing to interact with culturally diverse people. They did this for ten days. Furthermore, two of the respondents (G, H) working in the European Commission referred to training on working in a multicultural environment offered by the organization after a few months of their arrival in Brussels. Mention was made also of a newcomers’ program of introduction to the basic rules to work in the Commission. It comprises also tips about the country, as well as encompassing a multicultural element in the working environment. Therefore, the respondents working in the EC did receive some kind of training when they arrived in Brussels, but it was maybe not very useful regarding their adaptation in Belgium and therefore ensuring future effectiveness in their work and private life.

Table 11 Quotations of respondents about ‘intercultural training and effectiveness’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Quotation of the respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>“I don’t think it will tell me something new or much new but you never know”. (C14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>“I don’t think that somebody can really help you with that, you just have to have some basics and then do it yourself […] you cannot be trained to that”. (H7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>“I don’t think that if you take somebody let’s invent a caricature, or somebody who is just not able to work in a multicultural environment and then you send them for 2 days into a multicultural training course, he comes out transformed, I don’t know, I don’t think it works like that”. (G3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I think that training is probably useful but I would be very surprised if it’s
decisive, if it makes a difference between somebody who has done it or not’. (G4)

“I think it raises awareness”. (G5)

Austria “If people are interested in it, in general, yes […] I would definitely think, vote for it, but personally it can also makes you confused a lot because of so many things, it’s very theoretical sometimes, when you begin receiving this training it’s sometimes really practical, almost too practical, two generalizing in a way, like do this and do not do this, in this country”. (I8)

“I would still say that it’s usually very helpful, I think it makes people often more aware about what you personally have been through, or what situations were you in, or how you react maybe, or how others could see things, I think it’s good to think about it and experience it”. (I9)

4.4. Brussels

Throughout the data collection process, it became clear that the city, in which the respondents moved to in order to work and possibly even settle, represented a specific case study in itself. Brussels is indeed a very multicultural, multilingual and multinational city, and has been so for a long time. Furthermore, since the decision of the EU Member States to make Brussels the seat of the European institutions in 1997, Brussels has become the ‘de facto’ capital of Europe. Thus many people from the EU Member States are attracted by this place and eventually apply for a job within one of the EU institutions. In the process, they become ‘Eurocrats’ living in Brussels and its surroundings. Indeed, in the course of successive enlargements more and more European institutions have been established in the Region of Brussels, which has led to the emergence of a European neighbourhood. In the process of this research, it has become evident that Brussels is considered as an ‘international bubble’, in which many nationalities live aside each other’s, even though some groups are more clustered than others. As respondent F put it, in Brussels, “you live in an international environment; you don’t really live in Belgium” (F10) and that is why according to some of the respondents (G, F, H), one cannot fully integrate to Belgium by living in Brussels, as the actual Belgian experience can be very limited. In addition, there is a tendency towards some sort of ‘social ghetto’, in which various ethnic groups live more or less apart from others. Interviewee F stated that

“It’s kind of layered, you have your Spanish people, your national people that you hang out with then you have the next layer with the more international, ‘Eurocratic’ one and then only on the third phase will be the Belgians”. (F11)

Furthermore, one of the questions was directed as whether the multiculturality of Brussels had a positive influence on the general self-perceived efficiency of expatriates. To some extent, this assumption was confirmed. It was stated that residents of Brussels, either being local or foreign, are used to communicate with non-nationals, so it helps to adjust and as one interviewee (G) mentioned,

“Brussels is by far the easier, let say it’s the most comfortable place to arrive into. You do not feel foreigner in Brussels, in the way that you, you could easily feel a foreigner, in Cologne or Munich or even Amsterdam”. (G6)

Yet, this usual co-habitation with all kinds of people may not always be lived without difficulty as one neither completely feels at home nor feels as a foreigner. Moreover, through the interviews it was
not always clear whether the participants referred to themselves as foreigner or to anyone making up the mixed society of Brussels. However, after analysis of the data the tendency would be in favour of the second possibility. As in the words of respondent H,

“One actually, you really feel like a foreigner here, it’s just that in Brussels, because there are so many expats, you don’t have the feeling of being at home, at no time, because it’s not in the air, there is so many people who leave the city on Fridays, they don’t consider it home, you can feel it and so you don’t have the feeling that it’s your home, that it’s something stable”. (H8)

Besides, as already demonstrated above, Brussels’s multicultural character has its drawbacks too, such as the lack of motivation - or need to - for instance, learn any of the official languages used in Brussels, i.e. French or Dutch. Indeed, it is made possible for non-nationals to live in a more ‘superficial’ manner in that city, without having to get to know the ‘Belgian culture’, lifestyles or even the city one lives in as internationals can stick to their similar others living in the international ‘bubble’, with whom they may feel closer and more comfortable. As argued by one respondent (G),

“You can live your whole life in Brussels [...] with knowledge of four or five streets and that’s enough for 20 years”. (G7)

Moreover, the majority of interviewees have very few Belgian friends. One respondent (A) argues that it is difficult to make friends with host nationals because most of them are not living in Brussels directly but in the countryside or in small villages around. They have their personal lives there and only work in Brussels. However, according to another interviewee (I), it is too easy to say that it is difficult to get to know local people. She mentioned that this could be the case because within Belgium, groups are pre-existent: the French speaking versus the Dutch speaking usually remain within their own group. They do not interact much together. On top of those groups there is the international crowd. So up front, in Brussels, one can find three different groups. Nevertheless, she (I) insisted if one really wants to get in contact with locals, one can join some activities, start learning the language, etc. Therefore she argues that it is mainly out of laziness or lack of time that these three groups remain apart naturally. However, the multiculturality of Brussels is not the only reason why the international community is formed a little bit outside from the nationals. Indeed, because when one is part of this community, it is easier to meet other international people and make friends amongst them, like the way Erasmus students often stick together. One is more likely to interact with people who share common interests, goals with you and those similarities can even go beyond the language barrier. As in respondent F’s own words:

“It’s very easy, you meet people who do the same things, have the same interests and who you can probably relate to and I think it goes beyond the language barrier as well, I know lots of people who are fluent in French or in Dutch and their contact with Belgians from either side is just as much as someone like me who doesn’t speak those languages”. (F12)

4.5. European Identity

This subsection is a result of a reflection that happened after conducting the first four interviews. Indeed, at the beginning of my research process, it was thought of interviewing both European and International expatriates. However, throughout the whole process of the study, and the restrictions
the researcher had to face, which resulted in a slight change in the target group, it was realized that it would also be interesting to focus on Europeans moving across Europe only as not many researches have been done in that matter yet. Additionally, the first emphasis being on the European Commission, it made sense to investigate the experience of people coming from the Member States mainly. The various interviews directed, shed light on the fact that adapting to a European country might be less challenging than adjusting to a country from, e.g. another continent such as Asia. Indeed, many respondents (A, C, D, E, H) agreed that there are similarities between the European cultures, even though remaining distinct. Those similarities made the integration and effectiveness towards a European yet nationally diversified work place or city more comfortable.

Therefore, this topic of European identity made the researcher wonder whether there existed a common ‘European identity’ for highly mobile individuals. In other words, the matter presented itself as follows: whether expatriates moving from one European country to another have the feeling to commonly belong to a European culture or whether their national or ethnic identity/culture is still their basis for identity construction. The answers received were quite mixed so it is difficult to make any generalization. Yet one thing that was clear was that the use of English as communicative language between people from different backgrounds, even though it is rarely their native language, became automatic, especially among the younger generation. It is a key to relational interaction. In that matter, some kind of a new culture is growing up, i.e. the ability to speak with people from another background. This goes even further: having significant relationships among people with a dissimilar mother tongue. Indeed, one respondent (E) mentioned his sentiment to belong to the cosmopolitan European youth (E12) in which youngsters from all over Europe communicate in such a ‘Euroenglish’, as he calls it. This leads to the emergence of a subculture encompassing groups of trainees and young professionals who thus become the ‘New Europeans’, eventually borrowing some things they can identify with from one country but equally maybe additional stuff from other places.

Although the statements on the emergence of a European identity are limited, they are worth to be given here. During one interview, the topic of identity construction came up and according to the respondent (C15), until the end of World War 2 countries were constructing their identities around cultural traditions, language, etc. Nowadays, according to him, it is not relevant anymore to build ethnical identities or national identities based on ethnicity, especially with the growth of all the European and international institutions such as the Council of the European Union, NATO, and so on. This interviewee argues that most nations realized that they had to move from this perspective and that national identities should be deconstructed regarding anything that is intervening in a federalization of Europe while retaining the languages, national food, traditions, etc.

Table 12 Quotations of respondents about ‘the existence of a European identity’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Quotation of the respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>“Yes I do, but only as opposed to a non-European nationality/culture. I will feel a ‘European’ influence on my way of behaving and thinking when I’m in Japan or in Dubai for example (or just walking down streets in certain areas of Brussels or Paris!), but I will feel Danish (or sometimes Parisian) when I’m in another European country”. (D9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Romania           | “[…], the easiest way is to link yourself to more broad idea like European or just more open-minded person, happy with your life and that’s it. You have to of course lose some part of your identity [...] but then you take other stuff in and
then you realize that you identity should be much more about that than your ethnicity”. (C16)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Africa/Germany</td>
<td>“If you’re living in a different culture yes, you can be the most international person in the world, you can work and live with people from all around the world, but I think on your quiet moment everybody goes back to his local roots, that’s where people find their comfort”. (F13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“National cultures within Europe are still dominant, you have national identities before your European identity, it’s not even national identity, it goes down to regional, local identity.” (F14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“and I don’t think that any type of pushing towards a European globalized thing would ever, it can’t replace that, I don’t think”. (F15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>“I don’t know, I suppose in a way, if you have a critical mass of people who have been, if it becomes the norm to have worked in other places, then, a new norm will grow almost imperceptibly whether you call that a culture or not.” (G8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I think it’s become, if you call it a culture, but I think we have moved along a continuum where we are much easier in dealing with people who are from other places”. (G9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>“From my point of view there is no European Culture or European feeling, it should be developed”. (A10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“[...] even People born in Belgium have country-feeling more than European feeling”. (A11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>“There is no European nationality or culture. I think the very notion of Europe is characterized by being very diverse: united in diversity. Of course, there are people who have something European in their identity. But I believe identities exist next to each other; you can have a European, Dutch and Amsterdam identity at the same time”. (E13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>“Yes but not everyone feels like that. This European culture / Nationality has been strenghtened in the past years through a European passport, opening of borders, 'Brussels' referring as EU capital, Erasmus, ability to work and live anywhere you wish in Europe, low cost travel etc. especially among young people”. (D5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nevertheless, it was also explored whether the respondents, all very international individuals, would consider themselves as global citizens or international vagabonds after experiencing this life of great mobility; whether they felt closer to a larger community than their home country. Many expressed their European orientation – and not international - that developed through their traveling experiences, although one interviewee (B) stated that working in Brussels made her being even more conscious that she indeed preserved attitudes, behaviors that are typical from her native country/region. Furthermore, another respondent (C) argued that he had the feeling to belong to a certain European citizenship but not international in the sense that there does not exist any ‘global’ citizenship, while there is a European citizenship which has he puts it,

“There is no global anything, but there is a European citizenship which is not citizen in the classical legal term, but it has some kind of legal connotations, some political and even cultural connotations, so yes, I feel myself very European for sure and only if I have to choose which one I am in the first place, I would start with European definitely”. (C17)
Moreover, it has been demonstrated that Europe is somewhat different from e.g. Asian countries in which the cultural shock may be more present. In fact several respondents have never been to Asia and some even fear it (e.g. respondent A), do not feel ready yet to live in a country with completely different traditions, expectations and cultures than the ones we have in Europe and maybe in the United States. Indeed, one respondent (H) stated that

“I would say European because I don’t find so many differences with people that are from Europe, I find differences with people that really come from other worlds, other continents”. (H9)

Nevertheless, due to her experiences in a multicultural environment, another respondent (B) realized that she was more Danish than she previously thought, so that it enabled her to better grasp her Danish roots that were still very strong. As argued by another person (C), it permits one to better identify with a country.

4.6. Sub-question 1

The previous subdivision in this results chapter allowed a first general overview over the findings from the data collected. It is now time to focus on the sub-questions that were designed for this study and answered through the interviews.

The first sub-question was the following:

**How are intercultural competences achieved as perceived by self-initiated individuals abroad?**

In view of the interviews, the existing literature on intercultural competence was supported, specifically the theory of cultural intelligence established by Earley and Ang (2003). Indeed, the participants demonstrated that one can develop such abilities through various levels.

Firstly, by enhancing one’s general knowledge of other cultures, traditions, lifestyles, etc. than one’s own, therefore referring to the more cognitive aspect of learning. This awareness can be raised using intercultural trainings.

Secondly, there is a sort of motivation, interest that one must have towards culturally diverse interaction. In fact, all the respondents clearly expressed their curiosity and genuine attentiveness in learning multiple aspect of an encounter or country with different values, standards, etc. For instance, respondent (E) conveyed his fascination regarding linguistics and how another language than his native one works grammatically, its origins, etc.

Thirdly, a behavioral feature plays an important role, maybe not directly in the development of intercultural competences but certainly as evidence of whether one has managed to master such competences or not. Indeed, the attitude one displays while being in an intercultural environment, either at work or in one’s personal life, really demonstrates his/her ability to interact adequately in such situations.

Finally, one participant (H) declared that in her opinion, one’s personality traits also influence one’s capacity to acquire intercultural awareness and competences. Therefore corroborating the literature on interpersonal skills that emphasize the need of some specific personal characteristics that can both apply to general and to intercultural interactions, such as being empathic, tolerant, flexible,
curious and so forth. An individual possessing such personality traits may be more likely to grow those abilities into an intercultural context.

**4.7. Sub-question 2**

Is there a correlation between international mobility and the development of intercultural competences?

To some extent, this question was positively answered and a relation between international mobility and intercultural competences was supported. Indeed, one fascinating aspect about developing a certain international experience that goes beyond merely going on vacation abroad – by settling for a few months, years, and living in another country – is the effect of such adventure on people’s habits, behaviors, interest and so on. Consequently, a question asked during interviews referred to whether the individual believed that they had changed as a result of their various journeys. Many respondents (A, C, D, E, F, H, I) acknowledged that they mature to some extent and they all agree that they change in many ways.

One interviewee (A) underlined the ability to be alone, be more patient and more open and see others beyond their ethnicity or nationality. In other words, it influenced their behavior in general. While another one (E) highlighted that this moving around helped him to find his place, where he can discover languages and many traditions and come across people with similar attitudes, interests. Moreover, another one (H) insisted on the way she became more tolerant towards different people in general, not just about their cultural backgrounds, especially when she compares herself to how she used to be and to some of her friends that stayed in her native country; and that she is less suspicious and smiles more than before.

Additionally, one interviewee (C) pointed out that he grew up in a ‘unicultural’, nationalist environment until he went to university where he lived completely in an ‘ethnic bubble’. It then changed and he had to get used to interact with dissimilar people and he realized that the issues he could face could be very small and that there were so many more important concerns going on in the world. That opening to his surroundings changed him totally. He states that

“I think I completely changed my mentality from being right nationalist to being left liberal. [...] my friends didn’t recognize me when I came home and [...] I lost a lot of friends [...] but I made a lot of new ones who before I couldn’t make friends with.” (C12)

Still he asserted that he did not regret any moment. However he also conceded that there may be some drawbacks when moving around and that sometimes one feels without any roots and one does not belong anywhere, as also mentioned by another respondent (H). That is why, for them, it is more adequate to link themselves to a broader idea, such as European citizens.

Moreover, regarding some abilities linked to intercultural competence and whether previous international experience may have enabled the respondent to develop those, almost everyone agreed that indeed, moving from one country to another influenced their behaviors and capacity to adapt, being interculturally efficient. They grew some open-mindedness, curiosity, etc. that may have not been part of their identity previously. One interviewee (I) stated that she learned also something else, that she developed a sort of understanding of individual nuances to one’s identity, and to put it in her own words,
“Trying to understand where the person comes from, how the person was raised, which culture the person grow up in but also at the same time, not forget that, you shouldn’t generalize too much just because the person grow up there or maybe speaks another language, or has mixed parents, doesn’t mean that he fits in my image of Poland and Germany or something”. (I6)

Besides, a finding indicated that the international experience one has benefited from in his/her life impacts on the development of intercultural competences. For instance, interviewee (F) who not only worked and lived in several countries before moving to Brussels, but also was raised in a multicultural environment, which makes him a ‘third-culture kid’ as mentioned in the literature on hybrid identities, stated that his multicultural background made him the person his is today.

Additionally, respondent C who explained his growth in a unicultural environment during which he was quite centered on his own ethnically similar in-group, undoubtedly recognized that he developed an intercultural openness thanks to the international movement he later started.

On the other hand, one person (F) pointed out the fact that indeed he changed but that it is difficult to figure out whether it may also be because he grew older. Thus he considers that his development is both resulting from his international experience, as a general life experience, and his ageing, depending on the situation. He therefore gave two examples as expressed below.

“I think I’ve become less idealistic, slightly more realistic or some would say cynical, [...] I became far more relaxed about things, I don’t stress out as much as I used to”. (F7)

“I think that my international experience has helped me, for instance, when I moved from Germany to Belgium, [...] was easier because I have lived in four countries before. I’ve kind of done that before and I’ve kind of knew what you kind of have to do in order to fit in different cultures, you can understand things easier, how the culture work”. (F8)

Finally, some interviewees (A, E, D, H, I) mentioned that thanks to previous experience in multicultural settings, they learned how to deal with stress and how to handle stressful situations or to resolve conflict.

However, one respondent (H) expressed a greatly diverging opinion by arguing that some capacities are natural, innate and stated that

“I just think that some of them are innate, and they help you also develop additional abilities when you are in an intercultural environment for example, your curiosity, people are normally born curious or not or they develop this skill very early, in their childhood or in their family or in their social environment and it doesn’t matter in which country they are, but the curiosity later helps you to integrate better”. (H5)

4.8. Sub-question 3

There was a shift, an almost unperceivable change of emphasis regarding this research. Although a slightly different focus had been envisaged, the non-access to particular respondents such as recruiters and human resource managers forced the researcher to this. Indeed, in light of previous
researches, a domain, namely intercultural competences and expatriates, was entered, in which the criteria suggested for effectiveness were recognized merely by recruitment managers.

It was therefore originally intended to go deeper into the selection process of expatriates than it resulted in. Indeed, the final target group ended in being composed of self-initiated expatriates only, consequently not sent abroad by any organization but who made the choice themselves.

Yet, the researcher had the opportunity to meet a person (respondent G) who previously worked in the human resource department of the European Commission. Hence, during that interview, it was chosen to focus on questions regarding the selection process of employees of the EC working in Brussels and discover whether there had been a shift in the recruiters’ mind regarding the selection process of expatriates. The third and fourth sub-questions are therefore mainly answered by means of this interview.

**Are recruiters aware of the possible (dis)advantages of skills, capabilities and behaviors related to intercultural competence?**

Through this research it has been shown that expatriates recognize the advantages that possessing certain skills within the broad term intercultural competence, may have an impact on their efficiency in different cultures, on the workfloor and in their social lives.

The next level was then to investigate whether recruiters were aware of the effects that such capabilities could have on their expatriates. As the respondents were self-initiated expatriates, this sub-question is still pertinent. Indeed, even if recruiters may not have selected them to send them on international assignements, they were selected mostly to work in a nationally and culturally diverse environement, therefore facing interaction issues related to cultures with their colleagues as well.

Only respondent I, who is not working in the EC mentioned that when interviewed by the recruiters of her current company it was asked whether she had previous international experiences and therefore was able to work in a diverse context and insisted on the fact that it was really important to be aware of the differences and how to deal with them.

> “She was really super aware of how important it is that you are aware that some people react differently because of their cultural background and that you have to kind of know this and take this into account”. (I10)

However, the interviewee could not tell whether that was the company’s general policy to explore those skills or it was merely the recruiters she met that were really emphazising on them.

> “I don’t know how much they take it into account but at least they mention it a lot in the interview”. (I11)

Besides, respondent G corroborated this result, to the extent that he noticed a change through the years in the recruiters’ way of doing, and that the soft skills of human resource such as more psychological, interpersonal criteria were increasingly important. Nevertheless, no specific policy regarding the importance of international competence is written down for the selection process. Again it had been evidenced that intercultural skills are implicitly identified as having a positive
effect on employees working in an environment where diversity is encountered on an everyday basis. Yet, no formal, explicit criteria take those into account as far as the researcher discovered.

“I think people are becoming more aware of it, when I look back now, I think many of these selections that were made 20 years ago, 15 years ago were based on a very narrow set of criteria. [...] The job was given based on knowledge and experience and very little account take in the fact who he is, he has a character that nobody can work with [...] I think we were much more naive 20 years ago than we are now”. (G10)

As a result of this finding it was asked more specifically whether some personality traits, for instance, tolerance and empathy which have been undoubtedly acknowledge as being part of the competences one may possess to be interculturally proficient, are paid more attention to during the selection process. Respondent G stated that

“I think much depends on the particular interview panel, I have been in several and some did not use any language like that whatsoever, they are saying we want to see if she is the kind of person we want to work with, but no more sophisticated than that”. (G11)

He precised that training for the heads of units, especially, are offered, in which they receive an analysis grid on the types of traits that they may want to see in an employee and that they may want to test for. In this circumstance, words such as empathy are used. Yet he again highlighted that it all stays very superficial and quite unsophisticated sometimes.

Additionally, in the respondent’s opinion, in 2012, it is quite common for people to have worked in various places and that factor has a positive impact on their adjusting abilities in a culturally diverse environment. He added that 20-30 years ago, for many people who came to work in Brussels, it was their first time living and working in an international context. Whereas, nowadays, numerous newcomers have had various opportunities to come across other individuals from different backgrounds. Indeed, as already mentioned above, there is an increasing mobility of people starting during their studies when they have the possibility to go abroad on an Erasmus program. As argued by the respondent,

“They have grown beyond their national boundaries before they come”. (G12)

4.9. Sub-question 4

The last sub-question wanted to explore the recruitment procedures further by discovering the extent to which intercultural competences are taken into account during selection of expatriates or employees. It is phrased as following:

Are evidence-based intercultural competences explicitly considered during selection processes or as merely an implicit guideline? And if so, what actual weight do these have in the recruitment process?

As already argued in the above section, it is obvious that intercultural competences are only used as implicit guideline, and may make a difference only if two people with the exact same technical skills are applying for the same job. Respondent (G) therefore tried to explain the researcher the selection process followed in the EC and the kind of criteria they will use to assess potential candidates.
Firstly, it was interesting to know exactly who selects the employees who will come to work in Brussels. Indeed, as there are 27 Member States at the moment, the question regarding whether it was the representations in the different countries that is sending people in Brussels. Contrary to the research expectations, it was explained that almost all candidates are directly chosen by the Commission departments in Brussels applying through the EPSO selection process. Only in the situation of a small amount of what they call “seconded national experts” (SNEs), it is a joined process. They are proposed by their Member State and accepted by the Commission.

Then it was clarified that the first step in the selection process was to create a selection panel for which recruiters have to clearly state what the criteria are, and how they will measure those. Mostly, those standards will be objectively work based. So basically, technical competences are considered as the most important ones. The following example was given by the interviewees;

“If they are looking for somebody that can lead a team, or write reports, who can negotiate, whatever, but there will be done and then they’ll try and have questions and tests to see if they can do it”. (G13)

Nevertheless, he specified that what they are looking for in a candidate also depends from job to job. Then during the selection interview it is essential to also have in mind some human aspects. In fact, the respondent argues that recruiters should also look whether the applicant in front of them is the kind of person that they would see themselves working with five days a week. He stated that

“If the candidate has the right languages, the right technical expertise, who convey some message that you know will not fit well into your work place, it will be a difficult person to work with, he or she probably won’t be taken”. (G14)

In conclusion, in the EC, candidates first have to apply through the EPSO website, in which they have to create an account and upload various documents, such as curriculum vitae, diplomas, reasons for applying, etc. Then, they have to pass several tests for admission to open competitions that may include multiple-choice questions, IQ tests, language tests and so on. Afterwards, they may be invited to reserve a date for going in an assessment center in which they are put in all kind of different contexts, and in which they are tested on their decision-making abilities, reasoning, etc. All information about this selection process is given in documents issued in the Official Journal of the European Union.

Worth mentioning is that another method can be used to select people if a permanent official is needed to fill a post. Indeed, sometimes, the person in charge prefers to get someone who is already working in the EC and who is willing to transfer.

5. Conclusions

In the previous section, the findings of the research were presented and the sub-questions were answered with the help of the data gathered. In this chapter, the overall results are interpreted from a meta-level in order to answer the main research question. As a reminder, this question was phrased as followed:

**Self-initiated expatriates: How do intercultural competences impact upon the expatriates’ self-perceived effectiveness in a multicultural environment?**
In light of the above findings, it can be argued that some salient aspects recognized as being part of a broader concept of intercultural competence positively affect the expatriates’ effectiveness in a culturally diverse setting. This result goes in line with existing literature such as Bennett’s intercultural sentivity framework of the multicultural personality model. The results of the conducted interviews make clear that self-initiated expatriates have their own perception regarding intercultural effectiveness but several features are acknowledged to be essential.

Indeed, an individual can be considered as an interculturally competent person by having a sense of self-consciousness that enables them to negotiate new formations of reality while having the capacity of being capable of making compromises and resolving possible conflicts and tensions resulting from cross-cultural interactions. As seen above, participants acknowledge their sensation of change through their experiences, always in a positive way. Furthermore, it was also demonstrated that conciliation was an important ability to effectively interrelate with culturally diverse persons. This often leads to the recognition of other frames of reference and when interculturally competent, people are always in a state of reformation of identity and growth. They have a capacity to adapt by integrating different but not necessary contradictory lifestyles into a new hybrid culture and identity, therefore, qualifying them to be more easily effective when facing a multicultural environment. The multiplicity of one’s identity is a reality nowadays for highly mobile individuals, it is clear that participants in this study do not have a fixed, bounded idea of their identity and culture but belong to a ‘third culture and space’. This sense of multicultural identities is an advantage to expatriates and their multiple sense of belonging in different places and their ability to fit in and enjoy multicultural environments positively impacts their experiences and turns them into better interculturally efficient beings.

Furthermore, as observed during the interviews, the main components of intercultural competence are threefold. It consists of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Indeed, if one has acquired cultural awareness, the information is useful only if the person can apply and use this knowledge appropriately to actual situations and behave accordingly. However, the participants in this study did not appear to be very nationalistic and were mostly driven by multiculturality, leading to a great interest towards togetherness. Therefore, their motivational level and enthusiasm to learn how to become interculturally efficient is very high as well, increasing their success in that regard.

Additionally, the data gathered demonstrated that the individuals managed to deal with their stress and emotions more comfortably because they learned from their previous experiences. At first, people wonder why others do things differently and then, they realize that there are many people who have different values and lifestyles and after a while they conceive that there is no point of remaining in one’s specific ethnic or cultural group only. International experiences offer amazing opportunities and enable to see and appreciate cultural differences. Individuals, then, have the liberty to choose on what they want to base their own, mixed, hybrid identity. Consequently, if one feels at ease in a diverse setting, and is able to build relationships, one’s effectiveness will certainly increase.

In conclusion, evidence has been found that being interculturally competent, with the entire facet that this multidirectional concept implies, is essential for assuring efficiency of people in a diverse world both on the social and work level, at least in the perception of people’s own level of IC. Indeed, in the globalizing society, intercultural capabilities are not only important when moving from one’s
native country to another but also to adapt to a new form of intercultural society that has emerged from increasing mobility. The results are encouraging because they confirm aspects of intercultural competence identified in previous researches as important and that individuals themselves perceive the same abilities to be salient for intercultural effectiveness as the scholars do in the literature.

6. Discussion

In the previous chapter, the findings resulting from the data collected on the field were presented. The purpose of this chapter is to look at the results from a broader perspective and critically assess the outcomes of the research and to draw conclusions in relation to the existing literature. This research examined self-initiated expatriates working in the multicultural, multilingual and multinational city of Brussels, in particular the intercultural competences they may have developed and whether those are of any help in order to increase efficiency while living and working in a multicultural environment. The focus was laid on the self-perception of the individuals and on people who independently chose to work in a different country than their native one. This emphasis on self-initiated, mobile itinerants is rather underexamined in existing research. This has lead this thesis to make contribution to the field of international and expatriate literature.

This research is an empirical contribution to the literature about expatriates, more specifically, the self-initiated expatriates or highly mobile individuals but also on the extensive literature in cross-cultural and intercultural management.

Firstly, a lot has been written about cross-cultural management, and international assignment of expatriates. Nevertheless, as far as the author knows, there is a lack in the literature regarding the expanding phenomenon of self-initiated expatriates and the relation between their level of intercultural or global competence and their efficiency in a multicultural environment, as is the case in the city of Brussels. The findings of this qualitative research suggest a clear connection between evolving in an international setting and some knowledge, skills and behaviors, at least in the interviewees’ own perception and self-assessment. However, it is important to recall that in the scope and limitation of this research, competence is always meant as the self-perceived competence of the self-initiated expatriates that took part in the interviews.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that this research has a specific focus and therefore did not concentrate on other factors that could play a role in the effectiveness of people. For instance, the educational level and social class of interviewees were disregarded in the questions. Indeed, it could be argued that those two variables may impact on the ability of an individual to be successful in an unfamiliar context. As a matter of fact, many studies on intercultural competence were performed for an educational framework, in a global education objective due to increasing internationalization. Institutions of higher education are facing diversity through students from all over the world and as a result are increasing their efforts to prepare their students to be interculturally effective and develop competence that will enable them to work and live in an international environment as international mobility is challenging, including such subjects in their curriculum (e.g. Byram, Nichols and Stevens, 2001; Deardorff, 2006; Stone, 2006; Byram, 2009; Jackson, 2010). As Jackson (2010) argues, “Globalizing forces have accelerated the pace of internationalization in institutions of higher education both at home and on foreign soil” (p.21).
From the literature review, it appears that assimilation is a one-way process, in which the individual coming from abroad has to adapt to the new working and living environment (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985; Earley and Ang, 2003). Besides, adaptation is seen as the best strategy to increase effectiveness. However, as a result of this research' findings, it is clear that the terms integration, adaptation and belonging to somewhere have many dimensions and layers. Indeed, it seems like there is another sort of integration. In the case of Brussels, it was suggested that one does not need to feel connected to the country, Belgium specifically, to feel well assimilated and happy. A third community, including mainly international and European employees is well established and offer sufficient connection to fulfil the feeling of belonging of the expatriates. In this diverse crowd, the emphasis is not put on some cultural or traditional backgrounds but on the individuals and their importance of their differences while all sharing the similarity of being part of a specific hub formed in the context of a multicultural city. This situation is enhanced by the typical European community in Brussels and its ‘eurocrats’. Finally, in this study, respondents accentuated that they associate mostly integration to their ability of creating meaningful relationships, which in turn will impact upon their wellbeing and through this, on their effectiveness in general.

As mentioned above, contrary to the literature, the results of this research demonstrated that individuals try not to ‘culturalize’ actions, but mainly regard attitudes of others as reflecting essentially their personality. Consequently individuals are generalizing a lot, reflecting, trying to see things from other peoples’ perspectives as well as trying to understand their points of view. Indeed, due to the multidirectionality of the situation in Brussels, in which colleagues and friends come from all over Europe or even the world, there is no national way dominating in neither the work floor nor the individuals’ personal lifes. By relating to diversity with an ethnorelativistic approach such as suggested by Bennett (1986) and other scholars, the findings corroborate the intercultural sensitivity framework. In addition, it goes even further as there is evidence that not only people in possession of intercultural competence are more tolerant and open-minded but also they are more flexible towards their own identity. Indeed, they developed multicultural identities, leading to multiple skills and ability and an amplified interest in togetherness. Using the aforementioned, they adjust and fit in different places and enjoy this advantage of being surrounded by numerous ethnicities, cultures, traditions, etc. This multiculturality upholds the literature related to third culture kids and third culture space in which an individual manages to create a frame of reference grounded not only on one main cultural background but also on the multiplicity of cultures they have encountered through their lives. Thus a mutual elasticity is achieved.

Nonetheless, it has to be noted that every respondent of this study came from a European country and chose to work in a European city. It can thus be argued that they remain in their comfort zone in opposition to whether they would interact in a country with greater cultural differences such as Asian countries. In fact, most of the literature on expatriates’ international assignments is based on the experience of American or Western employees being sent to Asian countries and the studies made in this context revealed much more difficulties to integrate and be efficient. Therefore, one question resulting from this research is whether the individuals interviewed were really interculturally competent or more ‘European’ competent, in the sense that whether they would feel as good as they feel in Brussels if they would be living and working in an Asian country for instance? It is, indeed, less challenging to stay within Europe. Of course, cultural differences exist among European states, however with globalization and the growing expansion of the European Union, national boundaries are blurry and people move from one country to another easily. Some
academics in the literature on identity have actually recently focused their research on the reality of a European identity, emphasizing on the similarities those countries share while remaining diverse in a number of traditions.

Hence, there is a void in the literature on intercultural competence. As discussed in chapter two, many attempts have been made to define precisely the variables of intercultural competence and how to develop and measure such capabilities. Yet, the importance of the context and location in which the intercultural interaction is happening is absent whereas even though the essence of the concept is in general agreed upon, it is made obvious that the definitions of intercultural competence changes depending on the position of people looking at it, or from the context. This non-situational nature of current explanation of intercultural effectiveness is an important gap in the theories and models. As argued previously, the success of an individual from Europe living and working in another European city does not necessarily imply an unconditional ability to perform well around the whole world. Even though the respondents of this research were positive and enthusiastic about their level of global skills, they themselves sometimes recognize that in their current state of mind, this confidence would not be the same in a completely different cultural setting such as if living in Asia for instance. Therefore, as a result of this research, it is argue that IC should not be looked upon in a global sense and may not be the same all over the world. Indeed, the cultural sensitivity required in the Brussel’s hub may be requiring different attitudes that it would require if someone would decide to move to Hong Kong for instance. It is thus discussed that the current theories which have developed IC as a global phenomenon may be mistaken or at least lacking a certain situational factor that may play a role.

Still, the results are encouraging as they confirm aspects of intercultural competence such as willingness to listen, and other-centred messages that have already been identified by other researchers as crucial for intercultural efficiency. Furthermore, awareness of cultural differences and an ability to reflect upon one’s own perspective demonstrate other skills acknowledged in the literature as essential too. As a matter of fact, the participants had a good cultural level and spoke several languages. However, the findings as deducted from the individual’s own perception upon their intercultural competence, no hard criteria could be measured in order to ensure objectivity of self-perception. That is why, as previously stated, soft skills and criteria were taken into account in order to measure self-perceived effectiveness in relation to IC and were argued to play a role in that matter, such as, for instance, SIEs’ feeling of well-being, and the enjoyment of their intercultural experiences in Brussels. This perspective reflects the uniqueness of this research, which, in turn, is the contribution to the field. Indeed, throughout this work, there is a minimum consensus of IC and it is evidenced that success may point in the direction of minimum turnover, feeling well, elasticity of flexibility in mix and match situations, etc.

Additionally, when going back to the existing literature on self-initiated expatriates, it is clear that the findings of this research reflected the findings of Inkson et al. (1997), Banai and Harry (2004) and Siljanen and Lämsä (2009) regarding the heterogeneity amongst expatriates and the reasons of their desire to live in a multicultural environment and outside their home country. Indeed, when looking at the profiles of the participants, they can be categorized in either the ‘officials’, the ‘cosmopolitans’ or the ‘global careerists’ suggested by the aforementioned scholars. Actually half of the respondents were employed by the European Commission located in Brussels and some of them were truly supporting Europeanization. Then, they could all also be considered as cosmopolitans or global
careerists as they all had a genuine interest for intercultural and international interactions. They were all driven by a desire to explore other cultures and some of them even declared being bored when living in a unicultural setting. This proved the relevance of studying the increasing trend of people to self impose their international mobility. This wish to discover new horizons creates individuals with great awareness about togetherness and with abilities to easily move amongst cultures.

In conclusion, drawing upon Deardorff’s (2006) and other scholars’ work, it seems necessary to gain a deeper, multidisciplinary understanding of what it means to be an effective intercultural individual in today’s increasingly global, multicultural and hybrid society as well as how self-initiated and other international employees understand and perceive such concepts in order to best meet an employer’s requirement but also to ensure well-being all over the world. Indeed, organisations around the world look for not only one’s experience but most importantly how one thinks about what one does e.g. one’s abilities, traits and characteristics, going beyond one’s work experience and education. They are looking for what some call soft skills. Therefore, organisations are increasingly using competency-based assessments to get a fuller picture of the potential of their people and where they fit best in their organisations. As well as education, qualifications and skills, these organisations want to know the person’s approach to problem solving, how they will engage with colleagues and stakeholders, their approach to tasks and projects as well as what motivates them. These competences sought by employers should extend to a multicultural environment and emphasis should be put on the ability of candidates to not only possessing those skills but being able to put them into practice also when dealing with a multicultural setting. Therefore, adaptation is not the only strategy one can adopt when being in an intercultural environment. Another strategy would be to achieve a third-space, in which there would be an intercultural fluidity that individuals in this bubble would intentionally cultivate as they would all be open and elastic and therefore would not necessarily have to adapt as suggested the current perspective of adaptation and integration within one culture.

7. Limitations, Implications & Recommendations

7.1. Limitations

As with almost all researches, this study contains certain limitations that need to be mentioned.

It is important to keep in mind that the findings of this study are only built upon the self-perception of the self-initiated expatriates interviewed on their intercultural competence and effectiveness in the intercultural hub of Brussels. Thus only one point of view has been explored and so this research lacks objective measures and a balanced view of evidence-based and acknowledged externally or by other objective assessments. Therefore no real assessment of the accurate efficiency and level of intercultural competence of respondents based on hard criteria was made possible and the researcher focused only on the individuals’ own story and viewpoint. It is then clear that no generalizations can be assumed and that this study’s outcomes are specific to the case study of the European self-initiated expatriates of Brussels.

A second limitation of this research is that the elements of intercultural competence derived from the participants’ observations and experiences may not be representative of every expatriate’s standpoints. Indeed, the respondents are all self-initiated highly educated expatriates and highly mobile individuals since they were all already immersed in intercultural situations before coming to
Brussels, therefore they may have a higher level of consciousness than the general population. Consequently, as they are actively involved in interacting with culturally different others, their motivation to be competent in a multicultural setting is further amplified. So even though I fulfill the quality indicator of reliability quite well, because of my limitations, I cannot assess my own findings as representational.

Third, regarding the supranational identity such as a European identity they may have, I unfortunately do not have many statements on this topic as I did not think I would go in that direction when I started my interviews. I have a few respondents who replied to an e-mail asking some questions regarding the reality of a European Identity and the findings of the data gathered are developed in the result chapter.

Besides, another limitation of this research is concerned with the fact that living and working in Brussels with the European Commission is more or less within a ‘comfort zone’ as discussed above. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to an international context.

Finally, the gradual shift of emphasis in this research due to practical reasons has led to less consistency between the initial purpose, to know more about the human resource selection procedure and the final outcomes focusing merely on the self-perception of people towards intercultural competence and the impact upon their success in a multicultural environment. Thus leaving a gap between the third and fourth sub-questions and the main research question.

7.2. Implications

This study contributes to the intercultural literature by providing self-perception of self-initiated expatriates on the value of intercultural competence in order to perform successfully in a multicultural environment. Indeed, it demonstrates that individuals perceive similar abilities to be essential to be interculturally effective as does the existing literature.

Furthermore, one positive aspect of this study is that it includes a multicultural representation of respondents. Indeed, nine cultural backgrounds are represented and therefore, the recommendation of van de Vijver and Leung’s (1997) to have a “culturally diverse perspective” (p.13) and that, “if a study is exploratory, or if the theoretical framework available is tentative, it is preferable to include three or more cultural groups” (p.28) has been followed. Indeed, the opinion of individuals from many backgrounds was collected, therefore taking into account the recommendation of the two scholars.

Additionally, it has been demonstrated that the respondents of the research were mainly part of the younger, highly mobile generation being part of this expatriate cocoon known in Brussels. They all had previous intercultural experiences either at a national level, in their country of origin or even through previous international assignments. Therefore the participants had similar intercultural background. It would be valuable to study another group made of individuals with no intercultural experience at all but who still considered themselves as open, with various traits mentioned as basic requirements of intercultural competence in the literature.
Besides, as mentioned in the discussion, the participants were remaining in their comfort zone by living in a European city, especially into the ‘Eurobubble’ of Brussels. It is therefore difficult to generalize their experiences and opinion to a broader idea of intercultural competence in a global, worldwide perspective. In addition, the interviewees in question were self-initiated and therefore cannot represent the entire group of expatriates which would encompass both self-directed and corporate expatriates. So it would be interesting to also explore traditional expatriates and their relation towards intercultural competence.

Finally, as stressed below, this research has an implication regarding the recruitment process of organization. Indeed, it demonstrates that considering the level of intercultural competence of candidates with explicit, clearly defined criteria would be of high value for the organization in order to foresee an individual’s ability to work and interact in a multicultural environment. Moreover, if such competences would be taken into account throughout the employee’s work as well, it would be necessary for the employers to develop an ideal set of criteria of what they consider to contribute to success or effectiveness from their perspective. Thus, there is a need to do further research in which the recruiter’s perspective is combined with the self-perception of employee to create criteria for the evidence of success. This would enable the individuals to monitor their intercultural competence progress in line with the organization’s perspective.

### 7.3. Recommendations

Future researches on the topic of international effectiveness are recommended, even though many of them have already been done. Indeed, additional studies aiming at developing a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic and complex nature of intercultural competence are needed.

Additionally, more evidence-based research, instead of theoretical models and theories is required in this field which could lead to a more adequate definition of intercultural competence, by including a locational and contextual aspect to the current approach. Indeed, the understanding and description of this concept vary from discipline to discipline and from people to people. Perception of what it means to be interculturally competent in the view of for instance Asiatic people could be surprisingly completely different or similar but there is only one way to find that out.

Moreover, the concepts of identity and culture may be overrated in a time of globalization and increased relations between countries on all the continents. It would therefore be interesting to investigate the process of identity construction of people from all over the world living in a multicultural setting and not merely from European citizenships. Studies could expand to other multinational cities such as London, New York or Hong Kong.

Finally, as already mentioned, the initial focus of this thesis intended to look deeper into the HRM side but in the end, resulting from a lack of opportunity to collaborate with recruiters, it was decided to look at IC and efficiency the other way around by focusing on self-perception of expatriates. Nevertheless, it was discovered, by chance, that recruiters were only impressionistically using soft criteria such as intercultural skills in their selection process, partly because it is assumed that self-initiated expatriates, by nature, have an interest in multicultural settings. Therefore, it is only

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9 Term retrieved from the video in the following link: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYD8Zb2D6PU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYD8Zb2D6PU)
implicitly that criteria such as flexibility and openminded look at the world come up when candidates apply for a job. For the work floor, it could thus be interesting to assess the IC of individuals in the annual appraisal as a more explicit part of the assessment, in order also to monitor the relation between expectations partly based on the IC of the candidate, and his/her actual efficiency, performance and well-being over the years and to see one’s evolution and learning process in that matter.
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JOURNAL ARTICLES


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**BOOKS**


**OTHERS SOURCES**


Appendix I: Interview guide and e-mail questionnaire

a) Interview guide

1. Interviewee
   - Gender, age, citizenship, marital status, children, native language, family background (eg multicultural)
   - Function in the EC, or other company
   - How long since in Brussels and how long plan on staying there?
   - Countries visited before and where you stayed longer: i.e. to live, study/school, volunteer, travel/long vacation, work...
   - Worked abroad before? Any other international experience for work?

2. Language proficiency
   - How many languages do you speak? Which ones? Proficiency in those?
   - Why did you learn them?

3. Relational/interpersonal
   - Can you socialize with locals or people from another culture than yours? (work+social life)
   - Through your life, did you develop any intercultural relationships? In which context (work, personal)? Do you maintain those relationships?
   - How do you feel when dealing with culturally diverse people? Would you have a positive and negative example?

