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TRANSBORDER POLICIES FOR DAILY LIFE

THE CROSSROADS

**INTERCULTURAL INTERACTIONS IN THE GLOBALISED EUROPE.
THE CASE OF EUROPEAN YOUNG PEOPLE IN BRUSSELS.**

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DOTTORANDO:
EMANUELE GATTI

COORDINATORE DEL COLLEGIO DEI DOCENTI
CHIAR.MO PROF. ALBERTO GASPARINI
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TRIESTE

RELATORE
PROF. AGGR. ANTONELLA POCECCO
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI UDINE

To those who believe that to be happy
what matters is not where you are or
who you are, but who you are with.

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Introduction

Globalisation have awaken scholars' interest for the last two decades and has been studied by different disciplines. In sociology, it opened a new paradigm, as it obliges to go beyond the idea of separate national societies (what Beck [2006: 3] calls *methodological nationalism*) to embrace the idea of a *global system* characterised by an increasing level of interconnectivity among its elements. Inside this complex network, capitals, goods, services, information, objects, meanings and persons move with a freedom and a speed that are unique in world history.

This freedom of movement also represents one of the key aspects of the European integration process. In particular, the movement of students and professionals, what I refer to as high level migration, has been thought of as a way to facilitate the raising from below of a European identity and the Europeanization of the continent through intercultural exchanges. It is still doubtful if the many European programs and grants which promote European internal mobility has been reaching this objective. In any case, such a Europeanization process from below is based on the conviction that interpersonal relationships at a micro scale would produce changes in individuals' identities.

One of the ideas moving the present research is that individuals and their identity are "inseparable from the transactional contexts within which they are embedded" [Emirbayer, 1997: 287]. Everybody is immersed in a set of social relations in which he moves dynamically, changing his identity and his behaviour both for social stimuli and for personal characteristics, that is, both for sociological and psychological reasons.

Therefore interpersonal relationships need to be studied under two perspectives: on one side, as origin of changes in one's identity; on the other side, as objects themselves of change. The fact that people change place, together with the will or the

necessity to maintain relationships in the distance, might produce changes in the interpersonal relationships nature itself.

In this sense, it is reasonable to wonder which are the consequences of globalisation, meant as increased transnational mobility, but also as the parallel development of communication instruments, on interpersonal relationships. At the same time, it is important to investigate the identity changes produced by transnational interpersonal relationships.

This research has the objective to study globalisation and Europeanization through the analysis of transnational relationships. In this sense, it aims at offering a novel approach that seeks to humanise phenomena which too often are treated at a theoretical plan, far from the daily life reality.

To reach this objective, the research analyses Brussels' expatriate reality. The political centre of both the European Union and the NATO, located really in the heart of the Western Europe, Brussels has always been multicultural, with its francophone, Flemish and germanophone cultural dimensions, at the side of which now the Anglophone one takes place. Brussels certainly is a unique city, not only for its role of symbolic capital of Europe, but also for its concentration of high level migrants from all over the world, usually working or wishing to work in the European institutions and in the many related organisations. The image of the crossroads well describes Brussels, a place where people coming from the most different places cross and meet for a while, some of them to remain, some other to leave for other destinations.

This uniqueness makes Brussels the ideal place to study high level migrants, for expatriates related phenomena have a very high intensity, this way being easily recognisable and analysable. I am affirming that what is unique in Brussels is not the presence of certain tendencies, but rather their intensity and their concentration. This is why I believe that the most of the results which will be presented are highly generalizable: similar phenomena, even though with local differences and on diverse scales, are very likely to be found in every urban environment where there is a significant multicultural high level migrants community.

The fact that Brussels attract people because of its political environment raises the matter of the relation between power and globalisation. It is thus an opportune question if globalisation is creating an élite of transnational professionals.

Therefore the main research questions raised are:

1. How does globalisation influence interpersonal relationships, in particular the non-family ones?
2. How and how much does the encounter with the Other during a permanence abroad determine an identity and value change in the Subject?
3. Are globalisation phenomena creating an élite of cosmopolite professionals?

The study is divided in two parts: Part 1 aims at providing the theoretical frame and the conceptual instruments to conduct the empirical research, while Part 2 analyses the collected material and discuss the highlighted results.

More in detail, in Chapter 1 I propose an operative definition of *globalisation*, including it in a *complex global system* perspective. While doing this, I also discuss its duration, setting a timeframe for those processes that I regard as the core of globalisation. To come to my definition, I make a critical review of the sociological literature in order to identify and group the different interpretation of globalisation provided by scholars. Then I explain the nature of the global system, dwelling upon the concept of complexity. Finally, I mention and operatively define the concept of post-modernity, which I will frequently refer to in the entire study, as a label to indicate a precise set of historical transformations.

Chapter 2 is divided in two subchapters. In the first one, I briefly analyse the transformations that *states* and *nations* are undergoing. I make mine the thesis of those authors who believe that national states cannot represent anymore the political arena highest level. Moreover, I debate the role of nationalism as an element to found a democratic citizenship, and I maintain that three different senses of belonging are taking its place, which I call *private*, *multi-layer* and *cosmopolitan identity*. During

the discussion, at the light of the results, I am able to improve this identity model, proposing a more complete identity typology.

In the second subchapter, I focus specifically on the *European identity*, contextualising it historically, politically and culturally. Analysing the possibility that such an identity can find its place in Europeans' hearts, I affirm the necessity to think of it as a layer that leans over other identity layers, without replacing them. Moreover, I underline the conviction that, being identity formed within social relations, EU internal mobility and transnational communication should facilitate the spreading of Europeans ideas and values.

In Chapters 3, 4 and 5 I refer specifically to identity, marking its ideal path from the public to the private sphere.

In Chapter 3 I diffusely analyse the post-modern change different aspects, especially lingering over the condition of *uncertainty* which derives, *inter alia*, from the increasing in the number of individual choices. As a consequence of social change, I stress the role of *reflexivity*, differentiating personal and social reflexivity. After countering the individualist and the communitarist tendencies, I analyse the possibility of thinking of a reflexive *Subject* that through reflexivity is able to respond to uncertainty, and to the collective action, that is, civil society, is able to recuperate the democratic control of spheres currently out of the individual influence.

In Chapter 4 I provide an operative definition of *identity*, underlying that it is a changing structure depending on the environment and on Subject's interaction. With these premises, I analyse the links between *mobility* and identity, this way proposing a modern notion of *nomadism* and taking into consideration the notion of *place*. Later I list different cultural interaction approaches, from assimilation to pluralism, focusing in particular on the concept of *cosmopolitanism*.

In Chapter 5, underlying the consideration that interpersonal interactions have a multiple role in defining individual identity, I propose a complete *typology of interpersonal relationships*. I use this typology during the entire study in order to

classify interpersonal relationships according to several parameters, including the role of the actors and the tie intensity.

With Chapter 5 the theoretical part is complete. In the second Part I directly work on data. I introduce my analysis through Chapter 6, in which I provide a detailed description of the *methodology* adopted in the present research, as well as a brief report about the birth of this work.

In Chapter 7 I provide an extensive *description of Brussels' expatriates reality*, based on documents collected in the fields and on interviewees' declarations. Firstly I define the profile of the so called Expat, as Brussels' expatriates are commonly referred to; then I describe the characteristics and peculiarities of Expats' subculture, with the purpose of highlighting the narratives, that is, the informal social rules which might condition interviewees' behaviours and statements.

In Chapters 8 to 10 I carry on the *empirical analysis* of the interviews, by taking into consideration, for each question, the most significant answers. The different sections of the questionnaire have been naturally grouped in three main topics, each one of which corresponds to a chapter; respectively: mobility, interpersonal relationships and identity. A large number of quotations is provided in order to guarantee the most direct transmission of interviewees' thought. Where necessary I compare the qualitative data with Eurobarometer and Eurostat figures.

Chapter 11 provides the *discussion* of the findings. Some main results are discussed: I propose a mover typology, distinguishing a particular kind of expatriate which I call Euromover ; I adjust the interpersonal relationships model by adding new types of relationships; I analyse the impact of intercultural relationships on cultural identity; I propose an identity typology, in particular dwelling upon the European identity; I analyse the prospects of a cosmopolitanism of values.

Finally in the conclusions I resume my findings by ordering them in correspondence with the research questions.

In the annexes, a sample of the questionnaire is available, as well as the transcription of each interview in the origin language used.

PART 1
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter 1

What we speak about when we speak about globalisation

1.1 Defining globalisation

The concept of *globalisation* suffers of a semantic vagueness that dangerously undermines its utility. Nevertheless, it has become an irremissible instrument in the contemporary debate, what can be considered a prove of his seductive power as well as of its importance in describing the global changes we are assisting to and we are facing. Authors from different disciplines try to define it in a more or less inclusive way, adopting either a reductive point of view or a general one. As it seems that no attempt aimed at defining it in a definitive way resulted successful, like other concepts such as “culture” or “communication”, it is condemned to enlarge disproportionably its meaning and to be the object of articles that list all its possible uses. Despite these discouraging premises, the impossibility to adopt a strict, final solution formula for the concept of globalisation should not bring to a renounce in defining it: I believe, indeed, in its heuristic value. Referring to globalisation, it is possible to have a common understanding, up to a satisfactory approximation, both of *a set of processes* and of *the relations among those processes*. It is in this way that I will use it in this work, and it is in this sense that I am going to limit its meaning. To do this, I firstly need to clarify my position regarding what in my opinion are misconceptions about the nature of globalisation¹, and more specifically what I call:

¹ The way I will soon develop my arguments will evidently collocate me in the group of those that Held and McGrew [2000] call “globalists”. Comparing the position of the “globalists” and of the “sceptics about globalisation”, Held and McGrew, as other critical literature about globalisation does, take into consideration some of the remarks that I am going to explain in the next subchapters. Nevertheless I was not able to find in the relevant literature a rigorously systematised treatment of the following specific subjects. Furthermore, I consider Held’s and McGrew’s differentiation between

1. the fallacy of globalisation existence;
2. the fallacy of globalisation duration;
3. the fallacy of globalisation nature;
4. the fallacy of globalisation extension.

1.1.1. The fallacy of globalisation existence

The first fallacy concerns the existence of globalisation as a specific phenomenon. It is possible to run into this misconception at two levels:

- a. at a basic level, it is claimed that there is no globalisation because there are no really global phenomena;
- b. at a more sophisticated level, it is repeated that globalisation is not a specific, original phenomenon (or set of phenomena), as the characteristics commonly called to describe it may be traced in the 19th century already, if not before.

I begin with the first critic, which to me finds its origin in the identification of globalisation exclusively with its economic aspects. If we consider global economy, in fact, it is evident that there are areas of the world not really touched by global exchanges. Discussing the fallacy of globalisation nature [§ 1.1.3], I will show how identifying globalisation with global economy can be useful to study contemporary changes in the market, but misleading if the purpose is to understand in a general way globalisation. All the same, even though we accept a coincidence between globalisation and global economy, I believe that the argument is incorrect, for it identifies the global market with those areas which have an active role, in a way or another, in the fluxes of goods and money. Such an identification is improper for two reasons. Firstly, it is very difficult to determine which areas are in the global market and which are not. For example, a village in Peru that produces small souvenirs to be sold in the nearest town, with a local benefit but a negligible impact on the economy of that area, apparently should not be considered to be in the global market; but

globalists and sceptics to be too much simplifying, for it tends to level the often deep differences among various authors' positions.

actually it is, as those souvenirs might be collected with other souvenirs from close villages by a local cooperative for fair trade and be imported in Europe, where they would be sold at a dozen times their value and become part of an ethnic market with important cultural consequences. Secondly, even those areas of the world which are really out of the market, if they exist, suffer the consequences of the global market; for example, the members of a traditional African tribe might find dried up the well where they water their cows because some miles Northern an American company installed a factory that takes water up from the local rill. This consideration illustrates one of the most important aspects of globalisation: if we move to the global level, the world itself is the environment of the global system and every element is, in a way or another, included *in* the system.

Let's consider now the second level, that is, the idea that globalisation is not an original phenomenon. Firstly, even if it was not original, this would not mean that there is no globalisation or that it is not important: it would only be a problem of duration, and I will discuss this point in the next paragraph. Secondly, I agree that characteristics like the national economy interdependence, the communication technology fundamental role, the increasing of global commerce and people mobility may be easily traced in the 19th century already, as a frequently cited passage of Marx and Engels' *Manifest* demonstrates [Gallino, 2004: 324]; but on one side, it is highly arguable that their intensity is comparable with the current one, and on the other side other properties of the global system, such as the international labour market, the preponderance of finance on real economy, the formation of new political spaces like the European Union, etc. present utterly new specificities.

Consequently, I would say that any argument against globalisation existence is not defensible: there *is* such a thing like globalisation.

1.1.2. The fallacy of globalisation duration

The second fallacy is about the duration of the process or of the set of processes that falls under the name “globalisation”, at the origin of a false *querelle* in which authors get often bogged down. I believe that any doubt about its duration is partially due to its use as a *passe-partout* word [Guolo, 2003]. Under a historical perspective it is in fact used to indicate [Hall, 1995: 164]:

- the unknown (for Europeans) areas explorations;
- the global commerce expansion and the first phase of the global market setting;
- the financial capital movements;
- the large scale production of raw materials, food and products for far industries;
- the colonialism process and relative migrations.

Robertson [1992: 87], for instance, proposes a dating based not on primary factors, but on greater or smaller changes in society, creating a five steps chronology. I report it, as it constitutes an interesting perspective that highlights a number of relevant societal key events:

- a. embryonic phase: from the 15th century up to the half of the 18th century²; arising of national communities, enlargement of Church sphere of influence, individualism, heliocentric theory, Gregorian calendar;
- b. starting phase: from the half of the 18th century to about 1870; sudden passage to nations and to international relations; idea of citizen and of mankind; international communication regulation; international expositions; problem of the admission of non-European societies to the international society; problem nationalism-internationalism;
- c. take-off phase: from 1870 to 1925; creation of a global system based on four reference points (national societies, individuals, international society and fairly homogeneous idea of mankind); problem of modernity; non-European societies inclusion in the international system; restrictions to immigrations;

² Maybe Robertson got inspiration here, as in other points of his book, from Wallerstein dating.

communication forms development; international novels, competitions, prizes; first world war;

- d. fight for supremacy phase: from 1925 to the end of the Sixties; Society of Nations and United Nations, Second world war, Cold war; Third world;
- e. uncertainty phase: from the end of the Sixties up to now; man on the Moon; global conscience accentuation, cultural materialism, problem of the “rights”, increment of the global institutions and movements number, global communication, multiculturalism, etc.

Countering Robertson, some authors see globalisation as a centuries or even millenniums process. I believe this conceptualisation brings to a dangerous semantic emptying of the word “globalisation”. In the ancient history and during the Middle Age there have certainly been what Osterhammel and Petersson [2003: 26] call “beginning of globalisation”, but those processes always stopped. Osterhammel and Petersson agree with Wallerstein in recognising in the 16th century geographical explorations the beginning of a globalisation process never interrupted so far. This dating is surely incontestable, but it refers to a concept of globalisation strictly linked to the economic sphere and to the world wide transport extension, without taking into account the specificities mentioned in § 1.1.1. When we consider the process of exchanges progressive enlargement, from its origins up to a global scale, we are not speaking about globalisation, but just about global commerce. All the same, even if we consider globalisation only as market related, the uniqueness of the contemporary global economy has clearly and convincingly been shown [see for example Giddens, 1999; Gilpin, 2001; Dal Bosco, 2004; Gallino, 2004: 323]. Taking into account other dimensions, it is surely very interesting to study, for instance, how colonialists influenced colonies local cultures, or how product exchanges from a continent to another influenced continental agriculture. I am not saying that all those issues are not important. What I am saying is that they are not what I label as “globalisation” – and this is why I talked about a “false” *querelle*. Any form of global interconnection developed before the modernity is “incomparable” with modern globalisation [Tomlinson, 1999: 52], and this because of a simple reason: in the past there was no *complex interconnectivity*. There were global phenomena, like, for instance,

colonialism, but only in the late modernity they reached that level of complexity that allows us to speak about globalisation. *Globalisation is, indeed, a peculiarity of the recent modernity*³, that is, of the XIX and XX century.

Now, any division into periods is done according to some criteria, like the extension of the observed phenomenon in space and time, the presence of the phenomenon in different sectors of social life, and the hierarchy among phenomena that everyone adopts in his interpretation activity [Ceserani, 1997]. Consequently, we can circumscribe the globalisation era according to the sphere we give primacy to. If we consider capitalism development and market world-wide spreading, as well as colonialism intensification, it is reasonable to collocate the beginning of globalisation in the second half of the XIX century and its first peak in 1914 [Dal Bosco, 2004]. But it is also reasonable to collocate it in 1971, with the abolition of dollar standard [Zamagni, 1995], or in 1974-5, with the liberalisation of capital movements [Zamagni, 1995; James, 1997], two resolutions that strongly contributed to the creation of the financial market as we know it. If we consider, instead, the conflict scale, we can find in the First world war the beginning of globalisation, while if we consider communication technologies we can trace it back to the advent of the radio, or to the first intercontinental phone call, according to the event we give importance to. Finally, if we consider the ideology aspect, we might say that globalisation starts in 1989, which does not represent the end of communism in the world (what about China?), but surely capitalism victory in imposing a new global order. These are all heuristic solutions, but they suffer from being mono-dimensional approaches that make it difficult to take into account all the globalisation process specificities.

For this reason, I believe that what I call *globalisation began with the Second world war*, even though, of course, the transformations and the discoveries of the decades before prepared the ground for its coming. I will justify my assertion taking into consideration different spheres and showing how a number of relevant changes occurred in the 40s and in the following decades.

³ I use here the expression “recent modernity” without any reference to Giddens’ theory of the late modernity.

Politically and philosophically, the Second world war is taken here both as a symbolic date and as a concrete key-event, for it was a massive global event as well as the preparation of the Cold war order. Under an ideological perspective, as Habermas [1998: 14] notes, fascisms defeat delegitimized those cultural, religious and political ideas which were not in line with the “universalistic spirit of political Enlightenment”, and we can still appreciate the consequences of that change when we think about our reaction towards Islamic fundamentalism⁴. At a cultural level, with Hiroshima and Nagasaki the entire world entered in a new phase of its history, in its post-modern phase⁵. To use Beck’s [1993] terminology, I believe that the *risk society* started with the first atomic bomb launch, because for the first time the result of a local conflict, that is, the consequences of a local event could determine extreme repercussions for the entire planet. At a political level, the atomic menace originated immediately a new political order, characterised by the two superpowers’ balance, and also by the progressive breakdown of colonial imperialism and the independence of the old colonies⁶. This way that system of states and international relations that only in recent years has entered into a crisis was prepared. The cold war order transmitted a strong idea of stability, even though under the fear of a nuclear holocaust. Before the Communism falling, the world could even appear as a unity, because every place in the world had a precise meaning and often a role in the global order. In contrast, paradoxically, the most recent globalised world may appear not as a totality, but as a field of contrasting and dispersed forces which liberate energies that no one is able to control [Bauman, 1998].

For what concerns the communication sphere, which I consider basic in defining globalisation, I differentiate people and goods mobility from information transferability. In the transport sector, it is in 1941 that the technology of the jet plane was tested, even though some prototypes date back to the 20s, and in 1947 that the

⁴ Of course, extremist fringe groups and factions of various kind are still present, and even growing, also in our society.

⁵ For the meaning I attribute to the word “post-modernity”, see § 1.2.4.

⁶ Another fundamental consequence of the war was the creation of the welfare in Europe [Habermas, 1998], which can be considered one of the elements that certainly contributes to define what we might call the “European way”. The fact that such an idea exists is important when the debate about globalisation comes to how supranational institutions, like the European Union, can operate in the globalised world and contrast the predominance of economy on politics.

sound barrier was broken for the first time [Asimov, 1989]. I do not want to underestimate the importance of trains, but they were able to reduce the possibility of famine, but could not connect different continents: obviously it is with the airplane, and especially with intercontinental flights, that the premises for the current globalised economy are thrown. I am not only thinking of the movement of goods, which is anyhow much quicker than through ground or water transports, but to the increasing level of people mobility: temporary migrations of highly cultured professionals, businessmen travels (and correspondent information and best practices exchange at a global level), mass tourism to remote countries, all these movements have been strongly favoured by air communications. The speed of current displacements is not without consequences: when we move from a place to another so quickly as with an airplane, we are always exposed to a cultural shock. To appease this shock, television, guidebooks and illustrative material available in every travel agency describe in detail not only the places we will visit, but also the kind of experience we are supposed to have there [Tomlinson, 1999], so that when we travel we already have a precise expectation of what we are going to see.

Concerning information transmissions, in 1946 the first electronic computer, the ENIAC, was built, giving birth to the informatics age. Radio and cinema were already relatively common, and had an important role in the pre-war and war propaganda, but it is only in 1947 that the production of television for houses became possible [Asimov, 1989]. In the same year, a global conference, with delegates from 60 countries, took place in Atlantic City to fix the frequencies distribution (which lasted basically unchanged up to now) [Menduni, 1998]. Television had an incomparable effect on society with respect to radio and cinema, pushing someone to talk about “audiovisual society” [Flichy, 1991; Borderia, Laguna and Martínez 1996; Giovannini, 2002]. Not only did it allow the worldwide spreading of ideas and mass cultural products [Silverstone, 1994], up to the point that by many it is considered one of the most important causes of Soviet Communism falling, but also modified our sense of place [Meyrowitz, 1985] as well as our way to interact and to think of the public sphere [Thompson, 1995].

Concerning the cultural sphere, it is after the Second world war that Japan mass-produced articles and North American mass products, from rock 'n' roll to Coca Cola, from Superman to Playboy, progressively invade the world. And it is with the cultural revolution of the Sixties, prepared by the black movements for equality that started to arise after the participation of many blacks in the second world war [Mercer, 2000], and then spread across American universities, that new ideas start to circulate, provoking deep changes in the social system of a number of countries. Robertson [1992] mentions the direct link between the general awareness of the Sixties and the global conscience development.

Last but not least, with regard with the ecologic sphere, it is only in the Seventies that a diffuse environmental consciousness begins to arise, prospecting for the first time the possibility for mankind of a slow dead due to pollution, in contrast with the image of a quick extinction due to a nuclear holocaust.

For all these reasons, I consider globalisation as a contemporary and a relatively recent set of phenomena, traceable back to the Second world war.

1.1.3. The fallacy of globalisation nature

The following is a not exhaustive list of the global challenges that are brought to public attention [Lomborg, 2004; Zolo, 2004]:

1. climate change and sustainable growth;
2. communicable diseases, sanitation and access to clean water;
3. malnutrition and hunger;
4. migrations;
5. conflicts, terrorism and new kinds of war;
6. global justice;
7. global governance, corruption, democracy and legitimacy;
8. financial instability, subsidies and trade barriers;
9. sustainable social policy;
10. access to education;

11. digital divide;
12. privacy and personal data protection.

What joins all those matters is their need of a global solution, that is, their need to be tackled through global policies agreed at an international level. To do this, economy is evidently fundamental, but there are many other forces at stake (political, social, cultural and human factors) which need to be taken into consideration.

The fallacy of globalisation nature consists in identifying globalisation exclusively with the changes we have been assisting in the economic sphere. This fallacy is misleading both at a theoretical and a pragmatic level.

At a theoretical level, it approaches globalisation as a mono-dimensional phenomenon, this way ignoring a number of other issues that the word “globalisation” as I mean indicates. Very shortly, the problem of the globalised economy consists in a system which is out of the states range and that seems to work for profit sake rather than to guarantee people wellness. This generates problems of national economies and welfare sustainability, as well as of (moral and factual) legitimacy with respect to the actions of international organisations like the GATT or the World Bank. Depicting the world situation this way without taking into consideration other factors brings to a serious underestimation of connected dimensions, like the human one (migrations, ethnic and religious conflicts), the cultural one (local vs. global, cultural homogenization), the ecological one. Any attempt to explain not exclusively economic phenomena using such an approach inevitably lead to inconsistent, or at least insufficient theories. This is particularly evident, for example, in the case of migrations. Every analysis of migration movements in purely economic terms revealed to be seriously incomplete, and every migration policy based only on the recognition of economic factors (like, for instance, the need that a receiving country may have of immigrant workers) presented unexpected and uncontrollable effects [Zanfrini, 2004].

On the pragmatic point of view, such a mono-dimensional approach valorises too much aspects such as profit or corporation interests, this way making very hard to seriously include in the political debate important issues like the consequences of industrialization on people or on the environment. Without a serious debate and a

political will to face these issues, it is impossible to settle the basis for appropriate and relevant solutions. Of course these issues remain at stake, so that an increasing number of citizens all around the world become aware of them. This way a gap arises between politicians and economic lobbies on one side and civil society on the other side, provoking either a violent reaction (no-global movements, ecologic movements, etc., up to terrorism) or an estrangement from politics, considered more and more to be out of citizens range.

A mono-dimensional economic approach also hides the fact that economic globalisation is not moved on by unknown, incontrollable forces, as Bauman [1998] considers them⁷, but by a precise economic neoliberal strategy. Only changing that strategy, or better, modifying the paradigm that inspires it, it is possible to take into account the interconnections between our economic conduct and its social, cultural and ecological consequences.

To sum up, an economic approach is surely necessary for a strictly economic analysis, but the international economy should never be confused with globalisation. Such a distinction would avoid more serious misunderstandings, like the one which derives from using globalisation as a synonymous of economic neo-liberalism. Many authors call “globalisation” an ideology to hide economic power differentials through the image of a self-regulated global system which for its nature remains outside the political decision range [Touraine, 1997]. As I will show in the following subchapters, this is not globalisation, this is part of the above mentioned economic neo-liberalist project, which partially coincides with the globalisation process, but without exhausting it. The equalisation between globalisation and economic neo-liberalism is extremely dangerous. It is adopted by global movements and originates a ridiculous slogan: no-global. Actually, what the no-global movement is against is the economic neo-liberalist dominancy, presently able to influence not only the economic sphere, but also the cultural one. Declaring itself “no-global”, the global movement against neo-liberalism enters in a semantic contradiction that has been

⁷ To say, as Bauman does, that economic forces are incontrollable is true and untrue at the same time. It is true that, given the high level of complexity of the globalised world, any economic policy can potentially bring unexpected consequences. All the same, this consideration should not lead to underestimate the fact that international governmental organisations, which strongly orientate international and also national economic policies, are composed by national states delegates.

exploited by its opponents. As Sen [2002] notices, the no-global movement is, in fact, global in its deepest nature, as it is a cosmopolitan, world-wide collective action fighting for global justice, global equality and for a global sustainable development.

This fallacy is extendable to other mono-dimensional approaches: the technology one, the international relations one, the cultural one, etc. It does not matter which dimension we choose: in every case it is a reductionism that does not really explain the complexity of our age. I do not want to underestimate the utility of mono-dimensional approaches: they are necessary to isolate particular phenomena and analyse them, and they have been producing important insights in many aspects of the globalisation process. Nevertheless, I find them dangerous when based on a theoretical misconception: the consideration of the economic, political and cultural spheres as independent [Shaw, 2000]. This misconception brings to wrong interpretations of the international reality current nature: on one side, there are those who think that, due to globalisation, states have no importance anymore and will disappear; on the other side, there are the ones who try to demonstrate the importance of states in order to refuse globalisation theory. According to Shaw, economic or cultural globalisation cannot by themselves destroy nation-states basis; but at the same time, it is obvious that states and their way to exercise power change together with the technological, economic and cultural spheres.

1.1.4. The fallacy of globalisation extension

This fallacy assumes different forms. In the first one, it concerns the idea that global and (inter)national are opposite categories. This theoretical misconception, pointed out by Shaw [2000], gives rise to a debate among those who claim that states will disappear and those, like Sassen [1996 and 1998], who claim that states still play a fundamental role. In my perspective, to set global against national is like to say that administrative regions and states are opposite categories, when they just describe different aspects of the same reality, or better, of the same system – aspects, I would

add incidentally, which work together for the efficient running of the entire national system.

At another level, this fallacy brings to the contraposition, clearly explained by Bonanate [2002], among those who claim that states, being the only sovereignty holders, are the only actors of international relations, and those who claim that, with globalisation and the consequent corporations and global organisations increase in power, we should not speak anymore of *international* relations, but of *transnational* relations [Hannerz, 1996]. In my opinion, this is another false *querelle* among dogmatic positions which are not really in contrast. It is obviously true that, formally, states are still the only actors of international relations, but it is also true that other institutions have the power to influence states internal and external policies. The problem, here, is that states are considered at a macro-level as living entities: they are anthropomorphised. States, actually, are complex institutions made of people: they are their citizens and they are something more than the sum of their citizens. Saying this I hope to exit, for a moment, from the strictly political vision to go back to a sociological one, thinking of what institutions are about: they serve the people. In this sense, the emergence of a) governmental institutions, b) corporations and c) a global civil society should not be seen as a menace for an efficient functioning of the international order. Let's see why point by point:

- a. Governmental institutions are the emanation of states power: they are at the same time transnational, as they constitute new actors with their own logic inside the international system; but they are also international, in the sense that they are one of the forms, like treaties, which states use to operate at an international level.
- b. The fact that corporations are acquiring more and more power surely presents a number of problems that I do not want to underestimate. But it also presents social, economic and technological advantages, like the reduction of transactional costs or the investments in scientific research and the effort in the technology innovation [Gilpin, 2001]. These advantages have been eclipsed both by the traditional indifference that neoclassic economists have

shown with respect to oligopolies and by the no-global movement action, which highlights the (many) dark sides of multinational companies. Even a Marxist critic underlines that, even though the way corporations work is seriously arguable, their existence is to be maintained as a trait of modern capitalism. Under this perspective, in fact, they are considered one of the instruments of the richer, Northern states domination on the South of the world. This is evident also in the cultural sphere: Microsoft, Coca Cola, McDonald's and Disney, just to make some examples, are powerful instruments to guarantee United States supremacy at a cultural level. The fact that Microsoft is an American corporation (and not a Japanese or a Chinese one) has orientated the development of informatics industry in a precise direction, and today we all use icons and keyboards with a limited number of characters, without imagining how it could be if the computer history had been an Eastern history. In this sense once again I would say that corporations are part of the transnational system, as they are able to exercise pressures on states; but they are also part of the international system because they are used by states. I am afraid that we cannot really solve the problems caused by corporations opposing the economic interests to the political interests, because they are almost the same thing. In this sense, globalisation is producing a general awareness that can be usefully used to reduce corporations at the service of people more than of profit, by orienting both political and economic interests in the same direction.