   Here on, good to probe and ask if they were AWARE they are doing something different, i.e. they consciously adapted their behavior to suit the other, not to offend. Or if they did it blindly, following some written, required protocol, advice by somebody. These will help you see how they developed this sensitivity

   - When was the last time you were talking with a host national and you felt like you are not on the same wavelength/you don't speak the same language/you have completely different perspectives on things etc.? Could you please explain
   - When was the last time you demonstrate flexibility when interacting with someone from another culture/background?
   - When was the last time you adjust your behavior, dress, etc. as appropriate, to avoid offending the hosts?
   - Do you use appropriate strategies for adapting to the host culture in order to reduce stress? If so, could you give me example(s)?
   - When was the last time you help resolve cross-cultural conflicts and misunderstanding whey they arise? Could you give an example? (work+personal life)
   - When was the last time you reflect on the impact and consequences of your decisions and choices on your colleagues with different backgrounds?

4. Personality traits
   - How do you think you are perceived by others? Do you think this perception is related to your nationality? Could you please elaborate?
   - Do you have the feeling to belong to any particular ‘culture’/group?
   - Do you consider yourself as a truly global citizen/an international vagabond?
   - How would you characterize your main character traits? What words would you use do describe yourself?
- As a result of your international/intercultural experience, do you feel you changed? how?

5. **Intercultural abilities**
- When you go abroad, do you learn the norms and taboos of the host culture (greetings, dress, behaviors, etc.)?
- When abroad are you interested in interacting with host nationals? Show interest in new cultural aspects? (understand values, history, traditions, etc.) Try to understand differences in the behaviors, values, attitudes, and styles of host members?
- How would you describe your adaptation in Brussels?

6. **Performance**
- How do you think your adaptation influences your job performance?
- How would you characterize your job performance? Are you satisfied?
- Have you thought of repatriated early?
- Did you receive any intercultural training before coming to Brussels? Do you think it has an impact on your current performance at work?

b) Interview guide for recruiters (not really used except for one interview)

1. **General introduction:**
   Intro of the interviewer, aim of the research, permission for recording, confidentiality

2. **Introduction of interviewee**
   - What is your function?
   - How many years have you been working for the European Commission?

3. **Selection**
   - On what basis do you select the expatriates?
   - Do you use specific criteria/strategies? Which one?
   - Do your selection strategies vary/differ depending on the country the expatriates are sent to?
   - Do they vary depending on the length of the international assignment?
   - Do you value the intercultural competence of the employees? Why? Why not?
   - Do those competences have a role in your selection strategy? To what extent?
   - If you would have to order the following expatriate selection criteria according to their importance, how would you order them?
     - **Job Factors**
       - Technical or professional competence
       - Managerial talent/leadership skills
       - Previous job performance in overseas assignment
     - **Relational/interpersonal Dimensions** → how do you test those?
       - Tolerance for ambiguity
       - Behavioral flexibility
       - Non-judgementalism
       - Cultural empathy and low ethnocentrism
       - Interpersonal skills
       - Communicative skills
       - Ability to work with employees with various cultural background
     - **Motivational State**
       - Congruence with career path
       - Interest in overseas experience
       - Interest in specific host country culture
       - Willingness to acquire new patterns of behavior and attitudes
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- Family Situation
- Language Skills
  - Host country language fluency
  - Non-verbal communication skills
- Personality characteristics and intercultural competence and which one are important for you?

4. Intercultural competence
   - Could you define what culture is for you? What is it made of?
   - Have you heard of the term intercultural competence? What would you characterize as such competence?
   - Do you think that possessing such competence while on international assignment has an influence of the expatriate’s adjustment/performance? Positive? Negative?

5. Cross-cultural training
   - Do you offer your employees in cross-cultural training?
   - Do you feel that employees who received such training are more successful when facing cultural diversity?

6. Effectiveness of expatriate
   - How do you measure expatriate’s effectiveness? Do you have specific criteria? Which ones?
   - Is there evidence that interculturally competent employees are more successful abroad? Why? Why not? Could you please give an example?

c) E-mail questionnaire

Intercultural Competence and Adaptation in a host Culture/Country

This questionnaire was designed within the framework of my Master thesis. In combination with face-to-face interviews, it intends to help you reflect on your potential for developing intercultural competences based on your personal background. This will enable me to collect valuable information that I will use, on an anonymous basis, for the completion of my Master degree.

My research aims to investigate whether expatriates and recruiters consider intercultural competence to work as a positive factor in assignments abroad. The second aim is to explore whether intercultural competences influence expatriates’ effectiveness to adjust abroad. Through this I would contribute to the international human resource management literature.

For more information, please, feel free to contact me: sophie.donnay@gmail.com

Demographic questions

   a. If other: Click here to type your answer.
4. What is your marital status? Pick an answer.
5. Do you have any children? If yes, how many? Click here to type your answer.
6. Did you move to Brussels with your family? Yes ☐ No ☐
   a. If no, do you plan on bringing them later? Yes ☐ No ☐
7. Function in the European Commission
Click here to type your answer.

8. How many years have you been working for the European Commission
   Click here to type your answer.

9. Which countries have you already been to
   a. On vacation   Click here to type your answer.
   b. To live there  Click here to type your answer.

10. Have you already been working abroad?
    a. Yes ☐ No ☐
    b. If yes, in which countries?  Click here to type your answer.
    c. For how long?  Click here to type your answer.
    d. How long did your longest stay abroad last? And where was this?
       Click here to type your answer.

11. What is/are your native language(s)?
    Click here to type your answer.

12. How many languages do you speak in total?  Click here to type your answer.
    a. Which ones?
       Click here to type your answer.
    b. What is your average language ability in those languages according to the European Levels Grid?

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Intercultural competences

13. Where do you usually spend your holidays?
    a. In your native country ☐
    b. Abroad ☑
    c. Why?
       Click here to type your answer.

14. When abroad, how would you describe your level of interest and motivation towards the host culture?
    a. Before?
       Click here to type your answer.
    b. Upon first entering the host culture?
       Click here to type your answer.
    c. Mid-way through the experience?
       Click here to type your answer.
    d. At the end of the experience? (If applicable)
       Click here to type your answer.
    e. After returning home? (If applicable)
       Click here to type your answer.
    f. Today? (If applicable)
       Click here to type your answer.
g. Does your level of interest vary depending on the country/culture you go to? 
Click here to type your answer.

15. Do you enjoy living in cultures/countries that are unfamiliar to you? 
Yes [ ] No [ ]

16. When you go abroad, do you get informed about norms and taboos of the host culture (greetings, dress, behaviors, etc.)? 
   a. Yes [ ] No [ ]
   b. If yes, could you please give an example about what you learned before moving to Brussels? 
      Click here to type your answer.

17. When abroad do you realize the importance of 
   a. Your colleagues’ reactions reflecting their cultural values? 
      Yes [ ] No [ ]
      • Could you please give example(s) 
      Click here to type your answer.
   b. Your acquaintances/friends’ reactions reflecting their cultural values? 
      Yes [ ] No [ ]
      • Could you please give example(s) 
      Click here to type your answer.
   c. The fact that your own reactions are embedded in your cultural values and norms? 
      Yes [ ] No [ ]
      • Could you please give example(s) 
      Click here to type your answer.

18. Do you use strategies for adapting to the host culture in order to reduce stress? 
   (If applicable) 
   Yes [ ] No [ ]
   a. If so, could you please give me example(s)? 
      Click here to type your answer.
   b. How did you learn them? 
      Click here to type your answer.

19. Do you know learning processes and strategies for learning about and adjusting to the 
   a. host culture? 
      Yes [ ] No [ ]
      • If yes, which ones? 
      Click here to type your answer.
      • How did you learn them? (Self-training, training from the organization...?) 
      Click here to type your answer.
   b. host language? 
      Yes [ ] No [ ]
      • If yes, which ones? 
      Click here to type your answer.
      • How did you learn them? (Self-training, training from the organization...?) 
      Click here to type your answer.

20. Do you usually/did you learn the host language? 
   Yes [ ] No [ ]

21. Do you learn the rules for expressing nonverbal behaviors in other cultures?
22. Do you change your verbal behavior (tone, accent...) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it?
   Yes ☐ No ☐
   a. Could you please give an example?
      Click here to type your answer.

23. Do you change your nonverbal behavior when a cross-cultural interaction requires it?
   Yes ☐ No ☐
   a. Could you please give an example?
      Click here to type your answer.

24. How do you perceive yourself as communicator, facilitator, mediator, in an intercultural situation? Could you please explain why?
   Click here to type your answer.

25. How do you think others perceive you as communicator, facilitator, mediator, in an intercultural situation? Could you please explain why?
   Click here to type your answer.

26. When abroad do you demonstrate willingness to
   a. Interact with host culture members?
      - On the work floor?
        Yes ☐ No ☐
      - In your personal live?
        Yes ☐ No ☐
   b. Learn from your hosts, their language and culture?
      Yes ☐ No ☐
   c. Try to communicate in their language and behave in “appropriate” ways?
      - On the work floor?
        Yes ☐ No ☐
      - In your personal live?
        Yes ☐ No ☐
   d. Show interest in new cultural aspects? (understand values, history, traditions, etc.)
      Yes ☐ No ☐
      a. Could you please give examples?
         Click here to type your answer.

27. Do you use culture-specific information to improve your communication style and professional interaction with colleagues?
   Yes ☐ No ☐
   a. If yes, could you give me example(s)?
      Click here to type your answer.
   b. How did you receive this information?
      Click here to type your answer.

28. Through your previous intercultural experiences, did you develop any intercultural abilities?
   Yes ☐ No ☐
   a. If yes, which ones?

   | Knowledge about various cultures | ☐ |
   | Empathy                        | ☐ |
   | Self-confidence               | ☐ |
29. Do you currently use any of the intercultural abilities that were developed as a result of an experience abroad?
   Yes [ ] No [ ]
   a. On the work floor?
      Click here to type your answer.
   b. In your personal life?
      Click here to type your answer.
   c. Could you please give a practical example for each?
      - Work floor:
         Click here to type your answer.
      - Personal life:
         Click here to type your answer.

30. Do you know:
   a. Two Belgian radio stations:
      Click here to type your answer.
   b. Two Belgian singers:
      Click here to type your answer.
   c. One Belgian painter:
      Click here to type your answer.
   d. Five Belgian beers:
      Click here to type your answer.
   e. A typically Belgian dish:
      Click here to type your answer.
   f. The current King of Belgium:
      Click here to type your answer.
   g. The current Belgian Prime Minister:
      Click here to type your answer.
   h. Who Didier Reynders is?
      Click here to type your answer.

31. What is typical about the Belgian way of life and how is it (different/similar to) in your country?
   Click here to type your answer.

32. Have you/do you plan to visit Belgian cities?
   Yes [ ] No [ ]
   a. Which ones?
      Click here to type your answer.

33. Have you/do you plan to visit Belgian museums?
   Yes [ ] No [ ]
   a. Which ones?
      Click here to type your answer.
# Appendix II: Transcription of the interviews

## Interviewee A

I’m first gonna start with basic questions. So you’re Spanish (talked about it while walking to the Botanique). Do you have a dual nationality?

No, no just Spanish

Your marital status?

Single

Do you have children?

No, or I don’t know of 😊

Your native language(s)?

Spanish

What is your family background?

I grew up in a totally Spanish background, in Spain, Madrid. It started to be multicultural like 15 years ago but previous to that it wasn’t very multicultural

Your function in the commission?

I’m working in IT and I’m like an external officer for a project with department cultural end education. We are storing project which EU participate in and stuff like that

Ok, so how long have you been to Brussels?

6 months

Do you already know how you plan on staying?,

For the moment I’m planning on staying here my whole life but yeah

Which countries have you visited before, or have you been working to before?

Should I separate visits from working?

Yes, it would be easier

Ok, I’ve been visited Mexico, Brazil, US, UK, Germany, France, a lot of, Italy, heu I try to remember.

No Asian countries?

No, no by the moment, I’m not encourage enough to face so high cultural change, no Asian countries, most of them Europe and US.

And working in Spain, France, UK, Ireland, Germany, Belgium, US too, Mexico and I think that’s all, yes.

And what was your longer stay abroad? Before Brussels?

My longest stay abroad before Brussels was like 4/5 months

In which country?

In the UK, in London

Ok, did you do an Erasmus program when you were a student?

No I applied for and I had it but I started to work in Spain and I haven’t done the Erasmus

But you already have a lot of experiences abroad!

Yes

How many languages do you speak?

Ok I think, I can speak Spanish, and a little bit of English, I’m beginner in Portuguese and very beginner in French

Did you learn them because of your work or just because you were interested in the languages?

I’m interested in languages, I learned English because of my work, it’s an international language and then is good for work, but the other ones, I started to learn by myself because I like it! I started for instance, I studied a bit of ??? and a bit of everything, it’s very difficult, because I like it

Ok, have you easy to socialize with people from another culture, to interact with them?
Ok, the beginning it was not very easy to socialize with people from many country than your own country but I think after one hundred countries it’s really easy.

It’s getting easier?

Yes for my perspective, here it’s very easy to socialize with people coming from outside Belgium, but it’s very difficult to socialize with people from Belgium

And do you know why is that?

I don’t know, I have my hypothesis, I think that for instance London is a multicultural city too with a lot of people coming from every site in the people and here, my hypothesis is European Commission came here mandatory so it was, someone made the choice to make Brussels the European capital, and then lot of people is here because they are officers or they have their position in the EU commission, not because they really want to be here and I suppose the change is ??? now and people need more time to be together, because from the expat point of view, from my perspective and my experience is really easy to live here, everything is well thought to make to live easy to expat people but is not really easy to know to real Belgian, you know

So its easier with other expatriates

Yes, you know it’s like a bubble in the city and I think it’s the fastest step and slowly this will change and became like London and everything is really fluently with people coming from different places, yeah

And do you think, is it easy at work to socialize with a Belgian colleague for instance of is it the same as in your personal life?

At work I don’t find any difference between nationalities, I mean everybody work together and people are working, and of the Belgian people is less proactive to have like after work relationship then expat of course because expats are here, and they begin there alone so. But at the work level, for me there is no difference. Ok from time to time the English accent is hard, but only that.

And usually you communicate in English?

Yes, we used to work in English and talk in English, ok I’m able to understand French if people speak slowly, for me there is no problem, but there are other people who don’t understand French at all. Like not the official, the official languages are French, German and English but the more understanded language is English

Ok, hum, so through your life and your experiences abroad, have you ever developed like strong relationships with people, friendship, or other that you still keep today?

Yes,

You keep contact abroad with different people?

Yeah yeah and this is very difficult for me cause I have friends in a lot of countries and I try to keep in contact and send them email. I used to really base now in facebook to get in touch with people from other countries and other cities and yes I have friends all abroad.

And usually you made friends in every country you’ve been to, or is there any country where it was harder?

Depending on the time I spent there but I used to try to find friends, yeah abroad and to know the city and to spend time and stuff like that

And was it with people from your work or more from an expat community?

Ok, I’m trying to avoid in every city to be inside the expat community. You have to be in because you are an expat and it’s really easy to socialize but I use to try to avoid to have a lot of friends in my work so I use to try to find people in other ways. And it is my way. SO I have friends from the work, I have friends from outside the work and I have friends from the expat community in every city or whatever... I have ???

Ok, [...eating...]

When you deal with culturally diverse people, when you are in a group with different people form different background, how do you feel? Do you know...,
Ok, I use to feel very comfortable then ok I use to contact people and try to find.. I think I have to ability to not be concerned about cultural or religion or countries or things like that. SO there is no problem. For instance, this Friday I did a party at my place and there were people coming from every, from a lot a countries, different cultures, different ages, different cultural levels and that kind

So it’s not a problem for you

For me, it’s not a problem

And so you are conscious about that, you know that you feel comfortable whoever you are with, depending on the culture, it’s not really what matters for you?

Yes, ok, at this point, I told you before, I ’m not encourage enough to try the Asian culture, yet, but I will do in the future

What scares you about the Asian culture?

Ok, it’s a, I, probably it’s my perspective again, and I see the Asian culture like father than European culture or American one, even middle east is closer than Asian. Ok, now China for instance is becoming more international and more related to us, but I have, it’s my feeling, like I’m not prepared to really connect there and

Because of the very different cultural way of doing?

Yeah, and the language, the way of life, and all this things

(eating)

Could you thing of a time when your were talking with a host national, so Belgian people or maybe even someone from a different country than Spain, and you felt like you were really not on the same page, like you didn’t speak maybe the same language, even if you were maybe speaking in English of course, but like you weren’t on the same page when you were talking?

Yes, what do I feel in that moment?

Yes, when was it and what did you feel, could you give me an example for instance, a situation where it happened or?

Oh, I think there are cultural differences in most important. For instance, for me the best example is Spanish people way of wo

So you were able to dealt with it?

Ok, yeah in the end I, like kind of negotiation, you have to give two steps to be closer to the German way and you have to wait till German do two steps in your way and in the end step by step it’s possible to deal with it

And this happened here in the Commission or when you were working somewhere else?

Ok, most of people here in the Commission is related to all the people and all the ways so they use to be more like open but I’ve been working in Munich and I remember there it was really hard because I they were not so prepared and not so open to change their minds or things like that, but it’s ok, and perhaps in those cases you have to do four steps and they only one but this is like negotiation again.

And would you consider yourself as flexible then?

Yes, I think this is one fit of me, I’m really flexible and cause I had to do it in the past and I have done it and I know my limit, I know the place where I really, my comfort place and I know where are the limits outside the comfort place, where I can’t go without being really disturbed or yeah.

So did you learn your limit through your experiences?

Yes,

Did it help working abroad?

Yes, ok I can analyze them theoretically but until you practice you won’t really know how to deal and things like that
Hum, did you even adjusted your behavior, or even just your way of dressing because of the people you were interacting with?

Ok, I've been working for a center and you know this kind of American consultancy company, huge consultancy international and there we had really a strict dress code, we had to be in a suit, heu every day, so I was related to change my dress code, even if I liked a lot to be in a suit. Then after I left that center, I use to dress in my way, every time. Yes, I think it’s heu good enough to, not, in the limit of to be polite and not rude, so

So for work, you were willing to adjust

Yes,

Hum, do you use, or did you in the past, use any strategies to cope with the stress that could come from an intercultural interaction or to adjust to a different countries with different cultures? Did you have learn any way of dealing with your emotions and you stress in order to make things easier for you?

I think the best way to deal with emotions is to feel them and let them to be. So yes I had have lots of emotions and stress and things like that but at the end I think for me the best way is to live them, to have them, to be patient, you have to pass by and this is for me the steps and yeah, but only that no special program or

Did you have any trainings or?

No, but ok, I had pass by a lot of stress in lot of companies and the consultancy world is really hard and you deal with, perhaps my capability to deal with stress and things like that is more than the average but I don’t know, I use to practice a lot of sport, every time and it helps of course and to keep my hobbies, so my, piece of myself, every time is for me the only thing I have to keep and I think from that everything will be ok most of the time

And have you ever had any conflict because of such difference, when talking to someone, either on you work life or your personal life?

Yes, I have had conflicts with, so kind of conflicts with people living abroad, in Spain, in my country. They were trying to tell me that the position is really awful and they had like, they were like really bad from my perspective, you’re bad because you like being bad. And then this is a conflict and the other person is not able to try to understand my way, ok I’ve been living abroad, leaving my country every four months, things like that I know it is hard, I’ve done it and I know what I’m talking about. And perhaps a small change in the perspective of the other person could help and this person don’t like to understand my, it is a conflict. I have had conflict with people that heu, never have traveled abroad and heu they ask you if you were there the whole life so they don’t take care of, ok small problems like try to find a place, know where is the doctor, where is the doctor working, where is the supermarket, and all the things. I have had some conflicts working with these people. They didn’t understand that I the beginning I needed more time to deal with things and to make the base and then once the base is done, everything will be better for everybody. Ok at the end they were solved. And in multicultural environment I have got any kind of conflict. I think most of people know the situation, we are all at the same position.

Ok, good. Hum, I was also wondering about some of your personality traits, so how do you perceive yourself? Could you give me some characteristics of your personality? That may have helped you adjust to a foreign country?

Ok, I don’t know, this is very difficult, but. Ok I think I am a really sociable person, then I’m able to speak with everybody, with anybody, without any prejudice or things like that and I use to try to help people, this is probably related to traveling abroad, because a lot of time I needed help and now, and I use to try to help with small things and with heu, whatever. And Spanish I’m really party oriented, so it’s really good to go out, and to know people going out and things like that. And I don’t know, I try to be polite every time, I respect everything

So you try not to be prejudiced or bias with anyone who comes from a different culture?

Yes, I try to be totally open and try to be empathic and I think this is
Ok, good, and when you go to a country, so when you came to Brussels for instance, did you first try to learn some norms, or taboos like do and don’ts in Belgium for instance? How to try not to offend people over there or…? Do you try to learn some stuff of the culture?

Heu, yes this is one of the things because I’m not encourage enough to go to Asia and heu, culture, you know, if you are more or less polite person, it’s gonna be difficult to offend to someone and let’s go to say more occidental, yes I think it’s very difficult. I didn’t try to learn, ok I use to take a look at this web pages comparing like ways of life and things like that but nothing else. My strategy is to go to downtown in every city I’m visiting and from there I start to expand and learn. I use to yes, only that

So nothing more specific → ex of Present in Japan

Ok I don’t think, there is no, I mean in the regular things or normal things about day, I think there is from my perspective there nothing special. If you are polite, if you, some things change from country to country, for instance it’s really amazing here when you ask for something, you have to say every time svp and merci and like several times, yes whatever and if you are not doing that, people is not gonna be offended, they know you are coming from outside, but this is not something really serious. If you don’t know it, it’s not really serious.

(eating)

Is there any subject that you avoid talking with some people, from some kind of cultures?

Ok, I use to try to avoid to talk with people I don’t really know about the tough subject like political view, religion, marital status and whatever, I think this is a question of education and no more and, but is someone talk to me about economy or political view or whatever I can hold the conversation without any problem. But I don’t know for me there is nothing to avoid, ok

If people in front of you are open to have a debate or even to disagree then it’s fine?

Yes

Hum, do you consider yourself as a global citizen or international vagabond?

After 10 years travelling I’ve been starting to feel like international. Ok, I’m Spanish and I like to good thinks of my country and I hate the bad things for my country but yes, I think that I’m international

So do you think that thanks to you previous experience abroad, it is getting easier to go from one country to another?

Yes, for me it’s really easy

You don’t really have any more problems to adapt of to adjust in the country or?

No, no, for me it’s really easy. So it’s fine. I will start from downtown,, I will start to explore and the people and

And then you’ll learn from that?

Yeah.

Do you feel changed as a result of your international experience?

Yes,

In what way?

Ok, I have more, for instance the ability to be alone, alone with myself, in my own, I have more and more every time. It’s not a problem for me to go alone to the cinema or to go alone to have a coffee, or to do some things alone. And probably, I’m more patient and my mind is more open; So I think every time more and more. Like, heu being with people as people only as a person, not only, without taking care of the agenda, of the religion, of the whatever, they are persons and we are persons and like an entity, more than a man, more than a women coming from this country, more than.

Ok, hum, I asked that, so as you said earlier, when you go to a country to you are interested in both talking with people also from abroad, in an expats community but also with the national people?

Yes, yes I use to try to know national people

So you are interested in getting to know...
Ya,
And is it because of getting to know their culture or just?
Yes, I think it’s easier to know a city, to know a country if you know people knowing the country there, the culture there
So you are interested in knowing cultural aspects of people as well?
Yeah, the cultural aspects and heu behavior aspects and this, yes everything related to a country
And do you think it helps to adapt to the country as well, knowing all those?
Yes, I think it heu of course it makes the life easy in the country, I struggling here at the beginning here it’s very difficult at the beginning to get this in Brussels, then I think it’s very difficult to know the culture of Belgium, or Brussels
And do you think this is because Brussels is already so multicultural? So it’s harder? Or do you think that Belgian are not easy to approach?
I think it’s not easy to approach cause I’ve met people from Belgium they are living in the country side or in small village not heu, but most of them are not living in Brussels and I have the feeling that their life there is totally different than the way of life in Brussels. Heu, so I don’t know I think it’s, I don’t think it’s because of the multicultural because London is a really multicultural city too and the basic culture is there. I think it’s like wasting of time. I think that Brussels is really ??? in this and it was like mandatory and it was not like people, because people living in London is there because they want to be there, because they have a kind of reasons but everyone has a reason to be there and lot of people here, they are in Brussels they are working in the EC and its not a choice for them.
And they have their life in the country side or
Yes
So maybe know I can ask you about, heu, do you think that your adaptation in the country helps your performance on the work floor? Do you think that people well adjusted perform well too? Do you think it has an impact on it?
Yes, I think that if you are able to, if you are adaptive, you will perform your work better. Depending of the kind of work, if you are doing really stable work, without any change, perhaps it could be a problem cause it could bored that for a multicultural relation or multinational work or, this kind of thing, I think yes, it kind of help.
So the adaptation for you if related to the job performance as well?
Yes,
Hum, are you satisfied with your job performance?
Yes I am, I’m better, well I know the work I know I have to pass by several stage and some of them I will be more focus dealing with personal things and then my performance in the work could be a little bit down and, yeah
Have you ever thought of repatriating early? Going back to Spain or?
No, No no, every time when I get a bit tired there and the nice beach and good weather but no, I don’t think of coming back to Spain
So even not when you first started going abroad for work? Or you never had that feeling, always felt well in the country and?
Well, when I started to work abroad and to live abroad I decided to be abroad, only to be abroad without any plan for the future or this kind of things. Before to start to work abroad I worked in all Spain, in most of Spain, where there are cultural difference too inside Spain and yes. And at work in Spain I started to travel
But you were always willing to go abroad, it’s not your organization who made you go abroad? Or sometimes you had both?
No, for instance in this case, I made the choice to come here. So I wanted to come here to Brussels, I would really love to be able to life and work here and keep the job and find a job here
So are you more like a self-initiated expatriate?
Yes
Not the traditional ones who started to travel for work because their organizations send them there or?

No I travel abroad because, a lot of Spanish people are now here because they haven’t got any other choice in Spain but I started when the things were really good there to

Did you receive any intercultural training before any of your work experiences abroad? Like in a company before or now or?

Ok, I have been working in ??, I’ve worked for a center and I used to do every year one event with people coming from the same company and from everywhere around the world. So this is not an official training like you have to learn the theory, but yes this is a training because you have to relate with people from other countries and whatever

So not formal but still within the company

Yes.

And did you think it help you? That it had an impact for you?

Ok, I’m, I was open minded enough but yes, it helps because at the end it’s more practice. You are know people from China, from South Africa, US, from France, from, yeah and you are interacting with them for 10 days and yes it helps.

[eating]

Are you aware when you, for instance when you interact with someone, and you have to change your behaviors are you aware of this change or do you do that automatically?

I use to do it automatically and my position in this case it is like I try to get all my empathy out and try to be first in the position of the other, and heu, give the other space enough and try to do with this and yes it’s automatically

But is it conscious? You know that you do that,

Yes I know that I do it and it’s automatic

And did you ever reflect on your behavior, your way of doing and how it can impact people? Or?

Yes, I have made a lot of mistakes and I used to analyze them and to learn from them, yes have made a lot of mistake. But I try to analyze, try to learn yeah

Would you have any other situations, or example you would like to give me when you were interacting in a multicultural situation or having to adjust to a country like something that was hard, something that was easier or?

Ok, at the end I think the most difficult when you are travelling abroad is bureaucracy. Cause in every country it’s totally different. Things like get a bank account, or try to find a doctor, or trying to find a flat, or the contracts for your flat’s things, basic things I mean

So it’s the hardest for you?

Yes this is totally different in every country and every time it’s new, and yeah

Ok, hum from all these cultures that you’ve met during your life, have you ever taken some parts of those cultures and made your own? So you are Spanish and first and do you think you learned for all the other cultures as well to make your own “culture”, like I don’t know, more international or,?

I think I have done this. I think I have related to a lot of other people. And ok, I have like my basis, not only as a Spanish, as a person, and in the same way I’m getting new things for other people, it’s the same, if they are coming from Germany. Ok I have done this but I haven’t analyze it as coming from many nationality. This things as for me coming from people, from persons not from a country or a way of life, but of course probably if I get something I feel good for me for my general person, probably. Most probable is coming from Germany and I didn’t analyze this in this way but yeah I have done it

So you learn from you experience

Yes

Good, so in general how would you characterize you experiences abroad? Positive, negative?

Always positive, yes

You never had any like very bad situation or?
Yes I had time but there are bad situations so they dependent of the country, of the environement ok perhaps at the beginning it was hard when I was in a bad situation or in kind of problem or whatever but you have, I have less experience and for everybody it’s very comfortable to be with your parents at home and heu, yah it’s experience, for me it’s experience.

It goes with the job of going abroad?

Yes

And are you aware that there is different adaptation stage? For expatriates going abroad?

No I’m not aware, I know there are several, I know the steps, I have been abroad a lot of time, I know the steps to being adapted and I know that people coming from abroad if they have not a lot of experience, they have to pass by several steps and it could take even years, depending

And nowadays do you still feel you are going through all these steps? Or is it easier

Ok, for me it is easier, for me now these positive and negative things are related to my personal life not to be abroad. I mean, it’s not related to the cultural adaptation, more related to the life and this kind of things that could even happen if I’m at my place and in my country, but yes, I think I have like, heu, developed like a methodology by being very concerned again a very lover of Maslow and then I try to fix the basic of the pyramid and once it’s stable and then the next steps following this and that. Once you have at least two steps, you start to life the live, it’s gonna be the same here than to live in the UK. London use to be hard city and this is very comfortable city and things like that but the west for me, the one step is like my life, not because of the country

And have you ever felt homesick? Like you had really a bad time because of the country of course, not your personal life and your really wanted to go back to Spain, to your family, friends?

I have done it because I was really really sick in London and ok I was really sick and on of the hardest city I know in London and it was heu really difficult for me to stay there being sick, alone and in this so hard city. Then I decided to come back to Spain some months and I did it and I got better and I left again. But only because of that

Yes, never because you weren’t feeling well in the country?

No,

Like you didn’t feel accepted or anything like that?

No no

So about the Belgian culture? What do you know about the Belgian culture? Do you know like for instance hum, Belgian beers?

Heu, I'm awful with names... Sorry but I’m trying to know the culture in the city, not only the expat culture, I’m trying to find the museums I like, bars I like, restaurants like, the ?? I like, the markets I like, but I'm trying to avoid this a like, ok everyday here there is an event for expats, the event is in my place the next in other,... I try to avoid these kind of events, even if from time to time I go because friends are going and it's a good way to meet your friends. But heu, yes I don’t know, you can try to ask me about the Belgian culture.

Do you know a Belgian singer

Belgian singer, Yes, ok, it’s a really new group, it’s called Beautiful badness, I really like them, I was here, hearing them in a concert.

Hum, what about our Prime Minister?

I don’t remember the name but heu it happen to me also with all the minister in Spain, so it is very difficult for me to remember the names but it’s my personality, sorry

Blbalbal useless about situation in Belgium

Do you feel a difference when you interact with French speaking Belgian or with Flemish speaking Belgian? Or do you realize some difference?
Yes, there are differences in many levels if you are in the Flemish area, it’s easier to speak English for instance and I think, ok, I know I don’t know all the French Belgians or all the Flemish but I know Flemish people and I know French Belgians and I think French Belgians are more reserved for instance and perhaps less sociable or more difficult to socialize with them and the Flemish I know they are more sociable, more open to welcome new people, but this is my perspective.

Sure, and what kind of city to plan to visit, have you started visiting cities?

Yes, I’m, each time I have a visit I use to go to Bruges and to Gent and they are mandatory for people visiting and for people don’t usually spent more than 4 days so, one day in Bruges, one day in Gent and a couple of days in Brussels.

But always in the north? Have you ever been to the south?

Yes I’ve been with friends a couple of months ago to see what we the living, but I try to remember the name but it was in the South, yes. I went to the south, I went to Louvain, but this is in the north again.

Actually there are 2 different one Leuven, in the north and Louvain in the French part but

Yes but I think they are really close and maybe I visited both of them, I remember like heu here, with the English, once it was it was easier and once it was impossible for me to speak English. So maybe.

French speaking Louvain is really a student city etc.

Anyway I will visit all the cities in the country so I have no preference to go to the Flemish or French part.

[Conversation about bigger cities more in the north and natural landscapes; country side, green, forest in the south]

Ok I will visit anyway.

So usually when you go abroad you try to visit the country, you don’t stay where you live.

Yes, yes, ok depending on the country, the US is huge but even when I was working there I tried to visit. For instance in Ireland I went to all the important places, the north, south, depending on the time too. But this time the fact that I’m planning on staying here I will be more patient and quiet, I will have more time.

What will it depend on (decision to stay)? Work? Or?

Yes, if I can’t find a job here I have to go in another city but

With your current job, how long are you supposed to stay?

4 years at least and probably I will try to get a position inside and maybe in the private but I’m a little bit concerned to work in the private industry in the non Flemish area cause I don’t speak a lot of French. When this time will come I will find anyway for a solution to stay here.

And you have time to learn French

Yes, yes I’m learning slowly but trying, I will try to find an academy but most of time academy are really oriented towards ??, and things like that and I don’t want to get any kind of title of certificate.

It’s just to learn the language to be able to speak?

Yes to be able to speak and life and work and so I found a French alliance school and <I want to try this, I wanna learn French for sure.

Otherwise you can also speak at work, it helps.

Yes you help me with Belgian people.

Thank you very much ....

If you need any other thing, you can send me an email, or sms or whatever and I will answer you!

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**Extra questions asked in an e-mail :**

Why did you choose to work somewhere else than in your native country?
I decided to work in countries different than mine cause I want to live in other places and learn different ways and try to find a place suiting me.

Do you consider yourself as an expatriate?
I’m an expat cause I left my country but I’m a person and I’m living in The World

What role do you think expatriation plays in your career development?
I stopped my career development, I want to live cause I have only one life...:D...and nowadays it seems to be impossible to have a good career development and to live a nice life...at least for me! It is incompatible to live the life I want and to have the career I want so I’m trying to reach a balance!

Why did you choose to come to work in Brussels? (because of the country itself, because of the city, because of job opportunities......?)
I choose to come to Brussels because of many reasons:
- Size
- Comfort
- Weather
- Geographical position in Europe
- European Capital
- Multi-language
- Pluricultural
- Balance between modern and old things
- etc

Do you believe that there exist a sort of a European Nationality and European Culture?
From my point of view there is no European Culture or European feeling...from my perspective it is starting now. It should be developed. Again, from my point of view even People born in Belgium have Country-feeling more than European feeling...nobody is singing something like "Born in Europe"...:D...(like Bruce Springsteen with his 'Born in the U.S.A.'...hehehehe)

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**Interviewee B**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Page</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Je vais commencer par simplement des questions de base. Votre nationalité ?</td>
<td>Danoise</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Votre statut marital ?</td>
<td>Célibataire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Est-ce que vous avez des enfants ?</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>A10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quelle est votre langue maternelle ?</td>
<td>Danois</td>
<td>A11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quelle est votre background familial ? Avez-vous vécu dans une famille multiculturelle ?</td>
<td>Non non, danoise</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Je suis agent contractuelle, fonction 3, je crois que c’est l’équivalent de desk officer</td>
<td>D’accord. Depuis combien de temps vous êtes ici à BxL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depuis juin dernier, juin 2011</td>
<td>Et combien de temps pensez-vous rester ?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pour encore a priori 2 ans et demi</td>
<td>D’accord, et après, pensez-vous retourner au Danemark ?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non, à Paris en fait</td>
<td>Et toujours au sein de la Commission</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Heu, non</td>
<td>Quels pays avez-vous déjà visité avant, pour le travail ou dans votre vie personnelle ?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Oh ben heu… Les pays de l’UE des 15 en tous cas + Malte. Les USA, le Canada, la partie</td>
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Québécoise, le Japon, la Corée du Sud, le Vietnam, Hong-Kong, Singapour

Et dans quel contexte ?

Vacances

Et au niveau de votre travail, avez-vous déjà travaillé à l’étranger au par avant, donc en dehors du Danemark ?

Oui, à Paris. Heu à Londres, mais c’était un travail d’étudiant, et ici à Bruxelles

Ok, avez-vous fait un Erasmus lors de vos études, ou l’équivalent ?

Oui, mais en fait, l’Erasmus c’était quand j’étudiais à Londres. En fait il y avait une année d’Erasmus à Paris. Donc heu oui, a priori, officiellement c’était Erasmus.

D’accord, Heu, Combien de langues parlez-vous ?

Oui ou même un peu

On va dire 3 de manière courante, donc le danois, le français et l’anglais. Et quelques bases en allemand et quelques bases en japonais.

Et vous avez appris ces langues pour quelles raisons ? plaisir, travail ?

Hum, l’allemand c’était dans le cadre de l’école, donc pas forcément du plaisir. Le japonais ça c’était par plaisir. Et l’anglais et le français ça c’est fait naturellement

J’ai quelques questions plus au niveau relationnel en général. Hum, à savoir lorsque vous communiquez avec des personnes en général d’une nationalité ou d’une culture différente de la vôtre, est-ce que vous arrivez à le faire facilement, ou est-ce que parfois il y a un peu de difficulté en fonction d’une culture ?

Non en général facilement

Avez-vous un peu d’exemples ?

Non mais on sait se faire comprendre par les mains, les gestes, si on ne parle pas forcément la langue

Est-ce que durant votre vie, vous avez développé des relations interculturelles, en ayant travaillé à l’étranger, des amis, etc. et que vous gardez à l’heure actuelle ?

Oui

A travers réseau sociaux ou autres ?

Hum, le lycée notamment, je suis encore en contact ou au travail j’ai gardé des contacts, oui et puis des gens que j’ai rencontré grâce à d’autres gens, dans un cadre plus informel, effectivement de plusieurs nationalités différentes.

Et donc en général, vous restez beaucoup avec les personnes dans le contexte du travail ou est-ce que vous essayez aussi de rencontrer des personnes en dehors du travail, qui n’ont rien avoir ?

J’essaie, mais c’est plutôt des relations de travail, qui peuvent ensuite se développer en quelque chose de plus amical, mais non généralement c’est au travail.

Et est-ce que vous faites partie de groupe quelconque d’expatrié ? Comme à Bruxelles, par exemple, il y a une énorme communauté d’expatrié ? est-ce que vous participiez à des activités avec ce genre de groupe ?

Non, non pas forcément.

Est-ce que vous vivez seule ici ?

Oui

Quand vous faites face à des personnes d’une culture différente, comment vous sentez-vous ? Est-ce que vous vous sentez à l’aise,…

Franchement j’ai pas de sentiments particulier, je ne me sens pas mal à l’aise si c’est ça que vous voulez dire, on va dire avec la plupart des cultures, mais non j’ai pas d’a priori quand je vois quelqu’un, fait la connaissance de quelqu’un d’une culture

Et donc en général est-ce que votre sentiment est plus ou moins positif quant à la communication, l’interaction ?
Oui plutôt,

Est-ce que vous auriez un exemple ?

De quelque chose de positif ?

Oui, ou négatif, une situation passée ?

De négatif, oui je me sens mal à l’aise vis-à-vis de personnes qui affichent leur religion, quel qu’elle soit d’ailleurs. Sinon non pour moi finalement tout est question d’ouverture d’esprit. Et puis en plus, si ce sont des relations plus superficielles, je ne cherche pas non plus à comprendre, ou entrer dans les détails des cultures de chacun.

D’accord, est-ce qu’il vous est déjà arrivé de communiquer avec une personne belge d’origine, ou autre (eg paris) où vous avez vraiment senti que vous n’étiez pas sur la même longueur d’onde, qu’il y avait vraiment un problème de communication, que ce soit au niveau du langage, ou de l’attitude en général ?

Non, je n’irais pas jusqu’à dire pas du tout sur la même longueur d’onde. Quelque fois effectivement je me suis déjà dit, mais qu’est-ce que c’est que ça, mais pas au point où il y avait une incompréhension totale, où j’ai été du carrément abandonner la relation, non.

Et comment faites-vous face à ce genre de situation ?

Ben j’essaie de répéter, de voir si j’ai vraiment bien compris la personne, ou est-ce que j’ai réussi à me faire comprendre, mais bon si je vois que ça ne marche pas, je laisse tomber.

Oui, et est-ce que vous pensez qu’il y a une différence parmi différentes nationalités, la manière dont les gens arrivent à s’exprimer ? ou vos contacts avec eux en général ?

Heu… pas dans les milieux que je fréquente, non.

Donc, vous vivez dans un milieu très interculturel en général ?

Oui oui, des gens plus ouverts et qui vous font des efforts de leur côté.

D’accord, est-ce que quand vous faites face à ce genre de conversation plus problématique, est-ce que vous arrivez à faire preuve de flexibilité, faire des compromis ? Et est-ce que vous en êtes consciente ?

Ah oui, tout à fait.

Est-ce que vous avez un exemple ?

Heu… pff non comme ça je ne peux pas vous donner un exemple comme ça, mais je. Ben par exemple, si, quand je suis arrivé en Belgique, par exemple, les belges qui disent septante, nonante, heu je fais vraiment l’effort de leur répondre en disant septante, nonante, etc. Heu même si je pense que les belges doivent bien comprendre soixante, quatre-vingts, et je me suis surprise il y a quelques semaines, une dame âgée qui me demandait le numéro du tramway et j’ai dit spontanément que c’était nonante-sept. J’étais assez fière de moi. Et aussi, mais c’est des détails, par exemple, pain au raisin, pain au chocolat ici se dit cook et heu donc au début je demandais un pain au chocolat et on me donnait quelque chose qui pour moi n’était pas un pain au chocolat. Heu et j’étais obligé de leur dire, en fait je voudrais l’article qui est là et me répondait à d’accord, c’est une cook au chocolat. Ce genre de petit truc.

[Small talk expliquant que dans le sud du pays, c’est encore différent, qu’on n’a pas toujours les mêmes termes qu’à Bruxelles]

Est-ce que vous avez déjà dû adapter la manière de vous habiller, face à quelqu’un qui faisait partie d’une autre culture ?

Non, parce que j’évite de me mettre dans ce genre de situation.

Mais est-ce que ça pourrait arriver, vous retrouver face à quelqu’un qui ne serait peut-être pas confortable.

Beh j’imagine, mais tant que moi je me considère on va dire décènte ou tout à fait correcte, là par contre, je n’ai pas envie de compromettre quoi que ce soit, là je ne change pas de façon de m’habiller, non.

Et par contre, votre attitude, est ce que ça vous la changer parfois en fonction des personnes avec qui vous parlez ?

Heu pour ne pas les chocker ?
Pour ne pas les choquer, ou oui ce genre de chose, ne pas dire quelque chose qui pourrait

On va dire oui, je vais peut-être utiliser un langage un peu plus châtier, ou heu pas que je sois
grossière, mais enfin moins de gros mots, ou d’argot, moins d’argot parisien par exemple.

Vous avez vécu longtemps à Paris ? Je ne sais plus ce que vous m’avez dit.

Oui. Ben 25 ans, quelque chose comme ça. On peut même dire que j’ai pratiquement été une
expatriée tout ma vie.

D’où votre français parfait. Ca explique beaucoup alors.

Heu. Est-ce que quand vous entrez dans une nouvelle culture, vous avez une certaine stratégie
ou manière de réduire votre stress, de gérer votre émotion.

Non, parce qu’en général, ça me stresse pas d’aller, enfin de faire la connaissance avec
d’autres cultures, d’aller dans d’autres pays avec une autre culture. C’est franchement pas le
stress qui me

Donc, en général, c’est assez facile de s’intégrer dans une autre culture.

Oui, oui

D’accord

Tant qu’on ne fait rien pour se mettre en évidence, je pense que, malgré les cultures, en tous
cas, mon comportement est relativement bien accepté partout.

D’accord.

Heu, est-ce que vous avez déjà dû faire face à des conflits, inter culturels ou cross culturels ? et
heu, comment est-ce que vous avez réussi à résoudre ce problème, ce conflit, soit qui vous
impliquait vous ou alors deux autres personnes extérieures ?

Non. Enfin, de petits malentendus dus à la langue, à la maîtrise de la langue plus ou moins
bonne soit de moi soit de la personne en face, mais j’ai jamais de conflit. Non.

D’accord. Même dans la vie personnelle, parce qu’on essaie de séparer aussi travail personnel,
si parfois vous pensez à un exemple plus personnel par rapport à travail ou

Non.

D’accord.

De toute façon, en général, je n’aime pas trop le conflit, donc je vois toujours essayer de
désamorcer avant d’arriver à ce stade-là.

D’accord. Et vous arrivez à ressentir si quelque chose est en train de partir dans la mauvaise
direction ?

Oui ; de toute façon, dans ce cas-là, je m’arrête et je parle, on parle d’autre chose, je m’en vais,
mais... non, non, je ne suis pas une provocatrice. Je ne vais pas aller provoquer quelqu’un
exprès, même ne serait-ce que pour commencer un débat qui peut peut-être être intéressant,
mais non, ce n’est pas du tout mon genre.

Vous essayez d’éviter les sujets fâcheux, un petit peu, comme vous avez dit, du genre religion,
politique, je suppose.

Heu, et donc tous ces changements d’attitudes, toutes ces adaptations, est-ce que vous faites
tout ça consciemment, vous vous rendez compte de votre différence d’attitude en fonction de
la personne avec qui vous êtes ou c’est automatique et que

On va dire que ça se fait automatiquement, mais en toute conscience !

D’accord.

Je sais que je vais devoir peut-être ne pas faire la bise par exemple deux fois, si c’est quelqu’un
qui n’est pas Français, ben notamment les Belges, j’ai appris que apparemment, c’est une fois
ou trois.

Oui.

Donc, je sais que, ok, il ne va pas falloir faire la bise deux fois, mais voilà je vais le faire
automatiquement.

Oui. D’accord. Est-ce que parfois vous réfléchissez à ce que vous avez pu faire, dire, votre
attitude et est-ce que vous vous remettez, pas en cause, mais est-ce que vous vous demandez :
tiens j’aurais dû être plus comme ci ou comme ça, étant donné que la personne avec qui je
discutais était d’une autre culture ou
Non, c’est peut-être un défaut à moi, je me remets rarement en cause.
Je ne juge absolument pas !
Mais non, à priori, non.
Pas de jugement, donc il n’y a aucun problème. Comment est-ce que vous pensez que vous êtes perçue par les autres ?
Honnêtement, je ne sais pas. Les quelques échos que j’ai eu c’est que j’ai une très grande culture générale, que je suis on va dire quelqu’un d’intelligente, mais par là, je veux dire intelligente, assez intelligente pour pouvoir s’adapter au public, heu, du moment.
D’accord.
Et ça, oui, on me l’a dit plusieurs fois.
D’accord. Et est-ce que c’est justement pour ce genre d’intelligence, développer ce genre d’intelligence, est-ce que vous avez, par exemple, avant d’entrer dans un pays, est-ce que vous apprenez les normes, les tabous d’un pays, les choses à ne pas faire, en général, les gros d’une culture.
Un minimum, mais voilà, je n’y prête pas non plus très très attention, enfin, c’est pas ça, heu, par exemple, quand j’achète un guide touristique pour aller au Vietnam, ce n’est pas ça qui, ce chapitre là qui me, qui m’intéresse le plus.
Sur quoi vous vous focalisez en général ?
Honnêtement, plutôt sur les sites à visiter, enfin, vraiment les trucs de touristes, mais, ok, maintenant, si on me dit «Oui, il ne faut pas se moucher en public parce que c’est très mal vu », ok, bon, ben je ne me moucherai pas en public, mais voilà, ça n’ira pas plus loin que ça. Si on me dit oui, enfin, il faut, je ne sais pas, ne pas se gratter l’oreille ou ne pas montrer la plante des pieds, enfin, ok, je le sais, mais ce n’est pas pour ça que je vais forcément ne pas le faire, en tous cas, de manière exprès.
Oui, oui. Et est-ce que lorsque vous avez déménagé pour travailler que ce soit à Paris ou à Bruxelles, est-ce que là, comme c’était dans un contexte de travail de plus longue durée, vous avez essayé de connaître plus sur, justement, la culture ou les choses à faire et à ne pas faire ?
Heu. En tous cas pour la Belgique, j’en ai bien honte, mais non, pas vraiment !
Et en France ? Pour la France peut-être ?
Mais en fait la France, j’y vis depuis que je suis toute petite, donc j’ai un peu intégré, heu, voilà, les codes culturels au fur et à mesure de la vie et puis voilà.
Ah oui, d’accord. Est-ce que vous avez le sentiment d’appartenir à une certaine culture, à un certain groupe culturel, juste culture en général, je ne cherche pas religion ou quoi, mais vraiment, voilà, Danoise de souche, donc beaucoup plus Danoise en tant que telle ?
Heu, oui ! Danoise, c’est peut-être, Scandinave ou Nordique, oui, et j’en suis bien consciente et j’en suis d’ailleurs presque très contente et heu, je crois d’ailleurs que venir travailler à Bruxelles à la Commission, m’a rendu encore plus consciente que effectivement, il y a des réflexes peut-être que j’ai qui sont clairement scandinaves, opposés au reste de l’Europe.
Est-ce que vous auriez quelques exemples de ce genre de réflexes ?
On va dire un certain sens de l’éthique du travail, par exemple, heu, une certaine, oui, honnêteté aussi, heu j’ai horreur de la fraude, tout genre de fraude, ce qui n’est pas le cas à priori de certains autres pays. Heu, oui, ce genre de petits détails.
Oui, et en dehors de ça, est-ce que vous vous considérez, justement, grâce à vos différentes expériences internationales, comme un citoyen international ou européen au moins, en partie, même après être Danoise d’origine ?
Je crois que je me considère comme citoyenne danoise, mais très européanisée.
Oui, d’accord.
Mais oui, si on me demande « Vous êtes de quel pays ? », oui, je dirai toujours le Danemark, ça ne me viendrait pas à l’esprit de dire en premier « Ah, je suis européenne ! » ou « Je suis Française », alors que pourtant... Oui, je dirais toujours oui « Je suis Danoise ! ». 
D’accord. Comment est-ce que vous vous dériveriez ? Quel genre de trait de caractère vous mettriez en avant vous concernant ? Justement, au niveau plus de trait de caractère qui vous aide plus à vous adapter à des cultures, à des pays, à des relations interculturelles ?

Honnêtement, je me considère comme assez rigide, mais très ouverte.

D’accord.

Ce qui fait que parfois, ça a comme conséquence plutôt de la frustration pour moi que une fermeture on va dire au monde extérieur.

D’accord. Est-ce que vous avez certaines manières de gérer cette frustration ? Est-ce que...

Pour être honnête, c’est la manière de, ma manière de gérer, c’est de me dire « les autres sont cons ».

Pourquoi pas ! C’est un moyen comme un autre ! Et est-ce que vous vous considérez comme quelqu’un de flexible ?

Heu, oui ! Je me considère comme flexible.

Donc, vous êtes prête à vous adapter !

Je suis prête à m’adapter, mais avec une petite pensée, enfin je me dis toujours, oui je suis prête à m’adapter, mais je le fais de manière superficielle.

D’accord.

Je m’adapte très bien, je peux parler avec n’importe qui, issu de n’importe quelle culture et ça ne m’empêchera pas de me dire, mais finalement, ma culture est, on va dire, pas supérieure, mais elle est meilleure.

Oui, il n’y a pas de problème. Heu, concernant plus les compétences interculturelles que vous avez pu développer, est-ce que lorsque vous êtes à l’étranger, par exemple, vous vous intéressez réellement aux autochtones, aux personnes du pays et leur manière de vivre, leur manière de ...

On va dire un minimum. Maintenant, je heu peut-être bien que oui, ici j’aurais envie d’avoir plus d’amis belges, voire bruxellois, mais maintenant, si je ne m’en fais pas, je ne vais pas en mourir et heu ce n’est pas une priorité, en fait.

D’accord. Et les aspects culturels du pays, par contre, est-ce que ça ça vous intéresse plus ?

Oui, mais de ce côté-là, je vous avoue que je suis un peu utilitariste, donc si c’est, oui, par curiosité intellectuelle, ça peut être intéressant effectivement de voir oui, la culture belge depuis, enfin, l’histoire entre Flamands – Wallons, etc. etc., je la connais un tout petit peu parce que je me suis renseignée, mais voilà ce n’est, comme ce n’est pas cette connaissance ou ce manque de connaissance qui va avoir une influence sur ma vie de tous les jours, ce n’est pas ma priorité.

D’accord. Donc, vous estimez que le fait de connaître ou de ne pas connaître une culture aurait un impact sur votre vie, votre adaptation de tous les jours. C’est pas la priorité.

Oui, non, justement, comme ça n’a pas d’impact sur ma vie de tous les jours, ce n’est pas pour moi une priorité.

D’accord. Et en dehors de ça, en dehors de la connaissance pure en tant que telle, tout ce qui est cognitif, est-ce que vous arrivez à comprendre les différentes attitudes, les différentes manières de vivre des gens. En plus de juste la connaissance est-ce que vous arrivez à l’assimiler, je ne sais pas si vous voyez la petite différence, du coup la comprendre et du coup pouvoir utiliser cette connaissance en fait.

Ben heu, je ne sais pas si je comprends bien le sens de comprendre, voilà, mais disons que effectivement, la connaissance permet d’expliquer beaucoup de choses.

D’accord.

Mais maintenant, est-ce que je la comprends, est-ce que je comprends le conflit Flamands-Wallons, par exemple, ça non, je ne vais pas vous dire que je la comprends. Par contre, je sais qu’elle existe, je suis au courant et effectivement, ce conflit-là explique beaucoup de choses.

D’accord.

Mais de là à comprendre entièrement, non.
D’accord. Comment est-ce que vous décririez en général votre adaptation à Bruxelles, au niveau professionnel et au niveau vie personnelle ?

Honnêtement, très bon, je n’ai pas du tout à me plaindre.

OK. Aucun problème...

Maintenant, comme je vous ai dit, pour moi Bruxelles n’est pas non plus, enfin, c’est pas le choc culturel, venant de Paris. Maintenant, si je venais de Paris et si j’allais vivre aux États-Unis, là je pense effectivement que le choc culturel serait beaucoup plus grand, mais pour moi, notamment les conflits qui peuvent arriver au niveau de la culture tiennent aussi au fait de la maitrise de la langue. Déjà, pouvoir parler la langue du pays où on se trouve, ou qu’on visite, efface déjà beaucoup de problèmes qui pourraient être liés à la culture.

D’accord. Donc pour vous, la langue serait un des atouts principaux pour une bonne adaptation dans un pays étranger.

Oui.

D’accord.

Mais si vous vous êtes très très bien adaptée, cette question-là, je ne vais pas heu… Parce que je pensais aussi, est-ce que votre adaptation en général avait une influence sur votre boulot, sur votre manière de performer au boulot ?

Ben, j’imagine que oui, si j’étais malheureuse, que je n’avais pas envie de rentrer chez moi le soir, que je trouvais que la ville était glauque, j’avais pas envie de sortir, etc. , très très probablement, heu, je ne serais pas aussi productive au travail, je ne serais pas aussi, on va dire, sereine.

D’accord.

Oui, je pense effectivement que ça joue vraiment sur ses capacités à bien performer, comme on dit apparemment en français-belge, au travail.

On dit peut-être autrement, mais j’ai tellement l’habitude d’être en anglais, ça fait deux ans que je suis dans un environnement anglais...

Mais je l’ai déjà vu plusieurs fois, d’ailleurs, performer, notamment dans le Soir, alors qu’en français de France, ça ne se dirait pas.

Vous diriez comment alors en français de France?

On dirait une prestation ou comment vous vous comportez, mais jamais performer. Pour le français de France, c’est un anglicisme.

Oui, et c’est vrai, à mon avis aussi, ça vient de l’anglais, mais de fait, si on le dit, ça va, je ne me trompe pas complètement. C’est parce que moi, c’est vrai que ça fait deux ans que je suis dans un contexte pure anglophone, donc parfois, même si le français, c’est ma langue, ça reste parfois difficile de repasser de l’un à l’autre.

Mais, comme vous dites là, quand je dis la langue et que le fait de pouvoir parler la langue, ça abaisse quand même de nombreux obstacles, heu, par exemple, les différences entre le français-belge et le français-français, heu, me fait sourire. Y a vraiment des choses qui me font vraiment sourire, heu, là par contre, je ne me dis pas, c’est mieux comme ci ou c’est mieux comme ça et essayer..., ça me saute aux yeux.

Oui, c’est juste se rendre compte que même dans une langue commune, y a quand même des choses différentes.

Complètement.

Et même d’une région à l’autre, je dis ici Bruxelles, ils disent certaines choses, à Liège, c’est différent et moi, à Bastogne, c’est encore différent.

Oui, oui, j’imagine.

Tout ce qui est bonbons et biscuits etc., je sais qu’il y a tout un truc spécifique suivant la région, donc, et je crois que pour ça, ma région où j’habite, d’où je suis d’origine, on est beaucoup plus proche du français de France, étant donné que j’habite à la frontière, à peu près, donc, heu, pains au chocolat, croissants, etc., là c’est vraiment la même chose, par contre c’est vrai que si on monte un petit peu, c’est différent.
Oui.

**Est-ce que vous avez déjà pensé que ce soit ici ou à Paris, heu, retourner dans, retourner au Danemark plus tôt que prévu, au niveau du boulot ?** Est-ce que vous avez déjà envie de rapatrier beaucoup plus tôt ?

Non. Si ça doit se faire, si par exemple, j’ai une offre très intéressante, bon ben oui, je le ferais, pourquoi pas, mais je ne suis pas forcément pressée de, ou je ne cherche pas forcément des offres au Danemark.

Oui. Donc, ça n’a absolument rien à voir avec justement un quelconque malaise dans un pays, ce serait uniquement pour une question professionnelle.

Oui.

**Avant d’arriver à Bruxelles, ou à Paris, est-ce que vous avez reçu des formations interculturelles pour voir...**

Non.

Non et est-ce que vous, de votre côté, vous vous êtes un peu informée sur le pays ? Ca revient un peu aux questions que j’ai déjà posées avant.

Heu. Pfff. Non, je n’ai pas pris de cours ou lu de livres spécifiques, je dirais plutôt que ça c’est fait sur le tas.

D’accord. Donc naturellement. Donc, vous diriez, en général, que vous êtes forte, enfin vous êtes intéressée par la culture d’un pays à l’autre et ça vous aide à vous adapter ensuite.

Ben, je suis intéressée, oui, j’imagine que je suis intéressée un minimum, mais je le prends plutôt comme, ben il y a cette culture X dans ce pays X, bon ben y va falloir que je m’adapte un minimum, que ça me plaise ou non et puis c’est tout. (D’accord.) D’ailleurs, j’imagine que si j’avais quelque chose à faire en Arabie Saoudite, je serais bien obligée de m’adapter à ce qui se passe en Arabie Saoudite, heu, mais voilà, ce ne serait pas par intérêt ou par curiosité mais plutôt un peu une obligation.

D’accord.

Mais disons plutôt une obligation n’est pas forcément synonyme de désagréable ou de ou d’une corvée.

D’accord. Et est-ce que vous avez l’impression d’aimer, suite à tous ces voyages, etc., d’avoir pris de temps en temps un peu de la culture d’une autre pays, par ci par là, et d’en avoir fait un point de votre personnalité ou... ?

Je ne pense pas non, en tous cas, pas de manière consciente.

D’accord. Et est-ce que vous vous sentez changée par rapport à avant d’avoir fait toutes ces expériences internationales ?

Changer dans le sens où, oui, en fait, j’ai pris, heu, je me suis rendu compte que finalement, j’étais peut-être plus Danoise que je ne le pensais. A force d’être confrontée à des choses qui étaient, je vais pas dire radicalement différentes, on est quand même d’une culture européenne, judéo-chrétienne, etc., mais de me dire « Ah oui ! tiens, ce réflexe-là que j’ai eu, finalement est vraiment très très danois par rapport à ce qu’aurait fait un Français, un Espagnols, un Grecs, etc. »

D’accord.

Donc, je crois ça m’a plutôt aidée, si on peut dire, à mieux cerner la partie danoise qui est encore en moi et qui apparemment est très forte.

Oui, donc dominante, je suppose.

Voilà, oui.

**Est-ce que vous appréciez être en contact avec des personnes de différentes cultures ?** Est-ce que c’est quelque chose que vous faites... ?

Est-ce que j’apprécie forcément, heu oui, si je trouve la personne sympathique, mais là je dirais c’est plutôt sur un plan plus général. Y a des personnes que je trouve sympathiques et d’autres, qui ont en tous cas, des traits de caractère que je trouve absolument antipathiques, quelle que soit la nationalité de la personne ; donc, si je m’entends bien avec la personne , le fait qu’elle
soit italienne, polonaise, enfin n’importe quoi, ce n’est pas ça qui va influencer mon choix.

Donc, c’est plutôt des traits de caractère en général et pas une question de culture.

Oui. Alors est-ce que peut-être ensuite ces traits de caractère sont peut-être liés à la culture, ça c’est peut-être, mais c’est pas une question que je me pose. (D’accord.) Je vais d’abord vers une personne, je vois qu’elle est sympathique, ça va très bien, et ensuite je vois « Ah tiens ! elle est Roumaine, elle est Allemande, etc. (D’accord.) Mais je ne me dis pas « Ah tiens ! cette personne est danoise, donc je vais forcément bien m’entendre avec elle, donc je vais aller lui parler. »

D’accord. Et vous pensez avoir plus facile avec, justement, certaines nationalités, une fois que vous vous rendez compte de la nationalité ? Est-ce que vous pensez qu’il y a certains pays qui sont plus facilement... ?

Ben, je vais dire peut-être, oui, les Français et les Anglais, c’est plus facile parce que je connais leur culture et j’ai vécu et que, on va forcément partager des mêmes références, qu’elles soient culturelles d’ailleurs ou autres, heu, je vais forcément, pas bien m’entendre, parce que c’est pas forcément une garantie, mais je vais, par exemple, parler de choses bien spécifiquement on va dire même parisiennes et pas françaises avec donc d’autres Parisiens, (Oui) et une conversation que je ne pourrais pas avoir avec un Belge ou, je ne sais pas moi, un Suisse, voire un provincial de France.

Oui. Donc, pour vous, c’est plus facile d’aller vers une personne dont vous connaissez quand même un minimum heu...

... avec qui je partage un minimum de références on va dire, oui !

Donc, du coup, c’est plus facile d’aller vers des personnes de nationalité d’un pays dans lequel vous avez vécu...

... oui, et que je connais...

... et que vous connaissez.

Oui.

Si jamais, vous deviez aller dans un autre pays que Belgique, France, donc un pays où le français n’est pas la langue, ni l’anglais, ni aucune des langues que vous parlez actuellement, est-ce que vous essaieriez d’apprendre la langue du pays ? Est-ce que ça dépendrait du nombre de, de la période durant laquelle vous devriez rester ou ... ?

Heu. On va dire que ça dépend effectivement de la durée de mon séjour, si c’est un séjour vraiment très court et si ce n’est pas une obligation d’y aller, là je vous avoue que j’hésiterais vraiment à y aller. (Mm, mm.) Par exemple, pour le contrat qu’on m’a proposé à la Commission, c’était donc à Bruxelles, j’en étais très contente et je suis venue sans hésiter. Maintenant, si la Commission m’avait proposé un poste dans une agence communautaire, mais en Roumanie, heu, je pense que j’aurais dit non.

D’accord. Donc, vous préférez, enfin, vous préférez, ce n’est pas vraiment une préférence, mais...

Je préfère quand même ce qui m’est familier. (D’accord.) Oui.

D’accord. Tout en visitant quand même plein de pays à ce que j’ai pu entendre.

Oui. Quand c’est des vacances, quand ce sont pour des périodes courtes, etc., ...

... c’est pas pareil...

... C’est pas pareil et là je suis partante pour aller n’importe où.

D’accord.

Mais si c’est effectivement pour le travail...

... et donc devoir réellement s’adapter à la culture...

... voilà, là, je préfère ce qui m’est familier.

D’accord. Heu. Je pense qu’en gros, on a déjà un petit peu couvert tout. J’ai beaucoup de questions, mais il y en a qui se rejoignent et ça dépend aussi en fonction de vos réponses, donc, heu...

De toute façon, j’ai réservé une heure, donc, il nous reste encore 25 minutes.

Ben oui ! Ca a été vite. Je ne sais pas si c’est parce que c’est en français et pas en anglais, et heu,
sinon, on peut discuter peut-être plus en général, sans avoir mes questions sous les yeux, comme ça, c'est peut-être même plus intéressant.

D'accord.

Vous êtes ma deuxième interview. Je suis encore en train de ...

Et l'autre personne que vous avez interviewée était de quelle nationalité ?

Espagnole.

D'accord.

Et lui qui a déjà vécu dans plein de pays différents, ça fait 10 ans qu'il passe d'un pays à l'autre pour le boulot et là, il pense s'installer à Bruxelles. C'est qui se plaît bien à Bruxelles !

Je ne sais pas... Qu'est-ce que je pourrais vous demander d'autre ? Donc, comment est-ce que vous, vous décririez ce genre de compétence interculturelle dont moi je parle ? Est-ce que vous pensez à quelque chose, mise à part la langue, bien évidemment, dont on a déjà discuté ?

Je pense que pour bien s'adapter, heu, bon il faut être un minimum curieux et un minimum ouvert, ça c'est clair, mais je ne pense pas qu'on ait besoin de..., ou je pense qu'on peut être un minimum ouvert, curieux, etc. tout en se disant que ses origines à soi, sa nationalité à soi et sa culture à soi, sont, j'allais presque dire supérieures, à d'autres.

D'accord.

Je veux dire, ce n'est pas ça qui m'empêche d'aller vers d'autres, d'apprécier d'autres cultures, etc. Donc je pense que avoir de bonnes bases solides au niveau de son identité à soi, heu, est peut-être presqu'un avantage, parce que vous ne vous sentez pas forcément menacé par d'autres cultures.

D'accord.

Donc, ça je crois que c'est ...

... donc, bien connaître son identité à la base...

... oui, être bien sûr aussi de son identité et ne pas s'auto-dénigrer ou dénigrer la culture de son pays ou en se disant, je viens d'un pays de merde, etc., heu, pour moi, ce n'est pas forcément une bonne chose. (D'accord.) Effectivement, il faut rester modeste, je ne crie pas sur les toits que je trouve que le Danemark est le meilleur pays du monde, heu, même si peut-être je n'en pense pas moins, mais au moins bien savoir ça, bien savoir que mais oui, je peux très bien aller, être tolérante d'une autre culture parce que de tout façon je sais que moi, mon identité, je ne la laisserais pas être menacée par les autres.

D'accord. Et ça ne vous empêche pas de communiquer efficacement avec d'autres personnes.

Non, non, et puis d'apprécier certaines parties d'autres cultures, voire, enfin je n'avais pas dire de les adopter, mais en tous cas vraiment des apprécier.

Est-ce que vous avez un exemple, peut-être, de quelque chose d'une certaine culture que vous avez même adopté parce que ça vous convenait, ça allait bien avec votre personnalité ?

De là à dire oui, ça me convient, par exemple, je fais la bise à la française, c'est-à-dire 2 fois, et quand je vais au Danemark, où on ne fait la bise qu’une seule fois, à chaque fois, c’est moi que me retrouve à tendre l’autre joue et heu, bon, est-ce que c’est parce que ça me convient, non, c’est parce que c’est une habitude, mais ça c’est vraiment une habitude dont j’arrive pas à me défaire, même quand je rentre au Danemark, par exemple.

Oui, et ce n’est pas quelque chose qui vous rend mal à l’aise ?

Non, non, les gens en rient plutôt, moi aussi d’ailleurs... Excusez-moi !...

(sonnerie du gsm de la dame)... « Allo »... suite en anglais (38min28)

Excusez-moi !

Pas de problème !

Heu, on en était où ?

Question de personnalité...

Ah oui, faire la bise 2 fois à Copenhagen. Oui, donc non, les gens en rient plutôt qu’autre chose.

Et vous, vous ne pensez pas que parfois vous pouvez offenser quelqu’un, pas évidemment avec l’histoire de bises, ça je ne pense pas que vous pourriez offenser quelqu’un. (Pfff.) Par exemple,
si vous venez à, je ne sais pas, communiquer, avoir une conversation avec un Japonais, donc culture asiatique fort fort différente de la nôtre, est-ce que là vous essayez de connaître peut-être un peu plus justement de ce genre d’actions qui pourraient offenser la personne ou...?

J’essaie d’être, de faire un minimum attention, oui, mais en même temps je crois que, il ne faut pas non plus, faire croire aux autres qu’on connaît tout de leur culture. Je veux dire, on est étranger, surtout au Japon, mais dans d’autres pays aussi, on est étranger et donc, je trouve qu’on a le droit de faire des gaffes, heu, évidemment, involontaires, et j’espère pas trop grosses. (Oui.) Mais, de ce côté-là, je pense que beaucoup de gens quand même sont plus tolérants quand ils voient que c’est vraiment un étranger et je sais que, moi-même, quand j’ai en face de moi un étranger qui par exemple parle français de manière un peu baroque, mais qui va dire, heu, qui va me tutoyer, alors qu’on est dans la rue, je ne vais pas m’en offenser, c’est parce que voilà, son niveau de français n’est pas, enfin, il n’a appris que tutoyer ou alors, c’est parce qu’on tutoie dans sa langue et il pense qu’en français on va tutoyer. Enfin, moi, j’ai tendance à être vraiment tolérante et j’ai pu remarquer, je trouve quand même que, effectivement, les gens sont plus tolérants quand ils voient que c’est un étranger.

D’accord.

Et notamment, par exemple, dans les cultures asiatiques, je sais qu’au Japon, les Japonais sont prêts à pratiquement tout pardonner à un étranger. (Ah oui.) Parce qu’ils se disent, ben voilà, ils se disent peut-être c’est un étranger complètement inculte et ignare, mais voilà, ils vont se dire OK, c’est pas grave, il m’a vraiment offensé, mais c’est un étranger, donc, je vais laisser tomber.

Oui. Il n’était pas censé savoir !

Donc, des fois, je pense que ça ne fait pas de mal ou en tous cas, il ne faut pas se priver de faire comprendre à la personne en face que on est effectivement étranger, que on ne connaît pas forcément sa culture, la culture de la personne en face et, que voilà, il faut que cette personne soit tolérante et qu’elle nous excuse si jamais on fait des bourdes involontaires.

Oui. Et donc, est-ce que vous pensez que justement ce genre de gaffes que vous pourriez faire, est-ce que d’un autre côté en le faisant, ça vous permettrait de mieux vous souvenir de vraiment plus comprendre la manière de penser d’une autre personne ou ... ?

Oui, probablement, oui.

Donc, c’est vraiment par l’expérience, vous pensez c’est plus facile de retenir et de vraiment comprendre que par justement uniquement lire des livres sur tel stéréotype de culture.

Pour retenir sur cette culture en particulier, je ne sais pas, mais en tous cas, être à la place d’un étranger, oui, forcément, normalement, vous donne une autre perceptive quand vous-même vous êtes étranger quelque part .

Oui, d’accord.

Enfin, je pense, j’espère en tous cas que sur moi, ça a cet effet, je vais être plus tolérante vis-à-vis d’étrangers qui vont faire des gaffes, je vais peut-être même en rire, parce que je l’ai peut-être été moi-même cet étrangère, qui a fait des gaffes, heu, devant une personne d’une autre culture.

Donc, justement, en me donnant cet exemple-là, vous montrez réellement que justement, ce fait d’avoir été, d’avoir fait face à ce genre de situation, donc vous, vous vous retrouvez dans une situation inconnue, vous permet d’un autre côté ici quand la situation est inversée et que vous êtes face à une personne étrangère, d’être beaucoup plus tolérante envers sa manière d’agir et...

Oui. Et puis, il y a gaffe et gaffe, enfin, y a ceux qui vraiment font une grosse gaffe et qui la font un peu exprès et puis, ceux qui vraiment c’est une simple bourde, quoi.

Oui, par manque de connaissance...

Voilà et y a aussi une manière ensuite de réagir, si la personne comprend qu’elle a fait une gaffe, mais que voilà, elle va s’excuser poliment, elle va essayer d’en rire, etc., bon ben, voilà, on pardonne mieux que quelqu’un qui va dire, enfin qui ne va même pas comprendre ou vous traiter comme ... voilà...
Comme ça peut arriver. D’accord. Ben, je pense que... on a déjà couvert pas mal.

Oui.

J’ai une Danoise dans mon programme de Master (Ah !) et vous me prouvez ce que je pensais, rien de mal, absolument rien de mal, mais elle aussi est très, très rationnelle et très très fière d’être danoise aussi et j’ai l’impression que vraiment c’est un trait de caractère vraiment danois aussi. Il y a aussi des Belges, des Français comme ça, je ne dis pas, mais vous êtes la deuxième Danoise que je rencontre cette année et ça se retrouve vraiment.

Ben voilà, quand je vous disais que j’ai l’impression d’être, que mes traits danois ou en tous cas liés à la culture danoise, se sont vus renforcés depuis que je suis ici, ben c’est peut-être la preuve.

Oui. C’est vraiment intéressant de voir ça, de voir justement l’opposé de ce qu’en général on me raconte, donc justement à force de venir de pays différents, ben je prends un peu de la culture par ci par là, et que vous, ça a vraiment fait un peu, pas effet inverse, mais ça a au contraire renforcé votre propre identité danoise. (Oui.) C’est vraiment intéressant.

Ben, j’imagine, vous parlez aussi néerlandais alors si vous...

Non, parce que c’est un programme en anglais.

Ah d’accord.

Non, je ne parle pas néerlandais. J’ai toujours eu de l’allemand, en secondaire, et comme justement moi, je suis du Sud et je suis très très proche de la frontière côté germano-belge et Allemagne et, du coup d’où moi je viens, en général, la deuxième langue qu’on prend, c’est l’allemand ; c’est anglais – allemand. Il y a quand même quelques personnes, oui y en a quand même souvent qui prennent du néerlandais, mais moi, j’ai préféré l’allemand.

D’accord.

J’ai anglais – allemand, j’ai fait de l’espagnol, j’ai fait un an chinois et puis je me suis retrouvée à Tilburg où les places de chinois étaient complètement full quand j’ai voulu m’inscrire, donc là, je ne sais plus pratiquer, mais...oui, mais pas de néerlandais.

OK.

Je n’ai rien contre le néerlandais à la base, mais les autres langues m’ont toujours paru plus utiles, donc voilà.

Et là ça, c’est par exemple un problème donc lié apparemment à la culture que j’ai du mal à comprendre, c’est cette division néerlandais, enfin flamand – francophone. Ayant habité dans un pays, la France qui est un pays tellement centralisé, où y a que le français et puis, bon, quelques langues effectivement régionales, mais qui pour tout le monde comptent pour du beurre, c’est vrai qu’un Etat, belge, en occurrence, avec ce genre de problème, c’est pour moi, enfin, c’est complètement, c’est assez fascinant. (Oui.) Mais c’est difficile à comprendre.

[small talk about the issues in Belgium]

Et c’est quoi votre ville d’origine ?

Bastogne.

D’accord.

[small talk and end of the interview]

Oui.

**Extra questions asked in an e-mail:**

**Why did you choose to work somewhere else than in your native country?**

I was attracted by the job that I’m currently holding, the fact that it is in Brussels is a plus. I would say that both the job and the place appealed to me, but I mostly based my decision to come to Brussels on the fact that I was attracted by the job. On the other hand, if I had been offered the same job but in a country that I did not particularly fancy or know I would probably
have said no. To sum it up: if I'm offered a nice job in a place that I like, the job is what I first take into account. On the other hand, if I'm offered a nice job in a place that I don't like (or think that I will not like) I will first take into account the place to base my decision on (chances are my decision will be negative).

If you are referring to the fact that I'm Danish and moved to Paris as a child and later started my career in Paris (before coming to Brussels last year), I would say it wasn't a deliberate choice (my parents made that choice for me) and that I just stayed in Paris as a natural and uncomplicated solution.

**Do you consider yourself as an expatriate?**

I am well aware that I have another nationality (on paper) than the country I live in (whether Belgium or France), but having mostly grown up in France/Paris I know French/Parisian culture very well and do not consider myself as an expatriate in France (and by the way, many French people think I'm French and are surprised when I tell them that is not the case). And I don't think Belgian culture (at least in Brussels) is that much different from French culture as I know it. I don't have the reflex of using the word "expatriate" to describe my situation even though the concept would in theory apply to me. I think of myself as a Dane that lives in France or Belgium without necessarily linking it to the status of "expatriate".

**What role do you think expatriation plays in your career development?**

For me personally, none. I came to work in Brussels because I wanted to and thought that I would enjoy myself (which I do). I never thought I'd come to Brussels because it might look good on my CV. Conversely, the fact that working in Brussels (or anywhere else outside Denmark) might hinder the development of my career is not a parameter that I would take into account. If I think that I will find a post interesting and enjoyable I will take it whatever impact (positive or negative) it might have on my career development and future opportunities.

**Why did you choose to come to work in Brussels?** (because of the country itself, because of the city, because of job opportunities.....?)

First and foremost I chose to work for the Commission and the Commission (at least most of it) happens to be located in Brussels. The fact that I knew Brussels a bit before taking this job and liked the city is obviously a plus, but I don't think I would have specifically moved to Brussels to look for work if I hadn't been offered my current job.

**Do you believe that there exist a sort of a European Nationality and European Culture?**

Yes I do, but only as opposed to a non-European nationality/culture. I will feel a "European" influence on my way of behaving and thinking when I'm in Japan or in Dubai for example (or just walking down streets in certain areas of Brussels or Paris!), but I will feel Danish (or sometimes Parisian) when I'm in another European country.

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**Interviewee C**

Yes, so you are in probation for the first nine month and then if you are fine with your work and you don’t do stupid things, then you get to be a fonctionnaire full rights for life practically. So I’m still in the first four month past and have five left so still in probation at the moment which means that I have to behave very well

Don’t worry, my work is really for an academy purpose, for the completion of my master

So whenever you complete it, do you think I could get a copy?

Sure

Because I’m interested in it, well my PhD thesis is not necessarily the same but it’s all connected so, it’s minorities rights so connected to intercultures, multicultural societies, their do, their don’t, their lives

So you used to do law originally?

I did law, law university, a law master degree in European law master degree and I’m doing my PhD in EU law too. Well EU law and minority rights which is, well it’s a very bad relations because there is very few thing in the EU law about minorities, almost nothing but there is
if you agree, I would like you to just sign this (consent form)

ok, so it’s gonna be anonymous in your paper?

completely

no name?

no name, nothing

that’s good

(reading and signing the consent form)

when you saw the email, I thought at my PhD, I know how hard it is to find people who have time for you so I’m doing it because I’m gonna have the same thing eventually

thank you!

so now, just to be clear it’s all anonymous, so even if I quote someone, in my results, or discussion, it’s really just gonna be a quote.

and not even letters or, not even the first letters of the person?

nothing, no

good, nor age, or country?

no nothing, just the quote, but maybe the country sometimes I don’t know yet

yes but I’m from Romania but it could be anybody

exactly

ok

none knows who I’m interviewing so

good, well I’m not gonna tell you any secrets anyway

and I’m not asking anything that should be sensitive so it should be fine

ok,

so, hum I’m just gonna first ask you some regular questions like your nationality?

my citizenship is Romanian, my ethnicity is Hungarian, I’m a member of national minority

ok, hum what is your marital status?

married

do you have children?

yes for 3 weeks, my daughter was born

congratulation

thanks

did you bring them with you in Brussels?

yes, yes she was born here, yes, my wife is here so it’s good

so, what’s your native language(s)?

my mother tongue is Hungarian, I grew up bilingual, of course, in Romania so I both speak Hungarian as a mother tongue and Romanian as a national language, state language, whatever you call it. I also speak English and I speak German to an ok level. I used to speak it better but I haven’t used it for a while. So I could say 3 and a half! And I’m learning French

good, so what is your family background? Was it multicultural?

everybody in my family trees is Hungarian so completely Hungarian if I can say that, but in the blood there is hemoglobin so no nationality but I can say I’m completely Hungarian, I’m a Romanian citizen but we, it’s the second largest minority in Europe, we are 1.3 million so it’s not like the small community, we have institutions, we have in our language school, so I grew up in a very Hungarian environment so yes, I grew up in county which is Hungarian majority in the middle of Romania so of course it’s Romania but we grew up in Hungarian mini society so I, you can say it’s multicultural but actually it’s not, it’s completely unique cause it’s Hungarian although it’s in the middle of Romania. It’s very simple if you go to Wikipedia you put Hungarians from Romania, you can understand. There is maps and everything so
And is it similar to the Hungarian from Hungary? Or? The culture and

Absolutely, I mean it’s just like French, you might have different accents but it’s 99% the same, so there is no real difference in the culture, the language, the history, the music, everything is the same. I mean, after the first WW, Hungary was split in many pieces so that’s how we ended up in Romania, lots of Hungarian and other ones in Serbia and then about 10 million stayed actually in Hungary but it’s all the same. We use to be in the same country for centuries but then it was shopped up so now we are Romanian citizens but we are Hungarian.

Ok, what is your function in the Commission?
I’m a policy officer, project manager, 8 to 5

Heu, how long have you been here in Brussels?
I’ve been here four months now so since 1st December, I started, that means four months, yeah

And how long do you plan on staying?
For life I guess

For life, so you plan on settling down here in Brussels?
Yes, well I mean you never know what’s gonna happen in a couple of years but for now, I’m not planning to go anywhere. Well I have to go over my probation, which in September I will find out if the contract is for life but that’s 90%, I mean if nothing really bad happen it’s alright so ya, I guess for life.

Ok, hum, which countries did you visit before, during your entire life, was it for work, personal life?

Visit, well, I do, visiting for tourism I visited a lot of countries of Europe of course, I mean whatever Benelux, France, Austria, lot of central Europe, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic heu I lived in US, in NY for almost three years, hum, I don’t know, except that I’ve been in Cuba once hum

But all for vacation except NY?
Vacation yes, except NY it was all vacation, NY was like living

Did you live somewhere else as well abroad?
No, no just NY, I mean I lived for couple months in Maryland but that’s also US and just for four months. I basically lived in NY in the US

So that is all you international experience for work?
For work, and for living, yah, US, before I came to Belgium, ya, for travelling a lot of else but that’s just couple days so you don’t get much in the culture of local life

Why did you the languages you learned except for Hungarian of course?
Well, of course school, I mean you have to, in Romania you start you third language already in second grade, second, in the elementary school, so by nine years old you’ve already started another language and by 14 you should speak it at an ok level.

Was that English?
Actually that was German, I studied German for 13 years I think, I took my bachelor, my grade in it and I was almost perfect but that was 12 years ago and I haven’t been used it since then so now I understand everything but if I start to speak German I think I’m gonna start to switch every third word to English because I got so much use to English living in the stated and then at school of course I started to learn English also by ninth grade and I mean it all started at school and when I went to university obviously it helped a lot with my English that’s it basically

And so French, is it because you are planning in staying in Brussels?

Yes, of course, I mean also in the Commission it’s a bilingual institution, officially, it’s trilingual but German is not really used, at least not in the Commission as much, maybe in the Central Bank of course, which is very German but except that it’s mainly French and English, lots of my colleagues are either French of speak French with the other colleagues, I mean, it’s changing more towards English now but still, still it’s very bilingual, every meeting you go sometimes people just switch from English to French and vice versa and then you have to understand,
there is no. so also for work and of course also if you live somewhere you have to learn the local language, you cannot live in a bubble and it makes no sense so
Hum, I also wanted to ask you a few more relational interpersonal questions. So for instance, can you socialize with locals or people from another culture than yours? A
I love it of course
And do you do that easily or sometimes
Yeah I think
You have to face some inner conflict or emotions
I don’t know actually I love, well, I mean if you live in NY for close to 3 years it’s, you get use to it, cause you know united nation, the institution and the city itself too, I mean there is hundred something different languages spoken in NY which are registered. I mean you can, you have organizations to help you with that nationalities so it’s really really multicultural, I mean so you get so much use to it, everywhere you work everywhere you go, everywhere you have any issues to deal with you gonna bump in somebody who is not, I mean most of the people are not local so it’s just absolutely natural, you don’t even think about it. It’s different culture, different nationalities, different languages, different religions, different backgrounds, different mentalities, it’s part of the way of life so I got use to that so much there that actually when I returned to Romania it was really boring to be in a single, or maybe double cultural environment, it was just so boring, so I needed, so that’s maybe the reason why I did the ??? I think if you get use to the multicultural western city, you’re gonna want that all your life, it’s boring to be in a unicultural world. I have no problem at all actually, I mean of the course the language, the Belgians if they speak English it’s very easy if they don’t it’s lost in translation, my French is not that well yet, so I’m trying, struggling, they struggle with their English so we kind of understand each other but not as much
And in your personal life a well do you interact easily with?
Yes yes,
Hum through your live abroad, did you ever developed any good intercultural relationships, friends or... and that you still keep today? Have contact?
Oh yeah yeah, a lot, facebook helps a lot when you move somewhere else, you still have you friends on facebook to interact and I have great friends from Brazil and NY and Columbia and god knows, Puerto Rico, everywhere
And where those friends usually made through work or?
Yes through work and then we keep up but it’s basically work
Hum, how do you feel, what do you feel inside when you have to talk in intercultural people, with people from different background, different cultures, do you have any specific feelings?
Of course there can be barriers, why not recognizing, I mean you start with the stereotypes that you know about that nation, nationality or whatever and then after a while usually you realize that most of it is bullshit but not all of it, sometimes some of it is true, it depends on the individuals. I have no, how should I say, no barriers towards anybody, I mean, I can’t name a nationality that I’m not interested in. maybe I have different interests to different types of nationalities or ethnicities but I couldn’t say that I don’t care at all about any of them, I would care about anybody to a certain level. Of course, I love some kind of people more because they are more relaxed more liberal and more, I don’t know, different or interesting and then some maybe more boring but then I have absolutely no preconceived ideas that let’s not talk to this guy because he’s god knows from which country, I don’t care, I mean it’s always the personalities, always the development of the person, how much he studies, how open he is, I might say that I’m not that open to fundamentalist religious people, no matter where they come from because I frankly I despised fundamentalist religious ideas completely, so if I know that somebody, it could be Christian, I don’t care, whatever, I mean I’m an atheist, if somebody comes with this heu, that I don’t like and I can open say that I don’t like that but apart from that
So usually are your interactions positives? Expect if people go too far in some direction that you don’t

Yeah I mean, rarely I can say I have experienced with people who eventually I handed up having not good relations but it’s always 90% of the time or maybe 100% of the time I was ??? to their ideological background, all my life I was involved in politics to a certain level and with politics, heu I worked in the politic department in Romania and there was also this international relations and you go to this conference, I can maybe the only people that I had interrupted relations is because of their ideology, because they are either extreme rightist or either religious fundamentalist or something but that’s not culture, that’s ideology, I mean I wasn’t, it’s not because they are from Macedonia or god knows which country, but because their ideological background is just scaring so it’s just

Would you have a specific example of a situation that happened and if there has been a conflict?

Yeah maybe one, there was a conference in hum in one of the central European big cities, hum about how this European party shouldn’t move on and what’s the next level at European level and blabla and there was a lot of people from Balkan countries and central European countries and there was this guy from one of the Balkan country and we had a pretty good discussion on the bread and then had a cup of coffee and then he started his presentation and he ended up being well, heu Christian Taliban if I can say like that and he wanted to put gay in jail and all that and completely scared me and then there was the question time and he blamed Muslims for this and that and I said sorry you’re not and I raised my hand after the presentation even though we had a good discussion break and had to tell him openly “you’re note different than the Taliban except that you don’t use guns but what you talk is the same hatred thing, I mean you really want, you really think that this European party should you in this direction? I mean this is a multicultural environment already and you are from the Balkans, you know what I’m talking about I mean you had some worst there and then you have multicultural is part of your daily life, you really wanna go there? This is not the way” and a lot of people agreed with me and of course after that you couldn’t talk to that person anymore. But that was not again nationality, not ethnicity it was an ideological difference, I’m more left and he was more toward extreme right if not extreme right and of course then you stop because there’s nothing to talk, I mean he is from a different kind, there’s no point, I cannot convince him to be more open and of course he cannot convince me to hate anybody so that’s it. So that’s maybe a concrete example

Hum, when was the last time you were talking with a host national either from here of maybe an American guy or whatever, and you felt like you really weren’t on the same page, like you didn’t speak the same language, you didn’t talk about the same subject, I don’t know, you were completely out of subject and? Did it ever happen?