- c. The global civil society manifests itself by movements and by non-governmental organisations [Kaldor, 2003]. In both cases they serve the states at least in two ways: firstly, they raise doubts and questions, create awareness and propose solutions that states can use to orientate their policies; secondly, they often offer to citizens services that the state is unable to organise, this way complementing the state lack of presence in a number of areas. In this sense civil society cannot be considered as a formal actor in the international relation system, but is surely useful to orientate the many international relation resolutions, also pushing countries to include some

issues in their agenda and to dialogue at an international level in order to discuss them.

At a third level, the fallacy of globalisation extension concerns the relation among the local and the global. Much has been written about this couple, but the debate can be roughly summed up in the opposition among those who believe that the two terms are in contrast and those who believe that they coexist and work together. According to the position an author takes with this respect, he can fear a mono-culture advent or believe in a certain degree of cultural syncretism; he can defend traditional production systems or uniform industrialised technologies; he can feel that his nationality is menaced or realise that his national products are spread around the world, etc.

I believe, once again, that any contraposition of the local/global categories depends on wrong premises. Globalisation is not a process that erases local peculiarities just by exposing them to the world sight, but rather a process that creates possible, potential interconnections among different localities all around the world. This, of course, produces cultural changes and, as the process is very quick, changes occur in a very fast way too. This speed might appear shocking to someone, but it must be remembered that whenever two cultures meet, they mutually influence, provoking a change one in the other. Historically this change was generally (but not always) relatively slow. Current communication technologies, as well as other elements, fasten this process and enlarge it to a scale that disorient many people. Nevertheless the local is not a dimension that is in contrast with the global one, but rather that cooperates with it, both working in the same system.

I defined this fallacy “of globalisation *extension*” because I believe that the misconceptions I have just analysed originate by the attachment to a *national* vision of sociology and political science that is not able anymore to take into account the complexity of *global* interconnectivity. Globalisation puts the premises for a *dialectic* among different levels of the global system (Gallino speaks about a

“dialectic interaction among global and local processes”⁸). This does not mean, as Robertson [1992: 141] points out, that any socio-cultural or political event could or should be explained by referring to the entire global system dynamics, but rather that *we are in a global system* (we will see in the following subchapters what this means). Robertson describes this system proposing a refined model based on four reference points, each one of them related with all the others:

1. national societies;
2. individuals;
3. societal global system (relations among national societies);
4. mankind.

The interrelations among these reference points constitute what Robertson calls “global field” or “global human condition”.

Couples like national vs. international, national vs. global, international vs. transnational, local vs. global reveal themselves inadequate to describe the globalisation process, because they postulate an order based on closed systems with no complex relations. Globalisation, or I should say, with Robertson, *glocalisation*, makes these categories explode, pushing one inside the other, so that what happens in a place can influence the life of people staying in another place, even a very far one.

I would say that, as the level of interrelation among national societies is more and more increasing, we can definitely analyse our world as a unique system. This does not mean that there will be one only kind of political society or a global mono-culture⁹. Robertson himself, following Habermas, does not believe in a collective identity, that is, in a mono-culture, but in a pluralistic and universalistic participation to the global communicative action¹⁰.

⁸ “... interazione dialettica tra processi globali e locali” [Gallino, 2004: 323; my translation].

⁹ For the moment I prefer to use this simplifying expression. In § 4.3. I will analyse in detail the different types of cultural interrelation.

¹⁰ This debate is related to different positions with respect to the idea of cosmopolitanism, which is not possible to analyse in detail in this research. See § 4.3.

1.2 What I speak about when I speak about globalisation

I have clarified what I believe globalisation is *not* and how it should not be approached. It is now time to explain what I believe it *is* and how it should be approached.

1.2.1. Global system

To begin with, with the word “globalisation” I indicate a process towards a more and more *global system*. I will now explain what I mean by the word “system” and, right after that, by the word “global”.

I use the word “system” to avoid the term “society”, even though, up to some extent, a global system is a global society: if we consider the broadest possible meaning of society, the discursive one, there is no difference between the two expressions, as in this sense a human system cannot be but a society. If we adopt, on the contrary, the sociological sense of the word, a society is defined by some characteristics, among which [Ribolzi, 1994; Gallino, 2004]:

- a. a common culture existence, which is evidently not traceable at a global level (the international law or the human rights, which are universal [Sen, 2002], cannot be considered as a global culture; moreover, they are still very far from being recognised and adopted by all governments¹¹);
- b. the consciousnesses and the feeling, common to all its members, to be part of that society; in this sense, what we face in the present is, instead, an open conflict among different definitions of what a global *Gesellschaft* should be [Robertson, 1992; Touraine, 1997; Giddens, 1999].

All this considered, I would like to differentiate the connoted idea of a global society meant as a mono-society, that is, some sort of a political system collocated at a global level (either a mega-nation, or an empire, or a federation), from the idea of a

¹¹ I would like to remind that even among the Western societies there is no agreement about some principles, like, for instance, the death penalty.

global system, that is, a set of elements of different nature linked by interconnections. In other words, I do not think that there are the conditions, now and for the next generation, to speak about a global society meant either as a political unity or as a cultural unity. As Beck [1997a, 2003] points out, there is no historical determination in this sense: as globalisation was not the only possible result of modernisation, in the same way it does not have now a predetermined direction. Touraine [1997] notes that after a period of globalisation there might even be a totalitarianism renaissance.

Robertson [1992] summarises four global order images that have been historically discussed in the political science debate:

1. global *Gemeinschaft* 1: system based on relatively closed social communities, either equals or unequal with respect to the value of their cultural traditions;
2. global *Gemeinschaft* 2: order constituted by one only global community, as a global village; it could be either based on a global common conscience, or on a pluralist ground;
3. global *Gesellschaft* 1: set of open societies (probably national) in intercultural exchange; they could be all politically equal or with a dominant one;
4. global *Gesellschaft* 2: global planned organization, with the political power either centralised or decentralised in a federation.

Beck (1997a: 25) underlines how the global society cannot be defined as a “national mega-society” that includes all national societies, but as a “global horizon” characterised by multiplicity and non-integration. He differentiates among globalism, globality and globalisation. Globalism would indicate the economic neoliberal ideology and action: its result is the passage from policy to market. Globality refers to the fact that we live in a global society (that is, a transnational society) and that a set of social phenomena that are not integrated in national state policies exists. This global society is seen as non-integrated, as a multiplicity without unity (Bauman’s [1998] same conclusion), for it is the result of different individual perceptions. Finally, in Beck’s words globalisation would indicate the process through which national states are influenced by transnational actors. Even though I find it useful to present this differentiation for its gnoseological value, I think it is rather artificial.

Despite this, I agree with Beck when he underlines how globalisation has not a linear dimension, as those who simplify the globalisation process to the terms of a global Americanisation seem to postulate. I find it odd that just when the idea of progress comes to its end, undermined by post-modernity implications, a Hegelian and Marxist root determinism is put forward again.

Referring to the idea of a system I hope to underline in my definition the aspect of the interconnectivity, that is, the relations among the different elements of the system itself. I am aware of the fact that the application of the system theory to social (living) systems presents great difficulties [Luhmann, 1984]. Still, I prefer the image of the system not because of all its theoretical implications, but because of its neutral connotation with respect to the idea of society.

Without digressing too much from our argument to the system theory, I would just remind that a system is, indeed, an interrelation of elements which constitute a global unity [Miller, 1965; Morin, 1977]. This basic definition already contains two main characteristics: the interrelation of the elements, and the unity constituted by these correlated elements. These characteristics have been condensed in the slogan “the whole is more than the sum of its parts”, which is explained just by the presence of relations among the elements. The state of each element is determined by the state of the other elements. As I have already noted following Robertson, even though we are conscious of the multiple relations among the system elements, the complexity of the global system is so high that we cannot explain every socio-political or cultural event referring to the entire system dynamics¹². The enormous complexity level of the global system obliges us to take it to pieces and analyse each piece or sphere separately (mono-dimensional approach). Nevertheless, we need to remain conscious that this operation brings us to a reductionism, because the link between the elements and the entire system brings to a new determination of the causality: as every element can influence the entire system, so the system can influence every element [Miller 1965], and in this interaction we find again the dialectic among the local and the global. To correctly approach all the issues related with globalisation, we have to

¹² To do that, we should pass to a higher analysis level, considering not just the elements interactions, but their organisation [Morin, 1977]. In this sense, a theory of the global system would probably reach such a level of generalisation to be scarcely useful.

skip from the simplex thought to the complex thought. As Morin [1990] points out, a non-complex vision of social sciences leads to the idea that there is an economic reality, a psychological reality, a demographic reality, etc., and that those categories exist as independent realities. Embracing the complex thought implies the necessity of taking into account the multidimensionality of these categories, for each one of them partially includes the others. In Axford's words [1995: 33]:

globalisation has to be seen as a multi-dimensional process, and that implies cutting across levels of analysis to grasp the reflexivity in relationships between actors and various institutional forms, whether local or global. By implication this approach rejects the argument that the global system is being integrated by a single causal logic.

Moving to the first term of my expression, Shaw [2000] identifies four different uses of the word "global":

- a. to indicate any phenomenon that goes beyond the national frontiers; in this case it surely represents an abuse, as words like "international" or "trans-national" would be more appropriated; nevertheless I would not ignore this use, because it reminds us that, even though not all relations in the globalised world have a global extension, global transformations affect also the smaller levels (I suggest to call this use *trans-national notion*);
- b. to indicate what is connected to all mankind or what refers to the entire planet (I suggest to call it *ecologic notion*);
- c. to indicate the social relations enlargement on a global scale (I suggest to call it *spatial notion*);
- d. to indicate the development of a human society common conscience on the global scale (I suggest to call it *cosmopolitan notion*).

Speaking about a global system I refer to the above mentioned ecologic notion. In this sense, I refer not only to human actions, but also and most of all to human actions effects on the planet and on other human beings. In this sense, the more the global system is integrated, the more it becomes exposed to menaces like the global terrorism or the interdependency of financial Exchanges [Gallino, 2002].

1.2.2. A definition of globalisation

On the basis of what has been discussed up to now, it is possible to propose a definition of globalisation.

Authors like Giddens [1990], Robertson [1992], Beck [1997a], Tomlinson [1999] all speak about globalisation in terms of relation that connects different elements. Giddens, in particular, defines globalisation as

The intensification of global social relations that connect distant localities in such a way that local events are modelled by the events which take place thousands of kilometres away and vice versa. It is a dialectic process because those local events can go in an opposite direction with respect to the distant relations that modelled them. The *local transformation* is a component of globalisation because it represents the lateral extension of social connections in time and space¹³.

Robertson speaks about a

twofold and massive process which implies the interpenetration between particularism universalization and universalism particularization¹⁴.

Scidà, in an article that I believe owes an important debt to Robertson, echoes and clarifies his words:

Interdependency and interpenetration of different social systems (civilizing cultures, national societies, ethnic sub-societies, cultural groups, national and international organisations, individuals) that affects all the three social change typical 'areas': the socio-cultural one, the institutional one and the individual one¹⁵.

¹³ "... globalizzazione come l'intensificazione di relazioni sociali mondiali che collegano tra loro località distanti facendo sì che gli eventi locali vengano modellati dagli eventi che si verificano a migliaia di chilometri di distanza e viceversa. Si tratta di un processo dialettico perché questi eventi locali possono andare in direzione opposta alle relazioni distanziate che li modellano. La *trasformazione locale* è una componente della globalizzazione perché rappresenta l'estensione laterale delle connessioni sociali nel tempo e nello spazio" [Giddens, 1990: 71; my translation from the Italian edition].

¹⁴ "... un processo duplice e massiccio, che implica l'interpenetrazione tra l'universalizzazione del particolarismo e la particolarizzazione dell'universalismo" [Robertson, 1992: 141; my translation from the Italian edition]

¹⁵ "... interdipendenza e interpenetrazione dei differenti sistemi sociali (culture civilizzatrici, società nazionali, sub-società etniche, gruppi culturali, organizzazioni nazionali e internazionali, individui) che coinvolge tutti e tre i 'luoghi' canonici del mutamento: quello socio-culturale, quello istituzionale e quello individuale" [Scidà, 1994: 69; my translation].

For Held and McGrew [2000: 14] globalisation refers to “durable and institutionalised network of interconnections at a global level”, emphasising the fact that far events can have consequences at a local level.

Tomlinson speaks about what he calls “complex connectivity”, that is, the growing network of interconnection and interdependences of modern social life [Tomlinson 1999: 14]. For Tomlinson this is the essence of globalisation: through the complex connectivity, the experience of the global enters in the local one, which occupies the majority of people time and space, modifying it.

The existence of a strong interconnectivity among different elements of the system means that even those who do not have a major role in the globalisation process are subjected to its effects. In this sense I totally embrace Beck’s [1993] idea of risk society, that is, the idea that we all share the risks produced by others’ action. More specifically, as risk society Beck indicates the current evolution phase of modern society, in which the risks generated by the system, and in a first phase underestimated because of a blind trust in its control capacity, escape from the control of the industrial society, which is then accused of producing and legitimating dangers that it is not able to dominate. This idea is somehow present in Giddens’ work too [1990 and 1991]. Gallino explicitly includes in his definition of globalisation the foreseen and wanted effects as well as the unforeseen and unwanted effects [Gallino 2004: 325]. Nevertheless, I would not identify globalisation with risk society. I would rather say that the fact that we share risks is a peculiarity of the globalised world.

Connecting the idea of interdependency and interpenetration that is common to all these definitions with the idea of a global system composed by local spheres, and taking into account the mutual effects of the interaction a) among the localities, and b) among the local level and the global level, I would define globalisation as a *process of individuals and institutions inclusion in a global system that connects them dynamically and dialectically through a complex net of psychological, economic, political, cultural, social and ecological relations, in such a way that the*

status of an element of the system may possibly influence the status of other elements or of the entire system.

I speak here about “inclusion” rather than “intensification”, as Giddens [1990] does, to underline the topicality of the global system over the process, this way taking the distance from him, who sees globalisation just as a modernization radicalization. I also avoid the reference to the universalization, which I consider a strictly cultural process. I avoid to refer to “social systems”, as Scidà [1994] does, in order to stress the direct inclusion in the system of individuals just as human beings, no matter what their social role is.

Saying that the system connects its elements dynamically, I mean that the system never reaches a stability status.

Saying that the system connects its elements dialectically, instead, I refer to the capacity of the elements to exercise a mutual influence. Using the image of the net I want to show how the different kinds of relations are not independent, but rather create nodes; as an easy example, we can image how the psychological dimension can influence the economic one during a Stock Exchange crisis, pushing millions of stock holders to sell, instead of following the most rational behaviour. However the image of a network, as Osterhammel and Petersson [2003] note, does not imply that everything is dependent on everything, because many interactions receive an orientation by a specific dimension or by a specific element of the system.

Finally, I include the ecological dimension in order to express the fact that a change in the status of an element may affect not only other individuals or institutions, but also nature.

In order to better clarify my globalisation definition I will now deepen two frequently mentioned concepts: complexity and post-modernity.

1.2.3. Complexity

I have mentioned the concept of *complexity*. Our common sense suggests us the meaning of this word. It is now the moment to better express what it is about. De Toni and Comello [2005], to whom I am debtor for the explanation I am going to provide, list an impressive number of definitions and reflections about complexity; all of them refer to the following properties:

- a. many variables;
- b. many relations;
- c. linear and non-linear relations¹⁶;
- d. necessity of a systemic approach.

A complex system, which is what we are speaking about talking of a global system, presents the following properties:

- a. great variety of components with specialised functions;
- b. components organised in internal hierarchical levels (for example: individuals, groups, ethnic groups, nations, etc.);
- c. components and levels connected by a great variety of links, what generates a high density of interconnections;
- d. non-linear interconnections.

There are two important points to emphasise here. The first one is that, given its characteristics, complexity *is not* a synonymous of complication. The latest can be approached linearly and analytically, by resolving it into its elements; complexity, on the contrary, needs a non-linear, synthetic approach, for it cannot be decomposed, but needs to be understood in its totality, as a whole. This is why I say that the global system is given by a complex net of relations. If we think to globalisation as a complex phenomenon, it is evident what I have been insisting on: a mono-dimensional approach, that is, an analytical approach is insufficient to understand it, because it would cause the loss of something essential. Moreover, I believe that an effort in the direction of a synthetic approach would also lead to a reduction of the Western driven interpretations of global phenomena. The result could be a more

¹⁶ In a linear system the whole is equivalent to the sum of its parts. In a non-linear system an added value is given by the connections.

precise vision of global phenomena. For example, instead of speaking of McDonaldization, which is a Western-driven, reductive perspective, we could analyse the exchanges and the mutual influences among different cultural systems at a global level.

The second point is that complexity is something in between order and chaos, without reaching anyone of them: it is a dynamic order. The world, in this moment, presents some sort of order in constant changing: economy has its rules, migrations go on according to precise schemes, climate variations show trends, etc., but they are all steadily muting; moreover, they all fluctuate among moments of total order and moments of total disorder. For example, the financial market has its laws and goes up and down continuously, but there are (relatively frequent) moments of crisis, followed by new periods of order.

Now, if we combine the great number of elements and connections with the great number of variations, we get to another law of complexity: the impossibility of previsions. Every element is connected to such a great number of other elements in such a great number of ways that becomes very difficult to foresee all the possible status resulting by a change in an element. In many cases it is a matter of probabilities, as it is a matter of probability to determine in which level an electron is rotating around its nucleon. In other cases, the consequences of an event are just unpredictable. Who could foresee that some ill chickens in Asia might ruin for months the entire white meat market in Europe? This example shows how globalisation seriously affects human and governors control effectiveness. On a more general scale, as already noted, globalisation has not a predefined direction – and this perfectly accords with the reality of post-modernity, which eliminates the possibility to believe in a historical determinism *à la* Hegel or *à la* Marx. This, of course, should not be a reason to abandon any effort to understand where we are going, but transforms our certainties in a matter of possibilities. It is not even possible to say if this complexity will grow indefinitely or will take other directions, even though there are proves of its current growth [Massey, 2001].

All these considerations bring me to a further remark: to consider the world as a system does not mean to define it as a world-system *à la* Wallerstein. As known, Wallerstein's influential model gives prevalence to the economic sphere, establishing a centre and a periphery on the basis of their relevance in the world labour market and production system [1974: 414]. Wallerstein [1974: 474] defines a world-economy as an (almost) completely isolated system, internally (almost) autonomous, in which such a set of transactions takes place that the system is (almost) self-sufficient. In this sense, historically there have been several world-systems in the same period in different areas of the globe, and each one of them constitutes the external area of the others by trading with them in luxury goods. Today there is one only world-economy, so that we can really speak of a *world-system* based on economic factors, which are able to work at an upper level with respect to the political ones. The extension of this world-economy is made possible by the current communication and transport technology level.

Wallerstein's proposal is extremely important, also because it is probably the first attempt to depict the history of capitalist society in a global perspective. Nevertheless, it is based on premises which are at the opposite side respect to the idea of a complex system. Wallerstein has been criticised for many reasons¹⁷. Under the perspective of the system theory, I can say that he underestimates the periphery contribution to the global order. If some chickens in Asia, to take up the same example as before, can indirectly provoke the loss of jobs in Italy, how far is the periphery? In a complex system there is no centre and no periphery: it is more as a net, with nodes which can be more or less intensive. On the other hand I recognise that the image of the net needs to be refined, for it does not explain sufficiently, as Wallerstein's model does, why the economic and social gap among the different areas of the system is increasing. A contribution in this direction should focus at least on two considerations: firstly, *not all the connections among the net nodes are of the same quality* (goods, people, money, financial transactions) *and intensity* (the quantity of the "thing", of the quality exchanged); secondly, *not all the connections,*

¹⁷ For example by Robertson [1992], Axford [1995] and Beck [1997a].

which represent the fluxes, are bi-directional. In other words, the connections among two nodes are rarely symmetric.

These considerations bring to another important point: to define globalisation as a process does not imply that this process is neutral. Actually, *globalisation is a matter of power*. When I say that the fluxes are not symmetric I am implicitly affirming that *some nodes of the net are able to influence fluxes quality and intensity, this way trying to give or actually giving a direction to the entire process*. So, even though globalisation has not a predetermined direction (that is, does not constitute a predetermined development of industrialism or of modernisation), it follows some mutable directions. This is an extremely relevant and often underestimated point, because it means that it is not an utterly uncontrollable process. *Even though it is impossible, due to the system complexity, to determine the movements of all the different spheres involved, it is possible to trace paths of development.*

1.2.4. Post-modernity

Several times I noted that some consequences of the complexity produce phenomena that are assumed by post-modernists as features of the current age. On the concept of post-modernism¹⁸ there are three main debates. The first one is about what post-modernism really is [Lash, 1990; Crook et alii, 1992; Smart, 1992; Kumar, 1995; Ceserani, 1997]. It is a very controversial debate, not only because there are at least two different founders, Lyotard [1979] and Jameson [1984], but also because it needs to define what modernity is (and Harvey [1990] shows how difficult this task can result). The second one is about the adequacy of post-modernism as a theory to describe the age we are living, especially with respect to other models of society, like the post-industrial one, the information one, the post-fordist one or the late modernity one [Kumar, 1995]. Each perspective has its detractors and supporters for at least one reason: each perspective focuses on and provides a good description of just some

¹⁸ As noted by Kumar [1995], and despite others' efforts [Ceserani, 1997], it is not possible to find a clear semantic difference between the expressions "post-modernism" and "post-modernity" (both with or without hyphen). Consequently, I feel free to use them as synonymous.

aspects of the age we are crossing. The third debate is about the consideration of post-modernism as a new historical age or as a continuation of modernity¹⁹. Even though these debates are enlightening, they remain too far from the present work objectives. I will only explain in what sense I speak about post-modernism and I will consider and list exclusively the characteristics of the post-modern society which are relevant with respect to the scope of this research.

A main point to clarify is that *post-modernity does not correspond to globalisation*: post-modernity is a phenomenon of cultural change, in which the creation of a global system and the growth of the complexity level have their role.

I agree with those who believe that the concept of post-modernity has at the same time great merits and serious limitations. As Touraine [1997] notes, the idea of post-modernity is useful as a critical instrument that underlines the crisis of the Enlightenment rationalist model, but it is unable to explain this crisis consequences. The essence of post-modernity lies in the conviction that reality is so instable and mutable as to make inadequate modern certainties. Post-modern authors normally emphasise and celebrate the refusal of any unifying process in favour of the recognition of a chronic fragmentation, that is, of the disintegration of relations, institutions and traditions. They also refuse any *avant-garde* idea and the possibility itself of its existence, but at the same time they experiment the new by mixing elements from different styles, subjects and epochs. This way they resolve the fragmentation itself by transforming it in a new unity, and in this passage I think that one of the main differences between modernity and post-modernity is observable: an effective way to express it is to say that we have passed from the “*aut-aut*” age to the “*et*” age²⁰. With this I mean that in the post-modern age more and more often we find coexisting differences, and we pass from the mono-perspective to the multi-perspective. An example is given by the passage from the concept of role to the

¹⁹ Somehow this third debate could be considered as part of the first one, but I prefer to divide them in order to differentiate the discussion about post-modernism cultural attributes from the discussion about post-modernism position in history. The first one regards specifically the idea that there are two post-modernisms: a celebrative one, which exalts mass culture, market and consumerism, and a resistance one, which is the basis for the new social movements and contrast capitalist cultural homogenization through the identity valorisation [see Lash, 1990; Kumar, 1995].

²⁰ Vasilij Kandinskij, reported in Beck [1993: 3].

concept of (multiple) identity [see § IV.1]: up to the Eighties, some sociological theories envisaged man as characterised by different roles (worker, parent, friend, etc.), and the theoretical problem was the integration of these roles in a unique personality. Now we think to individuals as holders of multi-level dynamic identities.

All this considered, I will use the concept of post-modernity *as a label* to resume and indicate the following characteristics of our society:

1. end of the positivist certainty in the idea of progress;
2. fall of science as privileged method to acquire knowledge (and consequent re-appraisal of other methods, like, for example, the common sense);
3. awareness of the planet ecological limits;
4. transformation of the traditions sense and role;
5. great narratives fall;
6. fall of the traditional social belongings (family, church, party or syndicate);
7. consequent shift from public commitment to private individualism;
8. huge increase of the areas and the number of choices; reflexivity;
9. growing complexity;
10. consequent increase of anxiety and uncertainty; dependence.

I will better explain and discuss each one of these points in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2

Europeanization in the global system

2.1 States and nations in the globalised world

Globalisation has put a number of vital issues (from economy to environmental policies) out of the single states range. At the same time, the increasing level of complexity has pushed states towards a delegation of tasks to regional and local administrations. Consequently, as it has been repeated by different authors [Martinelli, 1995; Vinci Giacchi, 1995; Habermas, 1998], national states, especially the Western ones, are subject to a twofold sovereignty loss process: bottom-up, because of the power delegation to local authorities, of the self-governing claims, of the ethnic identities and sub-national cultures strengthening; top-down, because of the globalised economy, of the more and more numerous international treaties, of their entering in international organisations. To use Sassen's worlds [1996], sovereignty has been decentralised. This process has triggered a still open debate among those who claim that national states are entities of the past destined to disappear and those who defend their essential role in the process of globalisation. The debate is complicated when the two elements of national states, that is, the nation and the state, are considered separately. Considering states as pure administrative units, it is evident that their more serious limit consists in their incapacity to face a globalised economy. Very shortly,

- a. they cannot anymore carry out effective protectionist policies;
- b. they cannot realise economic policies aimed at stimulating the demand;
- c. they compete to attract foreign investments.

At the same time, as Sassen [1996 and 1998] repeatedly affirms, states still have a determinant role in the globalisation process, because, after all, they are the rulers of the economic system, and the actors who move big international organisations are

states representatives. There is no contradiction between these two positions: states are surely weak with respect to the globalised economy, but they are the responsible of the current primacy of the market (especially of the financial one) because of the economic neo-liberal strategy that has been generally carried on from the Eighties up to now.

More complicated is the nationality issue. Even though having a nation is not a man intrinsic characteristic, it seems to be so today [Gellner, 1983: 9]. But this triumph of the principle of nationality is apparent [Hobsbawm, 1990], and both nations and nationalism are put into a crisis.

It is possible to recognise at least two types of nationalism: a cultural one, which realises itself by sharing a system of ideas, behaviours, communication; a voluntary one, when two men mutually recognise to be part of the same nation and create a link of loyalty and solidarity [Gellner, 1983]. Now, I believe that globalisation puts into a crisis both these types, as I will try to demonstrate in the present research. Culturally, there might be people who travelled so much that they do not recognise themselves anymore in the particular culture of their original state; moreover, there are people who feel their national identity, but for different reasons voluntarily refuse it, this way preferring other belongings.

As different authors from different perspectives state [Horowitz, 1985; Hannerz, 1996; Bonanate, 2002], there is no historic prove that supports a clear and durable connection between a people and a place, as it is claimed by nationalisms. If we consider only the geographical perspective, this argument may appear weak, but if we also take into account the temporal element, that is, the geographical element in a diachronic perspective, we immediately understand its meaning: even modern states, which may resemble static entities, are the result (and continue to be the result) of innumerable meetings of cultures, exchanges, movements of people and borders. Moreover, they are not the result of an “international state of nature”, but of a pre-existent set of international relations: if the case of African states is illustrative of this, being them “designed” on paper according to the will of colonial powers, also European states find their original dynastic liaisons in diplomatic accords and in

treaties that precede their formation [Parsi, 1998]. In other words, states as we know them are the result of a long duration interaction among people from different places and culture, both at an ordinary life level and at a political level. This, anyway, remains an academic consideration.

At the ordinary life level, another mechanism, well explained by Martinelli [1995], seems to question nationalism validity. Without entering in the Gellner-Hobsbawm debate, it is possible to say that nationalism has been a great unifying ideology against internal and external disruptive forces, that is, the class conflict and the power struggle among states. Today both these menaces loose, at least in the West, part of their traditional importance. At the same time,

The idea that in every national group it is possible to identify essential characteristics that differentiate it from the rest of the mankind is in open contrast with the liberal democracy universal values (as well as with the universal religion and the socialism ones). Every kind of fraternity, including the national fraternity, tends in fact to decline itself in a particularistic sense, implying a rigid separation among a 'we' and a 'they', among 'friends' and 'enemies', is a powerful mechanism of collective identity creation, but at the same time is a presupposition of competition and struggle¹.

Globalisation creates the conditions that somehow make citizens of different areas of the globe feeling involved in far events and even sharing the same emotions:

Military, political, economic and cultural crises are increasingly defined as global crises; even relatively limited regional conflicts are seen as global issues. Global society is beginning to be more than the some of its parts; or, to be more precise, more than a framework for the competition of its parts [Shaw, 1994: 14].

In other words, fragmentation, pluralism and the accent on differences on one side, and the movement towards unity created by globalisation, the ecologic idea of being one only species on the Earth and the human rights universalization on the other side are delegitimizing the idea of a democracy exclusively coinciding with the national space: *national states cannot be anymore the political arena highest level.*

¹ "L'idea che in ogni gruppo nazionale si possano individuare caratteristiche essenziali che lo distinguono dal resto dell'umanità è in aperto contrasto con i valori universali della democrazia liberale (e anche delle religioni universali e del socialismo). Ogni tipo di fraternità, compresa la fraternità nazionale, tende infatti a declinarsi in senso particolaristico implicando una rigida separazione tra 'noi' e 'loro', tra 'amici' e 'nemici', è un potente meccanismo di creazione di identità collettive, ma è nel contempo un presupposto della competizione e della lotta" [Martinelli, 1995: 37; my translation].

Moreover, in consequence of the feeling of proximity with very far people and of the spreading of democratic universal values, a division among peoples based on an ascribed characteristic like the place of birth becomes more and more anachronistic and arbitrary, as well as less and less appealing. Thus Bonanate can affirm that “if nation has had a historical ‘progressive’ function, it might have exhausted it, and its path might be come to an end”². Furthermore, Bonanate [1995] and Habermas [1998] think that a democratic citizenship does not need to be enrooted in the national identity, as it can be based on a set of (universally recognised) values.