It’s interesting, I mean you know, I’m from Romania, form the western part of it, which was pretty much part of central western European culture’s fear, Catholicism, etc. so it’s the same kind of culture although yes of course Belgium is different along Flemish or different from Romanians of Hungarians but not that much different. I mean it’s far to, I spoke with lots of Belgian people here and I didn’t discover any major differences, I didn’t see that maybe there was an issue that we are completely on different sides of the issue, no really is not that different, it’s the same European culture, and of course the historical background, different language lots of things, food or whatever, but no I don’t remember any huge difference, any huge argument or anything, I mean tastes are different, they like different beers than we do but I can remember in this 4 months in Belgium any case when there was this huge difference between how local thought about something and how I thought, I mean not really

And do you think it would be different if you were interacting with someone from international countries, so not within Europe, with maybe an Asian country or

Probably I guess, yes they are more different of course, I guess I mean I never had any
interaction with immigrant here because my neighborhood, where I live is quite Belgian expat neighborhood, I never spoke too much with Congolese or Moroccan or things like that but hum maybe hopefully one day I will meet them somewhere, I don’t know. My life is still kind of in a bubbly which I don’t like much but for now I don’t have time to care about that much, I have to start my life here, but I guess when I start to speak with Africans or I don’t know Asians, I mean I did it in the US and yes there are differences quite big and then I use to work in a street 2 streets away from China town and you meet Chinese and yes, they are different, completely different, very different in anything, very conservative actually, you realize how conservative they are but I mean yeah that’s it

Hum, do you ever demonstrate flexibility when interacting with culturally different persons in order to make the interaction work or,?

You always have to try of course, I mean but then again if you realize at the some point that the differences are too huge, then there is no point I would say, if it’s connected to your work or maybe in your personal life, some issue then you have to deal with that person. Then of course you do a lot of compromises and you don’t hear stuff you don’t wanna hear, you just move on but then if not, if you realize that the difference is too huge then there is no point in struggling with it! It mean obviously we all become friends with people who we have pretty much the same values, the same interests that’s logical, not just in nationality wise, it’s logical in every kind of interest wise, I mean hum if you have to do that, you do it otherwise there is no point to do it I think

Could you think of any situation where you had to do that? Either to make the work work or in your personal life to make relation work or?

Yeah, of course, I mean I guess in NY it happened a couple of times when you work in restaurants and I had colleagues who were, but again and again not nationality wise, but maybe you can say cultural because some cultures are quite conservatives and again it cause back to religion or ideology and yeah, it’s culture but it’s also religion and then after a while you realize that you are after different panel and you just don’t talk about that issue, you talk about everything else, you talk about work, you talk about movies, you talk about fun, music or whatever, you don’t touch the subject of religion or the subject of I don’t know letting women choose their own partner, not letting their fathers choose for them or stuff like that. I mean I had colleagues from Muslim countries where the situation was that of course and they had not choice. Heu to accept whoever the father chooses for them and I found that outraging and after 2-3 exchanges, you realize that you’re not gonna change him and he’s not gonna change you so let’s just keep this issue away and let’s talk about everything else. And of course you can sustain a good relationship, a good working relationship if we both agree that we will not talk about this issue and usually with intelligent people that works and then I mean you’re not gonna be sweethearts, very good friends because you can’t I mean, but otherwise it can work, and I think it should work because otherwise society falls apart, you have to do compromises sometimes, you don’t have to be very close friends with everybody, so you choose your friends 😊

And are you aware, are you conscious of all these processes that you have to deal with when interacting with different people?

I think I am, yes I guess I am

So you do it consciously, it’s not automatic or?

No I mean, well after a while you get use to it, if you like in a very multicultural country, like NY you get use to this so fast, you have to if you don’t wanna be isolated in some small ethnic bubble which pretty much kills your chances to do anything there because well, I think the American ??? works people are saying oh he’s gonna be Spanish, no he’s not gonna be Spanish, it works very well today I mean the kids from Mexican immigrants grow up in English schools, had to speak English, they speak Spanish only with their parents and heu it doesn’t matter if people have Russian or whatever background there, by the time they are 20 they all speak
English perfectly and they don’t even think to go to ethnic school and they go to English schools, universities, it works and it works because people realize, ok you have a background which you respect and then traditions and blablabal but then your life is not about that, because it cannot be. And it's easy in the US because in the US the whole identity is not ethnical and it helps a lot because in Europe if you go anywhere you have this strong language, nationalist, historical identity which is very hard to identify with if you are not born in there, but in the US they don’t care about the language, I mean you can have Spanish traditional forms to fill in, who cares as long as you do your work, you pay your taxes, you improve the life of everybody then nobody cares about the language. I mean yes some do but that’s not the issue. And the whole identity is more about freedom and economical well-being and rising your children in a nice environment and having fun and going to nice holidays and then who cares about the rest. I think it’s actually a very good mentality I think

So do you think that in Europe we are more about really constructing our identity around our culture, language, or ?

I think we were construction our identity around that, until the end of WW2 and I think that’s a breaking point where the elite of each country realize that this is not going anywhere, I mean there is not point of creating identities which contradict the neighbor what’s the point, I mean it’s not leading anywhere to talk always about the past, problems and who killed who in what centuries and which land, and which town, it doesn’t take us anywhere at all and I think the EU has a huge part in this and also NATO and also all the other institutions, council of Europe and all that so I think eventually no I don’t think we are building anymore ethnical identities or national identity based on ethnicity, except couple of countries which still are really stuck in the past but most of them realized you got to move on from this because, and I think, well I work in a EU institution so of course I defend the institution because I really believe in it otherwise I wouldn’t come here but I think it helps to deconstruct this nineteen century nationalist identity, they have to be deconstructed eventually, I mean of course some parts of it are defensible and should be kept like of course language, national food, traditions but anything that is kind of intervening in a federalization of Europe I think it has no place anymore. I don’t care if the rightists get pissed, I don’t think there is anymore place for that, you should not always bring up history or anything, that’s past it doesn’t exist anymore, you have to move on

Hum, have you ever had to adjust your way of dressing while you were with some person from wherever I don’t know? That you really had to adjust your way of dressing in order to make the conversation work or...

Dressing, no really I don’t remember any case, I never went to a Mosque or Churches where you have to dress in certain way so I don’t remember any of that. No really

Would you be willing to do it if necessary?

Well if the architecture of that building is that interesting and worth it then yes of course, I would go in to Hagia Sophia in Istanbul if you have to dress some way, that’s fine because I would love to see that building. If it’s worth it, if the experience is that rich, why not

Heu, when you have to adapt to a new culture, to a host country, do you ever feel stressed? And do you use any kind of strategies or processes in order to reduce it? Maybe not now, but when you first move somewhere else like in the US or?

Well I think it’s, everybody learns from their first months, now that I did it, this is the second time I move in another country, and I know what to do, the first time, you don’t. I didn’t at least, maybe some people do but I didn’t. heu the first time you are always with all the “oh, they are not doing this right, and that right, how stupid is it, that” and after a while then you realize that of course hundred of millions or thousand of millions of people are not going to change because of you, you have to change because of the ten million, they are not going after your values obviously, that’s simple number I mean, you are one and they are ten million and if they do this, you have to do the same thing because there is no and that after a while I started
to realize that there is no point of always, I mean lots of people around in the ethnic bubble, in the Hungarian bubble always say “oh American do this and that is so stupid” and then I say “well they didn’t go to your country to work, you came here so I don’t think you really have a choice, I mean it’s kind of tough but that’s life” so of course you can keep and you should keep some of your values but most of them or at least anything that’s related to living in the society and not having many conflicts, you have to adjust, there is no other way, I mean that’s the basic rule or immigration, it doesn’t mean you have to assimilate, you cannot frankly I mean, if you don’t grow up in a country, your mentality will never be exactly the same I don’t think you can completely assimilate in you immigrate after, in your 20s or 30s but at least you have to adjust most of your mentality, you have no choice, no other way, and I think that’s a very rational thing to do

Yes, so you personally, you don’t feel stress really?

Of course I do, it’s not easy but then always if you grew up in a culture and you live in another one you really are in an advantage choosing the best thing of both, you know 2 already and you can compare heu, let’s say, raising children, hum, here doctors do some things differently, they say that the child has to be kept at 18°C because if it is warmer, the child can get some sickness now for me, 18°C it’s cold, I’m sorry, it’s cold, heu so I like 22-23 and we put it down to 18 because doctor said ok, our child was, heu what’s the word, when you have a flow you do (atchoum), when you yes this noise, when you sneeze, ok we put it down to 18 and she started to sneeze every five minutes, I said this is not right, come on I don’t care what science they know, the child is cold, let’s put it back to 22 and that’s it. So this is an example when you have, because back home, doctors would say it’s 22-23 because it’s small and needs warm, blabalbal so this is a cultural difference and you have the liberty to choose, sometimes there is this perception for me that everything is better the west, no I don’t think everything is better, a lot of thing is better but there are also lot of things that are better there. And then you have you choice but like I said, everything that’s essential for you to feel at home and other people liking you, accepting you, you have to switch, you just have to because otherwise you’re gonna be isolated for life and that makes no sense

So you try to take some stuff of both cultures?

Yes, I mean that’s the compromise you have to make

And is your wife Hungarian as well?

She’s doing the same thing, it’s harder for her because she didn’t went for 3 years in NY so for her it’s the first time immigrating and then yes, she, I keep telling her, “you have to accept this and that and that” and then she’s arrrgghhh, she doesn’t really want to but she has no choice, so eventually she will, I mean she is also kind of open minded but still it’s hard for her first time you know, and she doesn’t speak zero French, I mean she speaks Romanian so from that she understands some, it helps a lot, you know latin language, but you don’t understand the details so for her it’s a little bit harder

Especially with the new born I guess

Yes the new born and going to the doctor who tell completely different stuff that her mother tells who is also doctor in Romania, and then she’s like what do I do know

Hum, did you ever resolve a cross-cultural conflict? Like you were witnessing maybe 2 people getting in a conflict at work or in your personal life and then you stepped in and tried to make it work or?

Pff, I guess so, I mean, I don’t know really, let me think, I always try to mediate when there are conflict based on different culture or backgrounds but I don’t know I cannot think of any examples right now, but I’m sure it happened a lot. Heu most of the places I worked, well I don’t want to say this, it sounds very self-flattering, but I really usually was the most open minded of the immigrant, or at least one of the most open minded, it’s a fact, I mean and heu, I tried to intervene in cases and I tried to help people when they weren’t understanding the other one and usually I try to intervene in the favour of the hosting part because heu, the
<table>
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<th>Immigrants don’t understand, don’t want to accept, and I say just what I told you that you have to, you just have to, I mean there are some limits, some issues where you have to do compromise otherwise you’re not gonna, it’s better for you because then you don’t feel at home, you know, you will always have this feeling that you’re from somewhere else and it doesn’t help you either, I mean, you cannot live your life feeling everyday that you don’t belong there, you don’t</th>
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<td>Yes, you have to adapt and accept some things from the country you are in. hum well, I’m gonna ask you about some of your personality traits. So don’t be afraid to be self-confident and tell me your best qualities so, but first, how do you think your are perceived by others?</td>
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<td><strong>Pff, by others, by whom? My working colleagues?</strong></td>
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<td>Yes maybe your working colleagues</td>
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<td><strong>Pfff god knows, I mean I’m here for four months, I don’t know, I hope they like me, I mean they’re nice to me, I couldn’t, I don’t know I mean</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Do you think that sometimes they perceive you on the basis of stereotypes from your country? Because of your nationality or?</strong></td>
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<td>Well, not necessarily, because as far as I learn there are very few, if no any stereotypes about Romanians here, many friends they think we are burglars and heu people on the street begging for money but that’s not, but not in Belgium, I say I’m from Romania ok, whatever, you can say Lettonia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Finland and they think the same thing and don’t, I haven’t have a case when there was any kind of preconceived idea about Romanian or about Hungarians so I could, I mean, well people just don’t know anything about this country as far as I learn in Belgium, they just don’t know I mean, as we don’t know anything about well people who lead and care about let’s say language rights know, but average guy from street Romania has no idea about the Flemish, Walloon and why would they, I mean they don’t care, people here don’t care, so why would they, I mean people are always amaze how they don’t know where we are, well so what, I mean do you know where they are, do you know the capital of I don’t know, whatever, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, you don’t so why would they, I mean in the US this is always the first perception of immigrant “ahh they don’t know my country”, so what? Do you know where the state of Wyoming is, the state of Idaho, the state of Nevada, do you know anything about that? “no” so why would they I mean they don’t need this information in their daily life so what, so hum, I don’t think they have any ideas about me regarding my nationality. Maybe my personality they might, I guess I could be perceived sometimes as arrogant, pushy, hum I don’t know I’m kind of a fast thinking person, maybe I interrupt too much sometimes in meetings, maybe, I don’t know, some might be afraid of me, some might, I don’t know really I don’t know, they are fine</td>
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<td><strong>Ok, no problem, hum do you have the feeling to belong to any particular culture?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>In Belgium?</strong></td>
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<td>No in general, your own feeling about your culture, how would you define it? Hungarian, that’s pretty much it</td>
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<td><strong>So do you consider yourself as a truly global citizen?</strong></td>
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<td>More like European, yeah of course global why not, but then I mean that’s all theoretical I mean there is no global citizenship, there is no global anything, but there is a European citizenship which is not citizen in the classical legal term but it has some kind of legal connotations, some political and even cultural connotations, so yes, I feel myself very European for sure and only if I have to choose which one I am in the first place, I would start with European definitively then maybe Hungarian then maybe Transylvanian, which is my regional identity and that’s it and of course in certain way I’m also Romanian since I’m a Romanian citizen but maybe that’s the farthest away from me which is kind of weird if you live in the country but that’s what happens with minorities</td>
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<td><strong>How would you know characterize your main personality traits?</strong></td>
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<td>Linked to nationality of just?</td>
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<td>Just in general, your abilities...</td>
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<td>I don’t know, I’m fast thinking, heu I don’t know I’m quite intelligent I think and arrogant also</td>
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<td>Do you think you are tolerant?</td>
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<td>I’m very tolerant I think except for fundamentalist, well I cannot tell you how many people who are intolerant that’s the classical way to put it, people always attack liberalist because well if you are liberal you have to accept anybody, no, I cannot, liberalism also value system which you have to defend and there is a limit how far liberalist can go, if somebody is intolerant then you cannot tolerate it because it’s not, it’s not in line with your mentality. I’m tolerant on anybody, any nationality, any religion, anybody except the fundamentalists, which I, religious fundamentalists, I cannot accept, I mean I don’t hate them in a way I could do anything against them or god knows, terrorism, not even close, I mean and I can still accept that they should have as everybody else, the right to say their opinions in politics, I mean I will never ban extreme right politics, no I think it’s too much, I’m not, but that’s it, I mean I would never let them govern, that’s dangerous, but they have their own share of their population and they have the constitutional or political right to say their opinion although sometimes they contradict basic laws and then maybe there is a conflict of, legal conflict there but except, I mean, let them talk</td>
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<td>And do you think that you are empathetic towards other cultures?</td>
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<td>Yes, I think so, why not, I mean there is a good case, if you want a case on this one topic, I used to work in a restaurant in NY, one of the many and there was a client from New Zealand and he had this Maori face, this aborigines face, it was obvious that he is a Maori which is the aborigines in New Zealand and heu, I asked him, it was in 2004 or 2005 I’m not sure and that was the first time that the Maori party entered the New Zealand parliament, there was never ethnic minority party in the parliament, they were always working for left or right of whatever but the first time with 8% that the Maori party entered the parliament which is a huge thing for that minority, and well he ordered of coffee of whatever, and I asked him “so are you happy that your party are going to the parliament?” and he was so amazed, how do I know that, and yes he is so happy, so good and then I could, I had empathical feelings towards him because I understood their struggle and why it’s important for their party to be representing their ethnical interests in this case. This is, ethnic party is not necessarily a good idea but at least until minority come to the level where it’s comfortable for them and for the majority being in the same state and everybody has their right at the level they are happy, you need an ethnic party and after that maybe it should be dissolved and everybody should vote left or right or liberal or whatever they want but at least to a certain part of the struggle of a minority, maybe an ethnic party is important</td>
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<td>So they are recognized</td>
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<td>Yes yes and you need a political fight, because otherwise you either get assimilated either start shooting which bullshit so there is no point of, I mean, we always say we are the second largest minority in Europe after the Catalan in Spain which is 6.4 million but you know we were the third because Kosovo actually were the second and they were 1.7 million I think and they won their autonomy and then their independence to war, now we don’t want to follow that path so the Hungarians in Romania, all they do is politics, they have their party in the parliament and fights for human rights and that right and I mean it’s unconceivable to take a gun, it’s absolutely unconceivable for everybody I mean, not even the most hardcore nationalists would think to do anything like that and then at least at this point you understand why other minorities in other country could be happy if their party enter the parliament and they start to fight for their rights, so yes, in a way with minorities, but not just ethnic, also sexual, homosexual I’m very empathic I will always go to a gay pride or something, I ‘m not gay I’m completely heterosexual but I completely agree with their fight I will be there anytime, I would be in the first line, without any embarrassment, I would march with them, why not</td>
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Yes, because we all have rights

Yes, well I have nationalists friends, even in the Commission and it’s “aarhh gays like this and gays like that do they have to show it in a pride” and I say, “what do you that at your national day? You take you flag and you parade no? yes, so that’s your pride and their pride is the other pride, what’s the difference?” yes but national is ok, and, why not, what’s the difference? This is the rainbow flag, this is the blue and white flag, you’re proud of some historical battle or whatever the national day is linked to or your independence and they are proud of their, not yet one right but they are proud of their interest or whatever, their culture, their movies, their, what’s the problem, I mean everybody has some pride and

Yes, it’s like women 50 years ago

Yeas it’s like suffragettes

Hum, ok, heu, as a result of your international of intercultural experiences do you feel change yourself? You already told me that you pick some stuff from each culture and try to make the best out of it

Of course, completely I mean

And again, you’re really aware of that? Are you conscious of all this?

I think it’s the best thing that can ever happen, heu, look you lose something, also you lose something because I grew up in a very unicural, nationalist environment until I went to my university, all my friends, all my family was Hungarian, I had basically now direct connection except some rare youth camp or circumferences, whatever, but except that I was completely in an ethnic bubble. That changed when I went to university of course because the university city was maybe more Romanian than Hungarian so all the sudden all my law classes were Romanian so I had to interact of course and then that changed a little bit there but it changed a lot in NY of course because then, and then you move in a huge city like and your realize that your issues are so small and so, I mean you are stuck in a different century, you’re redigitalizing the nineteen century for no reason I mean there are so many more important issues going on in the world and you’re gonna. I mean of course some issues in current century nationalism are ok like language rights or I don’t know, the right to put up your flag or I don’t know whatever, ok fine, but that’s it, I mean everything that goes beyond that makes no sense, building nations like in nineteen century, but is still happen in many countries, it’s amazing, I mean, especially in the Balkans, you feel like in 1840, heu just everything is going digital there but it’s the same mentality I mean it’s frightening, I mean it doesn’t take anywhere. So of course when I went to Europe I changed I think 180°, I think I completely change my mentality from being right nationalist to being left liberal. It completely changed my I mean my friend didn’t recognize me when I came home and they started to, what happen to you, you are not, and I lost a lot of friends, actually, I lost 2/3 of my friends and I kept a couple and I made a lot of new ones who before I couldn’t make friends with. So so yes it completely changed me of course but I don’t regret any moment I mean I would lose a lot if I hadn’t done this. Yeah in way yes, there is also backside because you move somewhere and you can I feel without any roots and you don’t belong anywhere, I mean I’m not Belgian and I’ll never be Belgian, I’m here, Hungarian but it doesn’t say anything so what! So the easiest way is to link yourself to more broad idea like European or just more open minded person, happy with your life and that’s it. I mean you have to of course you have to lose some part of your identity because there is no, you just can’t live this identity in that environment, more, but then you take other stuff in and then you realize that your identity should be much more about that than your ethnicity because in Eastern Europe you grow up with the knowledge that your identity is all about your ethnicity or almost all about your ethnicity, maybe some religion or some other stuffs but then you realize that it’s just a really small piece of it and actually there is so much more else to think about to identify yourself with. So you become more international of course, except if you live in a ghetto, I mean if you live in an ethnic ghetto. Some people love that, I mean I have Hungarian friends
who don’t even get out of their Hungarian ghetto I mean, they go to home parties only to Hungarians, they watch Hungarian TV only, which with satellite is not a problem and they don’t care about the surrounding very much

So they don’t really ever adapt to

No but they don’t even want to, they always think that “I can have this, my small Hungarian bubble and eventually I will go home anyway so” and they even raise their kids in this bubble and their kids of course they learn the local language in the school but then they don’t connect much, I don’t see any point of doing that, it doesn’t take you anywhere I mean what’s the point, you’re not gonna have a small Hungary in Brussels ever because it’s impossible and then why struggling people, just try to find a balance and that’s it.

Hum, when you go abroad, do you ever, before going abroad learn the norms and taboos, the do’s and don’ts of the country, or some of them, or?

Not really I don’t very much I mean just let it surprise me, I mean, it depends on the country, I mean when I, maybe in the European countries about most of them I know enough, I can pretty much know what to expect. Heu of course outside of Europe, yeah you have to read a little bit, when I went to Cuba I read couple articles to know about what to expect, I mean Cuba is a special case anyway, it’s you know, it’s kind of a dictatorship maybe, maybe not but anyway it’s kind of closed society and you have, yes I read before going there because it’s better to know what to expect

And are you able to apply the knowledge that you received from these readings and?

Yes, why not, yeah I mean there are quite good guide books nowadays, you cannot go wrong, now they are very good adapted to the best reality so I think

And are you interested in the cultural aspects of the different countries as well?

Yes absolutely, for instance, we decided to get married somewhere overseas, on an island somewhere, with my wife, because we wanted to avoid this traditional huge religious wedding with all the grandmas coming and this Hungarian music as boring, greasy food, and we didn’t want a traditional wedding we hate it so there is only one way could escape that, if we got married somewhere else and they cannot come, so we decided to go to somewhere, wherever and we checked out a lot of, I mean it’s actually an industry, there is islandweddings.com and hundreds of other pages which offer wedding services if you wanna get married in some other place. The service is there, not necessarily for the hotel, or for the travel, it’s there for the legal aspect because wedding still implies a lot of legal issues, you have to send papers before, they have to prepare the contract, it’s not that simple, I’m a lawyer so I know it’s not easy to get married legally, especially in different country, where you are different citizen you need to go to services agency, you cannot do it by yourself, it’s just too complicated. So we went to some of these pages and there were offers all over the Caribbean, I mean almost every island is doing that and some of them are part of European country, some of them are independent and then you have to check the legal aspects, ways to get recognize, and Cuba was one that was the most hardest to get recognize because Cuba didn’t sign the Convention of the Apostille, if you have ever heard, that means that a country if it’s a member of that Convention every official paper will be instantly recognize in other member country, there are 102 countries member of the Convention, Cuba is not, so if you get married in Cuba, your married certificate from Cuba will not be recognize in Romania or Belgium or anywhere else. So you need to go to a lengthy process with stamps at the Cuba embassy, stamps at your embassy and then... so there was a lot of bureaucracy but we did the sacrifice knowing that Cuba would offer much more culture than any other culture on the island because all the small island they are just touristic islands and rarely have any kind of interesting culture, I mean I don’t wanna talk bad about them but compared to Cuba there is not that much music or even political history or culture and Cuba offers more and we chose Cuba even knowing there will be legal difficulties because of the culture, I mean we could have went to Aruba or Martinique which is part of France, it’s much easier to get recognize in the EU but they are not that interesting, I
mean they are but compare to Cuba they are not at least so, we chose Cuba exactly because of the culture! So yeah of course if a country offer culture which is more interesting I mean why not.

Nice, hum,

So if you want to escape your family for your wedding go to Cuba

Yes and we call you for the information

Yes, I will send you the links 😊

Hum I’m just gonna just quickly ask you about your performance, do you think that your adaptation in a country influences your performances at work?

Well, the adaptation to the work improves your performance at work, not necessarily the country, I mean EU is a bubble and Belgium too, I mean you know that the work we do is not much connected to the local anything really, it’s really macro, it’s 27 member states level so there is not much connection, unfortunately actually between I would love to have more connection with Belgium state but there is almost nothing. So my adaptation to the Belgian society improves my private life, but doesn’t have much impact on my work, really I mean, maybe my knowledge of French of course, but except that, not really

So it’s more work adaptation which has an impact on your performances?

Exactly, at least in the EU, if you work for the EU I think it is the case, yes

Are you satisfied with your job performance so far?

I guess so, yeah yeah, I love it, I always wanted that so 😊 when you fulfill your dream, you’re happy!

Usually you are, yes. Hum have you ever thought of repatriation early either when you were in the US or here in Brussels? Or

Well in the US I never went to stay there, and with this case, it’s completely the other way around, like I came to stay here, but in the US I couldn’t say it didn’t cross my mind but I never really thought about it very seriously! Because you know there is one thing to immigrate when you have a good pay, like the job, and there is another to immigrate when you work in restaurants for ok money but it’s not the same thing, you know if you, I always wanted to work in an intellectual environment, I had law study background, I didn’t want to work in restaurants forever! In the US to start to work in a intellectual environment, you need to finish university eventually because, or you get your diploma recognize, but that’s far too complicated with law, because law is different in every country so in order for me to have to life I imagined in the US I should have went 4 years to a law university in NY which would have cost me a fortune, and which would probably destroy my young life because to have that money you have to work and then working-studying, working-sleeping, five hours a day it’s just takes away your everything, destroy yourself physically! I have friends who did that and eventually most of them succeeded but I just wasn’t prepared to struggle for 5 years in order to start at the same level as the local started 10 years ago! There was no point! So I came home, I finish my studies in Romania and I eventually ended up here.

Ok, and did you receive any intercultural training before? For a job? Like before coming to Brussels?

No actual training, never, no, I mean I’ve had life training but not an actual organized training, there will be some training in the Commission after, I think in June, on that but I never did it before.

So not before, just after a few month you’d been here then maybe

Yes, there is a mandatory training that you have to do, it’s not even a choice, you have to do it if you start work in the Commission, in your first 9 months there is a training on working in a multicultural environment, yes I will follow it because I have to, I’d love to anyway not just because I have to. I don’t think it will tell me something new or much new but you never know

Yes of course, well I think we’ve covered a lot already [...] ending the conversation

I give you my card so whenever you’re done, in half a year of a year, if you could send my the
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<th>final version of your paper</th>
<th>Sure I will! Well I should be done by June or August if I’m not late so It’s not gonna be later than that anyway</th>
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</table>
| Conversation ending with again making sure that it will be anonymous!!! | **Interviewee D**

**Tout d’abord, de simples questions, en fait. Ta nationalité... française...**

Oui. Je suis franco-allemand, en fait.

Franco-allemand ?

Oui.

C’est pour ça que tu parles bien anglais.

Oui, c’est vrai.

Parce que les Français, souvent, c’est comme nous les francophones wallons, c’est pas très...

Oui.

Tu parles allemand alors aussi et parfaitement ?

Oui, mais pas aussi bien que le français, mais je le parle couramment. C’est ma langue maternelle quoi, tu vois...

Ah oui...

Mais je ne le parle pas assez.

Je suppose que tu n’as pas d’enfants ?

Non.

Je peux te tutoyer ?

Oui, oui !

Parce que c’est vrai.... J’ai tendance à... Heu, ton background familial, donc, tu viens d’une famille déjà multi culturelle à la base, franco-allemande.

Ma mère est allemande, mon père français.

D’accord. Et sinon, rien d’autre à signaler...

Rien de particulier...

Non ?

Ma tante habite en Belgique, enfin, elle s’est mariée avec un Belge. C’est le seul truc.

C’est bien ! C’est multi culturel, hein !... Ou est-ce que tu travailles ?

Je travaille pour l’Union Internationale des Transports Publics. C’est une organisation qui représente l’industrie des transports publics au niveau international.

Et qu’est-ce qui t’a donné envie de venir à Bruxelles, en fait ?

Le travail, mais ... Je ne pensais pas du tout venir à Bruxelles et finalement, j’ai trouvé un stage ici, puis j’ai trouvé un stage dans une autre boîte par la suite et après, j’ai changé de travail. Et je pense qu’à Bruxelles, c’est souvent comme ça ; c’est les stages qui... Ils viennent très jeunes, les gens viennent jeunes, très très jeunes, souvent en tous cas, ils commencent un stage et ils restent, ils restent pas ...

Et pour ton stage, c’est déjà une entreprise de là-bas en France qui t’a envoyé à Bruxelles ou c’est toi qui as choisi de venir ?

Non. J’ai cherché du travail et j’ai vu ça à Bruxelles et c’était un peu dans mon domaine et du coup, j’ai envoyé ma candidature et j’ai eu le stage.

Qu’est-ce que tu as fait comme études ?

Géographie et urbanisme.

Ah oui ! Depuis combien de temps tu es à Bruxelles ?

Près de trois ans et demi.

Et tu comptes rester jusque combien de temps encore ?... Indéfiniment jusque maintenant... Tu comptes rester habiter en Belgique ?...

Ca me plaît pour l’instant.
Quels pays est-ce que tu as visités ? ou dans lesquels tu as travaillé, autres que la Belgique ?

La France.

Oui, pour le travail ?

Non, en France pour les études et pour ma vie quoi...

Oui, en général.


OK. Donc, tu as déjà de l’expérience internationale, un petit peu, enfin, européenne.. Combien de langues tu parles, mis à part français et allemand ?

Et anglais, les trois bien, et j’apprends le néerlandais un petit peu et l’espagnol. Mais bon... je prends des cours.

La volonté est là.

Oui, la volonté est là et je peux le mettre un peu sur mon CV.

C’est toujours pratique.

Pourquoi est-ce que tu apprends ces langues-là ? Donc, français et allemand, langues maternelles, et le flamand...

Le flamand parce que je suis en Belgique et que je vais peut-être rester ici et je pense que si je veux rester ici et trouver du travail, peut-être dans le futur, ce serait un plus d’avoir le flamand et en plus, comme je parle allemand, c’est très proche le flamand...

...normalement c’est plus facile...

...oui, c’est plus facile et l’espagnol, juste par intérêt personnel.

Par plaisir.

Oui.

Donc, tu n’as jamais dû apprendre pour un boulot, puisque tu es passé de France à ici ?

Non.

J’ai quelques questions au niveau plutôt relationnel, inter personnel, du style, bon c’est vrai qu’en étant Français, ça risque d’être moins... Est-ce que tu socialises facilement avec les gens locaux d’un pays ? Je vais peut-être pas dire Belgique, parce je suppose que France – Belgique, ça se ressemble quand même pas mal. Des gens d’une culture différente ; c’est vrai qu’à Bruxelles, il y a plein de gens de partout, donc ça n’a pas besoin d’être des...

Ici à Bruxelles, c’est très international, donc je pense qu’on n’a pas forcément besoin. On peut se retrouver avec d’autres gens internationaux. Après, je pense, ça devient plus dure quand tu...

Je ne sais pas, moi personnellement ou de façon générale ?

Toi personnellement, oui. Est-ce que tu as facile de socialiser avec des personnes d’une autre culture, d’un autre pays ?

Oui, mais je pense que la langue, c’est une barrière. A Bruxelles, ça va, donc il n’y a pas de soucis. Mais avec les Flamands, c’est plus difficile, comme je ne parle pas la langue.

Oui. Et en anglais, ça ne va pas ?

Oui, en anglais mais en fait, ils vont plutôt parler français.

Oui quand même.

Oui, oui.

OK. Et donc en général, il n’y a pas de problèmes.

Non.

Tu arrives à t’entendre facilement avec les personnes d’un pays.

Où je vis, oui.

OK. Est-ce que tu as déjà développé, à travers ta vie, différentes relations inter culturelles, que ce soit amicales ou autres, des relations internationales ?

Oui, à la base, j’en ai parce que j’étais dans une école internationale et en plus, avec l’allemand, comme je parlais allemand... il y avait pas mal de gens internationaux et j’ai toujours des amis
très proches; on se voit très souvent et sinon, à Bruxelles, beaucoup d’amis très européens, voire plus européens que vraiment d’un pays, tu vois ?

Oui.

Des gens qui voyageant, qui ont l’habitude, qui sont déjà à moitié quelque chose ou qui… Et après, quand j’éttais en Angleterre, là j’ai vraiment rencontré des gens, des étrangers qui étudiaient là-bas et là j’ai quelques relations aussi là interculturelles.

Oui. Au sein de l’Europe, mais ça reste quand même interculturel.

Européens et aussi quelques amis à l’extérieur de l’Europe, mais qui habitent en Europe.

En général, tu t’es fait ces amitiés-là à travers tes études et le boulot ou est-ce que tu fais partie de…

Surtout du boulot et après, à Bruxelles, tu rencontres aussi des gens, comme il y a beaucoup d’étrangers, énormément d’étrangers, tu rencontres aussi des gens à des soirées.

Est-ce que tu participes à des activités d’expatriés ou quelques chose comme ça, parce que je sais qu’il y a une communauté expatriée assez...

Non, j’aime pas, je ne connais pas, en fait. On m’a déjà proposé et le principe, non. Pour des Français, j’ai un peu du mal à comprendre pourquoi…

Oui. Tu es le deuxième à me dire ça, alors que le précédent, c’était un Roumain, donc…

Oui.

Et tu te considères toi, comme expatrié ou...

Expatrié, moi je, pour moi, c’est un peu obsolète ce terme, parce que pour moi c’était à l’époque où il y avait des grandes boîtes et on y envoyait des gens, enfin, il y a toujours des grandes boîtes, mais on envoyait vraiment les gens sur un contrat particulier, mais qui enfin, d’origine de ton pays et on t’envoyait quelque part, t’étais très bien payé, on te payait tout, les frais et tout ça, alors que maintenant, on envoie souvent les gens, on est sur un contrat local donc du pays de destination et… Je pense que les gens partent aussi d’eux-mêmes...

Oui, les « self-expatried » (?)

Oui, voilà, et donc, je pense… C’est pas vraiment obsolète, mais c’est de moins en moins fréquent j’ai l’impression. Je ne me sens pas expatrié parce que je suis ici et je n’ai plus de lien avec le pays d’origine, enfin je n’ai plus de lien sur le terme personnel.

Tes parents, ta famille, sont toujours en France ?

En France et en Allemagne.

Quand tu fais face à une conversation interculturelle ou une inter action interculturelle, en général, comment est-ce que tu te sens, toi, à l’intérieur ? Quel genre d’émotion est-ce que tu ressens ? Est-ce que ça dépend des personnes suivant le pays d’origine et ce genre de chose ? Est-ce qu’il y a des émotions bien spécifiques qui te viendraient à l’esprit maintenant ?

Ben, en fonction de la personne et de son pays d’origine, t’as des sujets qui sont plus ou moins délicats et je pense que c’est toujours super intéressant de débattre là-dessus et c’est aussi un peu sensible.

Est-ce que tu aurais un exemple en particulier ?

Tu as le problème en Belgique. Ca c’est toujours un peu difficile, parce que les Flamands sont super sympas, ceux que je connais, même des Francophones, mes colocataires, par mes anciens colocataires, le sujet est toujours un peu… Ca c’est un exemple de sujet un peu sensible comme ça. Nous on le voit d’un regard extérieur, avec un regard extérieur, et en tant que Français, mais à moitié Allemand, en tant que Français, moi je reste assez objectif parce que… mais en tant que Français, tu vas avoir tendance à défendre plutôt les Wallons ou les Francophones, pas moi. C’est toujours un peu sensible, parce qu’en fait, quand tu regardes ça d’un point de vue étranger, je pense que tu analyses les choses de façon beaucoup plus rationnelle que quand tu es vraiment de ce pays-là, parce que tu restes moins objectif, moins rationnel, parce que c’est des choses très sentimentales.

Oui et tu as tout le tralala autour que les gens font et du moins les politiciens surtout.

C’est sûr que tu prends les choses très personnellement parce que c’est ton pays d’origine, donc
si on critique quelque chose… ce qui est normal aussi. Et après, d’autres exemples, le Japon, j’ai
une copine qui est justement Japonaise, qui habite en Angleterre, et il y des choses, que moi…
Elle évolue un petit peu, il me semble, quand je la revois, mais des choses sur lesquelles, des
sujets qui sont très difficiles, notamment enfin très difficiles. Il y a vraiment une
incompréhension, notamment le sujet des baleines et des chasses à la baleine. C’est vraiment
un sujet, moi je comprenais pas pourquoi ils faisaient ça parce que la baleine disparaît, mais
eux, ils comprennent pas parce que pour eux c’est dans leur culture et qui font ça depuis
toujours et c’est pas forcément vrai et c’est un sujet… Ou la seconde guerre mondiale, comment
ont assumé par exemple les Allemands, le racisme, etc.

Et parfois, tu te sens un peu mal à l’aise, en fait, tu essaies d’éviter quand même …

Oui, oui. Mais je trouve que c’est très fort aussi de parler avec quelqu’un de ces sujets-là et de
créer un climat et d’apprendre un peu aussi comment discuter. De par le travail
aussi, je parle aussi avec des Asiatiques, c’est très susceptible, très très susceptible et il faut
vraiment faire attention à ce qu’on dit et la manière dont on dit les choses.

Tu te rends compte de ton changement d’attitude justement quand tu es avec ce genre de
personnes.

Oui, oui.

Est-ce que c’est déjà arrivé qu’une fois tu parles avec quelqu’un justement, soit qui ne parle pas
la même langue ou d’un pays, d’une culture étrangère, et tu avais vraiment l’impression , même
si il y avait un langage commun, par exemple, tu parles français avec quelqu’un, mais que tu
n’es pas du tout sur la même longueur d’ondes, genre, pourtant, vous parlez du même sujet,
mais avec complètement quelque chose qui ne va pas, une incompréhension totale ; est-ce que
c’est déjà arrivé ? Tu aurais peut-être un exemple ?

J’ai un peu au travail, surtout sur les … quand ce sont des sujets du travail… Je réfléchis !… En
fait, au travail, je travaille avec des organisations de transports publics et ils n’ont que leur point
de vue local de leur ville ou de leur pays et du coup, quand tu parles des choses, quand tu
travilles avec eux, ils n’ arrivent pas à concevoir que la situation peut être différente dans un
autre pays, c’est pas qu’ils arrivent pas à le concevoir, mais… bien sûr je leur explique , mais ils
ne s’imaginent pas en fait, c’est pas conscient. J’essaie de réfléchir avec des gens… Là, il n’y a
rien d’autre qui me vient à l’esprit.

Y a pas de problème. A chaque fois que je vais te poser une question, c’est vraiment, quand tu
es dans une relation inter culturelle, comme ça, je ne vais pas répéter chaque fois. Quand tu
parles avec quelqu’un donc de culture différente, est-ce que tu démontres parfois de la
flexibilité ? est-ce que tu t’adaptes ? est-ce que tu arrives à faire certains compromis, histoire
justement de faire que la conversation marche et qu’il n’y ait pas de conflit au bout de la
conversation ?

Il faut être un peu diplomate. Quand on connaît, ça dépend si on connaît la personne bien ou
quand on connaît un petit peu, ça dépend du stade d’amitié, du stade dans lequel la relation
est. Mais, il y a des choses qu’il faut faire attention, comme je disais, avec des Japonais par
exemple, des Asiatiques ou d’autres gens, il faut faire attention à ce qu’on dit et à comment on
le dit.

Est-ce que tu aurais un exemple concret ? Un moment où tu t’es rendu compte que tu avais
vraiment fait preuve de flexibilité et qui tu avais pris sur toi et essayé de…

C’est difficile de trouver. Il faut que je réfléchisse un petit peu.

Pas de problème.

Je pense que ça arrive constamment. C’est difficile à…

Et de nouveau, est-ce que tu t’en rends compte ou est-ce que tu suis…par exemple, imaginons
que tu aies lu un livre sur comment interagir avec tel genre de culture, justement avec
quelqu’un d’une culture asiatique, est-ce que tu suis simplement le protocole, ce que tu as lu,
en fonction des stéréotypes ou est-ce que tu t’adaptes en fonction de la personne en face de toi
et tu te rends compte ?
Le problème c’est qu’il faudrait qu’une personne… La plupart des gens que je connais sont des gens qui ont un certain standard international, comme ça, qui est respecté, ce sont des règles...tu sais, tous les gens que je connais sont un peu de ce standard-là, donc on n’a pas... Je pense qu’avec les Européens, en tous cas, ceux que je connais, il y a peu de sujets... Je réfléchis un peu parce que ... Avec les Allemands, par exemple, c’est difficile quand tu parles des sujets de la seconde guerre mondiale. Je réfléchis est-ce que j’ai des exemples concrets ?... Je pense qu’avec les Allemands, par exemple, le sujet de la seconde guerre mondiale est toujours un peu difficile, il faut toujours faire attention et c’est vrai qu’il y a plusieurs exemples là-dessus. Il faut faire attention à comment est-ce que tu parles et les gens sont souvent ouverts en général, mais c’est pas vraiment rester flexible, mais il faut faire attention plutôt, notamment sur les blagues ou quelque chose comme ça, parce qu’ils peuvent le prendre très personnellement.

Oui, parce qu’il y en a pas mal des blagues... avec Hitler, etc.

Oui.

Est-ce que ça t’arrive alors d’ajuster ton attitude, ton comportement face à ce genre de situation ?

Justement avec ma famille là-bas, j’ai tendance à faire des blagues. Il y a un exemple, c’est l’humour. L’humour, c’est pas mal comme exemple pour voir les différences entre les cultures. En France, on a souvent l’habitude dans l’humour de vanner les gens, dire des choses sur quelqu’un, ça peut être très personnel, mais au final, c’est une vanne, il ne faut vraiment pas le prendre pour du vrai et rigoler et après, la personne qui se fait vanner, il faut qu’elle rentre dans le jeu. C’est comme ça que ça fonctionne. En Allemagne, j’ai déjà essayé de faire ça avec ma famille et ils le prennent personnellement tout de suite, c’est comme ça, il faut tout de suite s’arrêter et ça, il m’est arrivé de faire des gaffes. Ca c’est un bon exemple. Et en Allemagne, par exemple, l’humour est très très subtil. Il est dans les jeux de mots en fait. Donc, il faut avoir une certaine intelligence aussi ou alors le connaître et peut-être que l’humour va être plus dans les histoires qu’on raconte à table ou quoi, les blagues... et ils peuvent être très très marrants, les Allemands là-dessus.

C’est pas le même genre d’humour.

C’est pas du tout la même chose. En France, ça va être beaucoup plus dans la confrontation un peu comme ça et ça va être aussi beaucoup plus con entre guillemets qu’en Allemagne.

Là, je pense que c’est un peu comme ça ici aussi.

Oui, donc, je pense que par rapport à ça, ce qu’il faut c’est l’humour. C’est comme l’humour en Angleterre, mais c’est plus difficile aussi.

Oui, il faut le comprendre !

On connaît plus l’humour anglais par la télé, là j’ai moins d’expériences. Il faut avoir déjà un certain niveau d’anglais pour pouvoir comprendre, moi ça va, et je pense que là, en Allemagne, il faut vraiment... je sais que je fais attention et je pense qu’il faut faire attention quand tu vas dans des pays où c’est pas pareil. Je sais que dans les pays du Sud, c’est plus dans le même style qu’en France. En Italie, t’es aussi plus dans la confrontation.