Despite of all this, it is difficult to deny the renaissance that nationalism is having everywhere, in the Western countries too, often in the form of localism. But, as Hobsbawm [1990] explains, *current nationalism is not anymore a moving element of history*, as it was during the 19th and part of the 20th century. The typical national movements of the very last decades are not unifying principles, but tend to divide, on the basis of the ethnic group, the language or the religion belonging. They are the result of the fear induced by real or imaged menaces deriving from the international migrations and the contemporary socio-economic transformation (the idea of a cultural and economic imperialism, felt also by Western countries). In other words, current nationalism is xenophobic, and many among those who do not adhere to it tend to refuse it even in a stronger way than if it was just an identification in old ideas, like, for instance, the love of one’s country.

In the present work I assume that three different sense of belonging are taking the place of the national one:

- a) a belonging to more private groups, like the genre, the ethnic group, the religious group, etc.; I will call it *private* identity;
- b) a belonging to different layers of citizenship, from the local to the supra-national one; I will call it *multi-layer* identity;
- c) a belonging to some conception of the world as a whole; I will call it *cosmopolitan* identity.

² “se ha avuto una funzione storica ‘progressiva’, può ben darsi che ora la nazione l’abbia esaurita, e che il suo tragitto sia giunto al termine” [Bonanate, 1995: 26; my translation].

In the empirical research I will try to analyse the importance of these identity models for the young Europeans.

2.2 Towards a European identity

Up to now many observers have considered globalisation as West driven: the ones who take globalisation only as a sort of market enlargement focus on the influence exercised by big economies and big corporations on national states, while the ones who describe cultural and technological change underline how globalisation works as a taste leveller, destroying local cultures in favour of the Western ones, and specifically of the American one; Ritzer's concept of McDonaldization [Ritzer, 1996] can be brought as an example of this kind of theory. I recognise that there is a part of truth in these theories, but I believe they only describe half of the story. As I affirmed in § 1.2.3., while taking into account the global system, we have to consider the power differentials among its elements. It is just doing this that we recognise how globalisation is much more complex than a cultural and economic imperialistic movement from the West to the rest of the world. Western countries are still global market leaders, but economy and finance work on a global scale, and other actors have an essential role; non-Western countries' influence on global economy and finance, for instance, is stronger and stronger [Giddens, 1999: 28]. Even though they reacted with a certain delay, European governors are aware that new models and new realities are arising, especially in the East (India and China, but also the Asian Tigers). The European Union recognised the crucial importance of remaining competitive with respect to these enormous countries while maintaining the specificity of its social protection model, this way keeping in differentiating from the United States. The Lisbon strategy is an attempt to make Europe competitive with respect both to new economies and to the United

States, and at the same time to establish a sort of global supremacy at least in the field of knowledge detention. The fast European Union enlargement is another sign of the will to create a competitive pole, able to establish coherent policies to deal with global challenges, strong and big enough to defend its own model in the globalised world. A stronger Europe is seen by many as a set of power and legitimacy that could be used to establish a “European way” to answer to global challenges. Martin and Schumann [1996] drafted a list of actions that the European Union could undertake in this sense. Among their proposals we find the following:

- a. initiatives to improve European Parliament’s and Commission’s legitimacy;
- b. construction of a European civil society;
- c. creation of a common fiscal policy at a EU level;
- d. Tobin-tax introduction;
- e. pressure on the World Trade Organisation to raise social and ecologic standards in developing countries;
- f. ecologic taxation of the resources consumption at a EU level;
- g. introduction of a European tax on luxury articles;
- h. creation of European trade unions, to contrast lobbyists influence on the Commission.

Without entering in the discussion about applicability and effects of those initiatives, I find interesting that the democratic procedures and civil society strengthening are seen as priorities with respect to other initiatives, that is, as conditions *sine qua non* to realise all economic changes. The importance of citizens, that is, of the civil society and of the civil dialogue has been recognised by the European governors at least since 1990, with the establishment of the “Action Jean Monnet”, and has been officialised with the article 1-47 of the Constitutional Treaty, which ratifies the dialogue between EU institutions and civil society associations [Mascia, 2004]. An important step of this process is represented by the Maastricht Treaty ratification. With the Maastricht Treaty, the European Union citizenship as differentiated from national citizenships is instituted. The European Union citizenship is not autonomous with respect to single member states citizenships: this means that I am not a European citizen because I am entitled to a set of natural and

fundamental rights, but because I am a citizen of a member state. According to Mascia [2001], this fact shows the prevalence of the inter-government dimension over the multinational one, and is the sign of states' will to preserve their total sovereignty over their citizens. Bindi [1993], in fact, gives the Treaty a more positive and hopeful interpretation (which I agree with): the European citizenship introduction would be the definitive recognition that the process of European construction does not regard exclusively the member states and their governments, but the citizens too. In this sense the Treaty would suggest, without explicitly declaring it, that the EU is based on two pillars: states and citizens. Moreover, it establishes a juridical relation between Union and citizens, represented concretely by the rights and duties that citizens are bound to by the EU legal system. In other words the Treaty, transforming citizens in key actors of the European unification process, traces a path towards a Union of the citizens (no matter now which form it will assume) instead of a Union of the governments. And this would favourite, I would say, the shift from a top-down unification process to a bottom-up one – which would correspond to the shift from the failure of the top-down attempt to create a European identity to the current approach in supporting its emergence from below.

Of course there is who fears the danger that the European Union remains a bureaucratic institution which strengthens policy delegation and fastens citizens from policy, creating the suspect that citizens themselves are just the receivers of top-down programs and plans [Bergnach and Pocecco, 1998]. The failure in the European Constitution ratification seems to confirm this fear. But that failure can also be considered as a positive event, for it gave a strong sign to European governors about the importance of including people in the decision process. The European Constitution failure, in fact, has been acknowledged by the European institutions, as we can read in this passage published on the Assembly of European Regions web site³:

The European Union has recently been through a period of flux, following the failure of the ratification of the European Constitution and the efforts of EU leaders to agree a new Reform Treaty. One of the messages that has come across clearly during this period is that the European Union has lost touch with its citizens. Opinion polls show that

³ At: www.a-e-r.org/home-en/main-issues/future-of-europe/eu-constitutional-treaty.html

citizens' trust in the European institutions is declining and that few understand the benefits that European integration has brought to them. The European Transparency Initiative was introduced by the European Commission last year [2006], in order to increase transparency, openness and accountability of EU governance processes. In May 2006, the Commission published a Green Paper which was intended to launch a debate with stakeholders on how to improve transparency of EU Funds, to increase consultation with civil society and to create a framework for the role of the lobbies and NGOs in the European institutions' decision-making process.

Habermas [1998] states that to improve European Union's capacity to compensate national competencies, the States should delegate more sovereignty to the Union and pass from international treaties to a "chart", that is, the Constitution. Of course this passage presupposes a process of democratic legitimacy able to go beyond the national political arena and to establish a European public arena based on constitutional values. The initiatives put in place after the Constitution failure go in this direction, that is, towards the civil dialogue.

In the present research I assume a Europeanization process narrow definition that put citizens at the centre of its action. In particular, the assumption to be verified is whether citizens are active actors in the process of creating a defined, concrete and shared European identity, which is in line with a more global, cosmopolite base of values. The word *cosmopolitism* is used here in its more general meaning of doctrine that refuses territorial and political divisions in favour of the human being right to define himself a citizen of the world [Riciperati, 2006]. The European Union, in fact, may constitute a global example of supra-national governance. Giddens [1999] notes at this respect that the European Union is different from the United Nations, being it more than just an aggregate of national states: as a matter of fact, its members voluntarily renounced to part of their sovereignty. This way the European Union gives a contribution to the democratic development inside and *among* the states, for instance by the creation of European courts. Actually this is one of the Union specificities: even though the European Union is not a federation of States, each single State delegated part of its sovereignty not only at an economic level, but also at a political level. The 1986 European Act marked specifically this power delegation from the States to the Community by ratifying the sussidiarity principle, according to which the central power has the right to intervene in case a State does not fulfil a EU

directive. This means that the sovereignty of every EU State is always penetrable by EU central power interferences [Bonanate, 1995].

Nevertheless, Giddens recognises how the European Union still suffers of a democratic deficit. According to this, as Barber [1995] notes, the European Union is currently responsible with respect to its own power élite (the Council is responsible towards national governs and the Commission constitutes a highly lobby driven technocracy), but not towards the citizens. This, of course, affects the possibility of an identification of European citizens with the European Union project. Barber shows his scepticism respect to the possibility of a transnational identity creation, which is thwarted by the resistance of national ones. On the same line is Martinelli: even recognising that “today more than in the past propitious circumstances exist for the creation of bigger state entities of multinational nature”⁴, he invites not to underestimate the importance of nations and nationalism. According to him, unification processes are only possible for those States

which have completed for long their process of nation construction, have consolidated representative democracy institutions and have a recognised position in the international community⁵.

For what concerns Europe, this means that Eastern countries still accord a great importance to nationalism, because they need it in order to strengthening their identity after Communism⁶. Also Parsi [1995 and 1998] thinks that the idea of nation is losing its power to get people worked up only in Western countries and within certain cultural spheres. But he also suggests [1995] that in the West is maybe rising something similar to the concept of the Arabian Nation, that is, a common cultural and religious identity. Habermas [1998], on the contrary, believes that the same abstractive push that made possible the passage from the local and dynastic

⁴ “... esistono oggi più che in passato condizioni favorevoli alla creazione di entità statuali più vaste di natura multinazionale” [Martinelli, 1995: 39; my translation].

⁵ “... che hanno completato da tempo il processo di costruzione della nazione, hanno consolidato le istituzioni della democrazia rappresentativa e detengono una posizione riconosciuta nella comunità internazionale” [*ibidem*].

⁶ This topic is surely much more complicated, but this is not the place to get deeper in it. For a more precise treatment of the subject, see Pocecco, 1998.

conscience to a national and democratic one can go on in determining an over-national social link.

The solution to this debate is normally found in the idea that European citizens may have a multi-layer identity: they can maintain their local and national identity and at the same time develop a European one. European identity construction becomes a process of multiple identity construction, in which ethnic, national and European identities coexist [Antonini, 2001]. I agree with this idea, but I also think that this way to discuss the problem suffers of a semantic vagueness. When talking about European identity, in fact, we should always differentiate among the identification in the European Union as supra-national political entity and the identification in a cultural historic European identity (felt especially in opposition to other cultural paradigms). Heller [1994] recognizes in the “high culture” one of the historic *topoi* of the European identity, countering it to the American constitutional culture. In this direction, Bergnach and Pocecco [1998: 2] trace a difference between being pro-European and having a “European conscience” (an expression they use with the same meaning of “European identity”), explaining how the first step does not necessarily imply the second one.

In any case, after a number of failures in creating a coherent European identity, the new European Union policy openly consists in unifying people valorising their differences. Europe finds its unity in the multiplicity of its cultural resources, as the European slogan says: “united in the differences”. This is a sound policy, and maybe the only possible one in such a diversified area, crowded by nationalisms and regionalisms, as Europe is. It is also supported by the assumption that “culture, as place, is a meeting point where different influences, traditions and strengths intersect”⁷. In this sense, one of the ideas that move the present work is that *identity is formed within social relations. In a globalised Europe, that is, in a condition of easy international communication and mobility, individuals enlarge their social relations range and, consequently, the spreading of ideas and associations.* This is why I will now move from a macro level to a micro one, focusing on individuals and trying to show the new forms of their political and civil participation.

⁷ “la cultura, come il luogo, è un punto di incontro dove si intersecano differenti influenze, tradizioni e forze” [Hall, 2001:160; my translation from the Italian edition].

Chapter 3

From public to private: the new identity path

3.1 The uncertainty age

Two women give birth. The two of them do not have enough milk, but while the first one pays a wet nurse, the second one goes to a pharmacy and buy all the necessary products for the bottle-feeding. Their children grow up and start to eat food. The first one does the shopping going to the neighbourhood shops, where every shopper knows her; the grocer always let her child try a small piece of cheese. The second one goes to a supermarket where she checks carefully the label of each packed product, and select the most of the food for his child in the biological products department. Of course their children need toys. The first mother receives from her older sister her nephew's tin soldiers. The second mother buys a special toy, specifically designed to amuse four years old children while developing their intelligence, their artistic sense and their colours and sound perceptions. She buys this toy, together with many others, in a dedicated shop where all the products are guaranteed to be manufactured exclusively with natural materials in the same country where the woman lives. Which is the main difference among the two women? Probably the more spontaneous answer will be: the first one gave birth before 1960, while the second one is a contemporary woman. Correct, but this is not the main difference, which probably relies in the different attitudes of the two women. The two of them consider their own behaviour to be normal, but in a different way. The first one does all that she does without really thinking about it: it's been always like that and all other mothers around her do the same. The second one meditates each single action, asks for advices to the other mothers but eventually prefers to follow what experts say, for example her doctor, who is always present. She is constantly

worried for the danger that can be hidden behind every single thing: the toy, for example, might be manufactured in a country where the legislation about materials is less severe than in her country, and her child might ingest toxic substances by licking it. In other words, the first mother behaves according to tradition, while the second one behaves in a reflexive way. The first one lives in a much simple and, apparently, safer world – so it is perceived, blissful ignorance! The second one lives in a complex world, has always the feeling of not having a complete control even on her closer environment and is stressed by a continuous uncertainty.

In the following subchapters I will describe the historical transformation that has made their situations so different.

3.1.1. The fall of the idea of progress

Modernity has been characterised by a positivist trust in the possibilities offered by science and technology, until the most recent discoveries sapped its foundations. Science itself, in fact, has begun the process of undermining its own certainties: many discoveries constituted a serious attack to the ostensibly untouchable scientific knowledge. To mention just some of them: in the physics, Einstein's relativity and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle; in the mathematics, the non-Euclidean geometries; in the economics, the importance of psychology in the market trend and the irrationality of the so-called rational actor. Because of these and other discoveries, science started to think about itself and to wonder about the validity of its methods and results.

In any case, the finishing stroke to the faith in progress was probably given by the use of the atomic bomb for military purposes. For the first time it appeared evident to the entire globe that the man, with his technology, was able to provoke his self-destruction. Already in the Sixties, mostly due to the nuclear shock, there was a full consciousness of the double face of progress, which can subjugate nature, but also cause mankind extinction. This consciousness was worsen by the raise of the ecological matters and the debate about the resources exhaustibility. The tension

provoked by the atomic energy has been represented in great contemporary masterpieces: in literature, just to propose a couple of examples, Paolo Volponi's *Corporale* (1974) and Don De Lillo's *Underworld* (1997) or *End Zone* (1972) immediately come to my mind. In *Corporale* and in *End Zone*, the protagonists become progressively obsessed by the fear of an atomic war, up to extreme consequences; in *Underworld*, the ecologic theme is mixed with the nuclear one: some experts in waste disposal promote a way to eliminate radioactive waste by burying it deeply and destroying it by an underground nuclear explosion, this way eliminating the radioactive with the nuclear itself.

With the end of the Cold War for a moment the possibility of a nuclear war seemed to be got over, but it periodically arises again whenever a non-democratic government or a fundamentalist one is discovered to work for developing atomic energy (North Korea and Iran represent recent cases).

3.1.2. *Private life: tradition, routine and family*

According to Jedlowski [1994], tradition is linked to two conditions: the first one, the existence of a stable social reality; the second one, the individual insertion in a shared common sense. Modernity lacks of both conditions: on one side, modernity chases the new, the endless change; on the other side, technological evolution, raising complexity and globalisation, which brings the consciousness of values and customs relativity, dismantled the idea of a possible shared common sense, introducing its contrary, that is, the idea that the world can be understood and lived in a plurality of ways. Consequently Jedlowski states that modernity got rid of tradition, but it was able to do it only during the 20th century, throughout a slow but definitive process of Subject opening. The loss of tradition and of common sense brought the necessity to re-think the world, to re-interpret it. As this exercise cannot be done on a social base anymore, it can only refers directly to individuals, who have the tough task to fill the lack of traditional experience with their individual experience [Jedlowski, 1994: 89].

Giddens [1999: 62] speaks about the contrast between “autonomy of action” and “constriction”. According to him, where tradition fails individuals are obliged to live in a more reflexive way, but this implies a large decision-making activity that may become extremely stressful¹.

I would say that something similar is happening with the routine. Under the influence of a market-driven culture of unremitting change, more and more people are seeing their routine as a weight, as a boring obstacle to a more adventurous and desirable life and to real, intense feelings. Not only fashions and commercial products become immediately old, but also art, cultural tendencies and even spiritual dispositions (so that people look for new forms of spirituality, from shamanism to zen). Even the people who are part of my routine may become a chain that blocks my change, and I can feel like selecting them through an active and reflexive process. Where tradition and routine are refused, a new element takes their place: reflexive choice.

It seems to be uncontroversial that, with the raising of modernity, tradition tends to lose its importance. I do not think that we can talk about a disappearing of tradition. I would rather say, with Giddens [1999], that it is changing its nature and form: fought by the Enlightenment, recuperated by Romanticism and then swept away by 20th century technological transformations, it eventually became, in our post-modern time, either part of local folklores or an externally driven gateway to a commercial idea of pure life – and in both cases, in many Western countries it is more an element of new age philosophy than an important part of people past and wisdom. In this sense it results correct the following description of modernity: “Presence of the past in the present that exceeds it and claims it”². The global

¹ Giddens [1992 and 1999] talks specifically about an increasing level of addiction to work, food, sport, sex, love. I am not sure that this reference to the concept of addiction is pertinent in this contest. Nevertheless I agree with him, and with a vast psychological literature, on the basic concept that every decision represents a problem for the individual: we all have mental maps and stereotypes, fixed opinions and automatic procedures that contribute to make our world well known and to simplify our everyday life. It would be impossible to act if we had to stop every moment and evaluate the best procedure or judge every person from scratch. Tradition is surely a way to control people behavior through the limitation of their range of social accepted possibilities, but it also represents a useful simplification of their range of action. In this sense it contributes to give a sense of safeness, and this explains why many people are so attached to it.

² “Presenza del passato nel presente che lo supera e lo rivendica” [Jean Starobinski, quoted in Augé 1996: 71; my translation from the Italian edition].

spreading of new values (science against faith; feminism against male power, etc.) is bringing to new local cultures and traditions interpretations. More and more traditions are under a process of verification and, if they remain respected, it is because of a free and often individual choice. Free choice and auto-determination are everywhere imposing their power over tradition, sometimes remodelling it, other times erasing it. This process often encounters resistances that may take dramatic forms, like the new nationalisms, radicalisms or fundamentalisms.

Tradition primarily is a set of norms and values that regulate people behaviour. It obviously influences every aspect of social life. Here I would like to focus briefly on a dimension that was particularly affected by tradition and has consequently passed through a radical change: family. As some authors point out [Luhmann, 1982; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1990; Melucci, 1991; Giddens, 1992 and 1999; Jedlowski, 1994], a new element entered in ruling the relationships among family members, an element which had a secondary importance respect to social obligations in the so-called traditional family: love. The choice of the partner and the relation with children are more and more love driven. Following this point of view, I will counter the notion of traditional family with the “love-based family” one.

According to Giddens [1992 and 1999], even though we must recognise the fact that many kinds of traditional family have existed in different cultures, we can identify some characteristics that are common to all non-modern society traditional families:

- a. the family was essentially an economic unit;
- b. marriages were not contracted on a love basis;
- c. there was an intrinsic inequality among men and women; women sexuality control was a male source of power;
- d. children had no rights and were loved more for their economic contribution than for their individuality;
- e. sexuality was finalised to reproduction (and this lead to a double morality).

If we compare this features with the modern idea of family we realise how vast and radical has been the shift from the traditional family to the love-based one³. This shift was reinforced by the more recent women conquests: the right to divorce, with the consequent frequent children fostering; the possibility to practice an assisted abortion; the general demystification of male virile identity that is carried out through the widespread action of media (cinema, magazines, television, but also psychology books). It is easy to understand how much all these changes produce uncertainty:

- a. firstly, love can end, so even though we declare eternal love, we know that we cannot give its duration for granted.
- b. Secondly, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim [1990] note, the family becomes the results of two individual choices which meet on a life project; this means that the two subjectivities involved need to work closely in order to maintain the predetermined direction and to achieve their goals, in a constant compromise activity. This means that two different personal biographies have to converge in one single couple biography, each one renouncing to a part of his or her individual identity to gain a part of couple identity. To do this, they obviously need a great motivation, which is linked to many factors, among which there is love. But love may be temporary, so that the entire life project may be suddenly interrupted by one part only.
- c. Thirdly, an important part of this life project is constituted by children. This means that the couple has to care about three different levels: each one subjectivity; couple health and realisation; children growing up and formation. The result of each one of these levels is determined by an incredible number of concrete choices, which constitute a terrible stress for the couple, especially when thinking that in every moment there might be a convenience in splitting the couple project to privilege individual projects. In other words, without the link offered by tradition, the couple needs to strive to maintain a changeable balance.

³ Sometimes we can still hear or read about a supposed crisis of the family, or crisis of the family values. I wonder what sort of crisis it should be, as we passed from a family characterised by obligation to a family characterised by choice. I would remark other problems in today families, but I would not be nostalgic for the past one.

3.1.3. Politics weakness: democracy in the globalised world

Democracy constitutes today one of the post-modern contradictions. While many areas in the world are getting to democratic regimes at last, in the oldest democracies people are more and more disappointed by this form of government [Giddens, 1999]. I will now analyse briefly this twofold process.

In the debate about globalisation, it is frequently repeated that never like now democracy is worldwide spread. I have a reservation about this argument that concerns the standards we adopt when saying that an increasing number of countries is becoming democratic. I do not think that having some democratic procedures, like free elections, without the correspondent democratic cultural background is sufficient to define a country as “democratic”. Besides many African countries, we can see an example of the difference between “having democratic procedures” and “being democratic” in Russia, where people prefers a strong man, ostensibly able to ensure security, to liberal institutions [Sabov, 2004]. I would rather say that having democratic procedures is the first step in the long path to democracy. Of course it is not really a matter of definition, but of standards, of accord in considering what a minimum level of democracy is, as democracy is always in a situation of tension between reality and idealism [Sartori, 1993]. I am sure that, if we considered a country as democratic not on the basis of its election procedures but on the basis of the freedom and the guaranteed rights, a much smaller number of national states would deserve the so much claimed title.

Speaking on a more theoretical plan, I agree with those authors [for instance, Bergnach and Pocecco, 1998] who believe that democracy is not the final goal, but *the starting point*. There is an entire implicit argument behind this sentence, but just to consider its first, easier interpretation, I would say that when a community adopts democratic procedures (reality) still has to realize participation, competition, comparison and freedom (ideal).

This is probably one of the reasons why the oldest democracies are facing a deep crisis: a gap between democracy promises (ideal) and their fulfilment (reality) is

strongly felt by citizens. This gap is due to a number of causes, some of which are directly linked to the globalisation process:

- a. it is not possible anymore to restrict the political action to the nation scale; even the idea of society as a closed unitary system has come to an end [Magatti, 2002]; an increasing number of matters need an international, or even a global approach; because of this, national politics appears to be unable to face global challenges and, consequently, loses part of its legitimacy as basis for the social link; in other words, people lose their trust in politics as a power able to mould social life and to regulate the markets;
- b. in particular the sovereignty logic, based on national states, and the market logic, based on the control over a de-territorialised and more and more de-institutionalised transaction space [Ungaro, 2004], enter in conflict;
- c. economic forces have progressively gained an increasing level of autonomy during the 19th and 20th centuries, becoming predominant with respect to politics; many authors today claim the return to a politics predominance, but globalisation makes it even more difficult than in the past, because it requires global institutions able to intervene on the global market and on national decisions as well (for example, on national labour market legislation);
- d. the efforts to transfer part of the national sovereignty to a transnational level either do not produce the expected results (like it often happened to the United Nations when they worked as conflict solvers) or produce institutions with a chronic legitimacy deficit (like the European Union);
- e. politics is unable to control money, goods and information fluxes, and the law less and less intervenes in ruling economic and cultural behaviours; the political system is becoming isolated with respect to the rest of society [Touraine, 1997];
- f. politicians themselves are accused to constitute an élite that governs for power sake more than for citizens' benefit and for the common good; the general awareness of politicians corruption deeply undermines citizens' trust, up to the point that Giddens [1999: 92] claims for a "democratising

- democracy”, that is, a mix of power decentralisation and adoption of measures against corruption;
- g. parties have become “political enterprises” [Touraine, 1997: 256] which try to conquer electors by unscrupulous communication campaigns characterised by a massive use of media; more generally, social institutions are becoming mere management instruments: as parties become organisations for power maintenance, so companies fight globally to increase their competitiveness, with no real regards for their social role;
 - h. unions are not able to adapt to the labour situation created by the economic neo-liberalism, that is, to defend the needs of the growing temporary workers category, constituted by the youngest workers; this way unions action ends up accentuating the generational social conflict [Rembado, 2007];
 - i. due to the increasing level of complexity, citizens are often unable to understand political decisions implications; moreover, there is often a conflict between citizens reasonable opinions and experts decisions based on a technical niche knowledge; in this sense, the lack of a public debate is complained;
 - j. these phenomena produce a decreasing of citizens trust in politics, which from noble activity becomes a synonymous of intrigues, and in politicians, who are seen far from their party basis in the positive, even as criminals in the negative.

Because of all this, we assist to the passage from the political and social commitment in traditional forms, meaning the adherence to parties or unions, to the commitment in a more private sphere, constituted by family, love, sexual sphere, but also by ecological struggles, human rights campaigns, voluntary service, etc. [Touraine, 1997; Giddens, 1999]. As Pocecco affirms,

Institutions lose any “charismatic” capacity to give meaning, offloading on the individual the responsibility of choosing and implying a relative detachment between individuals’ history and collective history⁴.

⁴ “Le istituzioni perdono ogni capacità “carismatica” di dare significato, scaricando sull’individuo la responsabilità delle scelte e comportando un relativo distacco fra la storia dei singoli e la storia collettiva.” [Pocecco 1997: 90; my translation].

Touraine in particular accords a great importance to a democracy based on the individual (the Subject) and on individual responsibility, in contrast with Dahl's [1990] influential conception of democracy as a poliarchy, that is, a plurality of interests represented by a plurality of different institutions. According to Touraine, a "political of the Subject" [1997: 269] is based on cultural differences recognition, exclusion rejection and individuals' right to a life story that realises a personal and collective project.

Different authors [for instance Touraine, 1997, Giddens, 1999, Magatti, 2002], even though using different terminologies, recognise the co-existence of three answers to the crisis of democracy: the economic neoliberal one, the fundamentalist one and the civil society one [§ 3.2], being the latest the most difficult to realise, but also the only one able to guarantee democracy evolution⁵. Magatti [2002], like Touraine [1997], speaks about a *personal* assumption of public responsibilities. In this sense, the process of individualisation would be a resource to decentralise the power and include a plurality of actors in the decision process. Both Touraine and Magatti also highlight that the role of politics should not be anymore the creation of an entire order: on the contrary, politics should restrict its role to the creation of those conditions of liberty and autonomy that would guarantee the change.

3.1.4. Work flexibility

For three decades after the Second World War, unions, welfare and big companies with pyramidal structures produced a work stability that allowed people to project their future [Sennett 1998]. Today, globalisation weakens unions power and makes welfare hard-sustainable by national economies. In this scenario, huge corporations with net structures dismantle every possibility of life planning by requiring to their (often temporary) employee a high level of flexibility. This flexibility can be asked in terms of:

⁵ An increasing number of political experts recognises the importance of civil society for global governance [for a review, see Mascia 2004].

- a. *time*: working hours, vertical part-time, etc.;
- b. *space*: availability to travel occasionally or frequently or to spend long periods abroad;
- c. *function*: people are often moved from a department to another, or are required to acquire new competencies in order to take care of new tasks;
- d. *working environment*: the high turnover needs spirit of adaptability to new colleagues; the working place can be frequently renovated according to the new trends;
- e. *company culture*: enterprises periodically revisit their vision and mission, asking their employees to change accordingly.

Employees need to be available to change their occupation from several to many times during their life, often changing field and place of work. Companies require from their employees a total adherence to their culture and values, but the work system does not present the premises to favour this identification: it is more and more difficult, today, to experience a sense of belonging to the enterprise one works for. In addition to this, company sales, combinations and consolidations, shake-ups and downsizing, outsourcing and relocations prevent the possibility to establish a relation of mutual loyalty between enterprises and employees: as the work tie becomes more and more temporary and uncertain, it changes into a pure business relation, where the behaviour of the two parts is regulated mainly by a contract. In this context, every extra (extra work or extra money) is accorded on the basis of a precise business convenience, which can be real or expected.

All the uncertainty that derives from this unstable condition is exalted under the icon of flexibility. The current labour culture celebrates flexibility as an essential characteristic of the entire economic system and, consequently, of the worker himself. Flexibility is considered a synonymous of “freedom of choice”, even though the choices are not explicit. And it could not be explicit, for the rhetoric of flexibility hides a great deception: it does not differentiate between the work flexibility and the workers flexibility. Ceri [2003: 8], taking into account the categories “work

rigidity/flexibility” and “workers rigidity/flexibility”, produces the following typology:

- a. rigid work and rigid workers: Fordism and bureaucracy; full time, long terms contracts;
- b. rigid work and flexible workers: fast foods and call centres; short contracts;
- c. flexible work and rigid workers: companies organised by projects; full time, long term contracts;
- d. flexible work and flexible worker: self-employment, free-lance, telework; renewable short contracts.

It is evident how workers flexibility corresponds to an uncertain condition for the employee. Moreover Ceri [2003: 10] underlines how rigidity and flexibility are variables that can assume different forms and intensity. He differentiates among different aspects of the labour profile and analyses how they influence the organisation of workers lives:

- a. work condition: the contractual and normative status; its change influences the life planning;
- b. work service: the set of the activities that form the roles of a job and that determine the professional identity; its change influences life meso-organisation;
- c. work structure: the activities of each single role, which defines the technical-operative identity; its change influences life micro-organisation.

These typologies show how the theme of flexibility is actually complicated and needs to be considered by taking into account not only the market or the companies side, but also the workers one. As a matter of fact, like Ceri notes, the satisfaction towards the labour status not only depends on the job nature, but also on its voluntary aspect. In this sense, flexibility has today two opposite meanings: for the employer, it represents the possibility to treat employees like any other productive factors, which can be taken, substituted, or definitely left according to the enterprise needs; for the worker it represents a life challenge, because unless he does not have adequate resources to face any situation, he will find impossible to accumulate professional experience, money and social credit [Ceri, 2003].

3.1.5. A world of choices

It has often been claimed that, with the collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union, the age of the great narratives has come to its end. This is not correct, of course, as Capitalism *is* a great ideology, and other great ideologies, like the religious ones, are still alive. What really and worryingly has come to its end is not the ideology itself, but the sense of direction provided by great ideologies (and often by their conflict).