Oui. Est-ce que tu as déjà dû changer ta manière de t’habiller ? dans une situation... on te trouvait peut-être indécent ?...

Non. Mais je pense que quand tu vas dans certaines villes, moi personnellement, j’ai rien en tête, par contre, quand tu t’installes dans certaines villes, tu dois, je pense à Paris surtout, je vois mes amis là-bas, s’habillent parfois... surtout que maintenant, ils commencent à travailler, à avoir plus d’argent, parfois, c’est assez impressionnant de voir à quel point l’extérieur compte. Même à Paris, les gens, à priori... il y a un certain style dominant dans les villes et certaines villes, enfin, les gens dans les villes font plus attention à ça. Que ce soit à Berlin, à Paris ou à Bruxelles, Londres...

Est-ce que tu serais prêt à changer ta manière de t’habiller pour rentrer dans le moule entre guillemets ?

A priori, non. Pour le travail, oui.
Et tu as déjà travaillé quelque part où il y avait un « dress code » bien précis ?

Non.

Est-ce qu’on dit « dress code » en français ? [small talk irrelevant]

Au travail, tu veux dire ?

Oui au travail.

Non, mais je sais que dans beaucoup de boîtes ça se fait.

Oui.

Chez nous, enfin, il y a des choses à respecter... par rapport à des shorts ou quelque chose comme ça....

Oui, d’accord.

Un costume ou quoi, le jour où j’ai des réunions extérieures, oui je dois mettre un costume.

Tu es de Paris, toi en fait, à la base ?

De la région parisienne.

Est-ce que, lorsque tu entres dans une autre culture, dans un autre pays, tu utilises certaines stratégies pour gérer ton stress, si jamais tu ressens un certain stress ? peut-être pas ici en Belgique, parce que Paris-Belgique, c’est un petit peu kif-kif, mais est-ce que tu as déjà dû faire face ?

Non, ça ne me stress pas. Je suis très à l’aise. C’est plutôt le stress du voyage alors ou la langue. La langue, ça peut pour certaines personnes..., pour moi ça va, mais ça peut stresser certaines personnes ; il y a des gens qui ne voyagent pas à cause de ça.

Oui c’est vrai. Est-ce que tu as déjà dû résoudre toi-même un conflit inter culturel ? donc des personnes devant toi ou lors d’une conversation, et tu as dû intervenir et essayer de calmer un peu le jeu ? Est-ce qu’il y avait un malentendu entre deux personnes ou entre toi et une autre personne et tu as résolu le conflit?

Moi, résumer le conflit, pas vraiment, je ne vois pas d’exemples concrets, mais j’ai déjà été impliqué dans une sorte de conflit ; notamment avec les Anglais, parfois, tu discutes de choses... La relation que les Anglais ont avec... je pense à l’Allemagne aussi c’est un peu une référence, les relations que les Anglais ont avec les Allemands, de par le passé, de l’histoire, sont beaucoup moins bonnes que les Français avec les Allemands, par exemple. Les Français et les Allemands se sont réconciliés entre guillemets, ils sont plutôt en de bonnes relations, alors que les Anglais ont toujours une sorte de haine contre l’Allemagne et tout ça et ça je l’ai beaucoup ressenti en Angleterre. Parmi les jeunes de ma génération et les étudiants avec lesquels j’étais, on a eu beaucoup de discussions là-dessus et ça m’a beaucoup marqué. Et à chaque fois, ça revient sur le passé, du pays et ces trucs-là. Flandre et Wallonie aussi, souvent, ça revient dans les discussions.

Ah oui ! quand même !

Oui, surtout quand tu vas à l’étranger, les gens veulent avoir des infos là-dessus, ils s’intéressent à ce problème-là. Quand tu commences à parler de ces choses-là, et si tu es en présence d’un Belge, toute ma famille, il y en a qui vivent en Belgique, on parle souvent de ça, ça part un peu dans tous les sens et c’est toujours très... on perd un peu le rationnel, le sens du rationnel et ça devient trop émotionnel.

Plus dans le privé, dans les discussions, mais c’est aussi dans les discussions avec les amis, ça rentre, c’est pas comme si on allait se taper dessus, si c’est trop, ça devient un peu tendu. Dans le boulot... je sais qu’il y a des conflits qui sont dus aux conflits actuels ; on ne va pas mettre une réunion avec des Israéliens et des Iraniens ensemble, quelque chose comme ça.

Il y a beaucoup de multi culturalités dans ton travail ?

Oui, parce qu’on travaille avec des compagnies dans le monde entier et du coup, quand il y a des conflits... on est obligé de mettre toutes les réunions Moyen-Orient, on doit les faire sans Israël et Israël dans les réunions européennes. Parce que voilà, et même entre l’Iran et l’Arabie-Saoudite...
Donc, il y a vraiment des différences culturelles prises en compte ?

Oui, il faut faire attention à la situation actuelle des choses. Voilà, Chine – Taïwan… ça je ne sais pas trop. En Asie, je ne sais pas trop ce qu’il en est, mais il faut faire attention.

OK. Au niveau de tes traits de personnalité. Comment est-ce que tu penses que tu es perçu par les autres ?

Comment moi je suis perçu par les autres ?

Oui. Et est-ce que tu penses que cette perception est due à ta nationalité ? Parfois, des gens te parlent ...

Ca dépend qui. En Allemagne, on va toujours me prendre pour un Français ; en France, plus pour le mec franco-allemand et en Belgique, pour le Français, mais pas vraiment, parce que je ne me sens pas très Français. Ça fait longtemps que je ne suis plus en France et comme je suis à moitié Allemand, je ne me sens pas très Français et pas très Allemand, plus Européen.

Tu te considères plus Européen que d’un pays.

Oui.

Est-ce qu’on t’a déjà abordé, traité entre guillemets, sur base de stéréotypes ; voilà, tu as dit que tu étais Français ou tu as dis que tu étais plutôt Allemand et la personne avec qui tu as discuté t’a sorti des choses purement stéréotypées ? Et tu t’es déjà dit non, non, ça c’est purement un stéréotype. Par exemple, Paris : je suis Belge, les Parisiens ont une certaine réputation ! Est-ce qu’on t’a déjà jugé là-dessus, sans même aller chercher plus loin?

Peut-être, mais en tous cas ils ne le disent pas directement ...

Cloup ! Plus de batteries ! Donc, petit stût de raccord !

Oui. Il essaie de faire trop attention, donc, et parfois c’est un peu énervant, parce que du coup, il essaie… Parfois, il faut être un peu dans la confrontation, du moins je pense, dans la relation, dans les relations. Parfois, il y a confrontation, mais savoir dire les choses de toute façon, être honnête et être un peu pragmatique.

Avoir ta propre opinion sur...

...oui et voilà et ne pas toujours s’adapter à la personne en face de toi, juste parce que tu veux que la personne en face de toi soit toujours d’accord. La peur de la confrontation… je ne sais pas...

Oui, la peur de la confrontation, mais garder quand même son opinion et ne pas commencer à changer en fonction de la personne qui se trouve en face de toi.

Oui, voilà.

Comme certaines personnes qui changent de personnalité, suivant avec qui elles se trouvent. J’ai un ami comme ça et c’est vrai que c’est pas, même pour lui, je ne pense pas que c’est bien, que c’est sain.

Non. C’est un problème de confiance ensoi peut-être. Je ne sais pas. Il y a des personnes qui sont comme ça.

Oui, la peur de la confrontation ou quelque chose comme ça.


Mais donc, être empathique, de nouveau, oui, mais jusqu’à un certain point ; ne pas dire non plus, oui amen et toujours essayer de s’adapter et que l’autre ne fasse rien.

Oui, oui.

Est-ce que toi, tu sens changé depuis tes différentes expériences, que ce soit ton Erasmus en Angleterre, ton stage à gauche, à droite ? Est-ce que tu change ton identité, peut-être justement ton identité culturelle a-t-elle changé, par rapport à… ?

Le fait de voyager, oui, le fait de vivre, de voyager, quand tu voyages souvent dans un pays particulier et que tu aimes bien ce pays, ou alors tu fais un grand voyage dans un pays, je pense que tu t’identifies vraiment, tu peux t’identifier à un pays et du coup, t’en fais référence à ce pays.

Le fait de voyager, oui, le fait de vivre, de voyager, quand tu voyages souvent dans un pays particulier et que tu aimes bien ce pays, ou alors tu fais un grand voyage dans un pays, je pense que tu t’identifies vraiment, tu peux t’identifier à un pays et du coup, t’en fais référence à ce pays.
Oui.

Il y a aussi de l’émotionnel là-dessus. Je pense que ça a vraiment... pour l’Angleterre, ça m’a quand même marqué et du coup, on parle d’y retourner, t’as envie de rencontrer des gens là-bas, d’en parler, de leur dire que t’as vécu là-bas et donc, avec l’Angleterre... Bon, l’Allemagne et la France, j’ai toujours eu, mais la Belgique et l’Angleterre c’est venu par la suite. Euh ! C’était quoi au juste la question ?

Si tu te sentais changé toi-même ? Ton identité, est-ce qu’elle a évolué, enfin évolué, pas dans un sens péjoratif évidemment, je veux dire, si tu as changé, si certaines de tes attitudes, si certains de tes préjugés de base ont changé ?

Ben dans tes discussions, dans ton contenu de tes discussions avec les gens, en général, je pense que ça influence beaucoup, avec les nouvelles références que tu as. Les comparaisons que tu peux faire, après dans ton comportement... Bon, moi et l’Angleterre, j’essaie de voir un peu... Je pense que j’ai beaucoup appris, notamment avec la Belgique, avec mon travail aussi, dans la façon de travailler avec les étrangers, au-delà d’Europe encore. L’Europe de l’Est, c’est encore différent, je pense qu’il y a quand même une certaine identité en Europe de l’Est. Du Nord au Sud, les pays sont très différents, les gens sont très très différents. Je pense que le fait de travailler dans des relations avec des gens d’autres pays, ça a beaucoup influencé la façon dont je me comporte vis-à-vis des gens dans ces pays. Quand je suis avec un Finlandais ou un Scandinave, je sais qu’à chaque fois il faut être au taquet sur le timing, sur la précision, sur la rigueur, sur tout ça, alors qu’avec les Italiens, dans le Sud, il faut être beaucoup plus dans le relationnel. Donc, quand tu travailles avec eux, quand tu as des réunions là-bas avec eux, c’est beaucoup plus dans à la bonne bouffe, le travail, ben bof, c’est moins important.

Ca passera après.

Oui. Et l’Europe de l’Est, c’est particulier aussi. Je pense que ça me permet vraiment de mûrir aussi là-dessus et de voir comment travailler avec eux, en Europe de l’Est, j’ai toujours l’impression que ce sont des gens susceptibles aussi, tu vois.

Donc, justement, tu as développé une certaine habileté de pouvoir t’adapter aux différentes situations que tu n’avais peut-être pas avant.

Je pense oui. Et on en a vraiment besoin, parce que quand tu travailles en Asie ou en Amérique Latine... En Amérique du Sud, ils ne savent rien respecter au niveau du timing et il faut l’accepter, parce que voilà, il faut être aussi tolérant sur ce côté-là et se dire que c’est comme ça là-bas, ben t’assume.

D’accord.

On assume et se sera un peu à l’arrache sur place. Mais c’est aussi, pour le travail, ou quand tu travailles avec des relations amicales sur le long terme, c’est aussi pouvoir leur montrer comment toi aussi tu es. Voilà, et moi j’aime bien que ce soit fini à temps et donc, toi tu sais que c’est comme ça, donc tu fais des efforts.

Oui, donc faire des compromis en fait.

Voilà, faire des compromis, oui.

Que tous les deux fassent un petit peu d’efforts de son côté ...

Oui, et si l’autre personne a peu de contact avec le monde extérieur, ça devient plus difficile. Si tu es avec un Chinois qui n’est jamais sorti de son bled, ça devient difficile.

Oui, tu penses alors peut-être plus que ta manière est la bonne manière et ...

Il faudra plutôt s’adapter à sa manière, à sa façon de faire, parce que tu sais que lui ne fera pas spécialement l’effort, enfin, involontairement.

Quand tu pars à l’étranger, de nouveau que ce soit niveau boulot ou vie personnelle, est-ce que tu apprends certaines normes et tabous des pays, des cultures, où tu risques d’aller ? Donc, est-ce que tu essaies de te renseigner, de lire, de voir un petit peu justement ce qui est à faire, ce qui est à éviter, dans tel pays ?

Ben, on avait des conférences, un congrès à Dubaï, donc là, quand tu vas dans ces pays-là, il y a vraiment des pays où il faut faire attention. En Europe, à priori, quand tu vas quelque part, il n’y...

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a pas de soucis, sauf dans certains endroits, par exemple, quand tu vas à Belfast. Après, il faut voir ! Moi, j’en suis conscient des problèmes qui peut y avoir dans un pays en Europe, donc, je fais attention, mais je pense que d’autres gens ne sont pas forcément... moi ça va, en Europe. Je fais un peu attention, parce que quand tu vas en Serbie, dans ces pays-là aussi, c’est assez... l’histoire, c’est quand même assez proche et... ou en Turquie, mais voilà et dès que tu sors de l’Europe en fait, ou en Europe de l’Est aussi, par rapport à la Russie, par rapport au communisme et tous ces trucs-là, et dès que tu sors d’Europe, ça devient plus difficile.

Et donc, est-ce que tu te renseignes ? Est-ce que tu essaies de lire des livres... Est-ce que je me renseigne ? Oui, surtout Internet. Parce qu’Internet, c’est tout. Les livres, peut-être dans les Routards et les Guides de voyages, je regarde un petit peu, mais sur les discussions ?

Justement, plus sur les choses à faire ou à ne pas faire, même comportementales, je vais dire.

Sur le comportement et les signes extérieurs... quand c’est quelque chose de... oui, c’est difficile... je ne me renseigne pas particulièrement, mais ça rentre souvent, ça vient automatiquement parce que tu lis ton Guide et ben, c’est ça ou c’est ça, tu apprends sur place et donc ça va pas mal se passer. Enfin, moi je n’ai jamais eu de problèmes, mais c’est pas comme si je voyageais au bout du monde... Et c’est plus des petites choses en fait qu’on apprend dans les voyages. Par exemple, en Inde, je suis allé en Inde il y a six ans, cinq-six ans, et pour dire oui, ils font non. Je ne sais pas si tu es déjà allée. Ils font un truc comme ça, comme ça, là tu vois et ils le font tous et en fait ça pose problème au début, parce que pour toi, ça veut dire non, c’est pas tout à fait un non, c’est pas comme ça, c’est comme ça, tu vois et dans le Sud, ils le font tous tous tous. Dès qu’ils font comme ça, ça veut dire oui, allez, c’est bon, OK et toi, la première semaine, pour toi ça veut dire non, alors tu ne comprends pas. Ça pose des problèmes parce que quand t’as des problèmes de transport, au début, tu veux prendre un taxi ou je ne sais pas quoi et tu négocies et quand il fait comme ça, ben oui, tu pars et après il te court après et te dit oui, oui, c’est bon.

Donc, tu apprends petit-à-petit.

Oui, il y a des petits trucs, des petites choses, des petits comportements comme ça, que tu acquiers petit-à-petit, parce que les gens le font, tu vois que les gens le font et donc... Oui. Quand tu vas à l’étranger, est-ce que tu t’intéresses réellement à la culture des nationaux, des gens du pays ? Est-ce que tu t’intéresses à voir si...

Oui, je lis l’histoire, j’essaie de..., ça se fait pendant le voyage aussi, c’est plus facile à assimiler, parce que tu vois des trucs, des bâtiments, je ne sais pas quoi, l’architecture, les musées et t’assimilées. Mais j’essaie de lire un peu avant, enfin quand c’est un beau voyage. J’avoue, quand je pars trois jours en Italie, jele fais moins, quoi, mais quand je pars trois semaines quelque part, j’essaie de le faire et j’essaie de lire aussi, mais après aussi, parce qu’après, en fait, quand tu lis un livre, un bouquin local quoi, un roman, tu lis et tu as du mal à t’imaginer parce que tu n’es pas encore dans le pays, mais tu peux lire un peu sur place, mais t’as parfois un peu la tête ailleurs pour lire et après, tu lis, c’est bien après. Avec le recul, tu lis un livre et tu vois... Je suis allé au Brésil en vacances il y a six mois et j’ai lu Amado, je ne sais pas si tu connais, c’est un auteur brésilien et j’ai lu trois, quatre livres après et c’est vrai qu’en lisant, j’ai retrouvé les lieux, les places qu’il décrit, les lieux dans lesquels j’ai vécu.

Donc, tu t’intéresses vraiment à l’aspect culturel de chaque pays .

Oui, j’essaie, oui. Mais sans, enfin, je ne suis pas à fond non plus, mais un minimum quoi.

Oui, c’est plus que juste aller en vacances, aller à la mer pendant les cinq jours que tu es en vacances et voir juste l’eau et la plage...

Non, c’est pas ça.

Justement quand tu fais ça, quand tu observes les gens, est-ce que tu essaies en plus de comprendre leur comportement ? Est-ce que t’essaies de dire, ah ben tiens, moi je ne fais pas comme ça, alors t’essaies de comprendre, tiens pourquoi est-ce qu’ils font comme ça ? Oui. J’ai l’exemple de... Il y a un truc qui m’a beaucoup choqué. Pendant mes études, je suis
parti en été faire un stage volontaire comme ça, un stage de volontariat, en Turquie. Donc, je suis dans un village, complètement à l’est de la Turquie, dans un bled paumé et là-bas, les gens en fait, on faisait un job environnemental, on rangeait des trucs, on nettoyait les parcs et tout ça et les gens, ils balançaient toutes les ordures partout, comme ça, tu vois, dans la flotte, on était dans un petit bateau et les Turcs jetaient, ils buvaient du Coca ou quoi et ils jetaient tout dans la rivière. Et après, on devait nettoyer un lieu avec des points de vue, une sorte de petit parc, sur la montagne, et ils jetaient tout par-dessus la barrière, ils jetaient tout ! Ils venaient et ils jetaient des trucs. Mais je me suis dit, mais enfin, c’est pas possible, c’est pas possible ! Qu’est-ce qu’ils font ? Et je me suis vraiment posé la question, mais qu’est-ce qui fait ça. Chez nous, c’est choquant !

Oui, c’est clair !

Et ça m’a beaucoup énervé. Une fois aussi, on a nettoyé tout un flanc de colline, comme ça, il y avait les yeux qui brûlaient en plus, ils faisaient brûler des trucs, on était là à nettoyer des trucs, à faire tout descendre et on était là à se demander ce qu’on allait en faire. C’était en été et donc la rivière était assez basse et il y a un mec de la commune, du village, qui est arrivé son bulldozer, qui a fait un trou dans le lit de la rivière, un trou d’un demi mètre de profondeur et on devait tout mettre dans le trou, tu vois. Moi, j’étais là, c’est pas possible quoi, ça m’a vraiment énervé. Après, j’ai réfléchi. En fait, tu réalisés que les autres, ils le font, c’est pas qui sont cons ou qu’ils le font de façon volontaire, ils en sont juste pas conscients ! Pour eux, ils ne sont pas éduqués à ça, ils n’ont pas eu l’éducation qu’on a aue au fil des années et en fait, tu retrouves ça aussi ici avec ces populations immigrées. Souvent, on parle de Forest, il y a énormément d’immigrés à Bruxelles et si on parle de Forest, on va dans le parc, dès qu’il fait beau, il y a tous les Magrébins qui viennent en pique-nique sur les pelouses, il y a une super ambiance etc. mais dès qu’ils partent, c’est le souk, ils laissent tout.

A oui, ils laissent tout.

Ils laissent tout et tu rencontres la même chose, ce sont des gens parfois qui viennent tout fraîchement d’arriver de leur pays et qui ne sont pas sensibilisés à ça. Et, au lieu de..., les gens à Bruxelles, les locaux, critiquent très facilement et ne comprennent pas ce comportement-là et en fait, je pense qu’il faut prendre un peu de recul et OK, c’est pas normal, je suis d’accord, il faut faire quelque chose, voilà, il faut un minimum d’éducation, mais c’est un peu notre rôle aussi. Ils sont là, bon... Et ça, ça m’a beaucoup marqué et j’ai réalisé à quel point on était très loin de la sensibilisation qu’il y a ici en Europe.

Toi, tu penses que c’est justement ces civilisations qui viennent ici, donc des Magrébins qui viennent immigrés ici, est-ce que tu penses que c’est le rôle du pays qui les accueille de leur apprendre les coutumes, justement ici à ne pas faire ça par exemple ou est-ce que c’est aussi à eux à se renseigner comme c’est eux qui viennent dans le pays ?

Oui, mais si eux ne sont pas conscients de ça, ils ne peuvent pas le faire, ils ne pourront pas le faire. Il faut un minimum d’intégration, voilà, mais le problème, c’est la quantité de gens qui a, mais ça, c’est un autre problème. C’est vrai qu’en Finlande, tout le monde dit..., tout fonctionne bien en Finlande parce que tous les immigrés sont bien intégrés, c’est génial, mais bon, ils acceptent X immigrés par an, je ne sais pas, mais la proportion est très basse. Ici, tu es dans une situation où Bruxelles attire les gens et on a du mal à contrôler. Il faut voir aussi... Moi, je suis contre le fait qu’on expulse les gens, mais il faut savoir maîtriser un peu la chose.

Oui et les intégrer et leur donner la possibilité de s’intégrer.

Aussi, les motivations, qu’on leur donne chacun mille euros et qu’ils font ce qu’ils veulent avec, et qu’il n’y a pas besoin de travailler, ça ne va pas aller. Mais voilà, je pense qu’il faut un équilibre.

Oui, ça va dans les deux sens. Comment est-ce que tu décrirais ton adaptation à Bruxelles en général. Très bonne d’après ce que tu m’as dis auparavant.

Oui, mais c’est pas facile au début. Même si c’est ta ville, ça dépend de la personnalité des gens. Il faut se faire un réseau, un cercle d’amis et moi, je sais que ça peut prendre du temps, si je ne
suis pas directement dans un milieu, comme l'université, par exemple, c’est vrai que par rapport à ça, je réalise quand je parle, que j’ai besoin de plus de temps. Je pense qu’il y a une différence, c’est assez intéressant d’analyser, parce qu’il y a des gens qui vont très facilement s’intégrer, s’adapter, c’est pas qu’ils s’adaptent, ils sont dans un milieu relationnel d’office et qui sont avec plein d’autres gens internationaux et ça leur va. Ils sont dans un milieu, tout le monde des stagiaires, ils rencontrent des gens très facilement et bon, soit tu es tout de suite dans le milieu et tu es intégrer, tu fais un stage à la Commission et tu ne rencontres que des gens qui sont arrivés en même temps, qui veulent rencontrer des gens, donc tu t’adaptes très bien, soit tu arrives et tu commences un travail, mais ta boîte est assez petite, tu ne connais pas grand monde et, je crois que c’était un peu mon cas, j’aime rencontré des gens, je sais que j’ai besoin de rencontrer des gens, j’ai besoin de relations plus approfondies...

Plus que juste au travail.

Oui. Et d’autres relations, plus... J’ai besoin de connaître plus les gens pour être à l’aise. Je suis social, il n’y a aucun soucis, je parle avec les autres, mais après j’ai besoin de plusieurs années parfois pour vraiment avoir de bonnes relations amicales, alors que je n’ai aucun problème d’intégration à prouver. Il y a d’autres gens qui se contentent de relations plus superficielles. Et ça, j’ai du mal, moi-même, j’ai besoin de plus de temps.

Pour vraiment fonder de bonnes relations amicales.

Oui et c’est là que je vais vraiment me sentir très bien, alors qu’au début, la première année, je voyageais tout le temps pour aller voir des amis, à gauche, à droite.

Alors, toi, tu penses que justement, ce genre de facilités ou non d’adaptation, c’est vraiment plus en fonction de ta personnalité, toi en tant que personne plus, je veux dire, que les expériences que tu aies pu avoir avant, c’est vraiment plus ta personnalité au final qui compte plus que si tu as déjà travaillé à l’étranger pendant dix ans avant, c’est en fonction de la personnalité de la personne.

De quoi, j’ai pas compris le début...

Le fait justement de t’intégrer complètement et te sentir vraiment bien, et donc certains prendront un mois, certains prendront deux ans et donc, pour toi, c’est plutôt une question de personnalité d’une personne à l’autre, plutôt que justement toutes les compétences dont moi je parle dans mon travail inter culturel, que tu peux construire avec tes expériences internationales, au final...

C’est les deux.

Parce que ta personnalité est touchée par tes compétences inter culturelles... si tu vois ce que je veux dire.

Oui, ben, c’est les deux, parce que je pense que si j’avais été complètement renfermé ( ?) uniquement sur ce que j’ai vécu en France, j’aurais pas pu être aussi social, je pense. Mais après, c’est important d’avoir des relations un peu plus longues, plus intenses, parce que c’est sur ça que se base l’amitié, par la suite, tu vois, et il faut vivre quelque chose avec les gens pour pouvoir après faire durer ta relation amicale. J’ai vécu en Angleterre, j’ai rencontré, j’avais une disons des relations superficielles pendant toute l’année, avec Erasmus. Tu rencontres des milliers de gens, plein de Français, bien sûr, et des gens de partout, et tu pars tous les soirs boire des bières avec eux, on est au moins trente là autour de la table, tu bois, tu déconnes, et par contre, voilà, c’est avec des Anglais aussi que j’ai passé de super moments, mais des relations qui perdurent encore aujourd’hui, je n’en ai que une, peut-être deux ou trois, avec qui je pourrais reprendre contact. Une, justement, cette fille japonaise que j’ai rencontré, on se voit régulièrement une fois par an, une ou deux fois par an, mais c’est la seule, sinon, les autres, c’est juste des gens avec lesquels je sais que je pourrais les revoir, mais on n’a pas de contact. Il y a des gens avec Facebook aussi. Tu peux analyser ça, mais tu ne vois pas ce qui se passe dans leur vie, sans vraiment...

Oui... être directement en contact avec eux.

Et j’ai gardé cette relation parce que vraiment j’ai vécu quelque chose avec cette personne
pendant un an, on a voyagé en Inde, plein de trucs en Angleterre, on a voyagé en Angleterre et on a chacun fait des efforts aussi pour voyager et pouvoir rendre visite à l’autre.

Dans le pays de l’autre.

Voilà. C’est vraiment un aller et retour, comme ça, un échange.

Un processus qui va dans les deux sens.

Oui, c’est comme ça, sinon dans l’amitié, c’est un peu difficile alors.

Oui, tout à fait. Donc, pour toi, l’amitié, c’est vraiment quelque chose d’important pour te sentir complètement intégré.

Oui, pour être moi-même, j’ai besoin de ça. Et rester comme ça dans les relations superficielles, ça ne me... j’ai un peu... Je trouve ça sympa sur le moment, mais ça ne suffit pas.

Oui, ça ne te suffiras pas au long terme.

C’est pour ça que comme si tu vois par exemple disons je pars, je me casse a Singapour, Shanghai ou quoi, heu il y a des risques, tu vois je sais que pour moi, d’autres gens sont moins comme ça mais je sais que pour moi il y des risques de difficulté d’adaptation, alors que je suis très international comme personne, parce que je suis moins dans le small talk et ça, tu vois, je suis moins la dedans et j’ai plus besoin de contenu, je suis assez réfléchi comme personne et j’ai besoin de contenu et d’avoir des discussions assez profondes, fin profondes entre guillemets, c’est important de déconner aussi, mais je déconne plus avec des gens que je connais bien que des gens que, et heu, donc ça c’est pas facile parce que tu ne peux pas être dans une discussion, et c’est pas spécialement du contenu, ça peut être aussi des discussions sur du relationnel, sur des choses personnelles, sur quelque chose de privé, voilà et heu... voilà

Et tu penses que si tu n’arrivais pas à obtenir ce genre de relations au bout d’un moment avec 2-3 personnes, est-ce que tu pense qu’à ce moment là tu aurais envie de retourner dans ton pays d’origine, fin France, Belgique, Allemagne ? Imaginons que tu arrives en Asie et que tu n’arrives pas à développer ce genre d’amitié

Si j’arrive pas au bout d’un an, oui, je rentrerais bien, ou partirais autre part, oui

Et jusque maintenant tu n’as jamais eu ce sentiment là ?

Non, non, à Bruxelles au début, je, j’ai eu du mal à créer mon cercle d’amis, mais heu j’avais, j’adorais la ville donc heu je savais que je pouvais construire quelque chose ici, tu vois

Oui d’accord, donc tu as pris le temps que ça a fallu et

Oui oui, la différence aussi relations personnelles deux personnes et un groupe. Tu vois, donc heu tu vois au travail j’ai un groupe de collègues, donc vraiment amis très très proche maintenant et heu en groupe c’est génial mais avec les personnes individuellement c’est pas toujours, tu vois j’ai une amie Sarah, une collègue Sarah et en groupe c’est toujours bien, ou à 3 c’est toujours super mais à 2, au bout d’un quart d’heure si on n’a rien, si on ne vie pas quelque chose, on part en voyage ensemble ou quoi, heu voilà on doit changer de sujet et heu

D’accord, en ce qui concerne tes performances en général au boulot, est-ce que tu penses que ton adaptation, ton intégration dans le pays influence ta performance au boulot ?

Heu, ouais, beh moi personnellement ça allait parce que ils sont francophones, donc j’ai pas eu trop de problèmes

Donc c’est vraiment au niveau de la langue, tu penses que ça pourrait changer ?

Non pas forcément parce que là où je travaillais avant, c’était une assez grosse boîte et donc on était dans cette ambiance assez francophone, par contre on avait une filiale néerlandophone tu vois, donc du coup eux, et il y avait un stagiaire qui avait fait 6 mois dans notre boîte et 6 mois dans l’autre. Et heu, et en fait, dans notre boîte c’était assez cool, on n’avait pas besoin d’arriver à 8h30, on pouvait arriver à 9, 9h15, on travaillait plus tard le soir, ça c’est typique français, francophone, on part à 6h, 7h le soir et il n’y a pas de souci et on se prend une bonne pause d’1h où on déconne un peu à midi tu vois, et on va prendre notre sandwich. Alors que dans l’autre boîte, néerlandophone, on arrive à 8h30, on mange à midi devant son ordinateur, son sandwich chacun derrière son ordi et on prend ¾ d’heure pour manger et on se casse à 4h30 tu vois, et ça ça change vraiment beaucoup et je pense que oui il faut vraiment s’adapter aussi à ça
Et donc tu penses que ça peut influencer tes performances finales ?

Ah oui est-ce que ça peut influencer tes performances, je pense que ça peut être déroutant au début, heu et moi, je sais que moi personnellement j’ai besoin de, le relationnel est assez important, les gens qui ne pensent qu’au travail et qui sont toujours dans le travail, le travail, le travail, ça me dérange tu vois.

Oui

Donc heu voilà et qu’il n’y a pas de moment convivial tu vois, ça je pense que ça pourrait me déranger. Après je ne dis pas que dans la boîte néerlandaise il n’y avait pas de convivialité, je pense, ça ne veut pas dire qu’il y ait une mauvaise ambiance entre les gens ou quoique ce soit

Oui tout à fait

Mais après est-ce que la performance, si c’est plus décontracté, peut-être que tu es moins performant, je pense que ça peut jouer, s’il y a moins de pression, je pense que ça peut jouer

D’accord, et heu avant de venir à Bruxelles, ou avant d’aller en Angleterre ou en Allemagne, est-ce que tu as reçu des formations interculturelles justement, avant d’aller dans un pays étranger, est-ce que tu as déjà reçu des formations officielles ?

Non, non

D’accord, et heu est-ce que tu penses que si tu en avais reçu ça aurait justement une influence sur ton boulot, sur ta performance au boulot ?

Je pense qu’il faut des formations introductives comme ça, à la méthode enseignée, donc à l’université, et à la culture heu bé c’est un peu lié quand même, tu vois en Angleterre, fin tu as vécu en Angleterre

En Ecosse

Oui en Ecosse, béh le système est complètement différent, fin par rapport à la France, le système est complètement différent, fin moi j’ai eu beaucoup moins de cours, et heu t’as beaucoup moins de cours mais tu dois t’investir beaucoup plus personnellement quoi, c’est complètement différent et ça je pense, en Allemagne, c’est encore complètement différent aussi, fin moi j’ai eu cours en allemand et en français par des profs allemands et des profs français quand j’étais à l’école et la méthode enseignée était radicalement différente, c’est vraiment dû à la culture du pays quoi. Et donc ça je pense qu’il faut peut-être informer les gens de ça et voilà, Allemagne si tu fais rien, si tu fais pas, on ne te demande pas de travailler, si tu veux rien faire, tu ne veux rien faire mais tu auras un mauvaise note tu vois, alors qu’en France il faut travailler pour arriver à l’examen final tu vois, il faut vraiment travailler à fond, en France on va te donner des échéances comme ça, les unes après les autres et tu fais tes trucs bien et après c’est bon.

Oui oui d’accord, ok, je pense que c’est, est-ce que tu es satisfait pour le moment justement de tes performances au boulot ?

Ca va oui

Beh voilà, je pense que j’ai fait plus ou moins le tour, [...] tu avais déjà entendu parler de compétence interculturelle ?

Heu non, mais c’est intéressant je trouve, oui c’est intéressant parce que faut l’acquérir c’est sûr, tu ne l’as pas forcément, c’est pas oui, mais heu ça se développe énormément, fin les gens en ont beaucoup plus maintenant avec heu Erasmus c’est un must, si tu l’as pas sur ton CV ben voilà... fin Erasmus ou une année d’échange ou quoi, ou une année à l’étranger et je pense que les gens, que les employeurs, même si c’est un job local qui ne nécessite pas forcément une expérience à l’étranger ou une autre langue, heu reconnaissent les avantages que ça peut avoir sur le relationnelle, sur tout ça. Je pense que tu peux faire la comparaison avec les scoutisme par exemple, tu vois et donc heu, il y a beaucoup d’employeurs qui, fin j’exagère peut-être une petit peu mais c’est quelque chose, ça dépend peut-être mais c’est quelque chose qui est souvent vu très positivement, parce que ça permet de développer des compétences heu d’initiatives de motivation et d’autonomie tu vois

Et donc ici comme on vit dans un monde de plus en plus interculturel et multiculturel, savoir
Oui oui, surtout en Europe maintenant, on est dans une Europe qui s’intègre de plus en plus même si on ne sait pas toujours trop où on va, c’est un peu acquis, nous notre génération, nos parents on bosser là-dessus, fin nos parents, la génération de nos parents à bosser là-dessus après la seconde guerre mondiale, alors que nous on considère ça comme quelque chose d’acquis, et du coup faut faire attention aussi qu’on ne détruise pas ça, parce que c’est vraiment quelque chose de très important et que, et qu’on a la chance d’avoir eu ça et maintenant qu’on est dans un monde qui devient complètement mondialisé,

Ben oui tout à fait

Donc heu tout est complètement inter dépendant comme ça

Oui oui, et bien voilà, merci beaucoup pour le temps. Fin de l’enregistrement

**Extra questions asked in an e-mail:**

- **Why did you choose to work somewhere else than in your native country?**
  - Because of a job opportunity but also personal wish to live abroad.

- **Do you consider yourself as an expatriate?**
  - No, for me an expatriate is someone who is send abroad by the national government or a company

- **What role do you think expatriation plays in your career development?**
  - => experience abroad, being able to adapt in a different environment, working culture, mentality etc.

- **Why did you choose to come to work in Brussels? (because of the country itself, because of the city, because of job opportunities.....?)**
  - job opportunity

- **Do you believe that there exist a sort of a European Nationality and European Culture?**
  - Yes but no one everyone feels like that. This European culture / Nationality has been strengthened in the past years through a European passports, opening of borders, ‘Brussels’ referring as EU capital, Erasmus, ability to work and live anywhere you wish in Europe, low cost travel etc. especially among young people.

  If you refer to a country or continent outside Europe, then we can definitely consider Europeans as a single block.

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**Interviewee E**

Meeting, introduction, signing of consent form

Do you speak Dutch?

Yes, I’m from the Netherlands so I speak Dutch

Nice, [explanation of the master]

What did you study?

Well, I did a master in law and politics of international security in Amsterdam, which is a combination of international relations and international law, so

ok, and so where are you working now?

Heu, at the moment I’m not, heu I graduated one year and a half ago and for one year I worked in a small consultancy, here in Brussels, after that I did the European commission traineeship, that’s heu DG home ???, working on internal security, it’s just around the corner here. Hum and that was till the end of February so now the last 40 days I’ve been, in prospect with my job applications

Do you plan on going back to the commission or?

Well, that would be interesting but It’s not that easy to get in there so at the moment I more
looking for consultancy policy analysis, communications, this kind of field. It’s not that I really
would not want to take a job at the commission, I mean it’s interesting but there’s a lot of
bureaucracy which is also a lot limiting and I think with smaller organizations you can be
sometimes more effective, at least for yourself

useless blbabal explaining I’m in collaboration with the Commission

I know someone who is doing the traineeship in EAC so I can bring you in touch with her and

yes it would be nice.....

So, what is your citizenship? Dutch?

Yes

Your native language(s)?

Dutch, only Dutch

What is your family background?

What do you mean with family background?

If you have multicultural family background, if you grew up in...?

No it’s all Dutch, at least the last 3-4 generations, I think I have one great great grandfather or
great great grandmother who was German but heu it’s all

How long have you been in Brussels?

In Brussels a year and a half, hum, but before I also lived in Italy for about 2 years in different
periods, then the Czech republic for about half a year for Erasmus, so

So you already have some international experiences

Yes

How long do you plan on staying here?

I don’t know, it depends a bit on, well if I find a job now, I would stay probably at least a couple
of years or more, hum I can also imagine going back to the Netherlands depends quit a lot on
the employment, but I could also imagine, I don’t know, going to a crazy place like NY or
Singapore, or Abu dhabi, hum but for the moment it’s most likely Brussels or the netherlands

Ok,

I first have to get out of this insecure situation so to say

Yes, of course! Which countries have you visited before?

Heu, quite a lot, hum most countries in Europe, not all of them, but most, hum like basically to
the East up to Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, hum I’ve been to Egypt,
morocco and the US.

Never in Asia?

Hum, I’ve never been to Asia, never been to Australia

Ok, hum and where did you work abroad? You already told me Italy and an erasmus

Yes, I did an Erasmus in Czech Republic and when I was 18 I worked in Italy for one year as an
au père, hum when I was like 20, I worked on a camp side for two months in Italy, hum I
studied Italian in Brugges and Bologna and I did a traineeship at the Dutch embassy in Rome
for half a year, so. And now I’m in Brussels for a year and a half

How many languages do you speak?

Hum well depends how well, but I speak 3 to 7 it depends

Ok which ones?

Dutch, English and Italian quite fluently and then well my French and German is pretty decent
hum I studied some Czech so I communicate a bit in Czech hum and I did Arabic for a year,
which, but it’s quite a difficult language so I don’t really speak it.

And why did you learn them?

Hum, I don’t know, heu I’m just interested in languages, I find it, I enjoy to find out how the
language work, what similarities is between one and the other, like 2 weeks ago I was in
Budapest to visit a friend of mine and then I was there for 5 days and I tried to pick up a bit just
by reading the signs and trying to think what does this mean for instance there were a lot of
buildings which said “Kiado”, so empty buildings which said “Kiado”, so I thought I would mean something like for rent or for sale and it turned out to be the case, I enjoy to try and analyse and break it down what could it means and see the link with other languages and this, because there are some words which are similar to other languages but then maybe spelled a bit differently and

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Hum, ok, I have some questions about more relational situation, can you socialize easily with locals from a country? Like either being here in Brussels or when you went to Italy

| Hum, I think, iin general it seems to be easier when you are abroad to socialize with the other foreigners than with the locals. Hum with the locals, it depends a bit, like in Italy I lived, in bologna, I lived with some Italian people so then hum it’s easier but still for instance in Roma, in Brugges, in this environment of international students, or heu international trainees, you socialize more with them than with the local people, for instance in Rome there I took a course in photography which was all with Italians so then I also hang out with them a bit. |
| Ok, hum, through your life did you build up any intercultural relationships that you still keep today? You still keep in touch, friendship, or whatever? |
| Yes, quite a lot actually, I think I’ve more foreign friends than Dutch friends, I think similar interests, similar interests in other languages, in other cultures, European affairs, world’s affairs, so and now there is facebook so it’s really really easy to |
| I know yes! |
| Yes, some of my good friends, they come from heu countries such as Kosovo, US, and heu Bulgaria, Cyprus and heu |
| And do you usually get the first contact through your work or for instance the Erasmus, or I don’t know? |
| Heu not that much, no it’s more from the, you are in the same peer group, like with students or with stagiaires together and you know, living the same experience and then amongst the people that are there, you find those that you have, that you related to, that you have a clic with and heu more then heu |
| Going alone in a bar and trying to |
| It’s not my best skills, like I can talk to people, hum but I have to have a starting point which I’m not really good at in a bar, but for instance an example would be that I would go to, I would be at a certain conference on a certain topic and then you can discuss the topic with the people after the conference but in a bar, I find it more difficult to know what to say and |
| Yes, yes of course, hum, how do you feel when you deal with culturally diverse people? What kind of emotions do you feel? And does it depend on people coming from different countries of origin or? |
| Well, yeah, it depends a lot on a different culture, like some people, but not only culture it’s also the personality in general like most of the people I hang out with are sort of use to move around in this international environment so they are quite adaptable and flexible I think. Hum but sometimes you feel someone is doing something weird and then heu, I think it’s more yes, more personal clic than |
| Culture? |
| Well culture makes also a difference because people have different cultural habits but you know sometimes people who come from countries that you think they are really different, heu, for instance maybe Balkan countries, Kosovo, Serbia, heu are quite similar actually and, well of course they have their traditions and their habits but it’s heu, and they may have different political opinion and so on, but in the end it shouldn’t be too much |
| So usually do you feel comfortable around culturally diverse people? |
| Yes I think the main point for me is whether they are genuinely interested, hum or whether they are more like superficial, like I don’t this temporary groups, you have some people that |
you really feel, that you really relate to and there are some that hum, you don’t really care about them in the sense that you know that after the period you will probably not see them anymore and it, yeah, after it doesn’t really matter, but it’s heu

Yes, hum do you usually have more positive or negative relationship with people from abroad, from different cultures than yours? Have you ever had any conflict with someone because of cultural differences or conflict, like not fighting but even just different opinion which maybe lead to a conflict or?

Not really, I don’t think for a, no, in general I don’t usually have conflict, hum, I manage to avoid them. You know sometimes it’s just, such a friendship can just fade away if you don’t have, hum a bound to start with, of course sometimes I have political discussions that I don’t agree with certain vision that other people have but I think in general I’m quite flexible, hum I think I’m relatively good at reasoning from a different perspective, like imagining heu, I don’t have many opinions about many things, any topic, because I always feel that I can reason it in one way but I can also see the opposite point of looking at it

So you can understand the point of

So I don’t have many big convictions, so to say

Ok, hum, ok, when was the last time, if it ever happened that you were talking with a host national from a country and you felt like you were completely not on the same page, like you had different perspective, you had different opinion, maybe you spoke a completely different language, even though you used the same language as itself, like you really weren’t on the same page?

Hum, I don’t really recall one of those moments

Ok, and do you think it’s because you usually try to understand what people are trying to tell you and so you try to

Yes, or maybe the people I have been with from other countries are too similar to me, maybe there is already something like a sort of European, maybe not a European culture but something, as the same as you can say there is a sort of Eurolanguage, a sort of language that people in Brussels here speak and they understand each other, and it’s not British English, it’s not American English, it has some Commission blabla, eurospeak, I think there is also, maybe some of the most shops, national trades, that sort of got out of this behavioural patterns, hum people are maybe not some of their extremities, hum so I would have a real example

Ok when was the last time, because you told me that usually you demonstrate flexibility when you talk with people, when was the last time that you demonstrated flexibility and could you give me an example, practical situation?

Well for instance when I was working for the Commission I was working for 2 different people, like one of them was British and the other one was Italian and with the British one, he gave me a lot of responsibilities, heu so I was sort of responsible for myself and although I was a trainee he, heu told me just to go and heu for instance I had a meeting with consultants where I was sort of representing the Commission there and he would, you know give me supervision once in a while, I would come to him with questions, but he would, he wouldn’t discuss all the details with me and allow me to do the work by myself, and with my Italian colleague, it was a lot different, there, every email I sent I have to CC her, hum every piece I wrote I had to discuss it in detail with her, she gave me a lot of guidance in everything, hum she made me once make phone calls to people, heu only by email I had to CC her; so hum, like both, from my British colleague I was really happy to, you know have the feeling of confidence from him and in my work, and with the Italian colleague, it was good to discuss in detail and really, you know, sometimes it was, sometimes it was, with the British one I felt a bit left alone so to say and with the Italian one I felt like she was controlling and checking on me a bit and then, you basically have to adapt to their personal styles and I really think it’s also something cultural, that’s what they also say about, you know about French and Italian in the Commission who are controlling everything and the Brits and maybe the Dutch and Scandinavian countries who are
a bit more loose and give you a bit more space. And I think that it has to do for that, the type of societies probably the Netherlands and Britain are a bit more egalitarian and Italy and France, they have some features of more hierarchical, like clients lists, heu lists systems, like it’s too, but I think there are some truth in it and heu you have to accept that and heu

And in your personal life, in your private life, do you have any example, like you had to be
flexible with people?

Hum, well, I’m not sure whether it’s a good example but heu, I’m not sure whether it’s about cultural diversity or about personal, I’m living now with hum, I’m sharing my house, I’ve two flatmates, one of them is Slovak, the other one is Dutch, so the Slovak I already know from my master, so she is sort of a friend of mine so I was happy to, you know I thought it would be nice to live together, but now, she is going to work and when she is at home, she is not very sociable, she is mostly, she is in her room a lot and heu talking with her family and her boyfriend back home and I’m sure if heu, I don’t see her often in our common, in heu the living room that much. I think it’s a bit of a pity but I’m not going to tell her, well, just, yeah, I’m not going to tell her to spend time with us together or, I’m not sure whether this is an example but

Yes yes, and do you think this is because she is not well adapted, adjusted in the country here?

I think she is having a bit of difficulty, hum with the new experience, I think she started to date her boyfriend like 1 month before she came here, that was quite new and heu, but she has experience living abroad, she lived in Amsterdam for the master and before she has been living in Italy and in Cyprus so she has, but I don’t know, for some reason know it’s a bit different

Ok, hum when was the last time you adjusted your behaviour, in order to avoid a conflict or to offend a person, or?

Hummm

If you ever had to do that of course

Yeah, let me, well there is an example, there is a friend of mine from the Czech Republic, like, I don’t know it’s a bit of crazy story, she is not only a friend of mine, there was some interest, hum but then that faded away, she also has a boyfriend for 3 years so that’s complicate the matter as well. Hum and I could sense that if I would say some things about something that annoys me from her, that would end up in a conflict and I don’t want that, so heu, I’m sometimes a bit annoy by the way she is treating me, like not getting in contact with me, unless she needs something and then she sends like a one line text or a one line email asking about the information, so

But you don’t say anything in order to avoid to make her mad or,

Yeah, because then I end up in a fight, I had some fights with her and hum, we are not really good in, and you know with some people you have good fights, like you have an issue and then a conflict and then it sort of solved it out there, it’s dealt with, but I can’t fight with her, which is, yeah, which sometimes is difficult. I think she is a difficult person of course, but it’s not

Ok good, and have you ever had to change/adjust your dress? Your way of dressing in a situation?

Well the only thing is hum, when going to a catholic church in Italy, you make sure that your knees are covered, that you are not wearing shorts but that’s, yeah, kind of normal. Also when I was in Egypt and Morocco, I tried to hum, make sure I was, but it’s, yeah, not show too much skin, but you know, and that’s the only experience, I think it’s a sign of respect but for the rest no, like I wear a suit when I go to an interview or to work at the Commission I mostly was wearing suits but then sometimes when I felt like it I also dressed a bit more informally. It’s quite, it depends a lot on the environment, like some of the, I think in some of the DG, the dress code is a bit more easy than for instance in DG competition or with the legal service. But those are some of the unwritten rules that you can sense a bit heu normally

Ok so you adapt according to what you see. Hum, ok, do you use or do you know any strategies to reduce stress when interacting with other cultures?

Well I think it’s important to talk with the people, and ask if it happens that you don’t
understand or, hum try to understand something about the history, hum it’s not really an answer of the question about stress but I think, yeah try to understand how a country works, and how things work, how they do things and that will help you to, you know plant in so to say, to avoid conflicts and stress

Ok, and are you aware that you do like that, like when you change your behaviour, or when you are flexible with someone? Are you aware of those processes that you do?

No, it’s not something, I’m not consciously thinking oh now I have to be flexible and give them some space and, I’m from the Netherlands and they often say about Dutch people that they are hum quite direct, heu that they can be impolite, hum and that they say just some things when they feel it, I still have that a bit.. hum and it can offend people but it’s also good in the sense that what you see is what you get, it’s sort of, there is a form of honesty and one of the things like this, like most is hypocrisy, people who are acting differently than they are, it’s not always appropriate, sometimes it’s also being superficial, it’s also I think they can still genuinely think what they are saying but then on a different moment they have completely different idea or feeling and I think that with Dutch people there is more hum, consistency in how they feel about certain people or certain things. So that is something which sometimes can be difficult for foreigners, because they are not always used to it, it doesn’t always happen in every society, in Italy there is a lot of theatre maybe but in the end you want to stay friends with everybody, and I think in the Netherlands that’s less the case, if you don’t like someone, a Dutch person will be more, will more easily say that or, make it clear

So you don’t follow blindly some written rule or some stuff that you may have read?

Well I try to adapt but I also want to, you know, I want to stay myself, I have certain convictions and I don’t want to act to be different person than I am, because I think it’s not fair to people, to myself in the end.

Yes, so it’s more about trying to find a balance between,

Yes,

Ok, hum, have you ever had to resolve a cross-cultural conflict, a misunderstanding between either two people or even with you and someone, have you ever had to resolve such a conflict?

Hum,

That happened because mainly of cultural issue or different?

I don’t have an example right now, sometime I am mediating or trying to explain to people what other people think, like the primary example, it doesn’t have to relate to any culture issue, is to my parents. My father has his logic, and he doesn’t understand the way my mother is reasoning, and the other way around so when they have conflict, when they have a fight they are not really talking to each other, like my father is making his point and my mother is reasoning is reasoning in her way and from her perspective and they don’t really communicate so sometimes I’m translating what my dad is saying to my mother and the other way around, they don’t like that at all. They really, I think it’s one of the primary reasons for a conflict I have with my parents, because it’s, so I really have to stop interfering with them, but that’s something I can also do in other environment, like try to ask questions to people and understand what they feel about certain things and try to contribute to the process of solving the issues

Ok, hum, do you ever reflect on the impact of you behaviour, or your action when you deal with people. Like sometime I don’t know maybe you did something and maybe you think after you shouldn’t have done that?

Yeah,, I think I constantly reflect on everything I do, on everything I say. Which is quite tiring by the way. Hum no I think I shouldn’t have done or say this and that, it was really stupid that I did this, like for instance with the fight I was having with the Czech girl I just told you about and afterwards I’m ok, but sometimes I also feel I don’t really know what I could have done to change it.
But then you try to learn from maybe your mistakes?

Yeah but you know, I think there are 2 things, for instance the action that is the reason for the conflict which is one, which is doing something stupid mostly, and then the fight itself and the things you say in the fight and in the end if you do not the action that creates the conflict in the first place, then you do not end up in a fight.

Yes yes, true. I have some questions about more your personality traits, especially that you told me that personality traits is really important. How do you think you are perceived by others? How do they perceive you you think? And do you think it's related to your nationality maybe? So some people would have some stereotypes about Dutch people?

Mmmhh they might, not necessarily because you know for some people I’m the only Dutch person they know so I am sort of the basis on which they forge their ideas about the Netherlands and Dutch people I think they think I’m very serious, which to some extend is true, like I try to do things, to take the things I do seriously, and do them well. Hum, some people also share my sense of humor, which is not the case with everybody but then yeah, my personality what else, well some people think I’m very well organized, very disciplined which is not really the case on heu, I’m getting a bit lazy and unfocused in this month, like for instance I have a sort of target for myself, like I want to do 2 job applications, in a day, and then I might end up playing games on the internet and hum, not doing my job applications. And it’s, but I think it’s also this phase, this month and a half, is a bit different than I usually am, like when I have a job, when then you know someone is paying me to do something so then I really want to do it well. So now I’m a bit irresponsible so to say

Hum do you have the feeling to belong to any particular culture group? Or culture in general?

I think, yeah the European youth, hum, cosmopolitan European youth, like I told you before, like you have this Euro speak, Euroenglish,, this language that you know, maybe an example, when you go on Erasmus and you’ve people from Spain, and Denmark, and Germany and hum France and they all speak English together, and they understand each other perfectly and then there is a British guy and you can’t follow him, because the pronunciation of the language is so different, so I think there is some yeah, subculture, if you want to call it subculture of this group of trainees, young Europeans, young professionals, and that’s probably one I sort of, it’s new, people are living there and there

And do you think you are feeling more European than Dutch itself now because of your international experiences?

Hum, I probably do, there was a phase I wanted to be Italian which I’m not and I’m very not Italian unfortunately, I wish I was more, no I’m not really sure, but it also has good things being Dutch, but I think two years ago I was more positive about the Netherlands, I’m not saying Europe is great and EC and the EU are solving everything in the best way , hum but I have more support for what is happening here than what’s happening in the Netherlands at the moment. Hum I’m not that satisfied with my government and mostly with the lack of long term vision to tackle essential issues on labour market, housing markets, pension systems, this kind of topics, and sustainability, how to deal with energy crisis for the 10-15-20 years, so that’s why I sort of not reject, I don’t have a lot of trust in Dutch society at large. SO

Ok, do you consider yourself as a truly global citizen or an international vagabond?

Yeah, hum, well I think you know, I always used to think I could live anywhere, hum, I still think so but I will have to realize that Europe is something different from US or from Asian countries so if I wanted to go to, NY is probably European city, culturally, like I’ve been there only for a week, but heu, hum, but I think, for instance if I wanted to go to the United Emirates Arab, or Eastern Asia, hum even though I would probably end up in international expat communities it would be hum, yeah a cultural shock, yeah it would be a new environment, it’s also a bit what I’m looking for, I would find it interesting to do something completely new and to start a new adventure in a completely different, you know, after Italy, the Czech Republic was easy, Brussels, it’s sort of the same as the Netherlands except that it has a lot of strikes and
unorganized super market and it’s a bit messy city and it has some hills and it’s not really made for biking, although I am biking here

Really?
Yes, someone has to started.

Good! Ok, so how would you now characterize you main personality traits? Maybe some characteristics that help you usually to deal with culturally different people and?

Well I think I try to do things well and to reach some things to an outcome that is useful, and at the same time I think I do not take myself too seriously, I try to hum, throw in some jokes, hum some sarcasm, irony, which is also something Dutch people enjoy, and not everybody does, hum so if people have a similar sense of humour then it mostly works, if not, it can be a bit difficult, but, but I don’t have to be friend with everybody! I can you know, there are some people more important

Yes, well I think you cannot be friend with everyone anyway

No
And do you think you are tolerant towards people?
Hum pretty much, yes,

Is there some situations you would be less or more? Depending on the culture of someone? Could you think of an example or?

Well, I would respect people’s opinion but if I don’t agree then I would hesitate saying that, for instance I remember having a discussion half a year ago, with an Italian girl, who turned out to be a bit racist. Hum supportive of the ??? and heu then I got a bit suborned on the discussion and make my point quite but the most people I meet are people who are living in the same environment you know and the same, they have open-minded attitude

Do you think you are just when you are judging people? Like you are fair? Or do you ever judge people?

Well I think everybody does, like you have a certain vision and idea of someone when you meet them the first time

And does it depend sometimes on the culture or is it more

An example is, like hum a friend of mine when I met her the first time I thought she was sort of a strange environmental hippie dressing some kind of clothing that I wouldn’t really, hum advise people to wear, but you then you find you have things in common in other things, she is a really good friend of mine, I really like her and she is quite powerful but sometimes I’m like what the hell are you doing, what the hell are you wearing and that’s heu

Ok, so then here you try to be flexible and let her

Yeah but you know I think in the end it’s about what connects you more than what separates you

True

Like she may also think I’m too serious wearing my shirts and for instance she is veaggan, I’m not but she doesn’t, she wouldn’t mind if I’d become veaggan but she is not the missionary saying, so she is open in that, so we accept each other particularities so I think it’s part of the reason why we are good friends

Do you think it’s easier to get friends or to interact with people from some culture? Or ?

Hum, maybe not, no I wouldn’t , well for instance I think an example could be, when I was living in brugges, there were people from North Korea, and they grow up in such a different society, hum I find it a bit more difficult to get friends with them and also with some of the Chinese people there. Heu because there is something of a different mindset so maybe, yeah, Eastern Asia, it’s also, you know I think you find people that are closer to you so there I was hanging our mostly with Norwegian guy, and American guys and then the Japanese were amongst them, the Chinese were amongst them but like I dated a Chinese girl for some time so it’s not necessarily a cultural issue. Maybe the fact that they stay together is a cultural issue because the difference is too big but
Ok, hum, as a result of your international/intercultural experiences, do you feel change yourself? Do you think that your identity has changed?

Yeah, well definitely, hum 10 years ago, it’s already 10 years ago, 9 years ago, I went abroad for the first time for a longer period so, hum it’s part of growing up, because then I was 18 years old so I was quite young and I still had to become an adult and over the years I’ve growing up in this international environment, so it’s something that comes with that, so it has definitely changed me. And I think I also sort of find my place there, hum, I didn’t always enjoy highschool, hum I’m not saying I’m always enjoying where I am now but it’s more, it’s a place where you know, you can discover languages, and discover many traditions of different countries and find people to, yeah with similar attitudes, so yes

Have you ever heard of the term intercultural competence?

Yes, I have some clue, hum I image it must be with how to deal with people from a different cultural background in a working environment, personal setting so

And what kind of competence do you think you would need to be able to?

Well I think you should, well the open-minded, tolerance, flexible, hum to notice when something is strange for someone of doesn’t make sense to them, hum be able to talk and communicate and explain why you do things in a certain way.

And do you think that your international experiences helped you to develop such competences?

Of course, of course yes, yes

Hum, when you go abroad do you usually learn the norms and taboos of the culture of the country? Like the do’s and the do not?

Well, I try to understand some things

Do you ever read books, articles

Sometimes yes but also for instance I read the travel guides and but for instance you know that in the Arabic country homosexuality is a taboo, that can also be a reason to start talking about it and to, because I think it’s ridiculous to judge people because of their sexual preferences and, hum when I was in Morocco I was visiting a friend of mine, who is gay, his parents don’t know. He is living in France now so he has the opportunity to have a boyfriend and to see what is out there and try to make the best out of it, but when I was visiting I did have a conversation about homosexuality with his father and he felt like ‘ah what are you doing, don’t go there!’ I kept it respectful, like I didn’t say that heu, he wasn’t too harsh but it was, it is a taboo subject it was a bit uncomfortable for them but I felt it was important so

But still you brought up the subject

Yeah, I don’t know, I don’t remember all the details of the conversation also it was in French so that was, I didn’t speak French very well at the time so you know that can also be, that can also make it easier because you know, you can ‘oh yeah I’m sorry I don’t really speak french’ so I can’t really explain what I think you know

Hum, so if you learn, If you read about the culture do you use what you read or you also try to see how it is really going on in the reality?

Well I think in the end it’s about common sense, so I try to apply common sense

So you read but you also observe and try to see how it really is

I think so

Ok, hum when abroad do you really grow an interest in interacting with host nationals? Or like here for instance in Brussels do you prefer to stay within the expat community or?

Well, I think for most people I would like to have more Belgian friends and to know more people who are really coming from here but often it’s sort of a separate world, like in the Czech Republic I think I have one or two Czech friends, in Italy a bit more because I was in an Italian family so it was easier there, but hum, probably it’s the same for you in Tilburg, you mostly hang out with the international people of your program and heu it’s probably a bit more difficult to get in touch with locals. I try to do that by, but Brussels is so international, it’s
heu easier to find the international communities. What I did is I tried not to be too much on the European commission trainee thing, like I tried to join some other organizations, some other place to meet people who have a different perspective, outside that bubble.

And do you grow interest in the culture of a country? Do you try to learn stuff from the history, the language, tradition?

Well I try to understand some things. In Belgium it’s a bit easier because one of the language is the same and there is to some extent a common history with the Netherlands hum, but also in Italy I try to understand their traditions and all

Heu, and how would you characterize, describe your adaptation in Brussels in general?

You feel well adjusted, comfortable you feel well... ?

Well yeah I think so

Have ever thought of returning home?

Well but it’s more about things that, well first of all the insure situation I’m in now but there are some things that annoy me, sometimes they are related to the public transport here, hum, but also to Brussels to some extent is a bit of a messy city, hum and what really annoys me it’s the supermarkets, I think the supermarkets they are unorganized, often you can’t see how much something costs and as a Dutch person I’m very pennywise and I want to know how much something costs before I buy it and the Dutch is completely different like if you go to Albert hein’s it’s very structure, you always have something which is discounted so that is. And the cost of living is a bit more expensive here than in the Netherlands I think

Really? In Brussels maybe?

Yes in Brussels, and the salaries in Brussels are a bit lower because there is a lot of competition as well, hum like everybody here has done one or two masters and speaks 3,4,5 languages and heu, has done traineeships here and traineeships there

Hum, just a few questions about your performance in general, even if you don’t have a job right now you can still relate to the previous one. Do you think that your adaptation in the country or in the work place influences your performances at work?

Well, yeah of course it does, like if you don’t understand you colleagues, you are going to have a hard time working there. Hum yes so , yeah, If you can’t relate to them, if you can’t communicate, if they don’t know what to expect from you, if you don’t know what they are looking for, then yes, it will

Ok, and hum, did you ever receive any intercultural training before a job abroad or Erasmus?

No nothing

You kind of did all your training by yourself?

Yes I think so

You learned from your own experiences?

Yes

And, hum, do you consider yourself as more self-initiated expatriate in comparison with traditional expat sent by their company?

Yes,

So It was a choice right from the beginning

Yes, yes there was never someone who told me we want you to go to that country and do that, it’s heu

And do you think there is a different between people who go abroad because they want to and people who are sent my their company?

I can imagine that they have more difficulty, like you come from the US and you are asked to go to, heu the business in Indonesia or Zambia, and you haven’t really consciously chosen to go to this country then it can be, yes, you probably have then a different experience than someone who goes there by own choice, because they want themselves

And it would maybe influence on their performance you think?
I can imagine, it depends, well you know not necessarily, if you enjoy the place, if they like it, if they well have a job that they feel they are doing well, that is worthwhile to them, probably they will perform well, but if they have I don’t know issues with the climate, with the culture, the food and not having chosen to go there themselves, then it probably will create problems.

Do you know anyone who has this kind of problem? Who didn’t adjust in the country?

Where there are some people who don’t like Brussels, but I’m not really sure whether they really don’t like Brussels, it’s also sort of, you know to point out the negative, like you always have these conversation about how do you like Brussels and you have the yeah I like this and that but there is this issue

So it’s more about the city than feeling well adjusted?

It’s also what, hum, what other people expect you to feel about the city. Like there is sort of the cultural reasons why you really like Brussels as an amazing city, like you are not taking seriously if you do, the same if you live in some ghetto, people will judge you for living in Anderlecht or molenbeek or Saint Gilles, you are supposed to live in the European area, or Etterbeck or Ixelles, that’s when you are, and if not you are living far away and you are so different, I’m making it bigger than it is just to make the point

Ok good. So for you do you think it’s really the language that enables you to adapt well to a country?

I think there are 2 things, hum if you look at, another topic we haven’t spoken about is the integration of minorities from different countries and then the Netherlands is an example, hum, basically from the 60’s, 70’s, 80’s, we didn’t have any integration policy, then in the 90’s, 2000’s we woke up and we noticed we have this growing minority of mostly Muslim origin, who doesn’t speak Dutch. Then we decided we have to teach Dutch to everybody and they will be fine. Now we are noticing that we have for instance 3rd generation Moroccan or Turkish people who speak Dutch but they are still “creating problems” hum, I’m not saying it’s only minorities creating problems, but sometimes they are creating problems so I think it’s about 2 things, it’s about language, but the most important thing, it’s employment like if you are doing something, if you earn money, hum it will really help you to integrate and it will be something that prevents you of creating problems, because if you work 40 hours a week, you’re just tired and you don’t have the energy to be in the streets and to

So it’s important to get a job and be active in the country you go to?

Yes you know to have a job and maybe be active in civil society organizations, or sports teams, political parties... so I think we always, we used to have this vision hum language is the key to integration but I think language alone is not enough, it’s about language and employment and be part of society and language is one important factor. Basically what they are saying now is what you hear now is that 30 years ago the immigrants were working but not speak dutch, no they speak dutch but they don’t work and

So it all goes together and trying to find a balance

Thank you very much.... End of interview.

Extra questions asked in an e-mail:

**Why did you choose to work somewhere else than in your native country?**

I don’t really know - probably because I like foreign languages and I enjoy being in contact with people of a different nationality. I feel that often they’re more open minded and that I can relate to them more easily.

**Do you consider yourself as an expatriate?**

Probably I meet the definition, given that I am living outside of my home country. I wouldn’t really describe myself in this term, though.

**What role do you think expatriation plays in your career development?**
No clue whatsoever. Might be a basis (and getting back home later), or a continuum (I might be working abroad for a loooong time)

Why did you choose to come to work in Brussels? (because of the country itself, because of the city, because of job opportunities.....?)

Because it’s a European city. I felt it was the right place for me to speak those languages. It’s conveniently different from my home country, The Netherlands, and conveniently similar and close.

Do you believe that there exist a sort of a European Nationality and European Culture?

There is no European nationality or culture. I think the very notion of Europe is characterised by being very diverse: united in diversity. Of course, there are people who have something European in their identity. But I believe identities exist next to each other; you can have a European, Dutch and Amsterdam identity at the same time.

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<th>Interviewee F</th>
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<tr>
<td>[Intro + ordering drinks]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you speak French?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heu no, just enough to order and but heu not enough to consider myself French speaker no</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yeah, where are you from?</td>
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<tr>
<td>It’s complicated because I’m heu, my parents are German but I was born and I grew up in South Africa. Hum so I’m a bit of everything</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes I supposed so there is always, most people think it’s the simplest question where you from but I heu, it’s a little more complicated for me</td>
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<tr>
<td>And how long did you live in South Africa?</td>
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<td>Most of my live, I spent heu, until I was 16 and then I moved to Italy for about 4 years, I finished high school there and then moved to Germany to study and then straight off after university I moved to Belgium. After my degree, 2-3 months later I moved to Belgium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why?</td>
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<td>I don’t know it’s ehu, I knew the job and so that’s why I ended up coming here. I heu I studied politics, hum and heu finding a job in this, somehow related to my degree is a little bit difficult in Germany so I applied for a few internships and I end up coming to a consultancy in Brussels and then I sort of, and that was 4 years ago so</td>
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<tr>
<td>So you work in a consultancy?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hum, not anymore, hum now I work for a trade association, hum it’s an ICT lobby group. We represent part of companies, many big American companies</td>
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<td>Signing consent form + explaining that it’s all gonna be confidential,...</td>
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<td>Do you have French roots? (seeing his last name)</td>
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<td>No, my step father he’s Italian but his father was French, hum that’s why he has a French surname, so *** and *** is the name of my biological father</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ok, so, what is your citizenship?</td>
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<tr>
<td>German</td>
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<tr>
<td>But you were born in South Africa?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, well I have a South African citizenship, hum but I also have a German one and a German passport, which helps me to be able to work in Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, ok, your native language(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hum, English and German</td>
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<td>[Irrelevant small talk]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you understand when they speak to you (luxembourguese)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not everything, but a fair amount, there are some differences!</td>
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<tr>
<td>[Irrelevant small talk]</td>
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Well anyway, hum so you told me you’ve been here in Brussels for 4 years and how long do you plan on staying?

That’s open ended, I mean I would, I would move anytime I could but I’m also perfectly happy staying here, it’s heu,

So will it depend on job opportunity or?

Yes, job, personal whatever comes in. at the moment I don’t have any plans to be so we’ll see what happens

Hum, have you ever worked abroad before?

For me abroad doesn’t really, it’s difficult since I am such a mix, I’ve worked in South Africa, I’ve worked in Germany, I work in Belgium, I’ve worked in England. Hum now which in between South Africa and Germany should I consider abroad... hum but I suppose yeah, I worked in the UK

Yes, in different countries so, even if it’s not considered as abroad for you, different cultures and

Yeah

Hum, how many languages do you speak?

So German and English are my mother tongues, I have a, I speak a little bit of Italian, well my Italian is ok, it could be better considering I lived here for four years but I haven’t spoken it in years so I speak a bit of Italian as well.

Ok, why did you learn them?

Well, German and English because simply, South Africa is an English speaking country, hum and I went to normal school and I grew up in English speaking and German because my parents are German so they spoke German to me.

And do you grow interest for languages when you go to a country?

Hum, I do, my big problem is that I don’t have much tenancy when it comes to languages, I try, I mean I take French class but I heu, considering that I already do speak different languages, I have not tenancy learning languages. But I do try

Hum can you easily with people from a different culture than yours?

Yes, hum pretty easy because I also have lived in so many different countries, hum I can of grew up in between two great different cultures, hum but, Anglo-Saxon and Germanic, so hum I heu I kind of easily find my way into

And do you think that you developed specific abilities to be able to interact with people from different cultures thanks to your youth and?

I think heu the fact is as myself don’t have a single own culture, hum I don’t, maybe I’m a little more open-minded, hum normally you tend to define your own culture through others, through differences, but because I’m such a fruit salad if you like, hum it’s, hum, I think it is easy for me to, I get the certain differences, how things work, how people perceive things, how people do things, hum and especially in Brussels it’s massively useful, if you can because it’s such a big mix and you work with people from all around Europe every single day and you do tend to adapt according to which person you are working with.

Yes

They do things like different

And so this flexibility, did you really gained I from your international experience in general?

Yes, absolutely, hum,

Hum you talked about culture, how would you define your culture then? Your identity? On what basis would you define it?

I don’t know for me it’s difficult because as again, since I don’t, I have, a lot of Germans don’t consider me as German because I never grew up there, hum when I speak German, you can hear an accent or you can tell that I’m not a native because I don’t speak a dialect, hum, South Africa wouldn’t also consider me a proper South African because my parents were first generation immigrants if you like so hum, so for me it’s very difficult, it don’t really have a
specific culture, I borrow from some things I learned from German, they way German culture I can identify with and I feel comfortable with, but equally so I feel myself massively Anglo-Saxon. Hum or South African because that was the main culture released in my younger years. Hum so you find, I’m not a classical South African, I’m not a classical German, I’m kind of a mix of both

And do you take also other stuff from other cultures that you encountered?

Hum, well I mean, yeah a little bit, because as I lived in Italy there are a few things that I hum, may have adopted maybe more subconsciously, hum than consciously, maybe little things that I may do or say and Italians are, hum but if I did some other culture things it’s also more subtle, more hum, without me consciously saying well I like this so I’m gonna take it

Ok, it’s more unconsciou. Heu did you develop intercultural relationships through your life and are you still able to maintain them?

Heu what do you mean?

Like friendship, or with people from anywhere,

Actually, yeah actually my closest friends are, even when I was living in Germany, I didn’t have many German friends, my closest friends well all non German, heu they were people coming from Afghanistan, Turkey, heu,

Like the international students?

Heu no they were all hum, German, they were living in Germany, their parents were living in Germany but heu Germany is also a quite large immigrant community, heu, but they would still distinctly, they weren’t Germany but they lived and grew up in Germany.

Ok, hum how do you feel when you deal with culturally diverse people, do you have any kind of emotions, specific feelings?

So people who are just different from me?

Yes

Hum how I feel about that? Y

Yeah,

Hum I think it’s actually really interesting, I heu, maybe because I’m such a fruit salad, I enjoy hum and heu I really enjoy actually dealing with culture, with other way people do and I mean I’ve learned, I dealt with so many countries that I’ve I think I’ve got also quite good at mastering how to deal with different people, from heu,

And could you think of maybe a country, a person from a country with who it was completely different? You didn’t really get along and maybe it was because of her or his country?

Hum, hum, I have maybe a little bit more difficult and it’s maybe also because I lived there as well, getting along with Italians people, it’s heu, but I don’t think, maybe it have to do with my own culture things but more with my own personality, I find a lot of them quite loud which I heu tend heu and sometimes I tend to, I get a little bit more irritate sometimes by Italians than,

And how did you deal with it?

You just deal with it, I mean you heu you do what you need to do, to get done what you need to get done, and heu, I mean always depending on heu if it’s a professional capacity, hum you just focus on the professional work and you ignore the things that irritates you, and probably also on the personal level as well, I mean, if they were irritate me because of their culture, I would hum, in a situation you have to do something and you just do it, hum I wouldn’t not engage with someone because I can’t deal with their culture that’s heu, yeah

So you try to be flexible?

Pragmatic, heu

Hum, is that really German being pragmatic, well organized?

Well I’m massively disorganized hum and actually most people don’t, a lot of non German they don’t see me as typical German they would consider me as different, I mean I, when I see a lot of German especially around here, it becomes far more apparent, how German are like than when I was living in Germany because there were Germans interacting with German so , but
when you see interacting with other culture, I can more distinctly tell the German out of them, hum and I realized more that I’m not like that, hum I think those things, I’m far more South African

Yes, [small talk irrelevant]

Anyway, heu, ok so usually you have more positive interaction with divers people?

Yes

You couldn’t think of any negative situation at work or in your personal life?

Hum no, but then again I mean, I often don’t attribute it to, if I have negative experience, with a person from a different country, most of the time I attribute it to the person’s personality and not necessarily because they are culturally hum, different, hum I noticed, I was travelling through China for a few months when I was student, and they I could realized that culturally they have lot more differences to say heu Europeans and they do notice the difference and you have to adapt more to it because they also have a different way of going about things, they have a different logical process and getting from A to B or from A to C you go A,B,C, maybe they do , they would sometimes go by and you sometimes kind of have to, there was the only time where I was more challenged, they eventually got there, but not necessarily the same way that I would normally have gotten to, or more Europeans, more Western cultures would have got to that

And so then did you demonstrate flexibility towards;..?

Well, yes, well as long as it got to the target, how they got there I mean I don’t heu

So do you try to understand sometimes why they do it like that?

At the beginning I didn’t quite realize whey things were just to make sense hum and did was partly a language issue but the logic is normally, even if you speak with a person from a different language, and you kind of use few words, but if you kind of have to same logic, the same way of doing things, then you kind of get each other, you understand the other persons. There there was not always, it didn’t quite understand, especially with the getting how they were, where they were going, but eventually, I kind of realize that they have a different, heu that they do a little bit differently, and then you heu,

Yes, heu when was the last time you were talking with someone from a different culture and you felt like you were completely on a different page,.....?

Hum, I actually can’t remember, hum, no no

Ok, hum, when was the last time, you adjusted your behaviour because of the person that was in front of you, having a conversation with ?

Phone ringing

 [...]  

Ok, hum I sometimes to it, I change my behaviour slightly, I have an Italian roommate and she is very Italian, hum and it’s also because, since I know how Italian communicate sometimes, I do things, I do change slightly I know with her I can’t be more Anglo-Saxon about things, in terms of humour, hum sometimes, the directness, hum I can’t to do it doesn’t receive the same type of reception, hum and they would, she would take things the wrong, but it’s because it’s hum a very Anglo-Saxon sarcasms is very much and I consider myself to be sarcastic, hum and I like to push the things and people, I can do it with English people or heu, I can’t always to it with German and not even with some more the Latin, because they just take it the wrong way so then I’ll say things in a more diplomatic, nicer way, but I could say completely different if I haven’t got my English or Irish mates, I can be insultingly direct and they think it’s grand and they will heu

And at work do you do that sometimes, change your behaviour?

Hum,

Do you work in a diverse environment?

I work with one colleague, we are 2 men office and he’s French. Hum so heu no, I’m mainly work with a lot of Americans, because of American association and the most of my colleagues
are based in the States, hum, I don’t change my heu behaviour towards them, no, they more, they do more in the Anglo-Saxon way of doing things anyways that’s heu

And when you do it, for instance with your roommate, are you conscious of it? Are you aware of it,

I’m aware of it, because it’s something against the way I would normally do things. I’m sensing the fact that she wouldn’t get it so I would say

And again this ability would you say that you gained it towards you experience all over the world?

Hum, yeah, I mean you just tried a few times and you kind of realize it’s not working so you learn from your mistake

Ok, have you ever had to change your way of dressing?

Not, no

Ok, hum, if you have to deal with stress because of an international interaction of situation, do you use any strategies, or do you have thing that you in order to reduce it?

Hum I have ways of reducing stress as a general rule, whatever the stress is, hum it’s not linked with internationally, or it’s just in general, I have my own, like everyone has,, their way to, but it’s not specifically because of international

So you never had like a feeling of stress because of a difference between culture?

Hum, yeah maybe, no, no I’ve sometimes strong opinions about how the cultures work hum, they probably aren’t true, it’s mainly based on my owns experience and I may just be because I met some type of people in my, so I have hum, certain opinions which are part based on clichés, hum part on personal experiences and then I heu I will adapt and I will make sure that I factor that knowledge in hum and whether the way I do it actually helps me or not I don’t know. Because subjectively I feel I helps me do it because it kind of match my own expectations, hum but I actually give sometimes objective hum result, then I don’t know, if I do something differently, heum

So you usually start with stereotypes and then you learn from your own experience and you adapt your?

Yeah because most of the time, especially if you don’t know the culture, you work of what you know, hum and 90% of times it’s based on stereotypes, hum

But do you follow them ‘blindly’

No, because people are social being, they heu, when you start interacting with someone, hum and then maybe you realize that this stereotypes aren’t true, I met, I’ve worked with Spanish, I mean my old boss was an Italian lady from the South of Italy who, you would think is more lay by, doesn’t, she is the most organized person in the world, more picky and organized, and precise and efficient than the most German person I know. Hum despite the fact that she is from the very deep Italy. Hum you cannot be more organized then her and so when I first met her, she was my boss and I thought she might be, well she is Italian way of doing but not even a bit, then again I had a boss from, from Spain, the guy was a very manana, manana type of, he was the very cliché you have and with him it was completely, he was just completely disorganized, never get stressed out, sometimes he completely match what I thought of heu, so again it’s heu

Do you think we still have some like really well rooted national cultures within Europe?

Yes,

And that some people still stay within that idea of my country has that culture so it’s the best and

I think it’s still dominant, you have national identities before your European identity, there was, it’s not even national identity, it goes down to regional, local identity. If you look at Germany, if you are from the South of Germany you consider yourself as Bavarian, you, heu they make massive differences, I think it goes beyond these national, heu and I think, personally that it’s your first identity,, it’s your local, I mean you
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<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tr>
<td>What is yours then?</td>
<td>Hum, no,</td>
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<tr>
<td>So you are more on a European level already?</td>
<td>Well not even European, because I’m half South African so Yes so it’s international</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yeah, I’m but again what is an international identity, I heu, the thing is when it comes to identity, you need certain things that you can hold onto, hum identify with X, Y and Z, I like to eat this, I like to talk about this, things that are kind of make the culture, hum, and you think you, but it in every national culture, heu, you have these point, connections that you can identify with but like a check list but I wouldn’t personally I don’t know what an international culture would be. European, yeah fine, there are certain European identity that you can probably tick the box, on an international thing it’s difficult because a person, I think a person form India would have completely different I think of their cultural background, would have a completely different expectations as a person from a Germany of from the US or from who knows where. I think that an international identity, I don’t think there is a So something like global citizenship is not really reality?</td>
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<td>I think, I don’t think it’s reality, because people need their identities, they need their, it’s a place to come home to, it’s like this safe ??? hum if you’re living in a different culture yes, you can be the most international person in the world, you can heu work and live with people from all around the world, but I think on your quiet moment and you look for your, I think everybody goes back to his local roots, that’s where people find their comfort. Hum and I don’t think that any type of pushing towards a European globalized thing would ever, it can’t replace that, I don’t think Do you think it may even increase this feeling, like people? I think it depends it think heu it can, heu, because I think that any force on thing is anyway a bad idea, it needs to be a natural development, hum and I think people, it puts people out of their comfort zone. Hum and I think people become more defensive, you need people to discover that, as opposed to indoctrinate it in people</td>
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</table>
| Hum, have you ever helped resolve a cross cultural conflict? Maybe thanks to your knowledge in how to deal with different cultures or? Hum, yeah, especially between my Italian friends and my German friends. Hum in terms of resolving I just, a few times I just explained that don’t take it the wrong way, this is just German way of doing it. I kind of make sure that it doesn’t escalate. Hum and it’s just because, especially with some German people I know that are very German and some very Italian people who are very Italian and they just didn’t get each other and then I would explain because I know, it is easy for me because I know both cultures Yes, hum I also have some questions about your personality traits. Hum how do you think you are perceived by others? Hum, well, as a person? Yes as a person? And do you think they perceive you relying on your background? I don’t know, hum I think people consider me to be a nice reliable, hum logical guy hum I think that’s heu And how would you describe yourself? Reliable, probably yeah, nice heu Do you think you are tolerant towards others? Yes, yes And to you think that you level of tolerance got higher when you moved around and that you learned to be more tolerant towards people? Hum, I think probably for me personally yes, hum I think heu, people today tends to be a little more tolerant than before and are more able to work with other cultures and I think because we all kind of become a bit more globalized so you are being in interaction with things that are
hum, so you tend to find a bit of generation conflict on that, hum my family is probably less tolerant than I am and they would probably criticize me for being maybe a little bit too liberal, hum I think if people are completely honest, I think that even the most liberal and open-minded and tolerant people also harbour certain stereotypes about people and they will, if they are honest with their true feeling, their initial gut’s reaction and then it takes work to get over that and they would make the effort and say they will give the person hum , I think that even the younger person, you grow up with a certain view, hum so I think your first reaction to people is hum what you learned and then you, I think the tolerance comes in that you, I don’t think it’s an inherent national thing I think it’s something that you are willing to say ‘yes, I’m gonna work to make sure that I’ but I think that’s a conscious process that you go through as opposed to a

And you do that?

Yes, because you always, especially in Germany it’s always complaining about foreigners, and from certain countries, hum and yes of course when you meet a person you hear of lot of this, it’s kind of like the dominant discourse so I think nobody is completely immune to it, to differences hum and my gut reaction is first on scepticism hum, but then what I do because I know, it’s not a reason why I wouldn’t engage with a person, hum

And do you think you are curious?

Yes!

Do you grow interest in the cultural aspect of a country? Will you try to learn a bit of the culture, history, the traditions...

Yes, but I genuinely learn social things, I love studying about society, I love studying about individual history and to and I read, my favourite books are biographies, not just about famous people, but normal people, I love, I always ask questions about where people are from, their families, what people in their families do, I hum, I like to know about people’s history. Hum

So it’s more about people than culture?

For me it’s more about people yes, but I like to put together, I like to observe cultures, I like to observe how things work, and I do try to figure out why people do things in a certain way, hum how do tradition developed, but I’m heu I studied social sciences I think that’s kind of a, hum that’s yeah kind of a trained on academic curiosity

Hum do you feel changed hum through your international experiences? Do you think you have changed?

Hum yeah, I mean of course you change, it’s difficult to figure whether you changed because you grew older hum and I think my international experience is one part of general life experience, it just makes it all up, hum I wouldn’t say that I would have specifically changed because of international experience, it’s just the growing older.

Do you have an example of something that you realized that changed?

Hum, I don’t know I think I’ve become, if I look back at the last 5-10years, I think the bigger change as a person comes when you leave university, when you start working, you become, I noticed for me I become a lot more pragmatic, it think you have positive and negative changes that you, I think I’ve become less idealistic, slightly more realistic or some would say cynical, and you, the kind of way of life and I think nobody can get away from that that’s just what, heu I become far more relaxed about things, I don’t stressed out as much as I used to , hum I become more, I kind of take things as they come, hum

But that’s more like you said because you grew up, not necessarily because of your international experiences.

Yeah, no, I think that my international experience has helped my though, is for instance when I moved from Germany to Belgium, I think me settling in to Belgium and just come into terms of these years probably was easier because I have lived in four countries before, so I kind of done that before and I kind of knew what you kind of have to do in order to fit in different cultures, if hum I mean heu, you can understand things easier, how the culture work,.. and I think that it
| helped because I lived in different country to I came to Belgium and I settled in easy; |
| So it’s easier to adapt to a new country because of your other experiences |
| Yes, no that’s something hum that’s definitely something and I think if I had to move to a different, to another country it would be again probably a lot easier |
| And do you think it also has an impact on your job performance? If you feel well adjusted do you think that it has an impact on your job performance? |
| Hum, I think, hum I don’t know, I think my, the impact on my job is more of a personal development as opposed to an understanding of cultural, hum I mean I supposed if I had to move because of my job to another country it would make the transition a lot easier, I would perform quicker than I would if I heu hadn’t come through that. |
| But so far you have never moved because of a job? You just chose to move? |
| Well I moved because I needed a job, but I haven’t |
| But it’s not a company that sent you here, like you came here because you needed a job, you didn’t have a work in Germany and your company sent you. So are you like more of a self-initiated expatriate? |
| Yes, and because most expats, the traditional ones, they have a certain timeline, they know the company will send them there for 2 years, possibly extend it for 2 years, they have a certain fixed time frame in mind, I don’t, I could leave next month, I could leave in ten years time. Hum whatever |
| Hum, ok how would you describe your adaptation in Brussels in general? |
| I think Brussels is a difficult case study, hum, I don’t think the rules, the way it works in Brussels is true to how it works anywhere else, hum, Brussels, especially if you interview people or if you speak to people living in the eurocrats community, it’s a very, it’s a bubble, I mean you live in an international environment, you don’t really live in Belgium, it’s, yes you live in Belgium but everyone can list maybe one maximum two Belgians that they know, there is, nobody can really say that they’ve been exposed, fully integrated to Belgium. Then Belgium is also difficult because you have heu, but nobody can really say that maybe they’ve been exposed to a couple reunion with Flemish or whatever, but not Belgian culture, I don’t think no one has a, hum |
| And do you think this is because of Brussels or because expats prefer to stay within this expat bubble than really try to understand what is Belgium and what it the culture there and;..? |
| Hum, I think it’s a little bit of both, at least on both sides, I think there is a limited interest from the Belgians to fully integrate the Eurocrats hum, and I think equally so there is a limited interest in the Eurocrats to properly integrate with the heu, but it also within the Brussels bubble you have lots of, again lots of groups, it’s not that it’s not an international mingling of German, Italians, Spanish, so the Spanish,.. kind of stay together, some groups find, tend to be more clustered than others, it’s little a bit if you want to compare, it’s like countries that have early phases of immigration in the country, hum like in the States, the German, the Italians, the Irish, they stayed a bit in kind of “ghettos”, hum and I think here in Brussels it’s the same, not ghettos in terms of physical ghettos, but ghettos in term of, yes because you have Belgian and Spanish living together or hum, but this Spanish will have Spanish friends, Italians will have Italian friends so it’s a bit of social kind of ghetto, so it’s weird because it’s kind of layered, you have your Spanish people then your national people that you hang out with then you have the next layer with the more international eurocratical one and then only on the third phase will be the Belgians and I think part of the reason why there is such a mingling is because a) it’s very easy, you meet people who do the same things, have the same interests and hum, you can probably relate to and I think it goes beyond the language barrier as well, I know lots of people who are fluent in French or in Dutch and their contact with Belgians from either side is just as much as someone like me who doesn’t speak those languages. Hum so it’s heu |
| And do you think because of that they would have a harder time integrate fully to another country or another city, for instance, if they come to my home town they wouldn’t have that international community, do you think then they would have more difficulties to feel well in |
integrated?