Firstly, with the defeat of Soviet Communism, caused most of all by the subjectivity liberation, it is not possible anymore to manage societies on the basis of one only principle [Touraine, 1997; Pocecco, 1997]: on the contrary, different theoretical perspectives (I should say a perspective *plurality*) are in open and dialectical competition. Consequently, a society based on shared values becomes hard to realise, if not impossible: as Touraine writes,

We live in a world of markets, communities and individuals; not anymore in a world of institutions. [...] It is necessary to renounce to base social life on the famous cultural consensus⁶.

Secondly, the belief in a scientific, objective explanation of the world has been demolished [Kumar, 1995], especially by Popper's philosophy. At the same time, the traditional social belongings (family, church, party or union) have been fragmented in a plurality of individual belongings, based on new priorities (love, ethics, multiculturalism, ethnic and gender belonging, subcultures, etc.). This change has progressively occurred during the period from the end of the first world war (for what concerns the feminine question) to the Nineties (for the other matters), and globalisation is one of the causes of the current impossibility to adhere to traditional social belongings. For what concerns culture and tradition, in fact, globalisation has shown a plurality of different uses and beliefs, so that now we are obliged, to some extent, to be relativist: we choose a culture or a religion being conscious that it is one among many possible others, each with its dignity [Fukuyama, 1992]. For what

⁶ "Viviamo in un mondo di mercati, comunità e individui; non più in un mondo di istituzioni. [...] Bisogna rinunciare a basare la vita sociale sul famoso consenso culturale." [Touraine, 1997: 55; my translation from the Italian edition].

concerns the political movements, and especially the socialist ones, they are doomed to be unsuccessful in front of a universalised capitalism, able to contrast regional protests with delocalisation policies [Harvey, 1990].

As Fukuyama [1992] is afraid, the end of the ideological struggle might lead to a future without well worthy battles and without passions, without fanaticism but also without cultural creativity. This consideration conduces Fukuyama to two conclusions: the first one, that people are closing in a passive consumerism and in their private spheres; the second one, that people will end up boring and will start to fight against their system itself, no matter if they are wealthy and spoilt. I believe that Fukuyama's line suffers of serious wrong ideas, but all the same that his conclusions are partially right. It is certainly true that the most influential struggle for the last two generations, the one between liberalism, fascism and communism, has one only winner, but this should not lead to put on the same footing, as Fukuyama seems to do, the many different forms that liberalism can assume. The differences among each forms are probably strong enough to talk about different models, even though all under the mark of capitalism.

Furthermore, being myself part of the young generation, I cannot but disagree with the idea that the youngest fight because they are bored (even though probably only history will judge), or because we advert a presumed lack of values (what has always been complained by the oldest generations regarding the new ones). On the contrary, I hope that there are still many different ways to realise democracy and to guarantee self-achievement proper conditions. Still, it is true that we fight, as Fukuyama predicted, against the system itself: the new Left moved from the battle for economic equality to the battle for the rights and dignity equality. The best examples of the new fighters are probably the ecologists and the no-global movement. The nature of the object we are fighting for is not the only aspect that changed: the way we fight has changed too. Fukuyama grasps the point fully indicating the passage to the private sphere, even though I believe that for many this passage is not passive at all. The people who demonstrate are a minority with respect to the multitudes that change their behaviour in minimal aspects of their life, this way realising a private and active protest: by boycotting a product or a television channel,

by educating their children to respect the environment, by dedicating part of their time to voluntary work, etc. This is the way many people, acting locally, try to influence the global system development.

What needs to be underlined here is how people behaviour is not influenced anymore by tradition, or by the belonging to a class, but by a precise individual choice or set of choices. In this sense, *the activity of choosing becomes an activity of identity structuring*: from the most superficial aspects of life, like the way we dress or the music we listen to, up to the most significant, like the job we do or the partner we select, every aspects of our life becomes something on which we have at least a partial control and, consequently, that we can choose to determine who we are and how we want the others to see us. In other words, as some of the traditional significance producers, like political parties and trade unions, but also like the family and the parish, have lost their power or have been demystified, we assist to a process of individualisation [Beck, 1993; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1994]: if both the interpretation of reality and the indication of the proper behaviour are not anymore hetero-directed, *individuals have more and more the twofold task of giving a sense to reality and of taking decisions autonomously*. A growing load of choices and institutional pretensions in a growing number of areas lies on single persons. Individual's biography becomes a biography of the choice, a "reflexive biography" [Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1994: 6]. Not only have we an excess of choice, but also the possibility to change our choices, which become "reversible" [Jedlowski, 1994: 128], in the sense that more and more often we can change our life for a new one. Sometimes we are even obliged to do that: it is the case of the re-professionalization to which many workers are subjected due to the obsolescence of their field of expertise.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim [1994: 31] wonder what kind of integration is possible in a high-individualized society. Together with Touraine [1997], they note how the cultural fragmentation makes the community of values impossible; consequently, they believe in the importance of individual thoughts and actions, or, to use

Touraine's terminology, in the Subject capacity to think his own space, as well as to act and to mould it on the personal as well as on the collective plan. I also believe in this individual possibility, as well as I believe in people's capacity to shape their environment and, up to a certain extent, even their destinies. But the enlargement of our range of choice is not without consequences.

Firstly, it influences our perception of time. The more we know we *can* experience, the more we feel we *have* to experience, and the more we want to experience, the less time we have to do it, in a vicious circle that accentuates our individualism.

Secondly, this movement towards choice is opposite to the movement towards complexity. Alfred North Whitehead wrote that the complexity of a society is directly proportional to the number of actions that people can do without thinking. This is extremely significant, because it shows how contradictory is our current thought: we create more and more articulated mental maps to order the complexity of our environment and relax our cognitive system, but at the same time we expose ourselves to an increasing number of choices, this way stressing our cognitive system.

Now, the globalised world is often described as a word of possibilities. We will see in the next subchapter how tricky this slogan is. In any case, it is incontestable that, no matter if we have access to them or not, the current world offers more possibility than our fathers' or our grandfathers' one. Living in a rich country in the globalisation era means overlooking a much greater horizons of information, discoveries and potential new experiences. The problem is that the more we experience, the more new choices open in front of us. For instance: if a student remains in his own country, and only travels for tourism, he will probably develop a career in that country; but if he only goes to Erasmus, learns well a foreign language and gets used to a different culture as well as to an international environment, he might consider other possibilities, like finishing his studies or going to work abroad. If he starts to work abroad, he will have to decide if going back home sooner or later, or create his family in his new country. If he gets married abroad and has children, the couple will have to decide where they want their children to grow up, what

languages speak with them, to what kind of school (a national one, a European one...) enrol them, all choices that depend on a broader experience with respect to the student who remained in his own country.

Such a constant, all-embracing process of choice increases the possibility that individuals do not know what is better for them, this way producing uncertainty in front of “the great choices of life”, but also in front of the smallest aspects of life: the way people dress, as I said, may assume a great importance the moment it becomes an act through which individuals communicate their identity.

This example shows another complication in the process of choice, a complication that is normally not considered in sociological literature. The activity of choice as I have described it is normally related to individual egos and has consequences on subjective biographies. Every choice, anyway, communicates something about the individual to all the others. This fact has two consequences. Firstly, whenever an individual takes a choice, he is making a social act, not just an intimate psychological one; in this sense, both during the process of choice and while realising his choice, the subject is considering his environment and the people around him, in other words: his community.

The increasing level of individualism does not mean that individuals are *socially* isolated. If the individual is uncertain and does not find help during his decision process, he might *feel* isolated, he might feel alone, but he is still taking his decisions because actually *he is not alone*. Post-modern consumerism tries to make us think that we buy things for our intimate pleasure. I have in mind, for example, the sentence I read once in a furniture shop in Bruxelles: “If you think it will give you pleasure, buy it”. The accent on the *self* is evident. But how many objects are produced and bought neither for their aesthetic value nor for their function, but just to be shown to other people? In other words: is some of our purchases a matter of status, it means that we are not isolated consumers, but rather social consumers. More generally, whenever we take a choice, how much is our intimate satisfaction and how much is the satisfaction related to other people reaction to our choice?

This question leads to the second point: as our choices are influenced by the environment we live in, they influence it too. My behaviour can influence other people in a number of ways, for example pushing someone to emulate me. If many people emulate each other, better, if an individual choice becomes a collective choice, a subculture springs. Sometimes the most globalised individuals, like the workers who continuously travel all around the world, are described as isolated subjects, as some sort of homeless who only live in the time, but not in the space [Heller, 1994]. I believe that these individuals are not isolated at all, on the contrary, they know to be part of a high-level subculture, with its rituals, its language, its attitudes, and I will try to verify this through my research.

To sum up these last points, I want to underline that individual choices have not just personal consequences, but remain in a mutual influence with the environment where they are taken and its people. This is not in contrast with the idea of individualisation: each person enjoys an autonomy (the fact of being free to choose) and an independency (the possibility of choosing a different way with respect to the socially accepted one) never experienced before. But this does not emancipate people from the consideration of their social context and, possibly, from conformism.

3.1.6. The age of uncertainties and reflexivity

I have shown how, for different reasons, the current (Western) existential condition is characterised by two aspects:

- a. a continuous change;
- b. the necessity for the individual to attribute a sense to reality and to adapt to the constant change by a pervasive choice activity.

I have said that these two aspects produce uncertainty, but someone could reply affirming that in every age uncertainty and fear have accompanied people life, especially with regard to historical catastrophes like epidemics, wars, invasions, etc. Despite this, I believe that in the past we can trace a sense of stability, that is, the idea of an order in life: the majority of the people were trapped in their social role

and in the local tradition, but at the same time they were saved by them. Post-modernity implies a passage from the ontological question to the epistemological one. The scientific ignorance of the past generated myths and religions, that is, faith. Today it is hard to have faith, as a new problem arises: faith in what? Even faith is subject to uncertainty in the moment we have to choose towards what we will address it. As Sennett [1998] and Ceri [2003] note (focusing on the economic field, but I would extend their argument to any sphere), uncertainty has changed in our time because it exists without impending historical disasters: it is a structural element of our society, it is considered normal, better: existential. A believer who fears the devil is not uncertain: he knows what to do, because he is sure that a certain behaviour will lead him to the Evil and another behaviour to the Paradise, no matter how he images them. He knows he is a pawn in God's great creation, but at the same time he is the centre of his believes, he thinks that God and the Devil are everywhere to save or condemn him. On the contrary, the man who had faith in the progress and now has not anymore, is alone. As Sloterdijk [2002] notes, he saw the images of the Earth taken from the space and realises he is on a small planet with limited resources. He knows he is not the centre of a divine project – maybe just a small part of it, a *fragment*. In this sense, I would say that *uncertainty is both ontological and epistemological*.

Uncertainty is so omnipresent that it is even celebrated. Of course what is celebrated is not the uncertainty itself, but, once again, the idea of having many possibilities and, consequently, the freedom to choose. I would like now to deepen what I discussed to this regard in § 3.1.4.

The word freedom is surely positively connoted, so I suggest to substitute the expression “freedom to chose” with a more neutral “having a set of choice”. Firstly, as the psychological research demonstrates and as everyone of us has experienced, if the set of choice is too large, we feel disoriented and often frustrated. This feeling can be more or less serious, but we can experience it in plenty of cases, for instance when we want to buy a yoghurt in a big supermarket and we find in front of a 10 metres for 6 shelves fridge full of yoghurts of any kind, everyone with a packaging

specifically designed with the purpose of attracting our attention. This is also the condition of those students who, finished the secondary school, are willing to go to university and need to choose the faculty they will study. The problem is more or less socially recognised and psychological support is provided in this kind of situation, through courses which are called “orienting”. Similar courses are available in situations of career change, moving, etc.

Secondly, whenever someone says that we dispose of a large set of choices, we should differentiate among the “allowed choices”, that is, the ones we are allowed to realise, and the “effective choices”, that is, the ones we are actually able to realise [Ceri, 2003: 17]. The fact that some possibilities exist does not mean that a person can achieve them:

[...] in the globalisation the number of allowed choices increases, while the number of the effective choices proportionally (but not necessarily in absolute) decreases. Of course not for everybody. In this difference – the difference among those who time by time find originally open alternatives closed and those who are able to open previously closed alternatives – lurks, in fact, power⁷.

*In the globalisation age the one who has power is the one who has the possibility to decide about other people's flexibility*⁸.

As seen in § 3.1.2., Giddens considers the couple dependency vs. autonomy, affirming that dependency begins when the choice, which should be autonomy-driven, is influenced by anxiety [Giddens, 1999: 63]. Ceri [2003: 22] is on the same line when stating that if someone loses autonomy, someone else gains control. The limitation of autonomy may happen in two ways: by a direct command (“you have to do that”), which implies conformation, surveillance and discipline, or by the creation of uncertainty (“you cannot avoid to do that”), which implies adaptation, re-definition of the situation and flexibility. In this context, flexibility means that we have to adapt to the variability of someone's else decision. So if I am subject to

⁷ “nella globalizzazione si estende il rango delle scelte permesse, mentre si riduce, proporzionalmente (ma non necessariamente in assoluto) quello delle scelte effettive. Naturalmente non per tutti. In questa differenza – la differenza tra quanti vedono di volta in volta chiuse alternative un tempo aperte e quanti riescono ad aprire alternative precedentemente chiuse – si annida, infatti, il potere.” [Ceri, 2003: 17; my translation].

⁸ “in epoca di globalizzazione ha potere chi ha la possibilità di decidere la flessibilità altrui.” [Ceri, 2003: 79; my translation; roman in the text].

someone's power, not only can I choose, but also I have to. This way I get to the paradoxical situation of having more freedom (more allowed possibilities) and less freedom (less effective possibilities, that is, less autonomy) at the same time.

On the same topic, Belohradsky [2002] assumes an institutional instead of an individual point of view: he agrees in recognising a choice number increase, but also notes that those structures which should guarantee a correct decision process do not fall under the individual control. For example, in order to select the candidate I will assign my vote to, I need a proper, independent information, but I have no control on media, so I do not have access to that information. I might generalise this point suggesting that *the level of complexity is in inverse proportion to the level of control*. It is possible to appreciate this fact thinking of the gap between common sense and expert decisions, which constitutes one of the current problems of democracy. As Dahl [1990] points out, democracy is based on the idea that people know what is better for them. This principle is undermined by the fact that people are not able anymore to consider all the interconnections among different facts. Moreover, an increasing number of decisions requires now a specialised knowledge that of course people cannot have. Consequently, people's capacity of taking good decisions thanks to their ability to understand what is better for them is seriously in doubt. Politicians often try to take advantage of this situation by legislating on key issues without the support of their political basis. This is what happened in Italy and in some other European countries with the European Constitution passage, which was not delegated to people by referendum, but was voted directly by the Parliament. It is obvious that this choice does not meet with European Commission indications towards a Europeanization from below. From their side, media has taken up the role of people informers, even though with seriously arguable results (problem of the agenda setting, superficiality of the provided information, factiousness). To accomplish with this role, they dedicate space to experts of the problem each time at stake; those experts should explain matters and provide people with the information they need to form an opinion. Unfortunately, it is rare to find two experts who provide the same interpretations or stress the same aspect of a problem, both for scientific and political

reasons. This way our society manifests a contradiction: on one side, a great emphasis is accorded to experts and experts' positions; on the other hand, the same experts do not seem able to clarify people doubts and to provide shared solutions to problems. Evidently, this contradiction throws discredit on scientists, this way pushing people towards a general *qualunquismo*, that is, indifference and mistrust towards the entire system: the final result is that the problem is soon ignored, because if experts are not even able to agree on the definition of a matter, what is a normal citizen supposed to do? Moreover, the entire mechanism produces a higher level of uncertainty than the one produced by the pure ignorance itself, and radicalises the *lack of control* sensation.

People's lack of control and uncertainty deriving from complexity are often used by power holders to promote actions and policies which ostensibly produce people's benefit, but which in fact hide more concealed political purposes. Current security policies are a terrible example of the way states try to make up for their incapacity to contrast the increasing level of wage differential and to regulate immigration by exercising a repression action, the last result of which is just the strengthening of control possibilities by the main powers [Ceri, 2003; Zolo, 2004]. A more ordinary example is given by the Italian policies for internships. Around the year 2000 a campaign to invite students and graduates to spend part of their time in internships was launched, underlying the deriving multiple advantages both for students and for the economic system⁹. The principle was absolutely correct: as Italian Universities mainly provide a theoretical preparation, students should gain the necessary experience for their profession through a working period; at the same time, companies are able to form personnel at a low cost and to select their future employees. The way this principle was put into practice has been, on the contrary, totally anarchic: firstly, students were invited to do their internships after they graduated, not during their studies as it happens in the most of the European countries; secondly, no contract was legally recognised for interns, with the effect to

⁹ This campaign was so intense as to reach a level of stupidity; practically all the publications aiming at informing people about stage possibilities, both on economic newspapers and on specialised magazines, began highlighting that the word "stage", at the time pronounced as an Anglicism, is actually French, and inviting people to accordingly change their pronunciation.

make it normal not to pay them, or to provide them with just a symbolic expense allowance as compensation for a full time service; thirdly, no regulations about the time companies could use interns and no obligation to employ them was established, so that many companies used interns just to supply their working force with low cost willing-to-work young professionals. The problem has never really been discussed on a public arena and the situation is still unchanged, despite the fact that the European Union is now investigating the legitimacy of this way to organise internships¹⁰. It is easy to understand that if the state does not intervene to regulate this matter is because it has a clear convenience to maintain the current situation: a stagier is not an unemployed, even though he does not receive a salary, and does not compare in the unemployment statistics. It is not a case that, at the time the campaign was launched, unemployment reduction was a political issue strongly affirmed by the government in charge.

The internship example shows how deep is the gap between politics and media depiction of reality on one side and the reality itself on the other side. This gap is clearly felt by people, provoking a social uneasiness which in its turn strengthens the lack of control feeling and the generalised rejection of politics, this way widening the distance between politicians and citizens. Incidentally I would add that this lack of control feeling is presumably the root of the many conspiracy theories we hear every day: as Eco says, “Anxiety rouses the plot mania which ends up reassuring us”¹¹.

It is important to underline that uncertainty does not correspond to fear. I will explain this difference with an example. The idea of a nuclear holocaust produced fear, not uncertainty. As noted in § 1.1.2., the cold war order transmitted a strong

¹⁰ According to what one of the interviewee says, the internship problem is common to other European countries, up to the point that she defines it a “generational problem”:

I know it takes quite a long time until you stop finding internships and start finding real jobs, but it's the same also in France, it's not only about Brussels, it's about our generation.

What do you mean?

That for young people, well educated, with a master in political science, law, economics, is much harder than 10 years ago to find a job. They do two or three internships before finding a real job. It's the same in France, it's the same in Europe [pause]. But I still hope to find something someday [France, 8: 87-92].

¹¹ “L’angoscia scatena la mania del complotto che finisce per tranquillizzarci” [Eco in an interview by Riotta, “Il Grande Vecchio alleato di Osama”, *Corriere della Sera*, 12 July 2005; my translation].

idea of stability, even though under the menace of an atomic war. Before Communism falling, the world could appear a unity, because every place had a precise meaning and often a role in the global order. Paradoxically, the globalised world may appear not as a totality, but as a field of contrasting and dispersed forces which liberate energies that no one is able to control [Bauman, 1998]. This lack of control is the centre of Bauman's idea of globalisation. For him, globalisation is characterised by the ungovernable, auto-propulsive and undetermined new economy, as well as by the idea of a headquarter lack. In this sense, Bauman, like Barber [1995], speaks about new global disorder, countering it with universalisation, that is, a global order. For Bauman, universalisation refers to action, initiatives and especially to the will aimed at making a better world in the name of progress, while globalisation refers to the global effects of human action. Even though, as seen in Chapter I, I do not share this line of defining globalisation, I agree with the idea of disorder underlined by Bauman. It is this disorder, that is, the lack of control what produces uncertainty, and in this sense uncertainty is not the fear of a possible event, but the impossibility to foresee the effects of an event, that is, the impossibility to fear something in particular rather than a general but defined set of consequences. For example, the ecological theme should frighten us, but what really happens is that the most of the people just do not know what to think about it.

This situation is partially caused by an excess of information: like in the case of the experts, information is too much, so that individuals cannot consider all the different matters without spending their entire life just doing it; moreover, information is often contradictory, so that eventually people do not have the elements to effectuate their choices. Today we find ourselves in a paradoxical situation: the excess of information generates the need of an increasing number of more and more specialised experts, but at the same time we are sceptical with respect to their answers, and we know that today true or best advice could be tomorrow lie or worse advice. In addition to this, as Jedlowski [1994] notes following Simmel, the raising of complexity and the high specialisation level reached in all scientific fields make subjective culture just a small part of a broader objective (or social) culture. In other words, what one knows is just a small part of all the human knowledge, and

definitely much less than what he needs to survive. Post-modernity produces an artificial world that overwhelms individuals, obliging them to retreat into themselves or into the more immediate, local sphere, but at the same time creating a stronger and stronger state of mutual dependence that increases complexity.

This process is reinforced by the action exercised by media, which with their pervasiveness reduce the opposition between public and private sphere. People's retreat in their intimate or local sphere, together with the possibilities offered by the new communication technologies, go in the opposite direction of McLuhan global village, producing a privatisation rather than a collectivisation of the experience. A prove of this is the fact that our society is more and more house-based, and that virtual communication is gaining importance to face to face communication detriment; but it is highly arguable that Internet communities can be considered authentic *Gemeinschaft*, as they do not seem to reach a real sense of belonging, of sharing and of mutual responsibility [Kumar, 1995].

Science loss of reliability, together with the change of tradition role, pushes individuals toward a permanent reflexivity [Jedlowski, 1994: 89]. Without entering into details¹², it is possible to define reflexivity as “the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity, and material relation with nature, to chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge” [Giddens, 1991: 20]. Melucci refers to something similar when he defines reflexivity in terms of need “to learn how to learn, that is, to control cognitive and motivational processes and adapt them to new problems”¹³. It is possible to recognise two levels of reflexivity:

- a. personal reflexivity [Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1990; Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1995], which is given by the formation and the constant adaptation of individuals' life projects;
- b. social reflexivity [Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1993; Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1999], which is given by an auto-monitoring social activity.

¹² For a more specific definition of reflexivity and for an analysis of the conceptual differences among those three authors, see Beck, Giddens and Lash 1999.

¹³ “non si tratta più soltanto di apprendere, ma di apprendere ad apprendere, di controllare cioè i processi cognitivi e motivazionali e di adattarli a nuovi problemi.” [Melucci 1991: 49; my translation].

Reflexivity is partially a product of the living in a risk society, that is, of the obligation to measure ourselves with the consequences and the effects of our actions. In this sense Beck [1993; 2007] underlines how, thanks to reflexivity, the risk society gains awareness and becomes able to modernise industrialism in such a way as to reduce risks. Personally, I am doubtful about these optimist conclusions.

Firstly, on many themes individuals do not reach a sufficient level of awareness. Despite of the load of information available on global warming, for example, there are people who still question this phenomenon. Moreover so many alarms are launched on a daily basis (wars and terrorism, ecology, famine, economic problems and social problems at a local, national and international level) that, for a simple psychological mechanism, people just end up by removing the most of them from their mental maps. Secondly, the general awareness is often not sufficient to produce changes, as the current political system does not provide people with effective instruments to really influence power holders' decisions. The defeat suffered by the no-global movement is a prove of the incapacity of current movements to influence in a determinant way the economic and political system.

I rather believe that *social reflexivity is producing uncertainty and anomy*, for it allows people to discover the hole in the modernisation paradigm and in the social system without providing them with proper solutions. Those uncertainty and anomy are *partially compensated by personal reflexivity*. In other words, people try to compensate their lack of control in the macro-social sphere with a concentration on the micro-social sphere.

3.2 The individual between public and private

I maintained that we assist to a movement from the public to the private. I also affirmed that many individuals concentrate on the local sphere rather than on the national or global ones. Until now I treated these two movements as they constitute one only phenomenon. Up to a certain extent, they are a single movement: people retreat themselves from the public sphere to a narrower dimension. At the same time, they are two opposite movements. It is time to differentiate them and explain how they are two different answers to globalisation.

3.2.1. Individualism and communitarism

Beck notes that the spirit of democracy and liberty is absorbed in the society through socialization and action [Beck, 1997b]. Action, indeed, is a matter of power. In this sense, Beck differentiates two phases of modernity: a first one, in which liberty was seen as an ontological propriety, that is, as a natural characteristic based on gender, lineage and social position; a second one, in which the political liberty still depends on the national law, but its social perception and its cultural side are the result of an individual or collective decision. This means that we live in a constant process of negotiation of our political and cultural identities. This process takes place in a post-modern condition of uncertainty, producing a twofold movement: on one side, towards a hedonist individualism, on the other side towards communitarism. This couple, individualism versus communitarism, has been discussed in different ways.

Giddens [1999] sets the cosmopolitan mentality against the fundamentalism. He underlines that the latest is a very recent reaction to the disappearing of tradition as a set of norms able to order the reality. Fundamentalism is, in fact, a way to defend tradition in a traditional way, that is, by affirming the faith in a ritual truth. On the

contrary, cosmopolitanism, which is based on tolerance and dialogue, should be driven by a universal principle. The risk in Giddens' proposal is to declare universal the Western-centric reconnaissance of the difference. Also fundamentalism claims its universality, and the result is that fundamentalism and cosmopolitanism fight for the predominance of their different universal values basis.

A more precise proposal comes from Barber [1995], who counters Jihad to Mc World, that is, fundamentalism against economic neo-liberalism, assuming that no one of them is able to guarantee a democratic future in a globalised world. Following Tocqueville, Barber affirms that economic neo-liberalism constitutes a kind of tyranny that leaves the body free but subjugate the spirit. As already noted in § 3.1.6, we are free to choose among a variety of products and services, but we cannot choose not to choose. The possibility of choice enlargement is fictitious, as individuals enjoy a superficial option expansion in a field, but loose the possibility to determine the field itself. So, for instance, the consumer can choose among a variety of car models, but cannot choose to invest in public rather than in private transport. On the same line is Touraine [1997] when, denouncing the market economy triumph, he underlines that we are not passing from a dirigiste society to a liberal one, but that economy prevails on non-economic logics, preventing people from activating new forms of social control on it. Fundamentalism, on the other side, identifies the self in the contrast with the Alter, promoting collective aims solicited by charismatic leaders by renouncing to democratic deliberation and tolerance [Barber 2005: 206].

Touraine [1997], perhaps inspired also by Galtung's work, presents a similar but more sophisticated point of view. For him, the post-modern individual suffers two different pressures, the liberal one and the communitarian one:

- a. on one side, *institutions lose their normative power and economy*, being more and more dissociated from production social relations, *is reduced to a pure international market*; individuals lose their traditional reference points and do not find new ones but in the privatisation of the public space and the valorisation of their primary groups;

- b. on the other side, *the mass culture penetration in the private space pushes towards a cultural identity defence reactions organised around the intolerant closing in a community*. The communitarian ideology tends to the creation of an heterogeneous but unitary front composed by different kinds of nationalism, fascism revivals, ethnic and religious integralisms. This ideology is based on the refusal of the alterity and of the universalistic law principles. In other words, cultural identities, legitimising authoritarian powers, lower themselves. Furthermore, at the basis of the communitarian thought there is the pretension of a monolithic identity able to colonise individuals' entire intimate life. But as Sen [2002] notes, identity is composed by many belongings (genre, political thinking, religious faith, profession, social values, etc.) in competition one with each other, but living together in the individual. Every belonging refers to a specific group, so that it is not possible to assign to a person one exclusive belonging.

As an integration principle able to provide an alternative to these two pressures, Touraine proposes the idea of Subject, which is given by the personal research of those conditions that allow an individual to become protagonist of his own history, to be an active actor in his Self construction. This research is conducted by the Subject at an individual level, with the use of his critical ability and the opposition to powers, and at a collective level through the social movements. The Subject, in fact, realises himself in the individual, but is not exhausted by the individual. It is possible to recognise here Touraine's effort to think of a Subject who does not renounce to his social dimension. Touraine, in line with the post-modern theory, notes that the lack of a unique principle able to produce a personality unity causes a fragmentation of the Self.

The Subject suffers of an identity formation crisis and becomes a desiring individual, looking for an impersonal, drive release, and moved by an aesthetic research of pleasure. Consequently, we, the post-modern Subjects, would be confined in our passions as the modern Subject was confined in God's or in the social law. Against this degeneration Touraine opposes a Subject who is able to

recuperate the relation with his Self, being animated by a collective tension towards the *Alter*. In other words, the social relations among Subjects would be based not on the belonging to the same culture or society, but on the mutual identification in the effort to become Subjects. So the Subject would be able to create his identity by complementing three forces [Touraine, 1997: 94]:

- a. the individual desire to maintain a personality unity;
- b. the personal and collective struggle against those powers that transform culture in communities and work in a commodity;
- c. the interpersonal and institutional reconnaissance of the *Alter* as a Subject.

I find this proposal as seductive as abstract. Touraine practically commits to individual free choice, auto-determination and personal equilibrium the massive task to contrast the current social forces and to establish a new identity path based neither on liberalism and communitarism nor on personal passions, but on an undefined principle of solidarity. This is, of course, totally vague, and does not go far beyond a declaration of trust in the human being and his ability to create a better world. Meanwhile this proposal is somehow disruptive and constitutes the celebration of a positive individualism:

[...] society functioning laws and rules cannot put as their principle objective the general interest, the common good or the social utility; they need to be activated to guarantee the freedom of the Subject, [...] understood as the right that every human being has to attribute meaning to his own existence¹⁴.

This broad auto-determination right should be achieved by two principles:

- a. solidarity, which is seen as a way to help the *Alter* without keeping him in a state of dependency and without limiting his capacity of action;
- b. will to communicate, this way recognising the *Alter* and his differences.

In other words, Touraine is depicting a society “without norms and order, but not without principles” [1997: 157], with human rights enlarged to social and cultural

¹⁴ “[...] le leggi e le regole di funzionamento della società non possono più darsi come obiettivo principale l’interesse generale, il bene comune o l’utilità sociale; esse vanno attivate al servizio della libertà del Soggetto, [...] inteso come diritto che ciascun essere umano ha di dare un significato alla propria esistenza.” [Touraine, 1997: 154; my translation from the Italian edition].

rights (which is, by the way, the direction followed by the current debate about pluralism [Greblo, 2004]). In such a society human development would correspond, according to the position carried on by Sen [1999], to the increasing of choice capacity of the largest possible number of individuals.