Yes, because I don’t think that, I think that people living in Brussels or Eurocrats they can’t, if they are honest with themselves, they can’t really say they live in Belgium. They hum, their Belgian experience is limited to trying out the beers, complaining about the inefficiency of the bureaucracy and dealing with the strikes, that’s it. Yes, they’ll take a few tours to Brugges, Gent, Namur, but that’s nothing more nothing less, so they take as much as American who would come here to visit and

So it stays very superficial?

Yes, I don’t think, there is no deep integration, because I think a lot of people come here a) because of work, not because they want to live in Belgium, hum lot of people are still very connected to their home countries and they, in their mind I don’t think they ever properly arrived in Belgium, and look I consider myself to be probably just the same, I mean I don’t, it’s because you always, I think a lot of people don’t ever want, their ideas is not to stay here for a long time and their idea is always to go back home, a lot of people and then those who tend to stay here, It’s not because of a conscious choice, but because it just happens. Hum and that’s why they never get this full integration.

That’s interesting, yes Brussels is specific, so Brussels makes things easier for people to integrate because they don’t really have to integrate actually?

No and I think, look at the people everyone that somehow is connected to European institution, they live within 2km² radius, they live in Ixelles and a few in Brussels, that’s it. Well you have the occasional adventurous who moved into Schaerbeek but more on the Ixelles border of Schaerbeek, the occasional Uccle but it’s heu, you live, work in the same and Brussels is for a lot of us a very small town. It’s not a 1.4 millions it’s a 50000 town.

Do you take part in any of the expatriate communities' activities?

No, not really, hum I mean most of my friends, I don’t have many Belgian friends, maybe one or two and I know them because they work in my institution as well, hum

So most of your friends, did you make them at work or ?

Most of them I made through living together with them. Hum some through work, a bit a mix, some I made randomly drinking

Nice, hum ok have you ever thought of returning to Germany or South Africa?

Hum, yeah all the time

And is it because of a lack of integration of just because you would like to go back?

Because I would like to go back. Hum mainly because I heu, this kind of goes against probably everything I’ve been saying, hum I do kind of do the all traditional family, hum get a wife and kids and I don’t think Belgium or Brussels is a place where I want to raise a family, hum and I wouldn’t mine moving back to Germany, especially, my family comes from Munich and that’s where I studied, back to Munich, that’s a place where I can see myself live, settle in that sense, that’s the place I want my kids to grow up in, not necessarily in Brussels, hum yeah, and I don’t know if it’s because, yeah well I think it’s partly because I want them to grow up in a culture that’s close to what I know and I noticed it’s part because of my family. When I grew up in South Africa, I grew up as a proper South African kid, and you could tell that there was, even with my own mother, there were cultural “clash” I mean I grew up as an Anglo-Saxon, massively sarcastic, my mother is German, she doesn’t have a sense of humour, hum and it’s just those things, I know some people whose kids grew up in a completely different culture and they are in that fact completely alien to their parents and it’s heu,

You want to be able to feel close to your kid?

Yes I want them to share the same culture than me

And why Germany over South Africa?

Hum look I think I wouldn’t have anything against South Africans, Germany is because a) I think it’s the biggest chance to get a job, South Africa is a bit difficult in heu, my family is German, no matter how, even if I grew up in South Africa, my family is German hum, and heu, Munich is
just an amazing place, heu I loved my life there, my best friend is still down there and part of my family is down there, hum I just like the way of life.

Ok, hum do you have any friends that you know they really didn’t adjust well and want to go home?

Yes I do, I know plenty of example of people who heu, but those are example of people who grew up in a homogeneous environment, always seeing things in one way, and they went abroad and hum didn’t

So building multicultural experiences since your are young it really helped to?

Yes I think

Then living in a unicultural

Well I mean I know other people who love the fact that they grew up in the same, close small, but I think those people who didn’t manage, all of them were from homogeneous, so I think it is a fact!

Ok, good, I think we’ve covered a lot already [...] [ending interview]

**Interviewee G**

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<th>Signing of consent form + intro</th>
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<tr>
<td>I have different questions as you are both expatriate yourself and in charge of intern from everywhere</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, human resource, what we call HR, we have newcomers, we have people who moved, they can be Belgians, they can be from very far away, they can be from far away but already for some times already here and I hope my voice is carrying enough to the recorder</td>
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<td>Well it should be fine</td>
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<td>I hope since I’ve so weak and lower voice, anyhow, it’s Hum, so I will first start with the regular question so that I have all the data needed, your citizenship?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
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<td>I remember that yes, your marital status?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Married</td>
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<td>Did you bring your family with you here?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heu, my wife got a job here before me, we had no children then, they came afterwards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ok, hum, your native language is native I guess?</td>
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<tr>
<td>English and Irish, we spoke the two at home,</td>
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<td>Ok, hum what is your family background? Your parents are they all Irish or?</td>
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<td>Oh yes, no multicultural whatsoever</td>
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<td>How many languages do you speak?</td>
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<td>At present, if I can include bad ones, 5 and a bit</td>
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<td>And which ones?</td>
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<td>Well English and Irish, French, Dutch, German and I can understand and speak a little Spanish and I can read several, 5 or 6 more</td>
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<td>Wow, hum what is your exact function is the Commission?</td>
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<td>I’m what they call the manager for learning and organizational development</td>
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<td>So did you take part in the lifelong learning program?</td>
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<td>No, no because in this DG in the DG EAC, so we have people who deal with heu primary schools educations, secondary, university and lifelong learning, those are policy areas, so for me I’m in charge of the learning programs for people working in the DG</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you provide any intercultural learning, trainings?</td>
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<tr>
<td>No, we make a distinction between what we provide in this DG and what the Commission</td>
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provides centrally, the Commission provides that centrally and we do not do it in this DG, in this DG we do not parallel any activities, so if an open enrolment training course is available in DG HR in the Commission, we do not provide, DG HR has at least one course and probably more than one on working in multicultural context,

Ok, hum how long have you been in Brussels?
22 years, 23 years

And how long do you plan on staying?
Maybe forever, I don’t know I’m really open, I miss Ireland

And do you feel completely integrated into Belgium? Or?
No not really, I don’t think it’s possible as a European official to completely integrate, you don’t belong in the economy, we are paid, if you like, outside the Belgium norms, we don’t pay Belgian taxes, we pay European taxes, it’s an, there are limits to integration, but let say at a social level with neighbours, friends, I think I’m very integrated into Belgian life. But still I’m not integrated into Belgium like a Belgian, not at all

Ok, and so do you live in a Belgian neighbourhood or did you stay close to the Irish community?

They Irish are notorious for sticking together, and, but I’ve never done that, we have Irish pubs, Irish clubs, Irish everything but I don’t bother because I see them all, I know them all but I, some people come and they live for years and years within their own cultural “ghetto” and I’ve never done that. Heu I can say that it’s for pure language reasons that many people, because many people come and they have no confidence in Dutch or in French so they withdraw into their own, the area that we are living in is not very far from Shuman and we bought the house 22 years ago and it was not very international then, it was international in the sense that they very Belgian and very close by African, Moroccan and some Turkish people, but over the years It has become more and more of a eurocrat “ghetto”, more and more the houses are being sold, buy by eurocrats.

Ok do you think that Brussels, the city in itself help people to integrate to Belgium or because of its multiculturality it’s harder to really get a sense of what really Belgium is?

Well I can both assure that it’s a very easy city to integrate into because it is in itself multicultural within Belgium, the 2 languages, when I say it’s easy to integrate in term, we can maybe look at the opposite side of it, is it easy to be rejected? And it is very hard to be rejected to Brussels and I’ve leaved in other places for a few years, in the Netherlands, in Germany and Brussels is by far the easier, let say it’s the most comfortable place to arrive in to. You do not feel foreigner in Brussels, in the way that you, you could easily feel a foreigner, in Cologne or Munich or even Amsterdam,

And so do you think that because of that, because of this multicultural city, people have a “easier” time to adapt to Belgium and that would maybe different if they would go to another town?

I think it’s easier in Brussels than in almost every place I’ve ever seen but there is also less motivation, there is less need, less, I imagine that if people go to leave and I just speak of another place, some place like take Cologne, or Bastogne, as a newcomer you would fee different in a way that you do not feel different here, so I think that’s why you can live your whole life in Brussels without, and I know people who’ve done that, without learning any of the languages used in Brussels, and with a knowledge of 4 or 5 streets and that’s enough for 20 years. I don’t that would be, that that would be a strong norm in a place like Bastogne or Cologne.

And in the work floor, do people still try to speak French or Dutch or usually is it more English?

It is, this DG EAC like the rest of the Commission has changed to, is in the process of change, we are one of the last DGs where French has a strong role, the Commission that I joined almost 23 years ago French was the dominant language in and there were only 2 DGs that were famous for not using French at the time, if they were newly formed ITech where they
brought lots of technical experts but the rest of the Commission worked in French and I was at a counsellor’s Commission’s meeting of the 20 member states where all the discussions and the margins of the meeting were in French. Irish, British and German and member of groups sat and spoke together in French. And that was 20 years ago, now almost everything is in English except for small defined areas of internal working, hum HR, finances, the inner working where French has some status, but the dominant language has changed completely.

Ok, hum, have you ever taken part in a selection of someone of another country?

Oh yes, often.

And how does it work? What is the process? On what do you base your selection criteria?

Well one of the first thing is, there will be a panel, a selection panel and one of the first things they have to do is to become very clear of what the criteria are, and how they will measure those criteria, and the criteria will be overwhelmingly work based, objective work based, if they are looking for somebody that can lead a team, or write reports, who can negotiate, whatever, but there will be done and then they’ll try and have heu, questions and tests to see if they can do it. So depending very much from job to job but that they are looking for and then in every selection process when I talk about the meeting, the interview, there is always some human aspect in it to see, I always say to people who are going to be candidates that no matter how much they put down criteria that what they are looking for is to see whether this is the kind of person that I would like to see 5 days a week and in my life. And if the candidate has the right languages, the right technical expertise, who convey some message that you know I will not fit well into your work place, I will be a difficult person to work with, he or she probably won’t be taken.

Ok do you think this has changed through the years? That the more psychological, interpersonal criteria has been increasingly important or?

I think people are becoming more aware of it, I think that heu when I look back now, I think many of these selections that were made 20 years ago, 15 years ago were based on a very narrow hum set of criteria, heu often to do with knowledge, or experience, and heu do you know, well you know the classical error that somebody says where we are looking for somebody who can write reports in English and in French, and who has a long experience in the area of let say pension, international pensions reforms, and they look at a CV and they say well this guy is perfect, he is perfect, he has done everything, he has the right languages, we more or less give him the job, we should meet him once not so much an interview but more or less have a chat because he’s got the job already. So the job was given based on knowledge and experience and very little account take in the fact that he is, he has a character that nobody can work with, and that maybe, an important part of his work will be that he has to work with several other people, and you find out after 6 months that he doesn’t want to work with anyone, he is a complete loner. I think we were much more naïve 20 years ago than we are now.

Ok, hum so, you have people from the 27 member states here in Brussels, is it Brussels who choose them, select them, or does the representations in the the different countries send people here?

No, almost all are selected by us, almost all, you have hum a small number of what we call ENDs, we call them “experts national detaches”, they are now called something like “seconded national experts”, SNEs in English, and they, it’s a join process, they are proposed by their member states and accepted by the Commission. But hum, you can say that if not 100%, than 99% of the people are chosen by the Commission department.

So here in Brussels?

Yes

And hum how do you measure those interpersonal skills that someone must have in order to perfectly fit a job?

You have to see that we have heu, to have a career in the Commission, you have to pass
through the whole EPSO selection process, and then I’m not fully up to date on how it works nowadays but there is for example one day assessment centre is part of it. Heu as well as technical tests, language tests, hum interviews, hum aptitude, IQ tests, and there is a full assessment centre, heu which is meant to put people in all kind of different contexts, especially social context, so they have to do good decision making, and things like it, so all of that is tested is you like, for people with a career here before they ever come to our place where we used to let people for 3 years contract agents, that’s not done by EPSO and that’s where the interview place a very important goal.

And do you keep a data base of all this information that you received from this assessment centres in case you just employ a few persons but more later?

We don’t, we, the DGs, we do not have any access to that, I think if somebody applies for a job, through the EPSO system, and all of their files as far as I know are completely confidential, and they get the report themselves on the assessment centre I think but that’s it, we don’t get it.

So if there is a DG who needs someone, you have to go through the HR department and ask them?

If you want somebody who is a permanent official to fill a post, then you either get one who is already working in the house, who is willing to transfer, or you go to what we call the “Laureate concourse”, where you have a list of people who have come through the EPSO process, their names are on the lists by special areas so you have a list of the laureate of the concourse of economic competitions, and public administration competitions any kind of competitions then you go to those, and then of course you do your interviewing and you selection them from that but you know that they have already, then if you like stamped by EPSO as the kind of people who could have a career in the Commission.

OK, hum, alright, do you think that with this increasing awareness of the importance of the personality traits as well, heu do you have some kind of listing for heu qualities you are looking for into people, more interpersonal, I don’t know like tolerance, empathy, and those kind of personality traits that we could build?

I think much depends on the particular interview panel, I have been in several and some did not use any language like that whatsoever, they are saying we want to see if she is the kind of person we want to work with, but no more sophisticated than that. You will find hum, because we have a training program on this, that if hum, and I’ve done it in another DG, we train heads of units especially heu and we give them a grid, an analysis grid on the types of traits that they may want to see, and that they may want to test for, then they use that language, and they use words like empathy, hum, so I think much depends on the particular panel and who is in it. And some I think can be still quite unsophisticated and naïve and others can be quite sophisticated.

And do you think that a person who have had already worked abroad or who has an international experience already will have more of those kind of abilities of competence? Do you think it had an impact?

I think so, I think so and I think now in 2012, it’s quite common for people to have worked in another places, I think maybe 20-30 years ago, I suspect that many people started in the Commission, I know many of my friends from Ireland, they worked in Ireland and then one day they got a job in Brussels, that was their first living in an international context, I see that people who are joining today, and for starters as students they have done Erasmus, they have done a master in another country, they are already well, they have grown beyond their national boundaries before they come.

And do you think that they grow some kind of European or international culture?

I don’t know, I suppose in a way, if you have a critical mass of people who have been, if it becomes the norm to have worked in other places, then, a new norm will grow almost imperceptibly whether you call that a culture or not. I mean I just give you the simplest, the
most primitive example that I have, hum, if you take the languages that I’ve used and I was tested in English and German, and maybe a little French when I joined the Commission, but most of the interview was in English, because they needed competition in English, now one of the things that we needed to be very aware of then was that even if almost everybody speaks English, if I speak really fast, in the way of the Western Ireland where I come from, the people there might not know it, now I think that we had to tell that to people 20 years ago, I don’t think that you need to tell it anymore. I think they know that, I think that people on the Western Ireland who will speak fast in a dialect of English amongst themselves, but I think even an 18 year old now doesn’t have to be told that if you are in England for the day or for football match or you are going to meet somebody in Brussels that you have to make an effort to be understood, they way I think you had to once. So in that sense maybe there is a new culture growing up of, of hum, ability to speak with people from another background. I’m fascinated by the stagiaires, you know we have in the Commission and we have at the moment 500 to 600 stagiaires, trainees, young graduates from all around the world and I hear them all the time now you have friendships, relationships build up and you over here them speaking to each other, and in general now they all speak to each other in English, so you will hear big conversations, small conversations, all going on in English but none of them are English speakers, you can hear that none of them are English speakers, so not only have they got the language, but they have the ability, I think to have relationships, people are getting married, people are having children, heu without hum, I know two couples at least, with children where they have 4 native languages at home, because the father’s language he use is his languages, the mother uses her language, heu, neither of which is French or Dutch, the children go to the crèche in French, and the only language that they have in common is English, so at home if everybody speaks together, it’s in English but then bilaterally the father speaks Hungarian to the children the mother speaks Slovenian to the children and when they go to the crèche, everything is in French. So those children grew up in four languages so that I think it’s become, if you call it a culture, but I think we have moved along a continuum where we are much easier in dealing with people who are from other places.

Yes, hum before my project, had you ever heard of the term intercultural competence?

Yes, hum, yes, where I don’t know, I was involved in a redesigning courses on working in a multicultural environment for the Commission, hum 10 years ago, and I worked with some experts then on part is multicultural, it’s something very easy to say but part, so but intercultural competence, I heard it but I hadn’t thought about it a lot.

What kind of competence you would think that are part of those intercultural competence? If you would have to describe, to define a few words about it, how would you understand it?

Hum, for me it’s not a thing in itself, it’s a subset, it’s an aspect I would say primarily of communication, because communication has to do with transmitting information and receiving it and understanding it and sharing it. And heu some of that is let say, one level of linguistic, so you overcome that, there is something resulting which is called culture and some of the culture awareness and cultural competence it’s almost like an openness to doubt, that even though I’m very clear with what I think, there might be other ways of saying it, there might be other ways of understanding it, and I might have to make an effort to understand the other people in their point of view, and I, it’s something to do with humility as well, to realize that the other people could have much more relevant things to say, other than I have, even though it might not be obvious to me, that’s part of it, what makes a difference in interculture and intraculture, it something to do with scale of obviousness in it and I think that the interculture, I think has a lot of advantages in that, I know for a fact that different people think that they understand, that’s when they are the most vulnerable, if you think you understand, but if you begin by thinking I probably don’t understand, I have to make an extra effort, I think that that is not necessarily a bad thing, they used to say that about Japanese business in the 1970’s, that everything was decided very slowly in Japan because it seems I don’t know...
anything about Japanese, but they said that even in an all Japanese context, that it’s often very
very hard to be précised so heu a decision that let say is done in an American context would be
made in 30 seconds, they will say we all know what to do here, we all know, let’s do it, then in
the Japanese context that took hours and hours of explaining it, discussing it, which often lead
to better decisions. But the reason in being in some way heu communication barrier, so for
me, culture is a potential communication barrier but it’s also a potential hum what’s the word,
it can add value to collective decision making, collective thinking

And do you think it can improve an employee’s performance at work? If he or she has
those abilities to deal with different person from different cultures, different countries?

Oh yes, but I would say that if at work that person doesn’t have those abilities, I would say in
the modern world, maybe not just in an organization like the Commission, I think it’s a real
disadvantage or real disability not to have them.

So you need those kind of competence, nowadays?

Yes yes I think so, and not just, in hum a very multicultural organization like the Commission, I
mean I go to Ireland sometimes by Ryanair, Ryanair is much more multicultural than the
European Commission, you can see it, even they, I mean they do most of their things in
English, and generally you can be on a plane where none of them have English as a native
language and none of them actually have learned English very well, but they still flight the
plane, they can still communicate with each other, with here I think at least we learned the
English well or we learned the French well, but we do our best, they don’t bother, they have
250 words and they get away with it and I think that that’s multicultural competence, to be
able to be effective in a place of great differences and not to be defeated by barriers but to be
able to turned them into advantages

And do you think this has an impact on your personal life as well? On your adaptation ability
in one country?

I think so but it’s strange how let say for individual life and individual well being it’s very hard
to, to come up with common scales, you know, some people are happy only if they have 100
friends, some people are miserable is they have even one friend, I think it’s very individual in a
way, and I’ve seen people who have lived long long time in Brussels with very little
multicultural competence, have lived in, I know the case of the Irish ghetto, or the Anglophone
ghetto and I don’t want to say they have ruined their lifes, I don’t think so, I’ve seen them live
very well and enjoy their lifes. Now for me it’s sounds very strange, one of the example that I
often give is heu when I worked in DG HR, one of the course that I was involved in reforming
and reinventing several training courses, one of them was the course preparation for
retirement, preparation à la retraite, it used to be given only in French, on the basis that y
ou are preparing for retirement in Brussels, you have to had learn you had to had been here for
number of years so everything could be in French. And it was a course, the only course in the
Commission I think open to couples, so hum if I’m coming up to 65 years of age, I could do that
course, I was obliged to do that course and to bring my wife, partner in because much of the
course was planning activities, managing money, coping with change and that, and I regularly
had to have heu, make arrangements for the wives, the partners to have interpretations
during the course. So they had been in Brussels often 30 years slightly over 30 years in some
cases and they had got absolutely no French. While living as, heu, in one case as a wife of a
director, in another case a wife of the head of unit, being quite in a high social level, involved
in the whole international context receptions, but they had managed to live their 30 years in
Brussels without learning any use of French language, or any other language either. So for me
that’s a bit choking but I don’t want to be too narrow minded about it and

But again if they wouldn’t have been living in Brussels, maybe that wouldn’t have worked?
Because Brussels enables those kind of

Yes yes, I think that if they had been in Bastogne, or in Cologne, they’d have gone home I’d
say. That’s what, we are back to where we started, I think the motivation is, there is a kind of
motivation which is positive, for me it’s heu an encouragement and hum building commitment that’s positive motivation, but the negative motivation is the fear, the fear factor is very low in Brussels, you don’t, as a foreigner, you don’t have to be afraid of Brussels.

Yes true, hum ok, so you talked about training that you offer, such as intercultural training, but do you offer them before people arrive here, so maybe in the different representations in the member states or is it all in Brussels?

And there is a multicultural element in what they call the introduction course, the training for newcomers, who are already selected,

And do they have the training right away when they arrive?

I think, I’m a bit out of touch now but I think that the HR offers, or maybe even goes more then offer, maybe puts newcomers to a small intercultural communication module

And do you think that those trainings help as well to work in a diverse environment?

Probably but heu training manager is sceptical about training, I don’t think that if you take somebody let’s invent a caricature, or somebody who is just not able to work in a multicultural environment and then you send them for 2 days into a multicultural training course, and he comes out transformed, I don’t know, I don’t think it works like that, I think if you reach the age of 25 or 30 in the modern world and you have some big black spots in your interpersonal development, it’s not a 10 hour and 1 day course that is going to change that so I think that training is probably useful but I would be very surprised if it’s decisive, if it makes a difference between somebody who has done it or not

But would you say that it at least raise awareness among people?

Oh, I think so, I think it raises awareness, you’d be aware and if I’m allowed to say it with your precious time, one of the problems of, with multicultural training, for me anyhow, and I suspect for others, is how it’s done and what the basis is, what the, almost the intellectual basis is and if people want to do multicultural training on something, let’s say as it’s worst it can go into stereotypes, so you are an English speaker and you’ve come to live in a place where people speak French and Dutch, and you have people from other places, and then you come away with a check list, this is how loud to speak with Italians, this is how quickly you speak to a German, this is how many points you put on the table for a French man, I think for me I haven’t seen it much but I read books like that which I personally hate, I think they are travesty to do that, so what we try to put in the Commission all those years ago I think it’s still there, it’s a multicultural course which aims at me, how ready am I now to understand others, there might be other nationalities, there might be other experiences, there might be other belief system, there might be just others, so it’s all about me, and I know that some people expect from that kind of a course, they say ‘I work with 3 Germans and 2 Italians, please give me hints of how I could tell a message to a German or an Italian’, I hope we don’t do anything like that, here we don’t and I hope nobody does

So it’s more learning how to be flexible when interacting with diverse people?

Yes, yes

And not just basing your learning on stereotypes and then just follow that blindly?

Yes yes, you have writer like heu Hofstede, and hum his, pupil of his Trompenaars, both Dutch and I personally I read their work years ago, I read Hofstede years ago and I never liked it, never liked it, where you take a scale and X and Y axes and you have distance and coldness and... but I know that Trompenaars is a pupil of Hostede and about 8 years ago, his standards price for I don’t know that was a one day consultancy or even shorter was 20,000€, to come and speak to top management in an organization about multicultural, he made 20,000€ in one day. Hum and maybe I’m jealous but I don’t think if it’s that line of this is you understand your problems, you want to know your mix, how many Germans, how many Belgians, how many Flemish and then I will tell you the problems you have, I don’t believe it

So it’s a bit too narrow minded for you?

Yes really reduction! If you ask me about multicultural, I would say if you take somebody from
let say a particular country in the middle West with a medical background, a lawyer background and I pick 3 places Lithuania, Serbia and Ireland, I think that those will have many things in common. If you come from that kind of social background. If you are the daughter of a lawyer, from this country you have a lot in common straight away and you probably have more in common with each other than you have with the guy who sweeps the streets in Serbia, in Ireland or in Lithuania.

So the level of education has an impact as well?

Level of education, yes, which is part of cultural phenomenon in its own right

Yes,

But even that, I mean it’s not just national, it’s or geography, it’s a whole ensemble en français, I like hum, if you know, making a good team and you have the Belbin model for team roles, and it’s almost like personality profiles and I much prefer that, you can of course then extend it a little bit to national characteristics if you want but it says there some people a going to be good internal processors and may only want to speak when they are confident, there are others people who will need in order to understand something, they have to talk, that’s if you like extroverted processes, other will be very meticulous and very attentive to details, other will be, very general when come up with visions but maybe very bad with detail but that’s a typology of understanding people, whether they are rich or poor, hum Belgian or German, hum man or woman, it’s a diversity model which I find very useful and I think something like that is useful in a way that saying well is he German or is he not, yeah I don’t find much.

So it’s more accurate to really judge and assess depending on your own personality, characteristic traits and really not focus too much on the nationality, where you come from?

Not on the nationality, yeah and not focus on your nationality or where the others come from, but focus on myself and say how well can I, how ready am I to work well with these people? Man, women, old, young, Northern European, Eastern European in front of me, and then of course along the way, you can say ‘oh my, is that true that…’ in French for example, I discovered that politics, policies, and politicians, for us for instance politics and policies are immediately separate into two categories, If you come from, if you study in French, only in French, it’s not an obvious distinction, everything is politique. You have to work on, you have the same word, if you are doing economics in an organization you have efficiency and effectiveness, again you have to do it and then there are other things where they have the same things they say, but do you mean I know it’s a useless debate, but you have come around in HR, you are dealing with hum man and woman in the Commission, equal opportunities and you have gender and sex, and you can have cross-cultural debates that are interesting but I think ultimately wasteful of time, on the role of gender versus sex. And are we into gender streaming or are you balancing between to two sexes? But again some of it is cultural linguistic.

And what was the name of the model you told me about?

Belbin, but it’s not multicultural, Meredith Belbin, you find almost everything is available, it’s still copyrighted, he’s still alive I think he is nearly 100 years old, heu you find all the information. He has, I think it’s a nine, you know those 14 or 16 types of ISEC, of those, Belbin is kind of different in that let say you take young or, they are all theory driven so they have introverted, extroverted, are you or are you not and then you cross it and you have 4 boxes or 16 boxes. Belbin is completely empirical, what he did was for years and years and years observe people in action and he found 8 to 9 types in the way people work together and you can make cross culture. I find it much more useful in terms of me becoming aware of my limits in working with others.

That would be interesting to have a look at that because I’m doing qualitative research as well. + small talk about article I read done with quantitative research.

Hum; ok, do you have a way to measure the effectiveness of the employees from abroad here? Or employees in general? Do you ever assess them?
Oh we have evaluation we have annual appraisals, we have a full system of appraisal and it works quite well. But measures of productivity, no, I mean it’s a French phantasm that organization managers get every now an then that they will measure the productivity of people, if you are typing a document, how many key strokes per hour or if you’re producing policies, how many new ideas per week, or

So it’s really

Most of it ends up in ??? most attempts to do that, the classic one, I think it was IBM in the 70s, the first network computers, one of the great promises they had when distance, let’s say that’s between the secretary and the manager was much greater than it’s now, then the manager would have a constant measure of the productivity of the secretary because he or she, he would be able to see, get statistics on how much typing she did, and of course, within weeks, they found that when the secretary were having chat, a conversation they always had an elbow on the keyboard, you just put your elbow on the space bar, so that it went click click click while you were having your conversation, because that faded into the data, so now I’m very very sceptical and thankfully I don’t think that for the moment there is any lunatic going around trying to wave the ideas, the ??? word per minute, we have an annual appraisal for everybody who works in house,

And is it based on practical competence or do you also try to appraise a little bit according to the ability to work in team or?

Oh yes that’s in it as well, there are 3 zones of competences that are looked at, but the first one above all is performance, performance and achievement, so it begins with, because we all start with job description with objectives, so part of specific objective when you are under review, and then kind of the extent to which I think I achieved my goals and then my boss has to come and whether he or she agree as well and then along the way, everything else is a subordination to that, what are my abilities, what are my weaknesses, what do I need to learn, what do I need to correct and then a subset of that is heu ‘conduite dans le service’ and that’s the ability to listen the ability to work with others and that’s a separate rubrique that has to become to the part

And is more so about self-perception, self appraisal or is it also peer review, sometimes?

In these annual appraisal it’s a self appraisal, a dialogue with the boss and then the boss write his or her appraisal of the person, if you come to the level of director, it has to have every year, hum, they call it 360 but it’s not 360, it’s heu a sampling, you have to call it 180, some subordinates and some with the same level, so those harvesting of anonymous information, so sometimes I get a message from a computer and DG HR to say ‘you have been chosen at random because you work with this director’ please click, answer to the following 10 questions.

And in the directors do you have people from all member states or is it mainly Belgian or does it depend?

The directors no it heu, the whole Commission is very diverse, nationally diverse

And do you have any statistics on how many people from which countries do you have here in Brussels?

Yes, yes

Could I get a grab on these?

Yes yes, I don’t have it by grade, I’m sure it can be gotten but for the whole of the Commission, I have, it’s a published document, I don’t have it with me, I will get it

And do you have any quotas you have to follow?

There are no quotas but of course there are, and the quotas are overwhelming the national and nowadays maybe gender, male, female, a little bit as well. I know that 3 ro 4 years ago, there was an Irish who was considered a very good candidate for a job and she was told, unofficially, ‘ce n’est pas la peine’, don’t even bother,

Because she was a woman?
Because there were way too many Irish women as directors and there were at the time way too many, so there is no quota, there is nothing but people keep their own score cards and they could see Irish woman, Irish woman, Irish woman so they said, Irish man probably no hope, Irish woman forget it, in general if you are Belgian and you want to be a director, you can forget it at the moment, there is just too many Belgians as directors, too many French as directors, I think maybe hum, maybe the UK is down a little bit, so a director is an important person, so when a director retires here, or leaves, long before she or he goes people are watching, member states are watching, and they will say 'there is the Belgian director leaving' they say 'there is no reason there should be a Belgian director back' because we have too many of them and then they will start looking and let say if I’m Irish, and the Irish permanent representation, say we have a chance to have an Irish director, forget it, look at the figures, we have too many. So there are no quotas, but everybody counts.

And you have specific policy on diversity within the Commission?

Well the Commission in its soul is nationally diverse, you don’t have to have rules, you don’t have, if we wanted to have diversity on religion, eye colour, hum whatever, there would be a major effort, there has been a major to begin the gender diversity, there has been a massive effort, with national diversity is zero effort.

So with the Commission, nationality diversity came first before gender diversity?

Oh yeah, the Commission is in its essence it tuned to national diversity

Because of Europe I guess

Oh yes, and everybody, even a person who is here for 3 years, 2 or 3 years in a team of 6-7 people and somebody leaves, at some subconscious level, there is very clear that if the team has let say 3 Irish people of the 7, there is no way that they are going to encourage any Irish person to join that team

So diversity within teams is important as well

Oh yeah yeah, and they won’t even have to think it through, they will just think of the seven they have and they will know instinctively that they are very weak in statistical analysis, that’s on paper, they are weak on the ability to transform, but in their, not in their heart, in their duodenum, they know that they are extremely weak with Eastern Europe, French, Belgian, Irish, German, Belgian, so they will not put into think candidates from the new member states Poland, Latvia, Lithuania particularly but it will be completely obvious that the choice will go there, and of course, if they do not find any good candidates, if the best candidates are all French or Irish, they’ll take one of them. But you don’t even need to put it on paper, the Commission in its instinct of the individuals and collectively is to keep the diversity

And do you have international people as well?

Very very little bit, I mean some people have the national by marriage, so you find some people who sound clearly American, even Australian in our colleagues, I think in our corridor I think he is a Greek-Australian, but very very few, but you have I remember 2 or 3 americans over the years but they were all married to Belgian or German, or Hungarian,

So even within the department where they deal internationally, such as the EESA? So on Brussels it’s mainly European working there?

Oh yes, yeah and then in the delegations, they recruit local people

Yes, but there is no locals coming here

No

Hum, well,

I’m just watching the time because I have to go to see a guy, but I want to give you the brochure on the nationalities

Yes it would be nice, and also if you had any information about selection criteria, or?

Yes yes,, but I think if you go on the EPSO website, you should find, I think you’ll find a lot in the EPSO website.

Ok, thank you is it all transparent?
Well the only thing is it will vary from competition to competition, but I think EPSO has, I don’t have whether it’s published or not, but they have some kind of the competence list and then from that for particular job they will say well we’re looking particularly for competence 23, 29 and they have some form of, if there is

End of recording because he went take the brochure and had to leave

### Interviewee H

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First signing the consent form</td>
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<td>So you are Bulgarian right?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>How long have you been here?</td>
<td>I’m here since November so that makes five months</td>
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<td>How long do you plan on staying here?</td>
<td>I don’t plan, no I don’t know in the beginning I started with the idea that hum I will start planning after my probationary period, which is nine month and then we’ll see, the problem is that before I came here I used to work in Italy and I really loved this place so I’d like to go back there, so I don’t know exactly how long. Heu, the minimum period that I can stay here is 2 years and the maximum is no limit if I pass my probationary, but I’d like to go back to Italy so</td>
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<td>Is it the only place where you worked, in Italy?</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Abroad do you mean?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Yes abroad</td>
<td>Yes that was the first place I worked abroad but it’s not only because I like the place and so one but also my partner is there so I have another reason. I don’t mind changing again the country, for example going to another, to a third country but I would like to keep my family close</td>
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<td>And did you do any Erasmus program or something when you were a student</td>
<td>No no because when I was a student, it was not so popular yet in Bulgaria, it had just started and hum, there were not so many opportunities for me, my generation, so I graduated in 2002. So It was before Bulgaria was in the EU so there were less opportunities.</td>
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<td>Hum, yes, here I see that you crossed all the abilities that I suggested plus one that you added so do you really think that you managed to get all these abilities thanks to your international experiences, to your intercultural relations and?</td>
<td>No I just think that some of them are innate, and heu they help you also develop additional abilities when you are in an intercultural environment for example, your curiosity, people are normally born curious or not or they develop this skill very early, in their childhood or in their family or in their social environment and it doesn’t matter in which country they are, so but the curiosity later helps you to integrate better, so this is why I crossed them all, it’s not necessarily that I developed them</td>
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<td>Through you experiences</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
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<td>And do you feel changed through your experience, with living abroad and?</td>
<td>Yes definitely I do, heu, when I compare myself to what I was before and to some of my friends that stayed actually in Bulgaria, and hum I think that now I’m more tolerant, to different people, I don’t even say culture, to different people, and I’m not so suspicious, people in Bulgaria tend to be very suspicious to the other one, especially if she or he is different, I’m not so suspicious and hum, yeah, this is the main change and I’ve started to take problems more easily, I smile more than before.</td>
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<td>Yeah, when you go to a foreign country to you grow an interest in trying to find relations or friends within the national people, the locals and trying to build some relationships?</td>
<td>Yeah, when you go to a foreign country to you grow an interest in trying to find relations or friends within the national people, the locals and trying to build some relationships?</td>
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<tr>
<td>You mean when I go even on a holiday</td>
<td>Yes, even on a holiday, and if there is a difference of course when you go on holiday or for work</td>
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H5
or whatever?

Well when I go on holiday normally I don’t have much time for contact if it’s a longer holiday then of course, why not. Hum I remember that last year with went with lots of friends to Spain and then because we were only friends like going there for fun, we really search for local people to integrate in our group, to hang out together and so on. But if I go with my family for example, or with my boyfriend, then we pretty much concentrate on seeing some interesting things in the country and not so much looking for additional people.

So more the cultural aspect of the country then?

Yes, yes it depends who I’m with and of course the time that I have to spend, in the case when I go there to work and that I will spend more time of course, but heu I have some, this initial period when I have to really adapt to the new environment I tend to avoid local people, before I really feel confident to communicate with them, so start something like one or 2 months after I arrived

And so then in between do you try to interact or to stay with people from Bulgaria or from more international community than locals then?

More international community, I try to stay within the circle of people that have the same problems than me, the same integration problems, like finding apartment or buying a car or whatever it is, my colleagues as well, in the beginning especially if you change the country, you have so many organizational things to deal with that you don’t really have time to go out and so I stick with people from the same I don’t know walk of life or I don’t know how it is called

Like the expat community within Brussels

Yes, and then bit by bit I start to get to know other people including locals.

Hum, and can you usually socialize easily once you feel comfortable with local people?

Well it depends if they speak English because heu normally I have lived in an non English speakin country, so in Italy in the beginning it was difficult because Italians normally they don’t speak English, not that they don’t want to, if they can they are very friendly and they speak English to you but if they can’t then it automatically blocks the contact so, in the first sixth months, it was very difficult. Here, I don’t have that problem yes

So is it easier in Brussels than it was in Italy?

Yes, yes

And heu are you interested in learning language of the country you go to if it’s for work again, so longer period?

Yes, yes, normally yes. Because it helps you survive and learn more, I really like language so whenever I go and if I stay for longer I would try

Hum, how do you feel, what kind of emotions do you feel when interacting with culturally diverse persons?

Mmhh depends on the person actually, hum normally I’m curious, for example, hum now we have a colleague from Bangladesh, he is a stagiaire, and normally I’m used to meeting people from Europe, and heu, and a person from a completely different culture, region and continent, it’s very exciting so heu on one hand I’m very curious and ask him questions and how, really judging how he reacts in one situation and another comparing to my own reactions, but I’m also hum very cautious because sometimes I don’t know what to do or what to say or what to ask whether it’s appropriate to ask that or not, so I’ve learned to be cautious

And do you also try to learn traditions and lifestyles from one country to another or? Do you read books, tourist guides and base your ideas on that?

No I don’t read tourist guides, I don’t like them, rarely I mean, sometimes if I’m interested in a particular point yes, I do read, but to prepare myself, I don’t, I just, I go and I start looking around and

So you observe?

Yes, I observe this is how I learn, and then it’s not that I’m curious about everything, for example if there is something interesting, I find new, like there is something that interest me in
e.g. the Netherlands, I would ask you what you think or why do you think it is like that or if we start a conversation and you mention something that I may get interested with, then I do that, but I don’t really make investigations just for the sake of it

And do you think you have some stereotypes of some cultures?

I think everybody has

And are those because of people you’ve met, what you’ve seen? Or is it mainly stuff that you’ve been told or?

Stereotypes is mainly the stuff that you have been told that you have read and so on, so I do have stereotypes and I’m trying to, when I approach a person, I’m trying to set my stereotypes aside and to see whether this person is an exception to the rule I have in my head or not

So are you kind of flexible towards?

Yes and this is something that I learned actually when I stared living abroad because also to me being from a country that is not so well known, people have stereotypes, so I've seen how it works and this is something that I don’t like so I'm trying not to have this even positive stereotypes, I've tried to set them aside

Yeah, hum, when was the last time that you were talking with a person from a different country or culture and that you really felt that you weren’t on the same page, like you didn’t speak the same language, even though if you were using English, but you really were completely, there was a huge misunderstanding, and did it ever happen?

Well it happened hum, already, of course maybe that happened more often, now I remember clearly just one case and it was heu forced heu so to say hum test that I had to pass for my newcomers course in Italy, there was one person, it was a Belgian I think, I think he has Moroccan origin and there was a movie about the role of the women in society and in the family, and he was really outrageously against that, I mean so angry about that movie and it shocked everybody, his reaction, so although we were discussing hum, the movie itself, heu you could see his reaction about women and most of the people there, were women and then it’s just really strange so this was my first,

Ok, hum, would you have an example of sometimes that you demonstrated flexibility, when you were interacting with someone from another culture?

Can you?

Like I don’t know, maybe you were have a conversation about some issue and then you made some compromises to try to reach an agreement and he or she also did it, so you tried to understand each other

Maybe it happens every day in life but heu I have to think of a concrete example. Ok, let’s go on and if I remember an example I will tell you

Ok (checking questions she answered to in the questionnaire). Ok, hum, do you ever adapt, change your behaviour when interaction with someone from another culture?

Mmhh, yes, I mean I do it all the time because I told you that you have to be very cautious with your language, with the phrases, the questions that you use so I do it all the time

H4

Would you have a specific example?

Hum, mmmh I have a friend, he is Irish, his girlfriend is Russian. And now I’m talking about against stereotypes because heu Russian is not something that the Bulgaria has very good connotations and heu we were in a company and several people would decide ??? plus other people who were discussing the Russian or something like that, I don’t remember and then I said ‘oh I don’t like the Russians’ and just later I found out that he has a Russian girlfriend, so now hum, now that I got to know her and that I know she is a really nice girl and so and so, so I’m trying to be more flexible with him, trying to not, heu, yeah use so many stereotypes, and hum yeah

And did you something like that ever happened at work, within the work floor with someones? Like really just a colleague? A work situation?

Yes, I can say that heu, once with the German head of unit that we had and they are very down
to, she is very down to earth, and very straight forwards so she doesn’t show any emotions and she has no problems coming to you and say ‘ok you didn’t do well you job” and in the beginning I used to take that very personally because if she tells you ‘you didn’t do your job well’, she means you didn’t work well enough on that particular project, but I think she doesn’t like the way I work, and the, hum, after several talks with the colleague that were working with her more than me, I just found out that it’s nothing personal, it’s just that for example she wasn’t happy with that particular task. And then with further conversation now that she is not anymore my head of units and we still see each other some times, I’ve realize that she is a very good professional and she is also a good person, so this is kind of a situation

Ok, hum and have you ever had to change your way of dressing in order not to offend something from another culture?

Hum, no, no I haven’t done this

Ok, no problem, hum, have you ever had to help resolve a cross-cultural conflict, a misunderstanding that arrived that work? And maybe you weren’t even part of the conversation but you stepped in and try to mediate the situation?

Mmhh, hum, not just once I only tried to change the topic, I don’t know if that counts, this is what I remember, because we were talking about religion, there was one Muslim guy and heu the conversation was basically if you don’t want to be your religion, what religion would you choose and heu, everybody say, the choices were between Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, or Buddhism and this guy at some point said ‘oh I see that nobody chooses Islam’ and then nobody paid attention to this remark and at some point I realized that it’s better to change the topic because he was all the time silent probably he wasn’t feeling well.

Hum, ok, all these behaviour change, that you do or this flexibility that you do, are you aware of that, do you do that consciously or sometimes not because you’ve learned through your experience that you have to adjust sometimes depending on who you are talking with?

Hum, I would say that I’m conscious most of the time, especially in my work contact, not so much in, with my friends, because now with my friends, it’s easier, they, we know each other and so on, but with my contacts on the work place, I’m conscious all the time

And does it usually help you with the interaction in general?

Yes, yes

You never have a bad situation

No of course everybody had bad situations but it helps you not to have so many embarrassing situations so even to make mistakes, everybody does, especially in a place where there are so many people from everywhere, so

How many, from which countries are people who you work with on a daily basis?

Heu, now I haven’t counted actually, I have a colleague from Romania, Hungary, Spain, Austria, hum Bangladesh as I told you, and Luxembourg, and from Bulgaria

So all over Europe mainly

Our unit now is very diverse

And do you think it’s easier to interact or to work with someone from some countries than others?

I think it’s easier to communicate with people who have already spent some time probably years in a multicultural environment, doesn’t necessarily count from which country they come from

It’s more about their own experience?

Yes

Hum, do you yourself the feeling to belong to any particular culture group?

Mmmhh no I would say European because I don’t find so many differences with people that are from Europe, I find differences with people that really come from other worlds, other continents, so this is more easy to see, so I don’t know, my mom says that I’m a tree without roots, because yeah but heu I think that is
And do you think that this has to do with your international experience abroad?

No no, it has to do with me, I’ve always been like that, I don’t miss for example, I don’t miss my home country, not at all and I don’t really want to go back there.

So you’ve never felt like repatriating to Bulgaria, either when you were working in Italy or here?

No not at all.

Did you always feel good integrated in the country?

Yes.

Hum, how would you describe you adaptation in Brussels in general? Your integration within Right now?