Touraine is aware that a multicultural society needs a universalistic principle able to guarantee the communication among individuals. At the same time, he wants to avoid a principle that pretends to be superior with respect to other conceptions of social organisation. Therefore he proposes the free construction of personal life as a universalistic principle that does not impose a social organisation. He also affirms that this principle does not reduce itself to tolerance and relativism, because it requires that every cultural identity legitimates itself not by the defence of a social order, but by claiming individuals' general equality and freedom, which are considered universal rights by the UNESCO¹⁵. Still I think that the danger to fall in a cultural relativism weakens Touraine's proposal, as well as the lack of a concrete, explicit way to guarantee that individuals' wills accord in a mutual subjectivity identification. As Touraine himself notes, the Subject arises at the individual experience level. But individuals' experiences are often so far one from the others that it is hard to understand how they could find a common communicative basis. Moreover, it is not clear how to trigger a process of change from the hate that currently separates some cultures to a mutual recognising.

On the contrary, I find extremely valuable Touraine's accent on the individual. Touraine is evidently against any kind of cultural colonisation or social organisation imposition, even the liberal, mass culture one. But he introduces a new element with respect to the pretensions of those who are just *against* (against globalisation, against the market, against pollution, against cultural contaminations, against everything): he refuses the idea of a society characterised by uncontrollable fluxes in continuous change, claiming the social movements power to intervene in the globalisation process. Thus *he restores the possibility to influence social change and the globalisation process itself*, and does it *by claiming that the power to change resides*

¹⁵ Sen [2002] takes into consideration the arguments of those who claim that human rights and freedom are not universally recognised values, especially in Asia and North Africa, and convincingly shows how these critics are groundless.

in the individuals, either considered in their personal action or in their collective action. More: Touraine affirms that by realising themselves in the respect of the others (and not at other people's expense, like in the economic liberalism) and through the effort for a sustainable development achievement, people would fulfil the social benefit. These ideas constitute some important premises for the present work. This conception, far beyond Bauman's resignation to disorder and lack of control, is in fact in line with the idea, proposed in § 1.2.3., that we can partially attribute directions to globalisation by creating paths of developments. It also contrasts the post-modern deconstruction of the subject, giving the pre-eminence to a constructive individualism, able to realise itself in a social dimension, over a narcissistic individualism.

3.2.2. The Subject between Self and society

As seen, different authors speak about the tendency of our society towards individualisation. Individualism is not understood anymore in Tocqueville's anti-solidarity meaning, but rather as political individualism, which seeks for rules and processes able to guarantee the accord among personal needs and interests on one side and coordination and cooperation on the other side [V.A., 1993: 536]. Individualism recognises to the individual a priority with respect to the community in which he takes part. This individual is a auto-determinant, self-sovereign unity, characterised by a constant emancipation will against any kind of communitarian subordination [Greblo, 2005; see also Laurent, 1993; Kumar, 1995]. As we have seen, the post-modern individual is still far from reaching a total capacity of auto-determination (and it is doubtful if he will ever be). This is why Touraine shrewdly speaks about the necessity to politically guarantee to individuals those conditions that allow them to reach happiness by auto-determining their own destiny. In other words, current individualism is conceived as a compromise between the individual and the collective demand.

When we speak about Europeanization or globalisation from below, for instance, we are referring to this attempt to harmonise the individual perspective with the institutional one. For the reasons we have seen in the first part of this Chapter, anyway, what normally happens is that individuals tend to retreat from the collective dimension to concentrate on the personal one. Even when a social movement arises, it is often ignored or overwhelmed by a politics which remains substantially far from individuals. This way a contradiction arises among what the political system claims (for example: Europeanization from below) and what it actually does (European institutions lack of democratic legitimacy, decisions from above). As we have seen, in any case, also the private sphere suffers of some contradictions:

- a. individuals are free to choose among given possibilities, but not to determine the spheres of choice;
- b. too many choices reduce people independency and increase anxiety;
- c. the consumer society exercises a constant pressure on individuals, so that it is hard to say up to what extent individuals auto-determine their way of life or are hetero-directed;
- d. the consumer society pushes towards narcissism and hedonism, that is, towards a more and more private conception of pleasure that makes it difficult to preserve couple stability by renouncing to a part of subjectivity;
- e. the conscience that the Western wealth is preserved by maintaining the South of the world in a condition of poverty provokes a cognitive dissonance in many people, divided between the maintenance of their consumerist life-style and their responsibility towards the global *Alter*.

The tension deriving from these ambiguities is one of the causes for the current shift from the Ego to the Self, that is, to its most intimate part. From advertisement to new age philosophy, a research of one's own authentic Self is proposed, this way implicitly suggesting that individuals as they normally feel themselves are not authentic, that is, are not self-driven and auto-determinant. But in the moment the consumer society recognises its lack of authenticity, automatically colonises the space of this most intimate research by creating a rhetoric of the Self and by using this rhetoric to sell new products. Moreover, the market materialistically transforms

the individualisation tendency into a product personalisation, stressing the idea that every material and cultural product is made “for you”, “to measure of your requirements”, to satisfy “your needs”. Morin [1962] noted that the standardisation of individual liberties determines a private individual, but this private individual is not Touraine’s Subject, but rather Barber’s consumer. Summing up, even in the private sphere there is a constant risk of the individual values reduction to the economic dimension [Laurent 1993], which causes a constant tension between a negative, narcissistic individualism and a positive, political one.

Thus individuals are subjected to a twofold pressure:

- a. on one side, they have lost the classic (collective) adherences (class, party, union, nation...) and are pushed to more personal adherences (genre, sexuality, ethnicity, locality...);
- b. on the other side, they are not really free to determine their private way of being, but suffers the constant market attempt to drive their way of life.

In such a context Touraine’s proposal of socially and politically guaranteeing to individuals the conditions to determine themselves as Subjects acquires an enormous importance, as individualisation by itself is not able to produce those conditions: social institutions are needed. Determining themselves as Subjects, in fact, individuals seem to be entrapped in a post-modern contradiction: on a macro-scale, the individual is claimed not to be able to determine himself as a Subject, for he has no control anymore on many aspects of his life (environment, political decisions, economy, etc.); on a micro-scale, the enfeeblement of tradition normative power broadens individuals’ possibilities to choose their own way of life. I believe that this is a false paradox.

I do not think that on a macro-scale people have less control on their choices now than in the past because of the globalisation process. In other ages, people had to face different challenges: epidemics, famine, the almost impossibility to change their social status, the continuous wars, etc. In our complex world, where we are aware of many more aspects of reality, it is obvious that we have the feeling not to have control. But as a matter of fact, people never had a real control on nature, on

economic mechanisms, on politic power. I would say that never like now people had the possibility to express themselves and their opinions and to change their destiny, even though, as seen, the limitations to self-determination are still very strong.

Civil society is, in this context, a way to channel individualisation in a collective purpose. When Touraine underlines the importance of the collective Subject organised in a social movement, he is affirming the necessity of an aware and responsible civil society. Moreover, civil society may constitute a reawakening of citizenship, which could pass from a mostly passive status to an active political process, able to influence great decisions through minimal initiatives [Pocecco, 1997]. But civil society is after all a collective action to modify social institutions. In other words, the Subject realises himself by a twofold movement: a movement towards his more intimate essence and a movement towards his social commitment. *By influencing, through civil society, the social institutions development, the Subject recuperates the possibility to enter in the regulation of those sectors of life that currently seem to be out of his control.* This is surely a difficult path, during which the Subject has to contrast and overpass a number of obstacles. But it is also a way to contrast the fragmentation of the Self, that is, to restore the personal identity unity. As seen, according to many scholars¹⁶, in the post-modern era the individual experience is fragmented. Nevertheless, as Giddens [1991] notes, we cannot ignore modernity trend to unity, which takes place also through globalisation. I am affirming that this unity is reached by a tortuous process of the Subject: he surely passes from the public to the private, but as the private is more and more invaded by the public, *the Subject returns to the public by closing into the private.* It is certainly correct to say that personal identity has lost its traditional adherences, but not that it has lost its collective afflatus. The *qualunquismo* itself, which is normally used as an example of people detachment from politics, can be seen as its contrary: being it a reaction of disappointment towards politics, it demonstrates that people still feel intensively involved in their social dimension, and that they react by seeking new

¹⁶ Not only the ones who defend the post-modern theory: see for instance Jedlowski, 1994.

fields to express their commitment¹⁷. These fields are found in the private dimension, which is partially lived in a private way (love, passion, friendship, sexuality) and partially lived in a public way (genre defence, ethnic group demands, etc.). But *through reflexivity the private way turns into the public one, and does it in three manners*:

- a. *by the Subject acquisition of awareness about his existential condition*; as known, the School of Frankfurt feared an Orwellian individual subjected to the media control; against this image, an even more dangerous one has been set, the Huxley's one, that is, the image of an individual who loses his self-consciousness in the pleasure [Postman, 1985]; I believe that the post-modern society presents both Orwell and Huxley characteristics; so the more the Subject is reflexive, the more he increases the possibility to get aware of those characteristics and to contrast them, this way getting to point b) and c);
- b. *by the Subject concrete and active struggle for self-realisation conditions* (for instance, the struggle for assigning to cohabiting couples the same rights of married couples);
- c. *by socially influencing other identities through the spreading of ideas and behaviours*, like in the processes *from below*.

In other words, I am claiming that it is incorrect to equalise the public and the collective. When we say that the Subject leaves the public sphere, what we actually mean is just that he is renouncing to the traditional ways of public participation. When we say that he moves from the public to the private, we suggest that he enlarges the private from the more intimate dimension of the Self to a broader social dimension, in which he realises himself through interpersonal communication and social action. In the following Chapter I will deeply explain these ideas.

¹⁷ Some authors, like Touraine [1997], speak about a shift from politics to ethics, to underline the passage from a conception of the individual as a citizen to a conception of the individual in his whole integrity, that is, as a Subject.

Chapter 4

The identity path goes on: places, mobility and cultural interactions in the globalised world

4.1 Personal identity: from condition to process

During the Middle Age and still during part of the Modern Age, individuals were not thought in terms of their identity, but just of their roles. During the 20th century, sociology used the concept of role to indicate the set of norms and expectations that influence an individual because of its position in a social network or system [Gallino, 2004: 564]. I agree with those who believe that the concept of role can still be useful for sociological reflections, but also that it is not sufficient anymore to describe the complexity of post-modern interpersonal relationships. The idea of role is linked to the prescriptions that society exercises over the individual, so representing a top-down approach, but it does not say anything about what the subject thinks, feels, prefers. In a world more and more complex, reflexive, differentiated and dominated by the idea of choice, as I depicted it in Chapter III, a concept that describes people's intimate world is needed. This has been traced in the idea of identity.

Melucci refers identity to three characteristics:

[...] subject continuity, no matter the variations during the time and the adaptation to the environment; delimitation of this subject with respect to the others; ability to recognise himself and to be recognised¹.

¹ “[...] continuità di un soggetto, al di là delle variazioni nel tempo e degli adattamenti all’ambiente; delimitazione di questo soggetto rispetto agli altri; capacità di riconoscersi e di essere riconosciuto.” [Melucci, 1991: 35; my translation].

Even though his definition of identity is not precise enough to express this idea, Melucci [1991] suggests that we move through different identities according to the environment we are in:

Identity is then a process of constant negotiation among different aspects of the self, different times of the self and different environment or relation systems in which everyone of us is integrated².

In other words, the individual is never the totality of his being: he consciously or unconsciously chooses part of his personality and in this sense his identity depends on his choices.

Kumar [1995] is on the same line when saying that identity is the result of a choice. For him, identity is not an accomplished unity, but rather the mutable result of a process of change. In this sense, people create and modify their identity day by day.

According to the symbolic interactionism perspective, which is adopted in this work, identity is a “definition that the subject gives of himself” [Tessarini, 1994: 971] and that passes through transformations during the process of social interaction. These ideas are in line with the work developed by the *Group de Fribourg*, a commission that produced a *Declaration for Cultural Rights*. The latest provides a sophisticated definition of “cultural identity” as “the set of cultural references by which a person or a group defines himself, constitutes himself, communicates and wants to be recognised in his dignity”³. In a previous version of this definition, provided during the works of the Group de Fribourg, author of the Declaration, there was a specific reference to a constant integration process of three elements in the identity: cultural diversity, which refers to the fact that the *Ego* is constituted beginning from the plurality of the *Alter*; the universalism-particularism dialectic, that is, the relation between individuals and society; the temporal perception of the self, given by the memory (past) and the project (future) [Perotti, 2001]. On the basis

² “L’identità è allora un processo di costante negoziazione tra parti diverse del sé, tempi diversi del sé e ambienti diversi o sistemi diversi di relazioni in cui ciascuno di noi è inserito” [Melucci, 1991: 55; my translation].

³ “l’expression ‘identité culturelle’ est comprise comme l’ensemble des références culturelles par lequel une personne, seule ou en commun, se définit, se constitue, communique et entend être reconnue dans sa dignité;” [Groupe de Fribourg, 2007: article 2; my translation from French].

of this definition, Perotti [2001: 839] differentiates in the concept of “personal identity” two aspects: the “factual identity”, which indicates what a person thinks he is, and the “value identity”, which indicates what a person would like to be⁴. Thus also in this definition identity is conceived as a process that develops in the time and affects not only the individual, but also the individual in his social interactions.

All this considered, three are the aspects that I want to underline in this meaning of “identity”:

- a. identity is not a stable structure;
- b. identity comes from the individual self-perception and is used to orientate his action;
- c. identity is plural, that is, is linked to the specific situation and to the environment the subject is in⁵.

If we accept this perspective, we need to analyse individuals not as isolated beings, but as *beings in interaction*. Now, for the purposes of the present work, I am interested in two kinds of interactions, the two of them able to mould identity:

- a. the interaction happening among people coming from different countries and that either meet in one’s of them country or in a third country, foreign for all of them;
- b. the interaction that takes place between people of the same country who meet abroad.

To set the research about these kinds of interaction, I will now take into consideration the mobility and the meaning of the place in the globalised era, then I will briefly analyse the perspectives about the meeting among different cultures.

⁴ Incidentally, I would observe that the gap between the factual and the value identity could represent the gap felt by the immigrant during his socialisation in the receiving country.

⁵ The idea of a plurality of identities is in accordance with Goffman’s theory. As known, Goffman [1959] underlined the multiplicity of roles, masks and behaviours that individuals adopt in order to face their definition of the situation. His intuition has further been developed in more rigid identity terms.

4.2 Moving identities

In the last two decades the nature of migration has changed radically [Cotesta, 1999; King, 2001] in quantity and quality: quantitatively, an increasing number of countries has been incorporated in the global migration system, and there is a worldwide acceleration of migration processes; qualitatively, a differentiation in the types of migration and a feminization of the fluxes are observable. Nevertheless, the image of an invasion from the poor countries to the rich one is a fantasy: migration fluxes run in precise and complex social, ethnic and economic networks [Sassen, 1996 and 1998; Zanfrini, 2004]. Moreover, even though with the globalisation the absolute number of migrants tends to increase year by year, the entity of international migration fluxes is limited with respect to the amplex of the economic gap that separates developed and developing countries [Zanfrini, 2004]. Only a limited number of people choose or have the possibility to emigrate with respect to the number of those who might find it convenient. Despite of this, mobility is one of the result of economic globalisation, and it appears to be destined to increase. It is not a coincidence, as Zanfrini notes, that *the most mobile work forces are the richest countries' ones*. In the present work I will take into consideration this kind of migration, that is, the high level migrations.

The more the world becomes bigger, the more people need to identify themselves in a place that can be associated with the idea of home, shelter, nest. The same mechanism would explain why a business man of a multinational company, after a day spent in front of his note book, connected to the Internet by his hi-tech mobile phone, may retire in the evening in his countryside old-fashioned cottage. In this sense, we actively influence places, both by imagination and concrete practice [Massey, 2001]. But this implies a consequence: there is an unbreakable mutual relationship between a place and the people who stay there. In other words, there is a constitutive link between identity and place:

It is very difficult to think the possibility of combining a good personal identity structure with the *atopia* status. [...] Even the nomads have places which are *topoi* of identity⁶.

At first sight, the concept of “nomadism” might appear inadequate and obsolete in our hiper-technological globalised society, but it immediately acquires sense when we think that it is inseparably associated with the idea of “travel” or, even better, of “movement of people”. The individual is in a dialectic relation with his environment, the two being part of one only system. This means that individuals and their environment are mutually influenced, and that identity is a social construction, not just the result of an individual process. Consequently it is easy to understand how crucial the experience of the journey is to determine people’s identities and, vice versa, how movements of people affect the places they reach. Thus I am affirming that globalisation, increasing the general connectivity, is producing a way of thinking places that is at the same time brand new and as old as mankind: *globalisation is in fact producing a new culture of nomadism*.

This is constituted by a nomad thought and a nomad existence carried out by a specific, but for the moment not better identified, cultural community. This 21st century nomadism is able to combine the movement with the existence of a personal identity place, being the latest a sort of “base” [Dallari, 2000]. Nevertheless the nature of this base is debated. Dallari sees it as a

[...] “base camp” where one can find all that is necessary at every new departure, where one can recognize himself when coming back, which one can think as *his* base [...] while he is on his way around⁷.

In my opinion this way of thinking one’s origins appears too static: it does not take into consideration the natural change that happens at every experience in a different place. Obviously this change can vary in its intensity, so that it can even not affect the first identity place perception; but it can also be so strong as to totally change it. When this happens, that is, when individuals reinterpret their origins on

⁶ “È molto difficile pensare la possibilità di poter coniugare una buona strutturazione dell’identità personale con lo stato di *atopia*. [...] persino i popoli nomadi hanno luoghi tipici dell’identità” [Dallari, 2000: 49; my translation].

⁷ “[...] un “campo base”, nel quale si trova tutto ciò che serve a ogni nuova partenza, nel quale troviamo la possibilità di riconoscerci a ogni nuovo ritorno, che possiamo pensare come *nostro* [...] mentre siamo in cammino [Dallari, 2000: 51; my translation].

the basis of the new places they travelled to, the change in their “camp base” perception can be so deep as to give a sense of being a foreigner at home, and this strengthens the feeling of being a nomad. Consequently, the place of the origins changes in the place of the memories, in the place where we find the image of what we are not anymore [Augé, 1996].

Moreover, any kind of mobility has consequences on people identity:

- a. identity implies the possibility of a difference between auto-identification (how I see myself) and external identification (how others see me) [Melucci, 1991];
- b. “People found their self and the sense of their place also considering themselves in contraposition with some place that somehow they feel as very different”⁸. If travelling I discover that the people I felt as very different after all are not that different, I can immediately enlarge my “base camp” borders;
- c. we can also influence a place leaving it, so that even our not-being-there can contribute to that change that we observe when, after a time spent somewhere else, we go back. In this sense, the return to a “base camp” can be extremely disappointing and seems to be more a migrant fantasy than a concrete possibility.

All this considered, a static vision of the origins place like the one proposed by Dallari [2000] does not explain, in my opinion, the complexity of migrants reality: when a migrant moves, he automatically changes both the place that he leaves and the place that he reaches, and this twofold process happens at two different levels, the level of the perception of a place and the level of its concrete, everyday reality.

Furthermore, as Giddens [1990] notes, modernity moves the place away from the space by replacing the face to face interaction with the media one. In other words, with modern media migrants can keep in touch with their origins place and influence it from a distance⁹. We cannot think of migrations like mere fluxes of people: every

⁸ “Le persone fondano il proprio senso del sé e del luogo anche mettendosi in contrapposizione con una qualche località che in qualche modo avvertono come molto diversa” [Rose, 2001: 72; my translation from the Italian edition].

⁹ This is why in the interview I ask to the interviewees if they remained in contact with their friend left at home.

migrant increase world complexity by creating also a cultural flux, and both these types of fluxes are able to change the nature of the origin and of the destination.

If the static idea of place comes to an end, there are two possible directions to reinterpret it:

- a. abandoning the idea of a binding correspondence between place and identity. This is Castell's or, more strongly, Augé's idea. Augé [1996] claims that if a place corresponds for someone to identity, relation and history, a space which has no identity, relation and history is a non-place. The classical example is the airport, which would not be a place, but just a non-place, as it is a place that one cannot live, but just cross, and a place without a past or a future, with just a present. Actually I think that an airport, with its shops and bars, and with its never-ending fluxes of people, has a strong identity. A more extreme example is given by James G. Ballard in his novel *Concrete Island*, published in 1974, in which, after a car accident, the main character remains entrapped in a small traffic island at the convergence of three speedways: the island, for its position, but mostly for its nature of non-place, remains totally invisible to the speedway drivers and even to the rescuers. Augé maintains that modernity produces non-places.
- b. It is also possible to abandon the idea of a stable and internally coherent place in favour of a place which is a place of meetings, exchanges, intersections [Massey, 2001]. This second idea has been well represented, once again, by science fiction and by fantasy literature. In the reality it is exemplified by the stereotyped idea of a harbour town, which is a giant meeting place for people coming from all over the world.

Even though I do not believe that there are such places as the non-places, I agree in the consideration that there is not a binding relation between place and identity, firstly because both the place and its identity are mutable, and secondly because identity is strictly linked to people's perception of a place. The latest can be influenced by a variety of factors, and mainly by:

- a. the role of the place in people life, in the sense that a place that for me has no meaning at all (like for example a blind alley behind a big building), can have an important meaning for someone else (in our example, for the homeless who live there);
- b. the kind of experience the individuals have in a certain place, in the sense that I can live a place in totally different ways if I go there, for instance, as a student or as a worker;
- c. the kind of interactions that individuals have in it, in the sense that I can find an experience abroad extremely positive (or negative) because I meet (or I do not) very pleasant people there and I create (or not) a rewarding social environment.

Consequently, I embrace the idea of “place” as a place of intersections, as a *crossroads* where different biographies cross and different experiences can be done. This idea of the crossroads brings us again to the representation of modern travellers as nomads.

An important aspect in the notion of nomadism is the idea of being compelled to move. I believe that today there are several reasons that make people feel obliged to leave their house in order to make an experience or create a new life abroad:

- a. concrete need: traditional immigration, family reunification, seek for better life conditions, war;
- b. seek for a new job or for new career opportunities due to lack of opportunities in one’s own area;
- c. imposition by the current job (a position that requires the worker to travel).

These are all traditional push factors to emigration, but I believe there is a fourth one, usually underestimate:

- d. inside obligation or need socially instilled into some individuals who are particularly sensitive to the culture of globalisation and who are attracted by the opportunities offered by international careers.

I suggest that this need is “socially instilled”. I believe, in fact, that our society is strongly celebrating the possibility to move and pushing people (by tourism) and

workers (by work mobility) to go somewhere else with respect to their origins place. If we analyse the literature, we see that man has always been fascinated by the idea of travel, associating it to concepts like discoveries, braveness, adventure. From Ulysses to the homeless cowboys, from the picaroons to the beat generation, we have always imaged ourselves somehow “on the road”. The difference with the past consists in the fact that today a journey is an ordinary experience. So ordinary that often we have no particular interest in the place we go to: we just move for travelling sake. As Augé explains,

[...] there are spaces in which the individual put himself to the test as spectator without being really interested in the nature of the show. As if the condition of spectator was the show essence, as if, after all, the spectator in spectator position were the show himself. [...] The traveller space will be this way the archetype of the *non-place*¹⁰.

I agree with Augé on the fact that we assist to a banalization of the journey, but I also believe that we cannot reduce people travels to hetero-directed movements. Especially for those who decide to spend a period of their life abroad, push factors surely concern the conviction that far away one can find a better world, like if “life were somewhere else”. At the same time, behind this idea, which is common to all migrants, there is the modern, promethean pretension to tame the entire world by discovering it, by feeling and acting like a “citizen of the world”. It would be a mistake to consider this pretension as purely contemporary: a novel like Jules Verne’s *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*, published in 1873, already contains *in toto* the idea of both space and time conquest that Giddens sees as the main characteristics of globalisation. At the same time it would be a mistake also to reduce this pretension to the conquest of time and space, for it contains another element: the idea of being able to adapt to any local culture. I will investigate this aspect in the empirical research.

¹⁰ “[...] vi sono spazi in cui l’individuo si mette alla prova come spettatore senza che la natura dello spettacolo lo interessi veramente. Come se la condizione di spettatore costituisse l’essenziale dello spettacolo, come se, in definitiva, lo spettatore in posizione di spettatore fosse lo spettacolo in se stesso. [...] Lo spazio del viaggiatore sarà così l’archetipo del *nonluogo*” [Augé, 1996: 80-81; my translation from the Italian edition]

4.3 Cultural interaction perspectives

It has been maintained, and it is certainly true, that media are one of the most powerful agents in creating a global culture. Nevertheless they are quite weak when it comes to make a specific culture known in another regions of the globe: they are a source of misunderstanding, of stereotyped images and in some cases even of prejudices. When two people meet, on the contrary, they immediately have a direct experience one of each other. When two people meet, something happens in their mutual perception; consequently, it can be maintained that movements of people have an effect of cultural hybridization. In the following subchapters I will briefly analyse the modalities of this hybridization and its consequences on identity.

4.3.1. National level

“Nations are not as solidly localized, well defined and internally united as we image them”¹¹. The role of national cultures is to work as an adhesive to create a sense of belonging able to pass over the countless differences among citizens. But, as Gasparini [2005] notes, with the individualisation the sense of belonging to a community becomes the result of a personal choice: some kind of belonging is unavoidable, but it can be restricted to some aspects of the public spheres or enlarged to different layers (local, regional, national, supranational), each one with different levels of intensity. Moreover, with globalisation new communities are arising whose identities are not exhausted by the national ones. Furthermore, the Western countries shift from emigration places to immigration destinations and the consequent high amount of immigrants inside their borders represents a challenge to the idea of ethnic and cultural homogeneity which constitutes the nation [Zanfrini, 2004]. Current migration movements to United States and Europe are generating a more and more

¹¹ “Le nazioni non sono poi tanto solidamente localizzate, ben definite o internamente unite quanto noi le immaginiamo” [Hall, 2001: 155; my translation from the Italian edition].

multi-ethnic¹² society. Minority groups bring with them a cultural richness that often contrasts with the pretended cultural uniformity of nations, this way opening a debate around ideas like multiculturalism, pluralism, melting pot, global village, which are all based on a mix, on a hybridization of national cultures in favour of something new and syncretic. Thus national states have to satisfy a difficult balance between the respect for the differences on one side and the maintenance of equality (legal, social and of the individual rights) on the other side [Pocecco, 2002]. This necessity leads to different policies towards migrants and to different cultural interaction modalities. In this sense, the major paradigms are assimilation, integration, multiculturalism and pluralism. These are obviously all extreme positions, ideal-types, but they indicate four different results that we can already find in different areas of the world.

For long both notions of assimilation and integration have lain on the assumption that cultural differences were just a transitory phase towards cultural unity. This cultural unity initially referred to the national cultural unity, but more recently the same argument has been adopted for continental blocks like Europe and even for the entire globe.

With the multicultural approach, the cultural difference persistency has been considered as an element to valorise rather than decreasing. Nevertheless the multicultural approach, or better, approaches¹³, even though extremely useful in raising the problem of diversity and proposing some solution, risk to become a reductionism, explaining conflicts (inside a national society and between national societies) only focusing on culture [Pocecco, 2002]. Moreover, multiculturalism seems to think cultures only in a horizontal way, giving an image of local, ethnic or national cultures which necessarily collide. This perspective is in contrast with the research about identity, which clearly shows how individuals tend to have more overlapping identities, sometimes in conflict one with each other. As identity is a result of the individual culture, the presence of a multiple identity confirms that

¹² I use on purpose the expression “multi-ethnic” in order to avoid (for the moment) the more appropriate word “multicultural”, which is strongly connoted. Even though I find extremely problematic the concept of ethnicity [see Horowitz, 1985; Boileau, Strassoldo and Sussi, 1992; Cotesta, 1999], it provides a clear idea of the kind of immigration that is affecting Europe and the United States in particular.

¹³ For a short review, see Pocecco, 2002 and Fasce, 2005; for a critical position, see Sartori, 2002.

culture is extremely mutable and is always the result of different influences, or better, it is the original result of the meeting among different cultures.

Sartori [2002] proposes a pluralist conception which surpasses the limit of the multicultural perspective. In this sense he invites:

- a. to go beyond an indifferent or relativist tolerance, which is just respect in other peoples' values, by assuming diversity and dissent as political and individual values and by making of these values a basis for a reciprocity between the different groups;
- b. to renounce to the attempts of founding democracy on mere consensus or on mere conflict, adopting instead the perspective of a disagreement dialectic, that is, a dialectic among the two positions that never turns into one of them. More specifically, Sartori underlines that we need consensus on fundamental principles, and especially on the rules to solve conflicts; once this consensus exists, we are allowed to have conflicts on the policies, that is, on the solution of concrete situations;
- c. to valorise alterity as much as identity, being the first the natural complement of the second.

The case of Europe is in this sense revealing: normally the people who feel a European identity also maintain their national and regional ones. Consequently, when we talk about creating a European identity or a global conscience, it is obvious that neither we are talking of levelling local or national differences nor we are satisfied with a living together in separate groups. Actually we are trying to create a basis of values that allows people to dialogue and a feeling of empathy among people living far one from the others.

Perotti [2001: 832] underlines the necessity to establish, on the basis of the political democracy, a "cultural democracy", explaining how cultural pluralism is now the ordinary condition in which the political world has to work. In this sense, he notices how a new category, namely the "personal and collective identity" (in other points called "cultural identity", expression that I prefer), has to be added to the oldest "equality" and "liberty". This category is needed to stress the fact that, even though in Western constitutions men are equal and free, they grow up and live in

specific contests that influence them. According to his argument, the concept of cultural identity works as a bridge between the particular and the universal: the particular consists in the individuals uniqueness, while the universal consists in the reasonableness that makes possible the endeavour for a mutual comprehension. In other words, cultural identity represents an approach based on the difference, which does not give universality for granted, but considers it as a goal to base the social and political dialectic. This approach, called “policy of the difference”, is different from the liberal one, which gives universality as already existing, identifying it with the Western human rights culture. The policy of the difference considers universality as mutual understanding and agreement between at least two different particularities, that is, two different visions of society.

This is right the idea of modern cosmopolitanism, which I will analyse in the next subchapter. For the moment I would like to make a distinction between cosmopolitanism and one of its declination, the post-modern idea of melting pot, that is, of a plural society where people of different cultures live harmoniously together, in an active and positive interaction, not just side by side.