Yes,

Hum at the beginning I found it very difficult, now it’s better although I have mostly, as friends I have people from like expats, very few Dutch and I think nobody Flemish, so but in the beginning it was really difficult, I was in heu, I really wanted to go away, I didn’t like the country, now I feel better.

And do you think that the way Brussels is so multicultural, make things easier at the beginning for you to adapt? Maybe even compared to Italy when you went there or, did you feel any difference?

In some sense I makes it easier because people are used to communicate with foreigners, actually, you don’t really feel foreigner here, it’s just that in Brussels, because there are so many expats, you don’t have the feeling of being at home, at any time, because it’s not in the air, there is so many people who leave the city on Fridays, they don’t consider it home, you can feel it and so you don’t have the feeling that it’s your home, that it’s something stable.

So you neither feel really at home nor as a foreigner?

No, hum I just don’t, in the beginning this atmosphere was really difficult to me, and hum moreover I missed my home back in Italy so I guess there were more than one factor, so yes, but I still feel it, I mean this is a no home place 😊.

Yes yes I see.

There is no particular face actually except that this expat things that it has and it’s strange.

And do you take part in these expats’ activities or?

Like what?

I don’t know I just saw that there are websites for expats, and that they organize some stuff around and

No I have some friends that I met at the newcomers course, I have some friends, very few actually, that I made during work and then I have some friends from Italy.

Yes, that you brought with you or?

Well, they moved before or after me, so we stayed in touch.

And what is this newcomers program that you talked about?

Yes, this is a newcomers training, or I don’t know how to call it, it’s heu obligatory for everybody who starts working in the Commission, it’s a 3 day course and all the people that started on the same day, in the Commission you can either start on the 1st or on the 16th. so if you start in the 1st, the 1st the 2nd and the 3rd day of the month, you have this newcomers training with everybody who start on the 1st; and hum they give you the basis rules to work in the commission, you get to know each other, which is really helpful, they give you tips about accommodation and so on, all the things that you might need, and there this is the first place when you really get to know some people and hum, you become friends with them and yes this is it.

Do they give you some advice about how to work in a diverse environment, how to interact with?

Yes, they do, not, I mean, this is by the way, something that they tell you, I think that there are special trainings also on that, on how to work in a multicultural environment, I’ve been to one, it was heu, a nice presentation, not really helpful, well I don’t think that somebody can really.
help you with that, you just have to have some basic tips and then do it yourself

Learn by yourself so, training is not enough

No trainings, you cannot be trained to that

True, it’s not like technical competence that can be

Yes,

Hum how do you think your adaptation in the country influence your job performance?

Hum, well I don’t know, I have thought about it, well I suppose that the more adapted you are, the better, I mean you can concentrate on you work and not all the time you have to go out and do some stuff and think about things that really worry you, so in that respect maybe it has, but yes, when you are adapted, when you have friends in the, you feel more self-confident. Self confidence is important, especially here in the Commission, which is very hierarchy bound, so self confidence helps a lot so that people can really take you seriously

Hum, do you have friends or acquaintance that you know they did not adjust well? And they don’t feel well here and they may go back to their country?

No, no

So usually everyone you know

Sooner or later, they adapt yes

And do you think that in the commission, if people come to Brussels, to work within the Commission, if they have some adaptation issues, will they tell and go back to their country or is there kind of honor feeling and try to keep it quiet and?

I don’t know honestly because I haven’t had such case, among my friends, I know that for example the wives of some friends they don’t feel well here but, they will not just give up everything and go back to their country because their family’s here and I think when you’re not engaged in other activities than your own family then you really start to feel it,, it’s not good

So the family could influence the decision of someone to stay or leave

Or leave, yes, because I know a couple that are here, they say that they are here temporarily, until for example they find something better in the country where the wife comes from because if you work, you have your social circle but if your wife doesn’t work, or it doesn’t matter if it’s a wife or just spouse in general, if they don’t work, then they are absolutely deprived of social contacts, especially in Brussels it’s difficult, although it’s a city, although there are so many people and so many expats, still it’s difficult and this is why and I don’t know whether they will really go back or integrate better, I don’t know

So do you feel right now, or in few months completely integrated to Belgium? Or would you ever feel integrated to Belgium living in Brussels?

I don’t know it’s difficult for me to define really the term adapted and integrated and so on, I feel well

So as you as you feel well, you feel integrated

Yes, I feel well and I don’t have anymore the problems I used to have in the beginning, still I face problems that I would easily solve in my country but here I don’t know what to do and that reminds me from time to time that I’m not so well, I’m not Belgian I don’t belong to this country but it will be like this anywhere I go

So it doesn’t change from one country to another

Yes

Would you have anything else that you would like to add or share? Well have you ever heard about cultural competences?

No actually I haven’t duged into this topic at all it’s something that is happening to me and I learn from my experience, I don’t, I heard that there are people who really studied intercultural communication but I haven’t

So when you try to adjust to a culture, you don’t really think about, ok what kind of capacity I could use, what kind of ability did I learn and that I should use right now in this situation and?

Maybe I just don’t give it so in depth thoughts, and it’s like, you see, I’ve studied
communication, and this is what I wanted to study and what I wanted to work but I ask you whether you should start studying communication at the university now I would say no, because communication is not something that you can study and learn, it is something that you have a skill, and since intercultural communication is part of your innate skills to communicate with people, it happens more easily for some people than other people, and it’s not something that you can learn and no matter how much you spend thinking about it, or doing something purposely about it, it can have influence but not really dramatic, so I don’t really spend too much time on it

And do you think that our generation, younger generation have easier to travel around, to move around than maybe our parents or grandparents thanks to Europe or all the possibilities that we can do nowadays?

Yes definitely, now people travel more easily, not only due to the single market, to the border less community and so on, but also due to the means of communication that have developed along and means of travel, so this is also a factor. But there are just people who don’t feel like it, they prefer to stay in their country and somehow feel insecure if they start travelling too much or living somewhere else, so I understand that

And was there a specific reason why you came to Brussels?

Hum, the specific reason was work related because hum, in order to work for the Commission you have to pass hum a competition which is actually difficult and hum If you pass the competition you have no guarantee that you will pass another one, I mean something it’s just a matter of luck, and hum because I had passed the competition, I wanted to use this opportunity and hum in Brussels there is more equipment to they offered me a job and hum from all the job that I could get in the Commission, in DG COMM, it’s the best for me because I specialized in communication so where else would I work than DG COMM so I said that I was really a good chance and I didn’t want to miss this opportunity and hum in Brussels there is more equipment to they offered me a job and hum from all the job that I could get in the Commission, in DG COMM, it’s the best for me because I specialized in communication so where else would I work than DG COMM so, I said that I was really a good chance and I didn’t want to miss this opportunity so it created additional problems because my boyfriend had to stay in Italy in now we have to travel to see each other but hum, well we’ll see how long and some of us will have to move in the end, whether he will come here or I will move to another country, I don’t know

But It was really work related, you didn’t decide to come to Belgium because of

No actually I had never considered this opportunity, if I had to choose among several countries, Belgium, wouldn’t be among them, I don’t know

If you had the opportunity to work in one of the representation in Bulgaria would you go back there or would you prefer to stay here?

No, no I already had a proposal from the representation in Bulgaria and I turned it down because I didn’t want to go back. To me this is a too familiar territory, so I wanted to gain more experience abroad.

Ok, so you like the challenges as well

Yes

This is not always easy but

I don’t know about in several years what will happen, maybe I would like to go back but right now no.

Ok, I think, we’ve really

Was it helpful

Yes yes, [small talk about practical example and stuff + discussion about answers in the questionnaire and that she doesn’t always remember]

End of recording

### Intercultural Competence and Adaptation in a host Culture/Country

This questionnaire was designed within the framework of my Master thesis. In combination with face-to-face interviews, it intends to help you reflect on your potential for developing intercultural
Master thesis – Intercultural Competence & Self-Initiated Expatriates

competences based on your personal background. This will enable me to collect valuable information that I will use, on an anonymous basis, for the completion of my Master degree.

My research aims to investigate whether expatriates and recruiters consider intercultural competence to work as a positive factor in assignments abroad. The second aim is to explore whether intercultural competences influence expatriates’ effectiveness to adjust abroad. Through this I would contribute to the international human resource management literature.

For more information, please, feel free to contact me: sophie.donnay@gmail.com

**Demographic questions**

1. Gender? Female
2. Age? 30-40
3. Citizenship/nationality Bulgarian Pick an answer (N-Z)
   a. If other: Bulgarian.
4. What is your marital status? Single
5. Do you have any children? If yes, how many? No.
6. Did you move to Brussels with your family? Yes ☒ No ☐
   a. If no, do you plan on bringing them later? Yes ☐ No ☒
7. Function in the European Commission
   Communication officer
8. How many years have you been working for the European Commission 3.
9. Which countries have you already been to
   a. On vacation Greece, turkey, Croatia, Slovenia, Italy, France, Spain, Belgium, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Czech Republic.
   b. To live there Bulgaria, Italy, Belgium.
10. Have you already been working abroad?
    a. Yes ☒ No ☐
    b. If yes, in which countries? Italy, Belgium
    c. For how long? 2.5 Italy, 0.5 Belgium.
    d. How long did your longest stay abroad last? And where was this?
       2.5 Italy.
11. What is/are your native language(s)?
    Bulgarian
12. How many languages do you speak in total? 5
    a. Which ones?
       Bulgarian, English, Italian, French, German
    b. What is your average language ability in those languages according to the European Levels Grid?

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Intercultural competences

13. Where do you usually spend your holidays?
   a. In your native country  
   b. Abroad  
   c. Why?
     I'm curious .

14. When abroad, how would you describe your level of interest and motivation towards the host culture?
   a. Before? 
      Looking forward to it 
   b. Upon first entering the host culture?
      Looking with interest all around me 
   c. Mid-way through the experience?
      Already know if I like it or not. Still very interested and looking for new things and, if possible, people. 
   d. At the end of the experience? (If applicable)
      In most cases I want to stay more 
   e. After returning home? (If applicable)
      I check the travel guides and the Internet to complete the picture. Send e-mails or facebook requests to people I want to stay in touch with. 
   f. Today? (If applicable)
      I remember the things I liked and the things that I found unusual about the country or the people. To some places I'd like to go back another time 
   g. Does your level of interest vary depending on the country/culture you go to? 
      Yes, I'm more interested in countries that have had a different historical and cultural path than mine. I'm not so interested in the Balkan countries for example because I understand their mentality since it's similar to my country's mentality. And I'm not interested in visiting exotic, poor or religiously fanatic countries. 

15. Do you enjoy living in cultures/countries that are unfamiliar to you?
   Yes  
   No  

16. When you go abroad, do you get informed about norms and taboos of the host culture (greetings, dress, behaviors, etc.)?
   a. Yes  
   No  
   b. If yes, could you please give an example about what you learned before moving to Brussels?
      Click here to type your answer. 

17. When abroad do you realize the importance of 
   a. Your colleagues’ reactions reflecting their cultural values?
      Yes  
   No  
      • Could you please give example(s) 
        the sexist or inappropriate jokes, the tone of voice, the use of imperatives and words such as "must", "want" 
   b. Your acquaintances/friends’ reactions reflecting their cultural values?
      Yes  
   No  
      • Could you please give example(s)
Master thesis – Intercultural Competence & Self-Initiated Expatriates

you can see this clearly when you receive invitations for parties or home visits (some say at 8 and it could mean 8 sharp or not before 8, others say from 8 to 10)
or when it comes to paying the bill (some insist on paying, others on sharing, some leave tips, others bargain with the waiter)
or helping someone with something (some are very responsive, others take it as invasion of their personal space)
or the measure and the value of punctuality
or how they address personal questions (when can you dare ask a personal question also depends on cultural values and also what is considered a personal question)
In the public transport and public spaces (if they shout, or whisper, if they
how they approach strangers (if they are suspicious or trustful)
and what's their opinion about rules and laws
c. The fact that your own reactions are embedded in your cultural values and norms?
Yes ☒ No ☐
• Could you please give example(s)

18. Do you use strategies for adapting to the host culture in order to reduce stress?
   (If applicable)
   Yes ☒ No ☐
   a. If so, could you please give me example(s)?
      I give myself time and I try not to be demanding and accept my own mistakes. I keep a daily diary of my expenses and I always carry a map of the city and a mouseskin to write down interesting things I see on the posters or just to mark places of interest - shops, hospitals, theatres, or even bus stops and the working hours of the shops. I study a lot - the language, the streets, the habits of people, at first I spend time alone, just walking around, starting from my neighbourhood and the work place, looking, avoiding places where I have to talk, visiting supermarkets rather than small shops, reading the labels, buying on-line, always keeping cash to avoid unfamiliar machines. In the weekends I travel by public transport to other city areas, trying to remember routes and places. I subscribe to newsletters, educational and sports activities, I approach people slowly and bit by bit start to be more and more active.
   b. How did you learn them?
      from experience.

19. Do you know learning processes and strategies for learning about and adjusting to the
   a. host culture?
      Yes ☒ No ☐
      • If yes, which ones?
         Click here to type your answer.
      • How did you learn them? (Self-training, training from the organization...?)
         Click here to type your answer.
   b. host language?
      Yes ☒ No ☐
      • If yes, which ones?
watching movies and listening to songs and radio, listening to conversations around you. Watching TV as well but I don't like it.

- How did you learn them? (Self-training, training from the organization...?)
  from my experience.

20. Do you usually/did you learn the host language?
   Yes ☒ No ☐

21. Do you learn the rules for expressing nonverbal behaviors in other cultures?
   Yes ☒ No ☐
   a. If yes, could you please give an example?
      Italy is all about gestures. I can't describe them in English words, sorry.

22. Do you change your verbal behavior (tone, accent...) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it?
   Yes ☒ No ☐
   a. Could you please give an example?
      I try to

23. Do you change your nonverbal behavior when a cross-cultural interaction requires it?
   Yes ☒ No ☐
   a. Could you please give an example?
      I try to

24. How do you perceive yourself as communicator, facilitator, mediator, in an intercultural situation? Could you please explain why?
   Click here to type your answer.

25. How do you think others perceive you as communicator, facilitator, mediator, in an intercultural situation? Could you please explain why?
   Click here to type your answer.

26. When abroad do you demonstrate willingness to
   a. Interact with host culture members?
      - On the work floor?
        Yes ☒ No ☐
      - In your personal live?
        Yes ☒ No ☐
   b. Learn from your hosts, their language and culture?
      Yes ☒ No ☐
   c. Try to communicate in their language and behave in “appropriate” ways?
      - On the work floor?
        Yes ☒ No ☐
      - In your personal live?
        Yes ☒ No ☐
   d. Show interest in new cultural aspects? (understand values, history, traditions, etc.)
      Yes ☒ No ☐
      • Could you please give examples?
      Click here to type your answer.

27. Do you use culture-specific information to improve your communication style and professional interaction with colleagues?
   Yes ☐ No ☒
   a. If yes, could you give me example(s)?
      Click here to type your answer.
b. How did you receive this information?
Click here to type your answer.

28. Through your previous intercultural experiences, did you develop any intercultural abilities?
Yes ☒ No ☐

a. If yes, which ones?

| Knowledge about various cultures | ☒ |
| Empathy | ☒ |
| Self-confidence | ☒ |
| Tolerance | ☒ |
| Flexibility | ☒ |
| Adaptability | ☒ |
| Curiosity | ☒ |
| Openness | ☒ |
| Respect of other cultures | ☒ |
| Tolerance towards ambiguity (=uncertain/unknown situations) | ☒ |

Others (Please specify) talk freely about differences and ask questions when I'm afraid I might be misunderstood and misunderstand someone.

29. Do you currently use any of the intercultural abilities that were developed as a result of an experience abroad?
Yes ☒ No ☐

a. On the work floor?
I've learned to be more tolerant, not to take some situations or certain behaviour personally, not to approach people with stereotypes and not act offended if colleagues approach me with stereotypes and not to make conclusions hastily.

b. In your personal life?
I've learned not to be patient to my friends and to have expect them to act as i would.

c. Could you please give a practical example for each?

- Work floor:
The start of a working day varies greatly from one country to another. In Bulgaria I would go straight to my office and start talking with the colleagues I share it with. In Italy I would pass by each office in the corridor and exchange some words with everybody. In Brussels I would greet the people in the elevator when I come in and out but not even say hello to my colleagues as i pass by their offices because I would hardly ever receive any response.

- Personal life:
I'm often told that I'm too pale for a Bulgarian and that they expected Bulgarians to look like arabs or turks. At first i acted a bit offended, then I started taking it with a smile and I say some words about the origin of Bulgarian tribes that are actually blond with blue eyes. People are normally surprised and impressed.
30. Do you know:
   a. Two Belgian radio stations:
      Click here to type your answer.
   b. Two Belgian singers:
      Click here to type your answer.
   c. One Belgian painter:
      Magritte, Bruegel.
   d. Five Belgian beers:
      Leffe, Kwak, Kriek, Maes, Chimay.
   e. A typically Belgian dish:
      Carbonada, Meatballs with tomato sauce, frites, goffre.
   f. The current King of Belgium:
      Click here to type your answer.
   g. The current Belgian Prime Minister:
      Elio di Rupo
   h. Who Didier Reynders is?
      Click here to type your answer.

31. What is typical about the Belgian way of life and how is it (different/similar to) in your country?
   It's completely different from my country. It's very typical the level of Belgian services - the absent Belgian services, the working hours of the shops, the divided city areas (administrative and residential), the lack of competition on the market, the typical Belgian houses. But also - the tolerance to foreigners, the multicultural environment have also become typically Belgian.

32. Have you/do you plan to visit Belgian cities?
   Yes ☑ No ❌
   a. Which ones?
      all of the most prominent ones, starting with Gent

33. Have you/do you plan to visit Belgian museums?
   Yes ☑ No ❌
   a. Which ones?
      I have visited the most famous ones already but I'd like to see the museum of the music and the african art too.
countries, so I mean such as my boyfriend, he is from India, my youngest sister’s boyfriend is from UK but has some ??? blood, my younger sister herself is actually half Austrian, half Palestinian you know, hum my older brother has a Polish girlfriend and they have a child now, my uncle has a Japanese’s wife, hum, my dad has a Turkish girlfriend, so it’s like, it’s not like I grew up with this you know, but with time it developed that we had people coming to my family who had different backgrounds and most of them are not Austrian, like they didn’t grow up in Austria, they are actually from these countries you know so it’s not like they just have they parents, they are not second generation or something. Hum yes and 2 years when I was younger we also had an African friend living with us so I think that was my first encounter with other nationalities, interculturalties and he was almost part of our family pretty much, you know, like an uncle or

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<td>So yes that’s family background, so personally I grew up as being completely Austrian but I had contact, and I still have contact with other nationalities in my family, yes</td>
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<td>Nice, hum where do you work?</td>
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<td>I work at a law firm in Ixelles, hum it’s an English-German law firm, it’s, well it’s English but it was a merger of an English and a German law firms so, hum, very international, in our office with have lots of people from the UK, Ireland, Germany, and then some others but that’s mainly the main nationalities I would say</td>
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<td>And is it really international or more European?</td>
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<td>Very international, I mean we deal more and more with cases which take place in Europe but on a daily basis I have contacts with people from the States mainly, hum, also Asia, South America, so the firm itself is very international, I personally, it’s more of a Europe focus but not only</td>
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<td>Hum, how long have you been in Brussels,</td>
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<td>Heu it’s a bit complicated, I came here in 2007 hum and I went on and off, liked I lived in Belgium for a year, the in Austria for a year, and that like happens 4-5 times I think, well 5 times so in total I lived more 2.5 year now and the rest I lived in Austria, but like I feel connected to Belgium since 2007 pretty much because of Suchan (boyfriend’s name), because when I wasn’t living here, I was still here like hum for new years or Easter break or whatever. Hum but really living here and doing whatever, more than 2.5 years.</td>
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<td>And did you first come because of you work?</td>
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<td>Hum, in 2007, I came for an EVS project, it’s the European volunteer service, so it was, I was paid and all by the Commission, it’s sponsored by the Commission, hum I came because of the project and not because of Belgium, hum yeah that was the initial reason why I came to Belgium</td>
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<td>And have you ever worked in another country before?</td>
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<td>Worked, no, definitely no, I’ve been in the States before and I didn’t work there</td>
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<td>And did you do any Erasmus program or something and that you lived abroad?</td>
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<td>To Belgium yes, so the first year here I was doing this EVS program, it was a volunteer service but it was in reality a work project, then I went back to Vienna, then I came back for one year, hum to do my Erasmus and went back before proper work. So all 3 experiences that are kind of different from each other</td>
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<td>But always in Belgium?</td>
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<td>Yes and when I was 15-16, I lived in the States for a year but that was not for work, that was for highschool exchange so</td>
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<td>But you live there for a year so that’s still a big experience. Hum how many languages do you speak?</td>
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<td>Hum my mother tongue is German, and English, I kind of speak Dutch and French, I’m taking Dutch classes again, I’ve taken a lot of French courses in my life, somehow I’m not very good with that language, I can read anything, you know I read on a daily basis like heu newspaper,</td>
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etc. but my active speaking is again very poor I must say, hum because I don’t practice it, and I
don’t unfortunately have many reasons to speak it, I used to live in Liège, during my Erasmus,
so I did, I mean I was in a French speaking environment and no one speaks English there, but
that’s been really too long ago, only two years but too long for me in order to really feel
comfortable in that language, unfortunately, reading is not a problem, I also studied it for
exams in French but pfff, I’m really not good at the speaking, even writing is for me a bit easier
than speaking because I’ve time to remember, or I can look something up you know, but I really
don’t like speaking but I don’t feel comfortable because I know I make too many mistakes and
all so that’s the main reason. Yes, so I’m working on Dutch but pff once a week it’s not enough
you know and

But it’s easier as you speak German?

It’s easier, I’ve done a course before in Vienna, I like the language because I kind of find it cute
in a way, hum so there are other reasons for it, hum yeah and definitely easier to learn, so I
wish I could get more into it at the moment but with work you know and, so. And Hindi, I
understand and speak a bit of Hindi because I took a course for a year, but that’s really also 7-8
months ago since the last time, at that point it was not that bad but now, I did not open my
books since last summer, it’s really a disappointment but yeah so one really and a few

Yes, hum, when you go abroad or within even your own country, can you socialize with people
from other cultures?

Like hum in comparison to people from my culture, Austrian?

Yes

Hum, I think it’s almost more interesting for me to meet other people from other cultures, you
know, I wouldn’t say it’s more difficult or less difficult, because it’s like you have already
something to talk about in my eyes, you know, like where are you from, it’s almost, it seems
more interesting then meeting someone Austrian where it’s also nice if the person if nice of
course, but I wouldn’t make a big difference I think if the person is from somewhere else or not,
because it’s on the other hand not special anymore to meet someone from somewhere else,
you know, it’s still more interesting I would say

And when you go in the country to you feel interested in the local people, try to know how they
live, their traditions, their norms and? And do you learn those sometimes before going
somewhere?

Yes, yes, heu when I take a trip to anywhere it’s, I almost always try to prepare when I have the
time, by buying some books about especially culture, language, I try to learn a few words, but,
like thank you and good morning or something but I know other people who are much more
into this you know, so I don’t prepare that much languagewise, but like knowledgewise I always
try you know especially customs, and what you do and should you avoid that you know, like if
possible don’t do this, etc. I know it’s very generalizing but still it gives you some ideas about
how it works, so I always try like if I would have more time I would be even more you know,
because it’s I think part of the travelling process to of course enjoy the country but also to
understand people there, so yeah I almost feel like it’s my duty you know,

And have you ever adapted you behaviour, changed your behaviour because of the people you
were interacting with?

Yes definitely hum, how to start, I have the feeling that I personally, and I’m sure it’s a good
think but I adapt hum I try to, it almost comes you know, when you go somewhere and you,
you feel that this is something that you shouldn’t do or shouldn’t say, or your body behaviour
you know, I almost always try to kind of go in the direction of the people surrounding me, from
the country and I’ve noticed a lot that I change the way I talk, etc. It’s just one example, but in
the States after you’ve been there for 1 year you know, you behave differently, it starts with
small things like giving hugs or giving kisses, it’s even here in Brussels, you know I go back to
Austria and I kiss every person I mean you know, and although it’s not a common thing you
know, because here when you go out and there are new people joining, like friends of your
friends, usually as a greeting you kiss and in Austria it’s not like this, we shake hands, but it’s something which I think about, how to read the person or I adapt to, like my Japanese aunt she does a lot of this [nodding with the head] and I look at her and I do this as well you know, or what else,

Do you do that consciously, are you aware of your change of behaviours?

Some of it yes, and some of it no, I think some of it is heu copying without noticing, you know, because I want to make the other person comfortable so you kind of get on the same terms in a way and some of it I guess it’s more conscious like when it comes to talking, it’s more conscious I would say. Hum it’s like certain things which you say for instance in English, but you say it differently in German, it’s heu, or even in French, you know, it’s heu German is direct but still very formal in a way, English can be very direct but less formal, especially when it comes to like writing documents, etc. hum, in German you always have to show the respect, if you are talking with a higher hierarchical or whatever, in English it’s because of I think it has to do with the you, there is no formal and informal so it’s more like kind of broad, there is a common way of addressing people, and it makes it more plenary not in a negative way but in French you have to take all those sentences which don’t mean anything and put them together and you just want to say one thing but you need a paragraph, you know, so that’s much more conscious somehow, for me because it doesn’t come naturally in a way

And do you think that this way of adapting your behaviour helps you to interact with people from different cultures, backgrounds?

Yes definitely I would say, I think this is to make to make communication easier, like these things like trying to adapt consciously or subconsciously it is simply to make the communication between you and the other person easier, but it gets very complicated in my eyes, heu, when the other person think exactly the same way, you know and I sometimes get lost because I’m contacting a person maybe from another country, or writing emails and the person writes back and try to interpret what does the person means, does this mean yes or no, for example. When it comes, hum yes exactly, English, in English, you often say ‘I would be happy to receive the report on Monday’ or something, if a German person reads it, and doesn’t know a lot about how you say things you know, in English, etc. he would think ‘ok Tuesday is also fine’, you would be happy to receive the report on Monday, Tuesday is ok as well if it doesn’t work out, but the person actually means that he needs the report on Monday. Things like this, but on the other hand if the English speaking person also thinks the same and knows that in German you need to say things very concrete, so he would maybe write the same sentence thinking he will understand that I would be very happy to receive it on Monday but Tuesday is fine you know. So it’s kind of like miscommunication there because both sides are trying to understand the other side and you understand what I mean, but that I find a little bit, it’s just a theoretical thing, but there are friends who have that issue, I you try to adapt and to interpret what do they mean, because if you talk like them they might understand something different because they put it in the context of the country I’m coming from you know.

They will try to understand what you mean and interpret as well

I don’t know if it’s really an issue you know, but could be

Heu, when was the last time that you demonstrated flexibility when interacting with someone from another culture?

On a daily basis 😊 hum, flexibility, like do you mean an example?

Yes, like you are able to make a compromise to make things work or?

Hum, it’s a little bit complicated because my boss he is German and he is known, like in the whole company, he is one of the top people, he is known to be very complicated and people just prepare things very precisely because they know his feedback is right but very to the point, so I also tend to go in that direction, to be very precise and to like, I ask people to do things according to the deadlines, etc. because otherwise I will be in trouble you know, so I need to adapt to his ways kind of and his needs, hum and requirements just to be save in my position.
Well you said here on a daily basis, would you have some example?

Well the problem in our case, I never, well never is not the real word but sometime it knows if it is because of us and our relationship and personalities or is it because of cultural background. Like I can’t think of anything right now of course, but yeah well, things like jealousy or things like how much time do you spend apart or not, how much free time can we take, you know, or not, or should we be together and spend time together because we are a couple, this things I’m not sure if it’s our cultural background, or if it’s simply characters, you know, so i find it a bit difficult to evaluate, I mean I could go into it but, hum but I guess what I do at work, I wouldn’t say it’s flexible but when I receive something from more Southern countries, Italy maybe, or hum Portugal for example, when I receive a request from a person, I tend to think that or feel that it could wait just a bit longer you know, because I know the Germans, they will come back to me much faster, they need something, it’s actually not urgent but they want it to be done as soon as possible, and I know I will get a reminder in two hours if I don’t reply you know, and I know that with the more Southern countries, that it’s still, they are more flexible on their side so I can a little bit more time to answer. Hum compromises it’s really difficult because I feel like, I’m really not very flexible with work you because I just, to get things done it’s just stressful and they just don’t have the flexibility in myself to be flexible towards others, you know.

Yeah, because of your boss and

I think so, it’s, yeah

In Belgium, on a general basis, like when I go outside, no. work yes, but that has more to do with work place and formal, like today I take Fridays as casual Fridays but it’s actually not but I actually take my freedom kind of you know, so it’s a daily thing at work, I just want to wear more casual stuff but that has nothing to do with culture, it’s just the firm. Hum when I travel, yes, like not matter where we go, like India, Egypt, I try to adapt a little bit more, usually it’s covering a little be more, like when I was younger I didn’t do it that much, thinking that they will get over it you know and some, somehow that they have to accept that I wear maybe a skirt to here [showing] you know, I was 15 probably or 16 but afterwards I started like adapting a little bit more because I just don’t want to offend anyone. So yeah

And do you think that this way of adapting and changing your way, this has to do with your international experiences, various experiences with people from abroad, different culture?

I think I would definitely be a completely different person if I wouldn’t have done my exchange when I was 15, cause this introduced me to this whole, I don’t know volunteering and when you start volunteering for them, they at least in several countries they have workshops for you and it’s very practical in the beginning because then they want you to help at camps, etc. and we also talked about some intercultural learning but I mean up to one point, but then when you start volunteering for a longer time, you can have other seminars and they much more into theoretical stuff and so I think with this EFS experience, not just the one year but also the year afterwards I started a lot of time like evaluating what do I do, how do I behave, etc. so like in my mind for hours, I don’t know how many hours I spend thinking about intercultural learning, what is it actually because it’s so hard to grasp, and intercultural competence, etc. so I think through this all experience through like getting the travel, being really interested in spending time abroad, maybe living abroad, I think I’m a completely different person then what I would be If I would have stayed in Austria, yeah completely. If I wouldn’t have touched this intercultural whatever, bubble, I don’t think I would be, I don’t know completely ignorant about other cultures, I don’t think so, but hum, completely different, you know no as, I guess interested yes, but not as many, notice more thing in an interaction you know, I’ve the feeling
that now I’m more aware of things because I thought about them, because I’ve lived a few things

Could you think of any specific characteristic that you developed and that can help you with your interactions on a daily basis?

I think it’s kind of this hum, sort of understanding or trying, I mean I cannot say that I understand everything but you know, but kind of trying to understand where the person comes from, what, how the person was raised, hum, which culture the person grow up in but also at the same time, not forget that, you shouldn’t generalize too much just because the person grow up there or maybe speak another language, because one, or has mixed parents, doesn’t mean that he fits in my picture of Poland and Germany or something. But understand where he’s from or she, that’s kind of the basic setting, but at the time understanding that he could be completely different, like personalitywise, or because of what he learned and so on, where he lived, etc. so kind of trying to understand the background of people and what shape them in a way. I don’t know how to put this into a characteristic

Do you consider yourself maybe more tolerant towards others?

Hum, tolerant, i really, when I was younger I really wanted to be super tolerant you know but it doesn’t work for me, because there are things which I can tolerate, because I think it’s fine, but because it doesn’t bother me of because I have the feeling that it doesn’t harm anyone, but then, there are certain cultural traditions or characteristic almost, like believes you know, which I just cannot accept because I feel it’s wrong or it harms someone, in my perception. If the other feel like it, this is something different you know, and that’s when I think tolerating if fine to one point but I think everyone has their own morals in a way and sometimes thing just don’t match, so I accept maybe, because I don’t have the power to change it but certain things I know I cannot tolerate you know, and I would always discuss it you know and I

Hum, do you have the feeling to belong to any particular culture group?

Hum, just two things that came to my mind somehow, well definitely Austrian because I grew up there you know and hum the second thing that came to me just now is that I feel so connected to Brussels, but it’s like this very, it’s a different group then like local Belgian people you know, it’s like this international people you were talking about, like expats in a way, I know Belgians but hum I used to have a lot of friends in Antwerp but it’s kind of contacts like it’s less and less, like I could always find a place to sleep but it has become very little contact at the moment. So I feel like I’m part of a cultural group here because I’ve so many friends from different cultures, but I don’t, like I really feel connected, hum but it’s like an international group, international group and all of us have like somehow, or most of us have deep connection with Belgium because we’ve been here for years you know but somehow it’s not like, unfortunately you can’t call it connection like a Belgian connection or something. I mean I love this country you know and I like living here a lot but it’s like I look at the people I’m with and it’s coming from everywhere so

Not specially locals, yes, and do you think this is because of Brussels, as you lived in Liège so maybe you can compare, if? Because Brussels is already so multicultural it can be harder to get to local people?

I don’t know, a lot of people say that, that it’s so difficult in Brussels to connect to locals, etc. I personally I’m, it could be of course that the groups here are already so, the French stay with the French speaking, the Flemish with the Dutch speaking, because it’s different schools and you know, different groups, you know, often in some many daily life things, like national things, it’s already split so I understand that they already split and then the more international crowd it’s naturally because of your work environment usually that you also have like groups, you know, that’s the feeling I have, but I still think that if you would want to, you could get in contact with locals, if you would really want to, I mean then you, I you like hum drumming then you can join a drumming group. I mean of course you have to start learning the language if you don’t know it, etc. but I think it’s really possible. So I think out of laziness or out of not having
the time, I have the feeling that it develops naturally into these 3 groups, because I know I could get much more active, like getting myself involved in more local levels you know, but I’m so comfortable already around the friends I have, I don’t have the motivation anymore, hum but I really think it’s a bad excuse in order to always blame it on Brussels, on that it’s difficult to reach the Belgian, etc. I think it’s the same almost everywhere you know it’s just it’s just easier here to meet international people and voila you have your friends and that’s it and you know. I don’t know I just here so often that it starts annoying me you know that the Belgians are difficult to reach and

Yes yes,

No but I think you hear it, like I mean in Vienna, you know from Erasmus students, also it’s a nice but it’s so hard to get in contact, it’s I mean almost all the Erasmus students in my eyes and I was also one of them you know, you stick to the Erasmus student because it’s easier, it’s your first week there, you meet so many new people from other countries, all of you, including you, you need friends you know, you get in contact, you have so much friend because this and that so after a while you have friends so there is no need in getting in contact with locals and I think that really it’s in every country like this. And I think it’s superficial because I also hear people saying that in the Southern countries it’s easier and blabla and then I hear another story from other people that the time staying yeah it was so wonderful and people were so friendly, but there real friends like most of them, 99% were Erasmus students! So it’s, maybe they party a lot with some people, like local people but I think really spending time I have the feeling that it was still like friendship circle was still with international people

But do you think that having such a multicultural city as Brussels helps you for your adaptation in the country or in the city?

Hum, yes, I guess the more established is this community, like this international crowd, you know that the more difficult it gets for yourself to get involved, because if it would be a village you know and just Flemish people I mean you have no choice you have to get in contact with locals but the feeling that it’s, that it makes it easier for you to have international friends, I don’t want to think that it makes it more difficult to get in contact with locals people because that’s not true but I think that naturally, most people just get to know international people and this maybe in a way makes it more difficult to get local friends but it’s still possible if you want to I think

Hum, ok, hum, how do you think that your adaptation within the country influence your job performance?

Hum, I can’t really, like say for myself that I feel well adapted in Belgium you know, like I feel well adapted to my life here you know, but I would only say that if I would have like, a strong Belgian friend circle you know, then I would say yes, I’m in contact on a daily basis with Belgians and some personal contacts, relations you know I get in contact with them a lot, then I would say yes, I kind of, I adapted in the country you know, but now I feel happy but you know I would like to do better on this topic you know. But that me feeling comfortable here that it has an influence, an impact on my work, because I’m happy to leave work because I know I have things to do here, I have hobbies, you know, I know the city, I know where to go, I like to discover it, we have parties plan or some dinners or whatever, so you know this definitely has a big impact on my work, because if I would have this job and no good like leisure time, I would be very unhappy so this definitely has an impact

But then the good this with this city is that all your adaption in this country can stay superficial, and you can still feel very well adapted, even if it’s not really integrated to the country?

Yes I think it’s quite easy in Belgium to get to know people and to build up kind of a happy life in a way with work-life balance you know, we could socialize because there are many things happening and you meet someone and they introduce you to others, I think there is a lot of networking happening on the work life but also on the social life level, so I think it’s a good place to be to
In Belgium in general, or in Brussels?

Hum Brussels, I would cut it down to Brussels.

Yes,

Definitely Brussels, yes

Hum, have you ever thought of repatriating?

You mean home?

Yes going back to Vienna.

I mean I don’t have deadline, my job contract is like not temporary, I don’t know in English so there is not like a point, it’s not like in 2 years it’s finished here you know so I go back early, so

But you don’t feel like going back home? Or even when you were in the US?

No, no I think it’s always in a way there, you evaluate it, like how happy, I evaluate how happy am I, etc. how long do I see myself here, if it would continue the same situation, If it would continue for long, so there have times of course, not in Belgium much but in the states, I mean I was very young so it’s different, that I was away from my family for one year you know so there I thought about it a few times because I had some trouble with my host family, etc. so I thought I would be, but I never really considered it because I knew I could go back if I really want to, I knew that anyways it’s done after one year, hum, I think in today’s time, were are so mobile in a way, like mobility is such a big thing, it’s not like you, like 2 generations ago when you left to live in a different country it was kind of like permanent or, like people expatriating for ever you know, it was usually forever, and now today we can just hop from one country to the other and go back if it’s needed, so I never had this feeling because I know that if it goes really bad you know, I would reconsider it and maybe go home. So at the moment I feel very happy in Belgium, hum yeah there is no real consideration, I mean like our personal situation we don’t know where we’re gonna be in one year because of different things but could be Austria could be here but in general I’m happy here I would like to stay for a while you know

Hum have you ever received any intercultural training, for your work and did it help you?

Hum I didn’t receive it for my work, like not this job, but at, during my exchange here and during my EVS, I received training, during my EVS not some much though, hum but I gave a lot of training and there was, I also received training as volunteer for EVS, EFS the organization that does the exchanges, but I was also a lot involved in organizing trainings and giving it to younger, like to teenagers like 15 to 18 you know, but also to older people like, mainly 20s but older as well, it was also on a volunteer basis so I didn’t receive money or something and hum, yeah so I was more involved in giving, I mean I did receive otherwise I could give but hum, in the, I worked with Ilyana in the same organizing so it was this, my EVS here, the first year in Belgium, and I was involved in organizing trainings on European level with the trainee coordinator of the organization so I mean I’ve seen 6 different training in one week, on different topics but they all had to do with intercultural learning or competences or whatever you know, but this has been already a few years ago.

And do you think it’s helpful, that it helps you deal with diverse situation and that those training are interesting to go to?

Well, if people are interested in it, in general, yes, I mean there is always people who are not really happy because different expectations or different backgrounds or something but generally yes, I would definitely think, vote for it, but personally it can also makes you confused a lot you know, because of so many things, you know, it’s very theoretical sometimes, like you start very, when you begin receiving this training it’s sometimes really practical, almost too practical, like heu, two generalizing in a way, you know, like do this and do not do this, in this country and then it gets more and more theoretical and you start talking about different theories, etc. and at some point I was just sitting there you know, I’m just shortly, not too much time left before the training starts, I just begin, shit, why am it doing this, why is intercultural learning, like what is the sense in it, I know I was just completely confused you know because I didn’t feel why we are talking about his you know and it was just like, I was completely worked
out somehow

Yes,

I would still say that it’s usually very helpful, hum I think it makes people often more aware about what you personally have been through, or what you personally, what situation were you in, or how you react maybe, or how others could see things you know, I think it’s good to think about it and experience it.

So it’s more to raise awareness among people and

Exactly and to make you aware and through this experience together with actually being in contact with people from other country so living in other countries, I think you start developing this intercultural competence you know, it’s like, it’s helpful, I think just living somewhere else, you know, sometimes if you like, it’s you miss out a lot of things you know, which could be interesting for you to see. Like sometimes I read texts which I’ve read before but I forgot about it and I see things in it which explain something to me, you know, how I behave or react or something you know, or how someone else’s reactions, and I just feel like I’m learning from it you know and this make my communication with others easier you know, it’s making me, I don’t know, just more aware in general.

And would you think that all those experiences abilities, capacities, competence that you developed thanks to your experience abroad that it helps you adapt to a new country, a new culture?

I definitely think so, I think the more often you live somewhere else, abroad, or I mean it’s difficult, you cannot say more often or more you know, it depends from person to person but the more experiences you collect I think, the more easy it gets to start somewhere else. Hum because I think it’s a mix of several things like on the one hand you get more aware of the local traditions maybe, or customs, or whatever, but on the other hand, you, I think you also learn to be more easy going, to be more cool you know and lay back and you know because it’s repeating itself and then you can handle it in a way so you’re learning from the difficulties you had maybe in the past and maybe manage to make this experience or the next, make it more easy going because you yourself are more easy going and

And does it enable you to reduce the stress you may feel with adaptation to a new country?

Yeah, I mean in reality I’ve only lived in the State and in Belgium abroad, but I can really image that if I would go somewhere else, I don’t find it, in general I’ve moved so much in my life, you know back and forward between for example Vienna and I know I can handle it you know, just to, like the organizing stuff you know which of course is not what you are asking for, but I already know like in my head that this is not a problem, I can figure it out, so this is already helping and I know, I start living somewhere else before and I did meet people and I was able to common term with them although they were from a different culture, or many different cultures, just like in Brussels you know. I just have the knowledge and I trust that I can do it, that I can adapt to it, like that’s before and when you actually move, you know, it’s at the same time easier you know because you are more aware of things and you have maybe also some more knowledge about, if you sign a contract with a lot of Portuguese as an example, you have more knowledge about maybe the culture because you’ve been in contact with it before you know or, you are more interested or you ask like the right questions because you’ve done this all before. Ahhh it’s so complex, but one interesting thing in my work hum, when I was interviewed with HR, they asked like specifically if I had intercultural background, hum it was like really important for them that I’ve worked with people coming from different countries and I don’t know if they had read my CV properly but I had stayed in Belgium before for an organization and did many different cultures and even the name of the organization like “European Federation for intercultural learning” you know should give you the idea that I was in contact with people from different cultures, at like work based level and so I tried to explain yes, and the HR manager likes to talk a lot so she started talking about how important it is because this can happen, that can happen, etc. so it was, she was really super aware of how
important it is, you know that you are aware that some people react differently because of their cultural background and that you have to kind of know this and take this into account you know, when you contact people, or are in contact, not matter on the phone, or email or meeting, so I thought this was really interesting!

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<td>I don’t know how much they take it into account but at least they mention it a lot in the interview and I really felt like, yes you can skip this topic if you have read my CV, we can skip this you know, I mean you can ask me of course but that’s also why I’m applying here, because I like this international environment you know, but I thought this was interesting and it reminded me of this</td>
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<td>Well I think we’ve covered pretty much everything…. Blbalba</td>
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<td>Yes I think, I don’t know why but this intercultural thingy, like learning competences, like this all topic it’s for me, sometimes really hard to grasp you know, because first of all, I haven’t actively been thinking about it for a longer time, I mean I do think about it, but it’s more often very practical, but this all theoretical stuff it’s been the last 3 years or something, or 2 years, but hum it’s so, there is just so much information and it’s so hard to put it all in one because I think still a lot of work has to be done to get to one point, because there are so many approaches to it you know</td>
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<td>I know I know what you mean</td>
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<td>It’s super interesting but it’s, I would never say like but it’s just interesting to see because you are in contact with it on a daily basis, I mean not everyone but at least for me at the moment it’s on daily basis, so it’s just strange to kind of live it and then realize that there are things going on which are interesting, they are not normal. If you would just, like living in Austria, this wouldn’t take place so it’s interesting to get back and realize oh yeah, something is taking place, something is happening, I’m learning something or I’m doing something which has to do with it but what is it and how is it then, it’s interesting.</td>
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<td>Well thank you very much for your time, ending conversation</td>
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