The idea of melting pot is typically American, as in Europe, which had been a land of emigration, the concept of ethnic minority is preferred. The idea of melting pot implies a people mixing with a mutual change in each other’ identities. Traditionally, melting pot is normally associated with the United States because there three conditions were present at the moment of their foundation [Gasparini, 1992]:

- a. there was a societal emptiness to fill in through men’s work rather than through a sense of belonging;
- b. consequently, individuals relied on the informal group (the community) more than on the institutions;
- c. self-made man conception dominated, being stronger than the traditional values like class belonging, religion, education, culture.

As Touraine [1997] notes, melting pot is just an ideology without no contact with the reality of our cities. It is significant in this sense that this idea has been better represented by science fiction than by other genres. I think, just to cite some very

popular movies, to *Star Wars*, where a society of multiform aliens from all over the galaxy is depicted, or to *Blade Runner*, which more realistically proposes a metropolitan subculture constituted by the fusion of different ethnic groups and the creation of a Creole dialect made of Japanese, Spanish, German, English and other influences¹⁴. Linguistically, this phenomenon is happening, for instance, in Florida, where immigrants from South America has developed a dialect that is a mixture of Spanish and English. Socially, on the contrary, neither in the United States nor in United Kingdom we assist to a real mixture of different ethnic communities¹⁵.

Dahrendorf [2003] talks at this respect about a great disillusion, which would consist in the moment we become aware that the concept of citizenship is not sufficient to work as a unification principle over ethnic and religious differences. The multiplicity in the community does not take places: the society is divided in homogeneous groups. Dahrendorf writes with a point of sadness that, if some years ago the expression “separate but equal” sounded extremely illiberal, because intellectuals and civil society were claiming for the “together and equal”, now it is the best we can hope in, as groups separation seems to be unavoidable.

I believe this late Darhendorf maintains a too static conception of citizenship. *The current challenge is to transform citizenship from a diversity leveller to a basis of values*. Up to now, in fact, citizenship has been the legal label through which national states have uniformed every cultural difference [Malita and Gheorghiu, 2004]. The impossibility to preserve an acceptable level of national homogeneity inside the national state territory oblige us to consider a new type of citizenship that recognises differences, but (as claimed by Touraine, Habermas and Giddens *inter alia*) which also provides a basis of civil values that needs to be recognised by all the actors [Sartori, 2002]. As Habermas [1998] says, individuals should not identify themselves

¹⁴ For an extensive analysis of *Blade Runner* as a post-modern movie, see Harvey, 1990.

¹⁵ In 2006, I personally had an experience of the existing ethnic divisions when in Manchester, during the visit to the local Museum of Science and Industry, I could observe a number of school-children groups accompanied to the museum: there were not mixed groups, but only either totally white ones (sometimes with one or two black complexion children as an exception) or totally black ones, in one case composed exclusively by North-African origin children. More recently, I could see how different ethnic groups tend to remain externally closed and separate during a walk in the neighbourhood of Belleville in Paris, where it is possible to pass from the North African to the Chinese area just crossing a street (more or less what New York’s Little Italy and China Town should have been in the past: neighbouring but alien one to the other).

in their nations for nationalism sake, but because their nations establish and respect justice, freedom and the tolerance principle. On this basis, a “cosmopolitanism of values”, as I will call it, is possible. This is also Giddens’ idea: he claims for universal values as a basis for cosmopolitanism against fundamentalism [Giddens, 1999; see 3.2.1]. Two critics are possible:

- a. this cosmopolitanism of values would assure the recognition of the *Alter*, the respect for the *Alter*, but not the possibility to communicate with him [Touraine, 1997], not yet the dialogue;
- b. this cosmopolitanism would be Eurocentric, or Western-centric, as it would claim Western liberal democracies values. In other words, this cosmopolitanism would look for universal values, forgetting that also fundamentalism convictions are based on a universalist pretension. Giddens seems to be perfectly aware of this when he says that we should defend with passion these values (our values) wherever they are not developed enough or menaced [Giddens, 1999: 66]. In my opinion this position is extremely dangerous, as it could be used as a justification for cultural imperialism or, even worse, for war in the name of the democracy exportation (which I believe is in itself a non-sense idea, despite its success in the last years). The risk, here, is to transform globalisation in an ideology to defend power differentials in international relations.

Thus the question is: how much minimum should the basis of values be in order to guarantee the dialogue among different cultures? Touraine [1997] answers by not mentioning universal values, but referring to two aspects: on one side, human rights universal respect; on the other side, the valorisation of the Subject, that is, the individual as an active actor able to produce sense and changes.

I believe that this last perspective valorises the processes of action from below and restores the trust in people as the centre of any democratic conception.

4.3.2. Global level

Transposing the analysis of the interaction paradigms from the national to the global level, Scidà [1994: 78] lists four intercultural relation types:

- a. *assimilation*, meant here as *Westernisation* of all local and national cultures at a global level;
- b. *homogenization*, that is, the creation of a global culture which comprehends features from all incorporated cultures;
- c. *separate distinction* [*separatezza*], that is, dialogue and cultural mixing refusal;
- d. *communicative differentiation*, that is, the creation of a system in which every culture participate in the global sphere with equal dignity; this implies in any case a minimum cultural basis.

So also at the global level intercultural communication needs a minimum cultural basis, that is, a “cosmopolitanism of values”. The problem is: what does it mean that it is global, or better, cosmopolite? Firstly, it does not mean homogeneous.

As stated in § 2.2., globalisation is much more complex than a cultural and economic imperialistic movement from the West to the rest of the world. Shaw [1994], for instance, reaffirms the image of a unity (global) full of differences (local), stressing the importance of diversity and richness of local discourse (this is the same rhetoric adopted by the European Commission). On the cultural level, there is certainly some sort of cultural spreading from the West, and especially from the United States, to the rest of the world, both through goods and cultural products, but it cannot be seen as homogenization [Tomlinson, 1999] for at least two reasons:

- a. every good and cultural product is reinterpreted by the receiving people and possibly used in a different way; for example, I may use a pair of Nike shoes, but I would never use them with a suit, what is very common in the United States;
- b. the spreading of goods and cultural products certainly produce a common symbolic background (so that, for instance, I can comment the same movie with people from different countries), but does not represent a limitation, for

those goods and cultural products not necessarily substitute my traditional ones; for example, I may go to McDonald's once in a while, but I do not renounce to pasta or pizza for McDonald's; in many cases, moreover, the exportation of goods and cultural products does not succeed at all.

I would rather say that globalisation produces a cultural enrichment: movements of people to Europe and the United States are increasing in their speed and dimension, while cultural products from everywhere are becoming globally available. Thus we do not assist to a homogenisation, but rather to the inclusion of cultural objects out of their original place, to a culture *de-contextualisation* that, in many cases, can represent an enrichment of people cultural horizons.

This first point clarified, we can concentrate on different definitions of cosmopolitanism. Pocecco [1997: 118] differentiates three types of cosmopolitanism, opting for the third one:

- a. the *cosmopolite idealism*, which is defined by the utopian pretension of a man without frontier, able to solve every conflict just with the weapon represented by the general and mutual understanding; it is an extremely inclusive approach, which sees the solution to conflicts in the general mutual comprehension and does not take differences in the necessary consideration;
- b. the *globalism [mondialismo]*, which accepting differences uncritically, is defined by a total relativism that levels all civilisation without revision;
- c. the *multicultural citizenship*, which supports the idea of a melange among cultures, in a constant movement of transformation and able to produce new cultures; it does not deny the identity existence, but sees identities as different aspects of a unique culture made of differences. Pocecco underlines how this new cosmopolitanism ceases to be an intellectuals' exclusive prerogative to become a practice for the democratic citizenship. In this sense, the "cosmopolitan idealism" and the "globalism" represent two obstacles for its development.

The multicultural citizenship perspective has the advantage of taking into account what Hannerz [1996: 11] calls "global *ecumene*", that is, the set of global interconnections, and what Tomlinson [1999] calls "de-territorialisation", that is, the

complex connectivity that weakens the links between culture and place (what I have called “de-contextualisation”). It also carries on the idea that when two cultures meet, the result is not the standardisation in favour of one of them (McDonaldization), but the mutual exchange, that is, the acquisition from both side of some aspects of the other [Hannerz, 1996; Tomlinson, 1999; Pocecco, 2002].

To sum up, a cosmopolitanism of values as I have described it up to now would be a set of minimum values that could be used as a basis for the intercultural dialogue, in the respect of principles like reciprocity and disagreement dialectic. This set of values would not be in contrast with cultural identities, but the dialogue that it would favourite would produce cultural mutual influences and consequent cultural transformations.

I agree with Tomlinson [1999] when he says that cultural identifications are not exclusive, what means that it is possible to feel a sense of belonging with respect to different and interactive cultural identities. The dialogue among cultures would support the mutual knowledge among them and the emersion of multiple identities. These multiple identities would strengthen the basis of common values. Thus a virtuous circle would be triggered by the acceptation of a cosmopolitanism of values.

Let’s transpose this argument to the matter of the European identity. European Union attempt to create an identity from above, for example by creating recognition symbols like the European flag and passport, has been strongly criticised, in favour of a Europeanization from below. The point is that both processes, the top-down one and the bottom-up one, are necessary but not sufficient. What is needed is a shared basis of values that overpasses national belongings and characterises a unique European identity. This is what we still lack. The European Constitution failed in creating this basis from above because it also needs the democratic and constructive interaction among Subjects.

This means that at a national, European and global level the communication and the interaction among Subjects is a crucial dimension, and the recognition of this fact is one of the principles on which the present research is based.

Chapter 5

Identity and interpersonal relationships

5.1 Interpersonal relationships and identity in the post-modern world

As seen in § 3.1.2, modernity is characterised by a number of transformations that affected also the field of interpersonal relationships, among which one of the most important is the emersion of love as central emotion. Love, indeed, is not the only space affected by the shift from tradition toward individual choice. Giddens [1999: 77] states that in three main kinds of relationship intimacy and emotional communication are taking the place of tradition:

- a. love and sexual relationships;
- b. parental relationships;
- c. friendships.

Sociology and other disciplines, like psychology, put a special emphasis on the first two, but there is a sort of reticence in approaching the third one [Di Nicola, 2002; Pahl and Pevalin, 2005]. Even the order given to them by Giddens seems to indicate the consideration they are in. I believe this approach hides two kinds of fallacies.

The first one is the idea that we can still analyse love and sexuality in a traditional way, that is, by linking them to the family. Given the transformations occurred to the role of marriage in modern and post-modern societies, I do not believe that marriages and divorces are still good indicators of something but of themselves, as they do not recognise the huge amount of not officialised love affairs, symbiotic relationships, mutual help relationships and so on (not to mention the fact that a marriage, or better, the relationship officialised by the marriage, does not necessary end with a divorce, especially if the couple has children).

The second one is the conviction that love and friendship are two realities without contact points. On the contrary, I believe that they often change one into the other, both in one sense or in its opposite, due to the extreme freedom that people have in expressing their feelings and in living love affairs. I would describe this freedom as “the possibility to try”: as the social control decreases and more and more sexual practices and couple types become accepted, individuals are more open than in the past to give a chance to a relationship, or, in other words, to accept the *Alter*. Moreover, even though many people express a narrative according to which it is not possible or right to have sex with a friend, reality seems to go in a different direction and individuals do not see each other as irremediably stuck in a precise role. This openness to take different roles and to leave the others free of doing the same has been grasped by the world of television and cinema: in comedies like “When Harry met Sally” and in serials like “Friends”, we assist to a high mobility from the role of friend to the role of lover and vice versa, and many times from the role of acquaintance to the role of lover.

In addition to this, friendship is also more and more a territory where, through an increasing importance of personal choices, individuals express and even create their identity. Already Aristotle noticed how friends, being like a mirror, are an instrument to know our Selves [Cattarinussi, 2006].

Nevertheless, sociological literature has shown a scarce interest in the matter of friendship [De Nicola, 2002; Cattarinussi, 2006], and still now the amount of literature on the topic is relatively small. This situation can be explained in two ways. The first reason is that friendship in our society is a totally private matter. No public ritual is foreseen to celebrate the birth of a friendship, or its lasting [De Nicola, 2002]. Even the border between a friend and an acquaintance is faded. This brings to the second reason: the definition of friendship is extremely problematic. The definition of love too, but actually when sociologists speak about love, they normally speak about its manifestation, that is, official couples and marriages. This is much more difficult to do with friendship, because there is no agreement on what it is.

Friends and other interpersonal relationships are usually “measured” or analysed using three indicators:

- a. the amount of time that an individual spend with another person;
- b. the level of exchange in the relation (that is, its instrumentality);
- c. the level of confidence and intimacy.

I believe that these indicators can be very useful every time a characterisation of the link among two people is needed, like in the network analysis. Nevertheless, they do not define the type of relationship: they create a multidimensional continuum where the individual or the researchers may collocate their personal definitions of it.

The difficulty in defining friendship is quite serious, as it is a concept that absorbs other kinds of relations: acquaintances, people with whom we flirt, etc. The troubles in defining the different types of personal relationship, anyway, should not lead to underestimate their role and importance in our society. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim [1990], focusing especially on love relationships, maintain that with post-modernity couple life falls under an incredible pressure, for individuals look in their partner to fill the empties left by the tradition disappearing and by the latest social transformations [see Chapter 3]. The loss of importance suffered by churches and religion and by social classes produces anomie, while people mobility attacks community belonging.

According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim [1990], these lacks are compensated by the increasing importance of the partner, up to the point that marriages would mainly be based on the fear to remain alone. I have a different perception of this phenomenon. Even though it is undeniable that loneliness is the reason why some couples remain together, I find rather excessive to use it as modern marriage principal explanation. Moreover, I think that not only the partner, but *the entire world of interpersonal relationships is used as a compensation for post-modern anomie*. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim [1990] themselves note that isolation and life lack of meaning (anomie provoked by the tradition loss) make the people who are close to us more and more important for our stability, conscience and self-consciousness. In other words, we use them to define our identity, our place in the

world. I agree with this position, but I would not restrict it to family members, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim insist to do: I rather think that *each person of our life, even the ones who are not intimate, have a role in defining our identity and our place in the world*. The people we meet at work, the news vendor where we buy the newspaper every morning, the homeless that we always see in the same place, day after day: all those people have a role in our routine and contribute to create our vision of the world, determining where we are and who we are. Not only the couple, but the entire communication sphere is important in the process of social construction of reality and identity.

I would not even disregard mediate personal relationships. I recognise that in our society the house, that is, the most private and isolating sphere, is acquiring importance and becoming the focus of new technology developments and products [Kumar, 1995; De Nicola, 2002]; but the increasing importance of communication cannot be ignored. Not only do people have a much broader number of friends and acquaintances than in the past, due to the enlargement of individual social environment and to mobility, but also they use media in order to further broaden their social group. If television and technologies like VHS or DVD push people to remain at home, Internet connections make them free of exploring the globe and to virtually know people from everywhere, so that many people do not meet their partners in social events but in the Net, as the success of meeting web sites is testifying. Even though I do not believe that Internet communities are comparable with face-to-face communities, I would not underestimate Internet potential in favouring interpersonal communications. For example, technologies like chat and Internet phones often allow people to preserve relations in a distance, otherwise destined to fade away in the time.

According to these premises, I propose a model to systematise interpersonal relationships. This model is necessary in order to avoid the ambiguities linked to concepts like “acquaintance”, “friend”, “love”, the definitions of which are extremely variable. I say “variable”, and not subjective, because I think that many times we do

not even know what we mean when we say that a person is, for example, a friend. Only if we are asked, we start to think about it and we produce some sort of differentiation, which often remains vague.

5.2. Interpersonal relationships typology

There are different ways to classify interpersonal relationships, according to the dimension taken into consideration. I will mention just some of these dimensions:

- a. type of the relation: friendship, family, neighbourhood, etc.;
- b. relation context: work, sport club, etc.;
- c. number of people involved in the relation: couple relation or group relation;
- d. exchange type: instrumentality, mutual support, affection;
- e. exchange direction: symmetric / asymmetric;
- f. exchange intensity: symmetric / asymmetric;
- g. relation intensity: weak / strong.

For the purposes of the present job, I valorised two of those dimensions: the type of the relation and the relation intensity. To indicate the different intensity grades, I got inspiration from Granovetter's [1973 and 1983] terminology. I do not agree with Granovetter's assumption about the tendency of stronger ties to share acquaintances and close friends. Actually an individual may decide, for personal reasons, to keep his friends separate one from the others, and actively avoid contacts among them. Moreover, I believe that in the globalisation era *people mobility works in such a way as to create networks in which an individual is the centre of a set of ties which have no connections one to each other*. I may have, for example, an old friend in Italy. Then I leave to go to Spain for some years, where I create my social network.

Travelling to Spain, I meet a German nice person and we keep in touch during my permanence abroad. Consequently, overall my network is composed by a close friend in Italy, some acquaintances or friends in Spain and another friend in Germany, who have scarce opportunities to ever meet. And even though they occasionally meet and spend good time together (my old pal may come to Spain and go out with my Spanish friends for a couple of nights), most likely they will establish no tie. Despite this, I think that some of Granovetter's conclusions are correct, even though not because of the reasons he adduces. Moreover, I find heuristically useful Granovetter's distinction between weak and strong ties, even though it needs some clarifications.

To begin with, I would say that the individual who travel in a foreign country is exposed to a high level of uncertainty, higher than the one he may experience in his own country. This is because abroad he lacks of those cognitive mental maps that everyone uses to interpret the reality. Or better, he tends to use maps that suit in his own country, that is, in a specific environment, but which may not work in a new one. Consequently, he needs to confirm or modify his maps, and this activity passes through a series of situations characterised by uncertainty, gaffes, etc. In other words, the individual collocated in a new environment often needs to learn again how to behave in a number of situations, and not only in the social ones. Only when they experiment a sufficient number of situations and start to set new maps, they can feel comfortable in the new environment. The time needed for this process varies from person to person, and some individuals never manage to adapt.

My idea is that *in a condition of increased uncertainty, individuals tend:*

- a. *to rely more on their social relationships* as sources of information and of certainties;
- b. *to search for fixed points in their environment* as elements they can count on.

Consequently, I believe that *abroad, at least during the phase of settlement* (which can vary individually in his length), *also the most superficial relationships*, that is, the weakest ties *acquire a certain importance in the construction of individual reality*, and may contribute to give to individuals a sense of certainty more

than what they would do at home. Moreover, the necessity for the individual to confirm his mental maps may increase his reflexivity, pushing him to look for new opportunities to collect experiences. Thus the individual may valorise his acquaintances as a source of experience.

All this considered, I maintain that, when analysing interpersonal relationships abroad, it is necessary to take in consideration the weak ties as much as the strong ones.

This conclusion is supported by another argument: weak ties can be a powerful source of social capital, and I maintain that social capital is particularly needed by the individual who is settling abroad, because he is likely to be isolated.

Given these premises, I would firstly classify all possible human relationships in:

- a. *presence relationships*;
- b. *mediate relationships*.

In this model, *presence relationships* differ from the *mediate* ones because they have or had in a previous phase some kind of face to face interaction. Mediate relationships will thus be those characterised by the absence of a face to face interaction. It must be underlined that this distinction has nothing to see with the intensity of the relation, as one may feel more in confidence with a person he only exchanges e-mails with than with his neighbour. In any case, there are at least two problems in this distinction.

Firstly, new technologies partially weaken it. The possibility to videochat enormously increases the level of mutual knowledge which is possible to reach even without a face to face interaction. Nevertheless, it is doubtless that even a conversation through video is not able to provide essential information about our interlocutor that we would immediately get through a face to face interaction, like his smell, the direction he looks while speaking with us (in a videochat he probably looks inside the camera), the way he moves (maybe he nervously moves his feet under the table), etc. Moreover, in a face to face interaction we can usually observe our interlocutor while interacting with third people, what normally does not happen in a mediate interaction (with the exception of parasocial friends). Consequently a

mediate interaction, even the strongest one, always leave a huge space to imagination: the two interlocutors have to fill the gaps left by the nature of the media they are using, and use their imagination, usually driven by their fantasies and desires, to do that. This is why I consider mediate relationships deeply different from the ones in presence.

Secondly, a relation begun with a quick presence meeting and then carried on through media should be classified in the first or in the second category? For example: I meet a person in an airport. We spend a couple of hours together and we find each other very nice. We exchange our e-mail addresses, then we left each one for his destination, in different areas of the world. From then on we keep in touch by e-mail and occasionally we videochat. What sort of relation is this? It is evident that in two hours the amount of information I can collect about the other is very limited, but still its quality is different with respect to what I can learn about him or her through a telephone or a computer. A further complication is given by the relationship type: I may meet a colleague for two hours in an airport, get a first impression and from then on comfortably telework with him, because for our work relationship I do not need more information; on the contrary, I can meet a girl and feel that it is love at first sight, but in that case I will risk to idealise her if I only maintain a mediate relationship. In the first case I can say that the face to face interaction was sufficient to determine a presence relationship, in the second case I must recognise that, if I do not meet my beloved again, I am living a mediate relationship.

Consequently, I can better define a presence relationship saying that it has or had a *significant* face to face interaction, where the significance is given in accordance to the relation type. Obviously, this distinction suffers of an inaccuracy margin which is proportional to its subjectivity level: presence and mediate relationship are just two ideal-types which take place at the opposite extreme of a continuum.

Overall, I still regard this distinction as useful because it gives importance to mediate relationships, which are often ignored or not systematised in the literature about interpersonal relationships. They are often considered as an anomaly, as something that does not have a precise place in individuals' everyday life. I believe

that this is very far from the truth, and that media have an essential role in many kinds of modern relationships.

I would introduce a further distinction by dividing the two categories in two classes:

- a. the *not formalised roles relationships* class;
- b. the *formalised roles relationships* class.

With the expression “formalised role” I mean a socially defined and recognised role. For example, a friend is strictly subjective: who we call friend varies from person to person, so the role of friend is not formalised. The role of lover (the individual who is in couple with a married person), on the contrary, is socially recognised and easily definable, even though it is not institutionalised by a social ritual like, for instance, the roles of husband or wife.

The role formalisation is not directly linked with ties intensity. It is useful to determine if a certain relation type is socially recognised or easily definable. Many social relations are not taken into consideration because they are not socially recognised, so that, for example, speaking of couples, scholars usually refers to stable relationships and disregard flings. The latest, in fact, have an increasing importance in our society, and it is definitely imprecise to label the people involved in a love affair as “singles” just because they are not living together or married.

Overall I obtain a typology composed by two main categories, each one divided in two classes. Each class would be then determined on the basis of the tie intensity. The latest is particularly important to distinguish people who socially have the same status, but actually have a different role in the life of the individual they are related to. It is the case, for example, of family members. An uncle, for instance, can be like a father or a total stranger. If the analysis only considers the role, without declining it according to its intensity, the result can be extremely misleading.

All these elements considered, I obtain the typology illustrated by the table 5.1:

Table 5.1: Interpersonal relationships model (complete version)

CATEGORY	CLASS	INTENSITY	TYPE
Mediate Relationships	Not formalised roles relationships	Weak	- Parasocial friends.
		Strong	- Chat pals who never meet; - people who got to know on the phone and never meet personally; - people who shared a non significant presence meeting and never meet again, but keep in touch through media.
	Formalised roles relationships	Weak	- Colleagues working in different branches who never meet; - Internet formalised communities; - never met distant relatives with whom one keeps in touch.
Presence Relationships	Not formalised roles relationships	Very weak	- Occasional meetings without reiteration, for example with shoppers, bar customers, etc.;
		Weak	- repeated meetings with people known by sight (for example, with the news vendor where one buys the newspaper everyday or the neighbour met every morning at the bus stop);
		Strong	- Acquaintances. - Friendship based on empathy and feelings; - flings, last longing sexual relations; - flirtations.
	Formalised roles relationships	Weak	- Work colleagues; - never met or occasionally met distant relatives on whom one can rely in case of need; - instrumental friendships (people who are considered instruments for one's own personal affirmation).
		Strong	- Parents and close relatives; - couples (engaged, living together, married; cheating lovers).

In the mediate, not formalised roles relationships, as weak ties I indicate the parasocial friends, that is, those V.I.P. who some people feel a sense of affection for, without really knowing them but through the news. People like Lady Diana or Britney Spears are examples of parasocial friends. Evidently it is a very peculiar type of social relation, as it is univocal, and it is not based on a family link or on a shared experience or interest, but just on the empathy deriving from a strong sense of identification.

As strong ties there are those relationships merely conducted through media and characterised by the lack of any significant face to face interaction.

In the mediate, formalised roles relationships I identify only weak ties, that is, those people who we are in touch with, even on a regular base, but that we do not know personally.

In the presence, not formalised roles relationships I recognise not only weak ties, which as Granovetter [1973] I identify in the acquaintances, but also very weak ties, represented by those people that we meet either occasionally or frequently (even on a daily basis), but without any sort of mutual commitment.

As strong ties I basically collocate close friends and any kind of non-standard love affair.

In the presence, formalised roles relationships, I recognise as weak ties the work colleagues and the distant relatives who remain a source of social capital. Theoretically there might be a difference with the distant parents identified in the mediate relationships, but empirically this difference is so thin that it only depends on personal perception. In this relationships I also collocate what I call “instrumental friendship”, which are a special sort of acquaintances taken in consideration not because of an intimate feeling but because of the advantages they can provide. I believe that while close friends are in the not formalised roles group, these special acquaintances are instead in the formalised roles one, for they are quite socially recognisable. Often, for example, we go to a dinner with (instrumental) “friends” because it is a social duty: we have to work on the maintenance of our social capital.

Finally, as strong ties I recognise all the close relatives and the couple partner, either married or not.

This classification will be a useful instrument to analyse and systematise the kinds of interpersonal relationships that individuals establish abroad, possibly identifying trends.

PART 2
FIELD WORK ANALYSIS

Chapter 6

Methodology

6.1 Why this theme

The subject of the present research is the result of an unusual combination: globalisation and interpersonal relationship, that is, a macro and a micro dimension. This combination is as unusual as the development of my sociological interests. Since the beginning of my degree courses, I have realised that I was thrilled by the group mechanisms and the mass communication, but also puzzled by the strange alchemies of interpersonal communication. Later, during the PhD, I approached the study of civil society, as the natural continuation of my first studies about mass communication, but since the beginning I realised that I had a gap in my political science preparation. To fill this gap, I involved myself in the democratic theory, but after having read the current most influential authors, I discovered that I was not satisfied by the study of a topic which could remain utterly theoretical. I was lacking a more concrete and sociological perspective under which I could see the democratic principles in practice, and I soon find it in the globalisation theory.

When it came to chose the research object, I knew I wanted to remain in the line of the globalisation theory and, at the same time, I was interested in remaining in the communication field. I did not know how to conciliate these two different topics, so at the very beginning I decided to study the process of Europeanization inside globalisation and of the European identity formation from below, but I must admit that I was still confused about how to do it.

To do this, I knew that the best place was Brussels. During the months I was thinking about my research theme, in fact, I had started a collaboration with a firm involved in the making of European projects. This firm, which is a controlled company of the corporation I was working for, is based in Brussels, and I had the

possibility to quickly visit the Belgian capitals a couple of times, in order to participate to international project meetings. That first experience of work in the field convinced me that Brussels was the place where I had to be, so I moved there with the idea of spending six months working in European projects and, meanwhile, carrying on my investigation. This way, I would have had also an internal point of view.

My first month abroad was shocking. Working in Brussels, I discovered from the beginning the expatriates reality. I had already been abroad several times, being in contact with different expatriate multicultural communities, but I was not prepared to what I found in Luxembourg and Brussels. Somehow it was completely different than what I expected, but I could not explain why. There were mechanisms in the way people interacted one with each other that I could not understand. At the same time, that environment was completely soaked in the European identity. Everybody in every moment was talking about it, directly or indirectly: about working in the institutions, about the EU development, about intercultural social relationships, etc. It was all about that, and I found it astonishing.

It is thus quite natural that I decided to focus on Brussels expatriate community (Expats) and to see what the contact between these young people from all over the world are producing, this way analysing globalisation through the study of interpersonal relationships.

Of course I had to restrict the field of analysis. On one side, I was interested in the European identity; on the other side, I knew that including non-Europeans in the research would have meant considering processes of inclusion and of serious cultural conflicts, which went beyond the scopes of my research. Moreover, as I will soon explain [§ 6.2.2], I was worried about the comparative level of my analysis. So I decided to focus on European citizens.

Concerning the age, I knew that I needed to exclude students from my research: having been abroad three times as a student, I know that they move from different reasons respect to other high level migrants and, most of all, they dedicate themselves to a party life that has little connection with the place they are. I was sure

that they could not provide me the information I was searching, so I decided to put the minimum age of my sampling at 23.

Similarly, I had the feeling that there might be a difference between the first wave of Expats, who went to Brussels when the European Community was still a relatively small institution, and the second wave, attired to the Belgian capital when the European Economic Community changed in the European Union and developed its current institutional setting. Moreover, the oldest people studied in an ante-Erasmus era, so to say, what might be quite a strong discriminant in the formation of the European identity or in the development of a disposition to moving abroad. Therefore I decided to fix in 35 the maximum age of my sampling. I had the possibility to have many talks with people of other ages, and even to interview them, but I did not include these data in the research.

This way I restricted the field of my analysis to:

- Europeans citizens (not just from EU members country);
- professionals;
- aged in between 23 and 35.

6.2 The methodology

The first problem I had to face in approaching the subject has been the definition of the concepts I was using. In the literature about globalisation there is still disagreement on the meaning of many central words, like cosmopolitanism, global system, modernity and post-modernity and even globalisation itself. Therefore in the text I try to define clearly every ambiguous concept I use, and to create operational definitions or new concepts whenever it is necessary. In this sense, my opinions and my personal interpretation of many theoretical issues play an unceivable role in this work. This is why I chose to speak in an active form,

instead of an impersonal passive form, to mark the fact that I assume the responsibility for all the ideas expressed in the present work, an assumption that I stress by using the subject “I”.

6.2.1. Standard and non standard methods

I consider my methodological position as intermediate between those scholars who see in the quantitative (or standard) analysis the only methods to reach trustworthy results, and those who believe exclusively in the depth of qualitative (or non standard) methods. I believe that the use of the one or the other depends on the investigated object. More precisely, I believe (together with many sociologists) that when the object variables are already well known and are operationable in indicators without renouncing to describe the complexity of reality, then standard methods should be used, while when the object is still unknown, and an exploration in his reality is needed, non standard methods should be preferred. Generally, however, I believe that standard and non standard methods should be used together: non standard research, in fact, is useful to orientate the standard one, and to complete it by helping in the interpretation of quantitative data.

All this considered, I can say that I had no ideological position to prefer one or the other type of research. I chose a qualitative approach because of two reasons: firstly, interviews appeared to be the best method to investigate a field that needed to be analysed in its nuances; secondly, inside observation seemed to be the best way to take advantage of my being a member of the Expat community.

It is possible to object that I had no possibility to run by myself a serious quantitative survey: how many interviewees did I need to have a representative sampling of the entire Europe? This is certainly true, but it is not for exclusion that I chose qualitative analysis, but because I thought I was entering in a multisided field, with a great variety of dimensions and the presence of many nuances inside each dimension.

All this considered, I decided to use non standard methods, combined with relevant quantitative second hand data. To be sure that the second hand quantitative data were comparable and uniform, as well as trustworthy, I used exclusively *Eurobarometer* and *Eurostat* data. Moreover, they seem to be the most influential data at a European level.

Inside the different non standard methods, I chose to combine three ways of investigation:

1. the document analysis;
2. the in-depth structured interview;
3. the participating observation.

For the latest, the fact of being inside the Expats community have helped me considerably in the creation of the questionnaire before, in the running of the interviews and in the interpretation of the collected data in a second moment.

Regarding the *document analysis*, 8 different publications dedicated to Expats have been taken into consideration. A *content analysis* of the articles, as well as of the advertisements published in these publications has been implemented. This analysis has been useful in order to organise in a documentable and coherent frame the many impressions collected working in the field about the cultural peculiarities of the Expats environment. The content analysis has been carried on both at a factual and at a narrative level.

Concerning the *in-depth structured interviews*, I chose this instrument because I needed to survey the individual inner conceptions of interpersonal relationship, underlying personal differences in consideration of interviewee's situation and motivations. To use Corbetta's words [1999: 405], I decided to run structured interviews to have access to the perspective of the analysed subject.

At the same time, I chose to structure the interviewees according to a questionnaire in order to produce comparable answers, so to facilitate the emergence of tendencies.

I ran two groups of interviews: the first one (three interviews) to opinion leaders in the field of expatriates; the second one (thirty interviews) to European young professionals. All the interviews have been recorded and then transcribed in the original language they were made (either English, Spanish, Italian or French): the transcriptions are available in Appendix 2. I preferred to let the interviewees choose the language, in order to make them feeling more at ease and to allow them to better express themselves, as they were normally speaking in a language different from their own. As all the interviewees were used to speak in a foreign language, this did not jeopardise the expression of ideas and contents. Quotations in the text, however, are always translated in English, in order to facilitate the reading.

I speak of tendencies because I renounced to any pretension of representativeness. Ideally, I would have liked to have an interviewee from any European country (not only the EU members), but the research of the interviewee revealed to be more difficult than what I foresaw, so I decided to interview all the people who offered me their availability on a voluntary base. This is why some nationalities are represented by more than one interviewee.

It is not just a matter of the amount of interviewed people, however, but also of the way they were found. In fact I basically used two ways to find the people: firstly I asked people I used to meet but with whom I had no personal connection (friends of friends, professionals working in my same building, people attending my same French school); secondly, I received by Ans Persoons, one of my opinion leaders, a list of all regional offices and representations in Brussels, so I directly contacted via e-mail national embassies and representations, regional offices of various nature, as well as single departments in the European Commission. Despite the huge amount of e-mails and follow-up telephone calls to the persons in charge of the different offices, with pray of spreading my message to their collaborators, I was not able to reach my target of covering all the European countries. So, part of the interviewees

was indirectly asked to participate in the research, while another part applied spontaneously: in both cases, it was not a random selection, even though thanks to this double system I could reach a really heterogeneous sampling.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that it is definitely a chance if the majority of the interviewees are women.

6.2.2. The comparative dimension

The study of globalisation presents some problems in the methodological approach with respect to the possibility of a comparative analysis. The traditional sociology was based on the comparison among different national realities. As Delli Zotti [1997] reminds, the present tendency towards states' integration causes a crises for the comparative approach, up to the consideration that, with globalisation, states might not be the right objects to be compared. Without reaching the improbable conclusion of a unique global culture, the sociological research faces the problem of correlating a given phenomenon with a single culture or with intercultural exchanges among different (national) societies.

All this taken into account, I applied two premises to my research:

- a. even considering only Western countries (Europe, United States, Canada, Australia, according to the perception of the majority of the interviewees), all what is not European is not comparable at the same level with European national states; in other words, I arbitrarily assumed that it is possible to compare Americans, Europeans and Australians, but not, for instance, United States with Belgium, with Czech Republic, with Portugal, etc. This is because I am not comparing, for instance, the per capita income, but precise cultural dimensions which I regard to be particularly influenced by both the European history and the process of Europeanization. Because of this premise, I included only European countries in my research.
- b. It is certainly true that with globalisation the differences among (European) countries tend to reduce, but it still possible to trace differentiations by

grouping the countries according to our common sense. Again arbitrarily, I grouped the European countries in Southern, Central, Northern and Eastern countries. Of course this is an operative division: cases like Estonia, for example, are very much in doubt, for such a country has many similarities with the Scandinavian states, but at the same time has been part of the Soviet Union.

Consequently, thanks to the first premise I compare only comparable objects (European countries or groups of countries), and thanks to the second premise I create unities of comparison (European geographic areas).

I am aware that some of the countries I treat as Eastern are often considered Central European countries: Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland. Culturally, they present both Western and Eastern features:

Hungary, Czech and Slovak. It's very strange. How West, how East, you cannot say that they are from the East, you cannot say they are from the West [...] the mentality and everything else is somewhere in the middle... [Bulgaria, 28: 268-270].

In these cases, I privileged political criteria over cultural ones: it is true that they have been under Germany's or Hapsburg's influence, but more recently they were under the Soviet Union influence, and entered in the European Union only in the last years.

I will show that the division of Europe in four geographical areas is sound, and correspond to how the majority of the interviewees perceive their European neighbours. For example, an idea of this division is clearly exposed by one of the respondents:

[...] even in the Parliament you can see the groups of people having more in common than other groups of people. For example, we are on a level of this building together with German, Swedish, Danish, English and Finnish, but on the floor underneath there are Spanish, French, Italians, but it's kind that they did it on purpose, I mean, we work well with certain groups. [...] And there is a sort of split: I mean, you have Northern and Western Europe, and then Southern Europe, and then Eastern Europe, and you can see that in the Parliament as well, and it's a very surprising split on certain topics [The Netherlands, 12: 101-108].

Once again, being the unity of comparison not rigorous, I am aware that I can only trace general tendencies.

Finally, even though they were not abroad like the rest of the interviewees, I included three Belgian professionals in my sample in order to highlight the differences between the locals and the movers.

6.3 The questionnaire and the data analysis

Each interview has been conducted by following a structured questionnaire with open questions, taking care of not omitting any point. Nevertheless, I adapted the questions to the specific case of each interviewee, asking for more explanations if the answers provided were not clear, or asking not foreseen questions where necessary or when an interesting point was raised. The order of the questions might change accordingly to the topics raised by the interviewee. I let the speakers free to develop their arguments and I permitted any kind of prolixity and long-windedness, as far as the interviewee remained in the asked topic or treated a relevant subject. This is why some interviews lasted for more than 2 hours. Despite the big effort that this involved in the transcription phase, I regarded that it was the best approach to dig into people background, attitudes, feelings and motivations.

The questionnaire is available in Appendix 1. It provides a first space dedicated to some operative data, like the interview number, the duration of the interview, the interviewee e-mail and/or telephone number for a future contact. Then, following Ferrarotti [1972: 473], at the beginning of the interview I briefly clarified:

- a. the purpose of the research, avoiding to provide too many details in order to prevent the possibility that interviewees answered what they think is expected by them rather than what they really feel or believe;
- b. who I am and why I was doing such research;
- c. that I would guarantee their anonymity; in this sense, I asked each interviewee to sign the permission to be recorded, given that the corresponding transcription would remain anonymous.

Questions have been divided in 7 groups:

- I. *Interviewee's experiences abroad*: I have considered the significant experiences (at least 3 months) before the current permanence in Brussels.
- II. *Effectiveness of European Union's policy to support the mid-term living abroad*: I asked if the interviewee took advantage of EU programs for living abroad.
- III. *Personal motivations*: this group of questions focuses on the period in Brussels, trying to define expectations and timeframe of such an experience.
- IV. *Interpersonal relationships network*: these questions investigate the intensity and the nationality preferences of interviewees' relationships; I insisted especially on the nationality preferences with questions that approached the same matter from different perspectives, in order to reduce the possibility that the interviewee answered what he thought it was expected by him.
- V. *Maintenance of distant relationships*: two matters were faced: interviewees' ability to maintain distant relationships and the media used to do that.
- VI. *Identity and values*: this group of questions focuses on identity, in particular by stressing the aspects of the relevant values. It must be noted that I do not ask directly about national identity, but more generally about identity, in order to investigate any kind of collective adherence the interviewee might have. Nevertheless, the most of the interviewee

immediately referred to their national identity, while a minority of them did not understand the question at all. The soundness of this approach was confirmed by João Delgado, one of the opinion leaders, who underlined that the different identity layers may be conflictual:

It's an interesting question, but very tricky. When you say European identity, I have the feeling that a lot of people would interpret it as a replacement of their national identity. For me that I already live in Belgium for 20 years is a different layer. You have a different layer that is common to other Europeans and it coexists with your national identity. But also your national identity lives with your regional identity. Many people from EU countries have a very clear regional identity. Even in Portugal there are regional identities, there are people from the South, from the North. So these are different layers and you can't talk about this as something that is exclusive, because this common European layer is common to everybody [...; A: 143-149].

Similarly, I chose to ask about “citizen of the world” instead of “cosmopolitanism”, because the second term is already positively connoted. I preferred to use the expression and instead of asking directly if the interviewee felt like a “citizen of the world”, I judged it was better to ask what his understanding of the expression was.

- VII. *Structural data*: among the various data, I included parents' profession in order to verify if the movers had been facilitated by favourable family conditions.

In my intentions, the groups I and II should provide the information about mobility; the groups III, IV and V, by far the largest ones, should provide the information about interviewees' personal relationships; the group VI should analysed the identity matter. Actually interviewees often did not provide precise answers to each questions, but mixed the various topics. Therefore, in the analysis phase, a big identification and ordering work of the expressed ideas according to each question has been necessary.

While making the transcriptions of the interviews, I tried to be as precise as possible in using interviewees' words and expressions, improving the language only in case of minor grammatical mistakes. In case the sentence pronounced by the

interviewee was not clear in its written version (because, for example, the voice tone was important), I added in square brackets a sort of paraphrases. In square brackets I also noted the significant pauses and the significant laughs (that is, the ones that showed that the answer, for example, was ironic). I used the bold to show my questions.

In the transcriptions, lines are numbered in order to facilitate the finding of a quotation in the interview text. Each quotation is identified by the country, the number of the interview and the lines, for example: Cyprus, 7: 14-18.

Reporting the data, I grouped the answers to each questions in tables which the sole purpose is to schematise interviewees' replies and show the existence of trends. To resume the different open answers, I grouped them in what I call *typical answers* ("T.A."). The abbreviation "N/A" means that the answer is Not Available or that the question was Not Applicable to the interviewee.

In the tables, I grouped the interviewees, according to their provenience country, in the 4 conceptualised geographical area: Southern, Central, Northern and Eastern Europe, followed by the two interviewees from non-EU member states. Inside each group, states have been listed following their geographical distribution, from south to north, from west to east.

Following Silverman [2000], I ran a double analysis on all the collected material: a factual analysis and a narrative analysis. Firstly, I considered the factual declarations, that is, I taken for true all what the interviewee said. Later I analysed the narratives, that is, those meanings and beliefs which are implicit in the interviewee mind and comes out from his arguments. This second analysis requires to the interviewer a certain degree of sensibility and psychological capacities, which I reckon my experience in the communication field provides me.

6.4 The sample

Question 1 and the structural data provide a wide information about the interviewees, resumed in table 6.1. Here I will just highlight some important points.

As it is possible to see, almost the half of the interviewee come from big cities, and only one third of them come from small towns. This data can be interpreted in different ways. A possible explanation is that people living in medium and big towns have more cultural stimuli to go abroad. Another explanation might be that people from small towns are less likely to go to the university, but I do not have empirical evidence of this.

Only 6 people had a sort of multicultural education because of their family movements or origins. This shows that having been travelling since the childhood is sufficient but not necessary to determine a pro-moving attitude.

The education level is very high. This is a common data to all the Expats. One of the interviewees without a master is almost ashamed when asked about his studies: “Well, since I got a job I couldn’t finished my master, so I only have a bachelor” [Sweden, 18: 336]. Moreover, with two exceptions all the interviewees speak at least three languages.

Analysing interviewees parents’ professions, it results that the majority of the respondent come from a medium social level. However the situation of the interviewees from the East is not fully comparable with the ones of the Western respondents:

How would you define your family social level in Lithuania?

Middle class. I have spoken a lot about this with my [Spanish] husband. Almost everyone was from the middle class. During the Soviet Union all the existent was available to everybody and everyone could pay: theatre, opera, ballet. I went to opera and theatre, to see everything. For my husband this is a middle-high class, but for us it is a little difficult to define [Lithuania, 22: 141-145].

Regarding the civil status, 13 people are single, 10 are living together with their partner and 7 are running a distant relationship.

Table 6.1: Interviewee structural data

Tab. 6.1		STRUCTURAL DATA										
cases	T.A.	sex	town size**	double citizenship / origins	studies	profession	mother's profession	father's profession	civil status	distant relationship	spoken languages*	age
1	Portugal	M	B		Ma	consultant	N/A	N/A		DE	PT*, UK, DE, ES	30
2	Spain	F	S		Ma	geologist	housewife	farmer	common-law wife		ES*, UK, Catalan	27
3	Italy (1)	F	S		Ma	delivery manager in a consultancy company	housewife	electrician	single		IT*, UK, FR	28
4	Italy (2)	F	M		Ma	cultural promoter	N/A	N/A	common-law wife		IT*, UK	24
5	Malta	F	M		2 Ma	diplomat	housewife	army official	single		MT*, UK*, DE, FR, IT, SE	31
6	Greece	F	B		2 Ba+2 Ma	consultant	lawyer	civil engineer	single		EL*, UK, FR, ES	27
7	Cyprus	F	B	USA and CY	2 Ba+Ma	media relation analyst in a consultancy company	housewife	car shop worker		CY	UK*, EL*, FR	26
8	France	F	B	no, but German mother	Degree (5 y)	stagiaire at the Parliament and in a consultancy company	translator	doctor	common law wife		FR*, DE*, UK, SE	24
9	Belgium (1)	F	B	no, but she lived in LU for some	Ma (running)	stagiaire	N/A	N/A	common law wife		FR*, NL*, UK, DE	23

				years								
10	Belgium (2)	F	B		Degree (4 y)	quality employee	plane pilot	employee	single		FR*, NL*, UK	25
11	Belgium (3)	F	S		Ma	research consultant	boutique owner	entrepreneur	common law wife		NL*, FR*, UK	26
12	Netherlands	F	N/A	DE and NL	Degree	MEP assistant	nanny	airforce pilot	common law wife		NL*, DE*, FR*, UK, ES	30
13	Germany	M	B		PhD (running)	R&D policy analyst in a consultancy company	veterinarian assistant	veterinarian	common law husband		DE*, UK, FR	33
14	Austria	F	S		3 Degrees	MEP assistant	husband assistant in a small enterprise	entrepreneur		South Africa	DE*, UK, FR, Arabic	32
15	Slovenia	F	S		Ma	economic advisor in a Regional Office	kindergarten teacher	engineer / designer	single		SI*, UK, DE, HR, Serbian, FR	29
16	Ireland	M	S		Ma	policy analyst	nurse	entrepreneur		SE	UK*, IE*, ES	26
17	UK	F	S		Ba	information and communication assistant in a Regional office	bilingual secretary	former Commission officer	single		UK*, IT, FR, ES	25
18	Sweden	M	S		Ba	information officer in a Regional office	factory worker	factory worker	single		SE*, UK	26
19	Finland (1)	M	B		PhD (running)	Commission officer	professor	professor	married		FI*, FR, UK, SE, ES	35
20	Finland (2)	F	B	no, but grown up in the NL, NO, SW	Ma	diplomat	N/A	ministry officer	single		FI*, SE*, UK, NO, FR, DE, NL, ES	34

21	Estonia	F	M		Ba	kindergarten teacher	(dead)	secretary in the European Council	EE	EE*, UK, FR, FI, RU	26	
22	Lithuania	F	M		2 Degrees (9 years)	journalist	N/A (she defines herself from the middle-class)	married (with a Commission office)		LT*, UK, IT, RU, FR	30	
23	Poland (1)	F	B		Ma	consultant	N/A	N/A	single	PL*, UK, DE	27	
24	Poland (2)	F	M		Ma	DHL product portfolio expert	accountant	quality specialist	single	PL*, UK	28	
25	Czech Rep.	F	B		Ma	Regional Office officer	engineer and entrepreneur	engineer (dead)	common law wife	CZ*, UK, ES, PT	26	
26	Hungary	F	B		Degree (5 years)	veterinarian	teacher	agricultur engineer		HU	HU*, UK	31
27	Romania ***	M	M	RO and BE	Degree (5 years)	MEP assistant	N/A	engineer	single	RO*, FR, UK, IT, ES, DE, NL	27	
28	Bulgaria	M	B		Degree (4 years)	import / export clerk	diplomat	tourism business	single	BG*, UK, RU	25	
29	Switzerland	F	S		Ma	stagiaire in a national office	nurse	factory worker		SW	FR*, IT*, UK, DE, ES	24
30	Moldova	F	M		Degree (5 years)	Accountant in the Diplomatic mission of Moldova in the EU	informatic	doctor	single	RU*, MO, UK, FR	25	

* = mother language;

** = Big (over 1 million inhabitants), Medium (over 20.000 inhabitants), Small (less than 20.000 inhabitants).

*** = emigrated in Brussels in 1999.

Chapter 7

Expats and the city: a cultural relation

Authors like Harvey [1990], Sassen [1996], Sennett [1998] underline how economy, and I would add to it policy making, are not indifferent to geography. On the contrary, there is a geography of power, and cities are its nodes. Harvey maintains that cities are in open competition to attract investments and people – not all kind of people, of course, but tourists, investors and high skilled professionals. Florida [2002] establishes a relation among economic development, creative workers and places, affirming that the most creative workers tend to concentrate in specific cities, triggering a virtuous circle of development which improves the quality of life and the general economic level of those cities. It is undeniable that Brussels, with its concentration of European institutions headquarters, is a symbolic and material centre of power. Such a centre of power attracts those people, coming from all over the world but mostly from the European countries, who come to work in those institutional (local, regional and national representations, chambers of commerce, etc.) or private organisations specialised in lobbying and European funds taking, as well as in consultancy and communication, translation and recruitment. All these foreigners are included in a recognised community, identified as the expatriate community or, more frequently, as the *Expats community*.

To outline the characteristics, the values and internal mechanisms which rule the Expats community, paper publications addressed to expatriates and interviews to opinion leaders will be now analysed.

Publications addressed to expatriates are widespread in Brussels. Some of them are directly produced by public financed institutions (like the Ministry of the Brussels-Capital Region or by Brussels International-Tourism & Congress) or private

ones. In their great majority, such publications are guides which provide useful information to foreigners either willing to come to Brussels or living in the city.

The documents taken into consideration are:

- *Mini-Bru. Statistical survey of the Brussels-Capital Region*, published by the Ministry of the Brussels-Capital Region⁶⁰ (free);
- *Welcome to Brussels*, published by the Brussels-Europe Liaison Office (free);
- *Brussels. Yours to discover*, one of the many thematic guides published by Brussels International-Tourism & Congress, the Office de Promotion du Tourisme Wallonie-Bruxelles and the Tourist Office of Flanders (free);
- *Agenda/Cinema. Out and about in Brussels*, a weekly magazine which provides information about events and cinema programs in the capital; being written in three languages (Flemish, French and English), and consequently supported by the Flemish government and the Flemish Community Commission, is the only document considered which is not exclusively addressing expatriates;
- *Newcomer. An introduction to life in Belgium*, a guide which has the form of a magazine and is re-edited every six months, being sold (for 3 euro) as supplement to the Expats-dedicated magazine “The Bulletin” (the numbers considered are the Autumn 2006 and Spring 2007 ones);
- *Together magazine. Dedicated to Bruxpats&business people in Brussels*, a privately financed magazine which began to be published in 2007 (free);
- *Expatriate survival guide. Your essential guide to living in Belgium*, published by Expatica, a company which provides information and communication services for expatriates in several European cities, such as a well-known website (www.expatica.com) which offers an electronic renting house finder and a meeting forum (free);
- *Expats in Brussels. The practical guide to settling and living in Brussels*, a bilingual (English and French) yearly guide (already at its 8th edition); printed in book format, it is probably the most complete guide for Expats (15 euro).

⁶⁰ The Brussels-Capital Region is one of the three regions that form the federal state of Belgium.

7.1 Migrants and Expats

The magazine *Mini-Bru* provides data about Brussels population and services, as well as useful addresses. According to this source, in the year 2004 in the Region of Brussels foreign population counted 263.000 units (over a total population of 1.000.000): 145.000 from the EU14 (Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United kingdom), 9.000 from the new members countries (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) and the others from outside the EU (especially north Africa). According to Van Parijs (2007) figures, only the 44% of Brussels' population are of Belgian descent (against the 80% minimum of the other Belgian provinces). Nevertheless these figures considers the residents in Brussels, that is, migrants, those who settled down in the city permanently or for a long time. Counting the number of mobile migrants, that is, those who remain in Brussels a period varying from a few months to a few years is a much tougher task. This is why only a rough estimation of the Expats community dimension, as the one proposed by Ans Persoons, is possible:

if you consider all the people working in the EU institutions, in the lobby and in NGOs, you reach a rough estimation of about 100.000 people, and that's one out of 10 people here in Brussels [...; B: 44-45].

In Brussels there is a very strong immigration from Africa, especially from the North, but this does not represent the target of the analysed guides: they always put the accent on Brussels' European identity and its role as "capital of Europe". Algerians, Tunisians, Moroccans are concentrated in specific neighbourhoods, which established expatriates and estate agencies recommend the newcomers to avoid (the classical advice one receives while looking for a cheap apartment in Brussels sounds: "do not go there, it is in a North Africa area"). This means that a first distinction is recognisable among non-EU migrants and EU migrants, either Expats or not: separated culturally, but also physically, non-EU migrants are the target of a

widespread xenophobia which often assumes the features of racism, while EU migrants are considered educated people who go there to work:

What is your perception of Belgians' perception of foreigners?

You mean like positive or negative? Well there's a difference between immigrants and expatriats. In general not only from my part, I have this general feeling that people working at European Institutions are all ok people, but we often have problems with violence and with immigrants, so that is negative.

In your perception are immigrants only from outside Europe? Or violence can be from Italian community, for example?

In Belgium there's the perception [of the violence] coming from North Africa and East Europe. I had personal experiences with those things, and my boyfriend was robbed by a gang composed by all foreigners. I never want to judge the whole community, but I know people think like this in Belgium [Belgium, 11: 106-114].

The interviewee mentions people from the Eastern Europe as considered dangerous. New members countries recently started to establish economic and cultural representations in Brussels. Consequently the first wave of immigrants was a traditional one, composed by the population poorest stratum. This shows that not all EU migrants are Expats anyway, and in Brussels there are an Italian, a Portuguese and a Polish community which are numerically considerable. Thus defining Expats is not easy, as it implies considerations which go beyond people's nationality.

The time frame of migrants' permanence in Brussels is relevant at this regard:

Mostly the Expatriats only stay for a couple of years, that's how I see the difference, and they are still attached to their own country, and if they come here it means that they have a good job and stay here temporarily, while an immigrant is looking for a job, often a criminal experience, and it's harder for them to get adjusted or to be accepted in the community, and they hang around in the street... it's a completely different world [Belgium, 11: 117-120].

The only exception is given by European institutions officers:

So most of the time they want to come for a short while, making an experience, and then go back to their countries with this experience, they know a language, they worked in an international environment... I think everybody who comes here thinks it's only for two years, except the functionaries in the Commission, who know it's going to be for their whole life.

You said that frequently they settled down.

That happens: they fall in love with somebody of another nationality, and if you really live in an international community for some years, it's really difficult to go back to your little village [...; B: 166-172].

The most of the Expats are temporary migrants in the sense that they remain in Brussels for a limited amount of time. The majority of the Expats want to go back home and see their permanence as temporary, even though they remain in Brussels for years and years. So long-term Expats share with traditional migrants the “myth of the return” [Zanfrini, 2004: 34].

The time frame of their permanence in Brussels is not the only difference between migrants and expatriates; migrants are considered those who are obliged to leave their countries because of the tough life and work conditions there, Expats those who freely choose to spend some years abroad:

Do you feel more an Expat or an immigrant?

More an Expat, because I think an immigrant is somebody who doesn't really have the choice to come back and I know I have the choice [Poland 2, 24: 94-96].

Do you consider yourself an immigrant or an Expat?

Not a migrant, no: I am here because I like it, so there is a difference. I didn't come here because in my country I can't find a job, in my country I would live better than here, I came to get experience [Czech Republic, 25: 219-221; my translation].

Migrants (both EU and non-EU) constitute a number of national communities, the members of which generally have a different profile respect to Expats. Migrants and expatriates do not really get in touch, as they have different biographies, different links to the origin country, and obviously a totally different perception of Belgium and of their future there. In Ans Persoons words:

The only difference that I make is between people who came here in the 60s or in the 70s, mostly to do dirty work, in mines and stuff like that, or in Brussels, like Portuguese because they were escaping from Salazar regime, and people who came here because they had a job in the European institutions. They have a totally different economic profile: those working for the European institutions have a higher education, earn a lot of money, they didn't leave their countries because they needed to, for political or economic reasons, they just came because they wanted to work for the European institutions and make a lot of money. And they don't really get in touch. For example, there is a huge Portuguese community, but they don't get in touch with the Portuguese in the institutions. They are two groups [B: 33-40; ...].

Which are the motivation and expectations that push the Expats here?

It's only work. They don't come because they like Brussels, it has nothing to do with it. It could be any other city. Their idea about Brussels is most of the times quite negative. People from the Southern countries say that it's cold and rainy, the people from the Nordic countries think it's a chaotic and dirty city. They come here just because they think that they have career options, and most of the time they come here for a short

while, and they all want to go back. There are people who stay here for 20 years and still want to go back [B: 97-102].

Migrants try to integrate in the Belgian society, for example learning at least one of the two official languages in Brussels: French and Flemish. At the same time, they provide services to their compatriots, for example in the food sector (restaurants, bar, catering), speaking the same language and offering typical national products. Expats often do not try to integrate, as they are already integrated in their Expats community. As Ans Persoons explains, more and more foreigners, especially among those from the new member countries, refuse to learn English:

For example I have a Canadian flatmate, and I encouraged him to learn French, but he refuses: he says he has to remain here only for a few years and he's not going to make the effort. If you only stay in the Expat community... but it bothers me: when we go to a shop or a restaurant and he doesn't even say "merci", I think it's not polite at all. But that's my opinion. And that's really changing: before people really made an effort to learn a basic French, it doesn't happen anymore. It bothers me, and French is not my mother tongue. You can't imagine in Paris people claiming to make English an official language [B: 128-134].

It is actually surprising to discover that many people enrolled in French schools at very low learning levels have already spent in Brussels 3 or 4 years. As Claire-Lise Dautry explains, the European institutions officers displaced in Brussels have to know at least three European languages; in recent years the OIF, Organisation Internationale pour la Francophonie, started to pay French schools to provide courses for European institutions officers, which consequently receive them for free and presently represents the 50% of Alliance Française⁶¹ students.

Another fundamental difference between migrants and Expats is their original social level, as Ans Persoons explains:

Are they [the Expats] richer than the average and consequently have access to better schools and so on?

It is maybe the case of the people working in the European institutions: if you want to make an internship over there you have to have studied economics or European policies. I think that people working in the institutions or in the consultancies most of the time have a better economic background. And in the new countries especially, you really have to be part of a higher class to be able to do those studies, otherwise you can't access to

⁶¹ One of the most popular and prestigious French schools for foreigners in Brussels and all over the world.

certain... they have to, because people who are here are asked to speak several languages, so often you don't do that if you don't grow up in a multilanguage environment, if you don't learn them at school... I don't know if it's changing. More often when we have stagiaires or assistances, they are less rich than they were before, they really look for cheap houses, and stuff like that. They do not all have parents that manage to have big partners for them. It's changing. Before it was worse. But the Parliament and the Commission have a lot of stagiaires who come to Brussels and do unpaid stages, because it's so difficult to get an internship. I don't see people who make another job besides their internships, it's possible that in their country they worked before coming here; because it's not that easy, when you start, to make money, and a lot of people really start with low salaries [B: 143-156].

Interviewees, with just two exceptions, all come from good social and cultural level families, in which at least one of the parents is graduated.

Depicting an Expat profile, Ans Persoons and one of the interviewee sum up some of the differences among migrants and Expats; education, age, social ability and motivation are indicated as main trait of the latests:

Educated, multilinguistic, speaks several languages, and curious. I think if you come to live in another country you need to be curious. And ambitious. And open, but not really about the city. Many of them leave without knowing absolutely anything about Brussels or Belgium. And they are quite young, 20-35 [B: 203-205].

How would you describe the typical profile of the Expat?

Highly educated, in between 25 and 35, here for a limited time, quite outward, he likes to socialise, he likes to see new things, maybe not career driven, I don't think that all the people here are career driven, I know people goal driven and other people who are here to make an experience, and most people don't plan to stay here, most people want to stay here for a period and then to go back home. Often people say that what they are doing here is a step for a position in their own national or regional government. And I am coming from a rural village in Sweden, where almost all the people neither have a bachelor, so here they are highly educated. [...] And if you meet people down here, they were their suits, they speak this Eurolanguage, which if you don't know it currently it's very hard to understand what people talk about, so that forms a kind of subculture [Sweden, 18: 110-122].

Even though interviewees often do not seem conscious of that, the Expats community has its rules, its rituals (like the "happy hour" after work), its language (the so called *Eurolanguage* or *Euroenglish*, notorious for being quite different from the proper English), its status symbols (suits and dresses, European institutions and companies badges, etc.), its meeting places (special squares, bars, but also

conferences, events, etc.). Consequently, the Swedish respondent is right while affirming that Expats' is a subculture⁶².

The differences among migrants and Expats as generally perceived both by Belgians and expatriates are schematized in the table 7.1:

Perceived differences among migrants and Expats		True / false
Common migrants	Expats	
need driven	job driven (career opportunity or experience)	true
stay for long	stay for short periods	true for those who do not work in the EU institutions
generally low skilled / low educated	very high educated	true
group in national communities	group in an international community and are very sociable	generally true
have contacts with Belgians	usually have minimum contacts with Belgians	generally true
usually speak French	often do not speak French	true
have common jobs	work in the WU affairs	true
do not gain much money	gain much money	true for institutions officers
every age	quite young	true

Table 7.1: Differences between migrants and Expats

Obviously the concept of expatriate is not proper only to Brussels, but there it assumes a specific connotation, which I refer to by using the word Expat. There is, in fact, who does not agree with the use of this concept. Claire-Lise Dautry, ostensibly showing a great European identity, maintains that in Europe speaking about

⁶² In chapter IX I will analyse in detail the relations among its members.

expatriates is not correct, for distances among countries are short and cultural differences are not pronounced:

I expatriated, but I do not feel an expatriate, it's difficult, because when you are French, you do not feel an expatriate in Belgium: here is Europe. I have just spent five years in China and over there there is an expatriate community, as there are expatriate bars, expatriate shops, a real expatriate life, but here, you work here, but you are not expatriate, here is Europe.

Then which are the differences among expatriates and immigrants?

I do not feel neither an expatriate nor an immigrant, I feel European, a Southern French detached by its headquarter in a city which is at one hour from Paris. I am a detached professional. In "expatriation" there is the word "ex" and I don't feel at all "ex" [...; C: 50-57; my translation].

Nevertheless I believe this is an extreme and rather political position, also reinforced by the fact that the interviewee is French and not, say, Greek or Latvian.

Analysing the over mentioned documents, it is evident how they can be extremely useful to whoever comes to Brussels, either on a permanent or on a temporary basis. *Welcome to Brussels, Newcomer, Expat survival guide* and *Expats in Brussels* provide in fact specific information about all the topics that newcomers may find useful: accommodation, education, health, transport, banks, culture, leisure activities, etc. *Newcomer* and *Expats in Brussels* are very much detailed: in particular the latest is a 300 pages guides with an impressive amount of information and useful addresses about the city, the administrative formalities to settle down and work in Belgium, temporary and permanent accommodations, connections to services like water, electricity, phone and so on, the school and higher education system and offer, banks and insurances, cultural centres, club and associations, language courses, places of worship, and all what concerns the everyday life. Moreover, as highlighted by Ans Persoons, there are professionals who go to Brussels with the idea to remain for a short period, but then spend their entire life there: "They want to go back to their countries after they retire, but then they realise that Belgium is their country" [B: 105]. Despite of this, the cited documents explicitly address to Expats, already in their titles: *Together magazine. Dedicated to Bruxpats&business people in Brussels, Expat survival guide, Expats in Brussels*. This may be considered a demonstration that the distinction between Expats and migrants is not neutral. As Zanfrini [2004]

maintains, the typology used to organize and administratively define migration phenomena reflect the expectations and the interests of the destination society. This means that every destination society divides its immigrants and label them, this way establishing with each (artificial) group a precise social distance. We should not forget that the Europeans who move from a country to another inside the Union are migrants. The majority of them are *free migrants*, that is, people allowed to free circulation because of international treaties (specifically the Schengen Treaty, which interestingly finds its origins in a first agreement, approved in 1985 and concretely implemented only in 1997, among France, Germany, Holland, Luxemburg and Belgium to eliminate frontier controls). Others are *temporary migrants*, for example those from the European Eastern countries which are still not in the Schengen area. Nevertheless, they are defined *Expats*. This differentiation has obviously the scope to stress the separation among migrants and expatriates, even linguistically, in order to attribute a diverse value to each group. Very roughly, I would say that non-EU migrants (in particular the North Africans) are seen as “bad” migrants, EU migrants (especially the Western ones) are seen in a neutral way and Expats (no matter where they come from) are seen (or institutionally indicated) as “good” migrants, as shown in table 7.2:

MIGRATION TYPE	ACCEPTATION LEVEL
non-EU migrants (especially north Africa)	undesired
EU-migrants (especially Western Europe)	neutral
Expats	desired (more at an institutional level than by the local people)

Table 7.2: Acceptation for the different types of migrants

For Brussels’ government, Expats are desirable, for they spend their money in the city. Confirming Harvey’s [1990] theory about attracting people cities, both public

and private organisations have all the interest in having as many foreigners in the capital as possible: if they work in the institutions, they are part of a privileged *élite* with a high purchase power, composed not only by officers, but also by their families; if they are young people looking for a job in the EU affairs, their high turnover assures that whenever one runs out of money, another one arrives. All these people have a demand of various kind of services, and are prepared to pay for them. Consequently, Expats represent a great source of income for Brussels' administration, and public and private organisations have all the interest in investing in promotion to depict a positive image of the city and to facilitate Expats in settling down.

The effort in attracting high-qualified workers evidently goes in the direction illustrated by Florida [2002]. People initially were driven to Brussels to work in the institutions, that is, because they were called by the institutions. Later, the institution revealed to be a source of opportunities and now they attract a number of young workers, aiming at finding a place in the European bureaucracy. Those young workers compete fiercely, but only a minority of them succeed in realising their dreams. Consequently, stakeholders interested in maintaining a high level of temporary migrants in Brussels work to keep that dream, that is, the European dream alive; at the same time they highlight the multiculturalism of the city, in order to transmit the image of a place where spending time is a rewarding experience.

7.2 Expats' subculture

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “expat” is an informal synonymous of expatriate. The fact that the analysed guides use the word “expat” instead of expatriate, or even more informal words like “Bruxpat”, reveals a familiarity which by itself already contributes in creating a community spirit,

identification and sense of belonging. It is like winking at foreigners and saying: “if you come here, you will be one of us, one of the club”.

Also the presence of such a great offer of information is an evidence of the fact that many organisations make a profit from attracting foreigners, because settling down in Brussels is not that difficult, especially for educated multilingual Europeans, and such an amount of information from so many sources is not really needed. As Claire-Lise Dautry sarcastically says,

After I lived in Japan I moved to Brussels and when they told me that it is an adventure I answered that it is not a big adventure. [...] the world is getting smaller and young people leave more than before [C: 83-86; my translation].

Moreover, a guide like *Expats in Brussels* is so complete and precise that it is difficult for other guides to add something. If the only purpose of all this material were to inform foreigners, *Expats in Brussels* should be adopted as official guide and financed by the public administration. On the contrary, it is the only publication among the mentioned ones which has a considerable price. Comparing it with *Newcomer*, *Together magazine* or the *Expatriate survival guide*, the reason of both the price differential and the information resources abundance becomes clear: about the half of their pages are occupied by advertisements. A brief review of these advertisements gives an idea of the stakeholders prospering with Expats: relocation services; accommodation agencies; hotels, residences, restaurants and food shops; laundry services; sport and wellness clubs; children care and schools (all international ones); post-graduate colleges; French schools; banks and insurance companies; job recruiters and career services; churches; travel agencies; airlines companies; car renting and sellers; foreign magazines and newspapers; etc. They even promote other guides and Expats dedicated magazines.

The presence of educated, middle class and high class foreigners in Brussels benefits practically the entire economic system of the city, and creates a virtuous circle: the more people keep going to Brussels and have a good experience there, the more they attract new people by informally promoting the city, by inviting their friends remained at home to join them, by family reunifications. Moreover, Expats have families that go to visit them, this way creating a continuous tourist flux. Huge

economic interests are at stake around Expats, and it is natural that public and private organisations try to attract them.

To do this, a simple strategy is employed, a simple message is explicitly or implicitly diffused: “we know that Belgium is not the best place where to live, but you are an important professional (that is, a quite rich person), so we will compensate its lacks by taking care of you and offering you all the comforts you may need in our prestigious city to feel at home”. So firstly an amount of useful information about Brussels and its services is available; secondly an institution like the Brussels-Europe Liaison Office works to help newcomers to settle down and integrate in the city; thirdly, an entire economic system offers its services especially designed for foreigners; finally, the community of the people who already settled down responds to people social needs.

Going through the documents, this approach is easily recognisable. Almost all the Expats declare that, before they reached Brussels, their friends in their country were commiserating them. The idea that Brussels is quite a miserable place where to live is present in Expats’ minds and emerges in their words as factual declaration (like in many examples presented in the following chapters) or as narratives, like in the following quotation:

What does it mean to you to live in Brussels?

I don’t have difficulties in being here [Finland 1, 19: 59-60].

The respondent does not answer in an affirmative way, but rather in a negative one, as if there was an implicit “despite the city...”. In the analysed documents, however, Brussels is presented as a place with light and shade, but but overall cosy and stimulating. Most of all, Brussels is presented as the capital of Europe, referring to the 2001 Treaty of Nice. This is what we read at the very beginning of *Brussels. Yours to discover*:

Your favourite.

Brussels, capital of the kingdom of Belgium is also the capital of Europe. A destination that’s wasy to reach and reasonable prices that won’t strain its visitors’ pochets, regardless of age. This cosmopolitan city that loves good food lives life its way and

expresses itself in a style very much its own: sometimes rebellious and mischievous, sometimes thoughtful and composed, but always very likeable. Despite its European dimension and despite all the different languages spoken of every street, Brussels is still inspired by a very “village-like” spirit [Fustin: 3].

The *Expats survival guide* is even more explicit:

It is flat and boring, overcrowded, always rains and torn apart by the language conflict. [...] Just some of the usual misconceptions about Belgium, [...] home to the European Union, the self-proclaimed capital of Europe [*Expats survival guide*: 4].

Newcomer's articles are on the same line, even though with a soberer tone:

Welcome to Belgium, land of hospitality.

[...] The country may not be what you expected, but it's likely to win your heart. Belgium has welcomed expatriates for more than five centuries. Its tradition of hospitality and tolerance date back to the middle ages [...]. Recognising the importance of attracting foreign talent, the Belgian government makes an effort to welcome expatriates and deal with their needs. A special office (Brussels-Europe Liaison Office [...]) provides expatriates with a free advisory services, covering everything [...]. The country's deep-rooted expatriate community provides a vast network of information and services for newcomers. [...] It's not just business that is booming. Brussels consistently scores high on quality of life [...; *Newcomer*, Autumn 2006: 5].

The capital of Europe. [...] Some 25,000 people are employed in the European institutions in Brussels [...]. But not everybody describes its presence in flattering terms. The international community is seen as overpaid and insular by many Belgians and as the cause of the rising house-prices and destruction of residential neighbourhoods. But like it or not, Brussels is Europe's beating heart and lifeblood [*Newcomer*, Autumn 2006: 10].

More celebrative is *Expats in Brussels*' introduction:

My beautiful Brussels.

“If you want to meet the world in a city of medium size, you must come here”, enthuses Charles Picqué. “The city has its villages: you can satisfy your feeling for the land in municipalities which seem a long way from the rest of the planet, and then, 100 metres further on, you are back in the heart of an international city.” [...] while it is probably the most multicultural city in Europe or perhaps even in the world, [...] Brussels has resisted the process of ghettoisation [sic! *Expats in Brussels*: 2].

Articles and advertisements focus on high status professionals, transmitting a twofold message: “we take care of you providing the highest level services”. Some of the many examples:

As soon as the decision is taken to come and live in Belgium, start preparing. [...] your company's human resources department may provide the information and assistance you need [... but] many multinational corporations call on relocation specialists to assist executive staff moving to one country to another [*Newcomer*, Autumn 2006: 20].

Marriott executive apartments. Brussels European quarter.
Welcome to the Finest Executive Apartments in Brussels! When you need to stay longer... «Home, Away from Home» [*Newcomer*, Autumn 2006: 26].

Ready-made comfort. [...] Living in an aparthotel combines the comfort of living in your own apartment with the services offered by a hotel – if and when you want them [*Newcomer*, Autumn 2006: 27].

Brussels Business Flats, your key to a comfortable stay in Brussels [*Newcomer*, Autumn 2006: 28].

Expatplus. A healthy decisions.
Let us take care of your health care needs, while you settle in Belgium.
Expatplus has been specifically designed for expats like you. [...] choose for expatplus, and you get the best quality in health care and service [*Expat survival guide*: 29].

Euromut health care. Live, we take care about the rest.
It is essential that you receive the best health care advice and customer service. [...] We make sure that your needs are understood and answered. Euromut – The Expatriates Best Choice [*Expat survival guide*: 47].

The International School of Brussels. 1400 students from 70 countries worldwide. One mission. Everyone included, challenged, successful [*Expat survival guide*: 31].

Advertisements and articles emphasise the aspect of professionalism of their readers, or the fact that they are highly demanding customs with special needs. An Italian bank uses a supposed Expat's solidarity rhetoric to promote its services: "As Expats, which bank can take care of our financial affairs? Who understand an expat better than another expat?" [*Newcomer*, Autumn 2006: 78].

It is interesting that in *Newcomer* the first two articles title "Brussels capital of Europe" and "Brussels for business...":

Brussels is one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Europe. Much of the energy that flows through the city streets now comes from an international population drawn to the hub of the world's largest economic zone [Autumn 2006: 15].

Concerning leisure activities, Brussels is presented as a stimulating city, even though, as Expats who have spent some years in it confirms, one needs to know it well to find out what is on:

Brussels is one of the most appealing capital cities in Europe. [...] Even if the weather is miserable, you can spend the weekends taking in the superb museums, visiting eclectic interiors or discovering quirky Belgian design. The only problem is that Brussels reveals its secrets reluctantly, and word-of-mouth is sometimes the only way to find out about what to see [*Newcomer*, Autumn 2006: 16].

Meeting places for Expats are advertised. The *Together magazine*, for example, has a survey called “the places to be”, with pictures of smiley beautiful people having fun accompanying the addresses and the short descriptions of the events one can find there. Expats dedicated events are frequent: “Meet expats in the real world at Expatica Speed Date events...” [*Expat survival guide*: 59]. On-line dating sites are also promoted:

Expatica date! Where expats click. Europe’s only online expat dating site. [...] you’ve made the move, now get out and enjoy yourself [*Expat survival guide*: 59].

Surveys with an explanation of social customs in Belgium are also available.

With the exception of *Expats in Brussels* (both in English and French) and *Agenda* (which also has some articles in Flemish), all publications are in English, as this is the Expats community language. Both to socialise and to live in Brussels, the linguistic barrier is not a real problem, as it is possible to spend years in the city without knowing French, Flemish or German. Some advertisements highlights that the advertised shop or agency personnel speak English. “If you already know a foreign language, Belgium is an excellent place to maintain and improve your linguistic skills”, we read on *Newcomer* [Autumn 2006: 105], both because there are large national communities and because “English-language books, videos and DVDs are widely available in libraries and shops in Belgium” [*ivi*: 116].

After all the information about how to settle in Brussels and enjoy the city, also useful tips to leave Brussels are offered, this way closing Expats’ “natural” moving cycle and confirming the high foreigners turn-over: “Selling up and moving on. You

bought a house in Belgium, now the time has come to move on” [*Newcomer*, Autumn 2006: 41].

Considering the analysed documents, it is easy to see how they contribute to determine, and in some cases to create, a sense of community. Expatriates arrive in Brussels and discover that:

- they have their own guides (as the analysed ones) and publications (as the *Together magazine* or the most popular *The Bulletin*);
- they are addressed as Expats, like the titles of many of these publications do;
- they have at their disposal, with the only limitation of their spending capacity, every possible dedicated service;
- they have their common language, that is, English;
- they have meeting places where it is easy to socialise with other Expats.

At the same time, they are somehow immediately trapped in a defined social role, as a very powerful image of what an Expat should be is immediately transmitted:

- cosmopolitan, open to diversity and multiculturalism;
- multi-linguistic;
- sociable and friendly;
- career-driven or at least job-oriented;
- demanding;
- earning good money;
- willing to “join the club”.

This image is implicit and pass through a very peculiar use of the language and a specific type of advertisements, as well as through narratives. Here I use the term “narrative” to indicate those hidden arguments which lie under the factual declarations and reveal the presence of an inner persuasion. They often are the consequence of given for granted personal values or implicit beliefs.

The document analysis shows that there is a certain number of narratives at stake in the communication towards expatriates:

- “It is a great experience to explore other countries”
- “It is nice to meet different people”

- “In Brussels it is easy to meet people”
- “You are a professional, you deserve much, you have the right to pretend”
- “Being an Expat you will enter in a world of opportunities”

The interviews analysis will show that these narratives are recognisable behind the words of some of the interviewee, this way demonstrating that they succeed in defining an Expat ideal-type and in affirming it in people behaviours and convictions.

Overall, communication towards Expats is meant to transmit an image that goes beyond the idea of community: those who enter in Brussels’ expatriates multicultural environment become an *élite*, the political Europe *élite*.

Chapter 8

Mobility

8.1 Previous experiences abroad

The table 8.1 (referring to Questions 2 and 3) provides an oversight of interviewees' experiences abroad. Significant experiences are considered those with at least a 3 months duration. The table counts the significant experiences and divides them according to the recipient country (for practical reasons, world countries have been grouped in broad geographical areas) and their purpose. It also provides an estimation of the total time spent abroad.

The great majority of the interviewee had at least one significant experience abroad. This tendency is confirmed by respondents' impression about Expats in general:

One thing I noticed is that the people you meet here, it's not their first time abroad. They tend to be a kind of travelling people. I've almost never met someone down here that has always been in his own country for his all life and then suddenly come in Brussels, the most of the people have been travelling before [Sweden, 18: 92-95].

Moreover, one third of the interviewees spent overall more than two years abroad. There is not a particular tendency to remain in the provenience geographical area, but, with one exception, no interviewee, neither the ones from the East, went to Eastern countries. Few respondents travelled to other continents, usually remaining in the so called Western world; only two respondents went to other areas.

Interviewees went abroad mainly to study or to work, even though only a minority of them had a paid job, the majority having internships.

Q2-3		Q2	Q3: times per zone of destination					Q3: what for?				Q3	
cases	T.A.	significant experiences abroad before BRX	South EU	Central EU	North EU	East EU	U.S., Canada, Australia	other countries	study	internship / au pair	voluntary work	work	total time spent abroad (months)
1	Portugal	3		3					1	1		1	18
2	Spain	1			1				1				10
3	Italy (1)	many short experiences		1	1				2				N/A
4	Italy (2)	2	2						2				16
5	Malta	3		2	1				1	1		1	19
6	Greece	3		2		1			3				60
7	Cyprus	2	1	1					2				34
8	France	1			1				1	1			12
9	Belgium (1)	many short experiences											
10	Belgium (2)	1			1				1				9
11	Belgium (3)	few short experiences											
12	Netherlands	4	1		1			2	1	1	2		36
13	Germany	1			1				1				10
14	Austria	1		1						1			6
15	Slovenia	few short experiences											
16	Ireland	2	2						1			1	12

17	UK	3	2	1				3				24
18	Sweden	3			2		1	2			1	13
19	Finland (1)	2		1				1			1	48
20	Finland (2)	5	2	1	2			5				40
21	Estonia	1					1		1			12
22	Lithuania	2	1	1				1	1			48
23	Poland (1)	3	1	2					3			12
24	Poland (2)	2			1		1				2	4
25	Czech Rep.	8	1				2	5	2		6	52
26	Hungary	2		1	1				1	1		27
27	Romania	1	1						1			7
28	Bulgaria	0										
29	Switzerland	2		1			1		2			8
30	Moldova	never abroad										

Table 8.1: Interviewees experiences abroad (Questions 2 and 3)

Such a high level of mobility among interviewees gives a preliminary idea of the fact that they are a concentration of mobile people and do not represent Europeans in general, even though an *Eurobarometer* study [2006] points out that there is a broad consensus among Europeans regarding the following aspects (*inter alia*), which are positively considered:

- **Free movement of persons and goods**, the Schengen Agreement (often explicitly referred to), and the abolition of borders. This is very often one of the first associations mentioned, itself generally leading to the citing of benefits both collective – single market, economic development, etc. – and individual – freedom to travel, study, work and live in all the countries of Europe, etc. [...]
- **The facilitation and encouragement of mutual exchanges, cooperation, experience and knowledge**, thanks in particular to the opening up of borders, facilitation of travel, and student exchange programmes (Erasmus, Socrates). In this respect, sometimes explicit reference is made to the richness of cultural diversity in Europe (particularly in France and Italy), or to the gradual emergence of a European identity symbolised by the blue flag decorated with a circle of stars, the European passport, the European driving licence set to be introduced in the future, etc. [*Eurobarometer*, 2006: 20].

As it is possible to see in the table 8.2 (referring to Questions 4 and 5), concerning the use of European programs, about the half of the interviewees used at least once a European programme to go abroad, what seems to confirm the importance of these initiatives in allowing a (first) experience abroad.

	Q4-5	Q4	Q5		
	cases / T.A.		Erasmus	Leonardo	Others
1	Portugal	yes	x	x	
2	Spain	yes	x	x	
3	Italy (1)	no			
4	Italy (2)	yes	x	x	
5	Malta	no			
6	Greece	no			
7	Cyprus	no			
8	France	yes	x		
9	Belgium (1)	no			
10	Belgium (2)	no			
11	Belgium (3)	no			
12	Netherlands	no			
13	Germany	no			
14	Austria	no			
15	Slovenia	no			
16	Ireland	yes	x		
17	UK	yes	x		
18	Sweden	yes	x		
19	Finland (1)	no			
20	Finland (2)	yes	x*		European Master in Human Rights and Democratisation
21	Estonia	yes			au-pair programme
22	Lithuania	no			
23	Poland (1)	no			
24	Poland (2)	yes			AIESEC
25	Czech Rep.	no			
26	Hungary	yes	x		
27	Romania	yes	x		
28	Bulgaria	no			
29	Switzerland	no			
30	Moldova	no			

* = used a program similar to Erasmus, but available only for Scandinavian Countries

Table 8.2: Use of European programs

The Erasmus program is the most used, and it is interesting to see how many students it sent overall. The following figures show the inward and outward mobility of Erasmus students for the academic year 2003-2004 (European Communities, 2006: 48):

	EU-25	BE	CZ	DK	DE	EE	EL	ES	FR	IE	IT	CY	LV
Students sent	119 450	4 789	3 589	1 686	20 688	305	2 385	20 034	20 981	1 705	16 829	64	308
Students received	122 133	4 469	1 228	3 312	16 266	159	1 505	22 530	19 247	3 430	12 165	59	61

	LT	LU	HU	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK
Students sent	1 194	137	2 058	119	4 388	3 721	6 276	3 782	546	682	3 951	2 667	7 539
Students received	208	11	920	236	6 239	2 986	1 378	3 544	187	171	4 709	5 903	15 956

Table 8.3: Erasmus students' inward and outward mobility

8.2 The choice to move

In this subchapter answers to Question 6 (“Which are the reasons that pushed you to move from your country? Why just to Brussels?”) will be analysed. The most of the interviewees spent variable periods abroad, both for studying and working. Question 6 inquires into the reasons of the decision to go abroad, trying to identify the trigger that push people to move. Moreover, Question 6 investigates why the interviewees chose Brussels as their destination.

8.2.1. Reasons that push people to move from their country

Interviewee’s statements have been listed in 9 typical answers, which can be easily grouped in 3 main categories:

- category A – **experience**:
 1. a general, not better defined will to go abroad;
 2. a will to get life experience and/or discover new things
 3. the existence of previous positive experiences;
- category B – **profession**:
 4. the fact that a career opportunity was offered;
 5. the research for new opportunities;
 6. the fact that the interviewee has to travel because of his job;
 7. a will to work in the EU affairs (not exclusively in the EU institutions, but in all the organisations and private companies that operate in the fields of lobbying and policy making);
- category C – **personal sphere**:
 8. the will to follow a family member or the possibility to get support by family members;
 9. the fact of being married or in couple with someone who is abroad.

The table 8.4 shows answers distribution among the interviewees. Identifying a single reason why people want to go abroad is not easy, as each person have both personal motivations and reasons related to his situation in his country. João Delgado tries to simplify:

With 27 countries and different ages, so we can have a lot of different expectations. I think the main expectation is to know a new reality related to the other countries [A: 54-55].

Q6											
cases	T.A.	will to go abroad	will to get experience in life	previous positive experiences	given a career opportunity	seeking for new opportunities	travelling is the nature of my job	to work in the EU affairs	family	love, marriage	coming to BRX was a coincidence
		1	Portugal			1	1*				
2	Spain					1			2*		x
3	Italy (1)			1		1*		2*			
4	Italy (2)									1*	
5	Malta	1	2				2				x
6	Greece	1						2*			
7	Cyprus	2		1		1		2*		2	
8	France	1	1	1				2*			
9	Belgium (1)**	N/A									
10	Belgium (2)**	N/A									
11	Belgium (3)**	N/A									
12	Netherlands	1	1		2*						
13	Germany									1*	
14	Austria							1*			
15	Slovenia	2		2	1*					2	
16	Ireland	1		2				1*			
17	UK	2						2	1*		
18	Sweden		1								x
19	Finland (1)		1					2			
20	Finland (2)			1			2				x

21	Estonia		1		2*						
22	Lithuania			2						1*	
23	Poland (1)		1		2*						
24	Poland (2)		1		2*						
25	Czech Rep.	1		2				2*			
26	Hungary			2				1*			
27	Romania								1*		
28	Bulgaria								2*	1	
29	Switzerland							2*			
30	Moldova				1*						

1 = main push factors;

2 = support push factors;

* = the reason why just in Brussels;

** = as she did not go abroad, the question was: would you like to go abroad? Why?

Table 8.4: Reasons that pushed interviewees to move from their countries

Normally the interviewees say that the first reason why they wanted to go abroad was some sort of inner push to move, of deep curiosity towards diversity, that they either followed by chance (for instance: Sweden) or actively looking for opportunities (for instance: Czech Republic, Poland 2):

I've always liked to explore things: new experiences, seeing new things. When I got the opportunity to go and see something, I said "yes, I will take this opportunity": it's more saying "yes" when the opportunity did arrive than actively trying to get outside Sweden. Going to Australia was the only thing I really applied for, while the other things happened more for coincidence, and I am very happy for it today, because I think I learned a lot travelling [Sweden, 18: 18-22].

Every time I'm in France for a long time, I feel I would like to go abroad to see different people, different things. In Europe, because it's closer and it's much easier to travel in Europe than to other countries [France, 8: 19-21].

The first time I think it's been to improve my English and to know other cultures. [...] Then [I went] to Latin America because the culture thrilled me and I really wanted to know it, [...] and the same thing happens now with Asia, I would love to know Asia, and I really like when I see a documentary film about Asia [Czech Republic, 25: 131-139; my translation].

One is the economic reason, because of the salary. It's not so bad in Belgium, but transferred in Polish currency it's better. Secondly I'm kind of a nomad person, I don't mind travelling, I'm not extra interested in other countries but if I stay in the same place too long, I feel something is missing, so once a time I need a challenge, like going somewhere and living in different environments. Getting to know the other country is also very interesting [Poland 2, 24: 44-48].

The Dutch interviewee more deeply explains this feeling of curiosity:

Which are the reasons that pushed you to move out of your country?

Basically for most I think curiosity. Being curious what's out there, what's the difference; and also some kind of ambition, some kind of "I need to prove that I can make it", that I can make it somewhere else, that I can achieve it. And on top of all I just love the feeling of getting out of a plain and smelling different odors and hearing different sounds, and everything being different: I really really love that. Just a way of challenge basically.

Why did you choose Brussels?

I didn't actually choose Brussels, I just chose the job really [...; The Netherlands, 12: 33-39].

Curiosity is here mixed with the will to take a challenge, to challenge herself and show that she can face the difficulties of moving to another country. Difficulties that

other interviewees keep in their minds (see below). In this case it is also evident how the job is important, but still remains the second reason, not the first one, to explain why she chose to move. Nevertheless, job is the reason why she went just to Brussels: not because of Brussels itself, but because the opportunity was there. This is a kind of typical answer that constitutes a trend among the interviewees. Compare for example Dutch respondent's answer with the Estonian's one:

Why were you interested in living abroad?

To see other countries, to experience life abroad, to live a little bit time on my own, alone. I don't know. I've just decided to stay a couple of years on my own. Of course, this was a good opportunity to come here and work as well. Otherwise I'd have pondered another opportunity to go somewhere, not to Belgium, but somewhere else [Estonia, 21: 31-34].

In this quotation the idea of challenge is more positive, being expressed in terms of staying alone, "on my own".

Why these people are so curious about what is beyond the borders of their country? Different explanations have been given. Some of them could not explain it, like the French respondent, or the Swedish. The latter, maybe stimulated by cinema or television, wanted to experience a different reality at least once in his life and then discovered that travelling was great:

Positive aspects?

You get to learn about things. [...]

Why was that important for you?

To see new things? I'm not sure. [...] The first time I went abroad I said: "I want to go abroad at least once in my life, I might be married in two years", then I went abroad once, then I got some other opportunities, and I went again and again and again, and... I'm not sure, really. The first time I wanted to see something different, just once, and then you get to a habit. But I can't say why it's important for me.

Do you think that you were influenced by television?

Well, it showed that there are other parts of the world, definitely. That's why I wanted to go to Australia [...; Sweden, 18: 188-200].

Some others are used to it because their parents used to travel and they started moving from one country to another since they were children (this is the case, for example, of the Dutch respondent, as well as of Finland 2). In other cases, it's because of the environment where these people grew up, like it is explained in the following quotation:

I think that when you are young it's quite a good time to travel and to go abroad, things like that.

Why?

Because when you are old you might have a family, you might want to settle down, and... those things really.

I see, but in this answer you give for granted that all the people want to travel, and it is not like that, you know.

No, no, I don't think so, I'm not saying that everyone wants to travel... [...] I think that possibly, to deal with my background – I went to a European school, so there were sections of English, German, Italian, Spanish, so I'm used to meet people from other places and having contacts with other countries, so that maybe contributed to my wanting to go abroad, and I just think that it's more interesting [...; United Kingdom, 17: 28-38].

In many cases, this will to go abroad was reinforced by previous positive experiences, like in the following example :

First of all I didn't like to study in my country, I wanted to see something different, I decided to study in France because I always wanted to go to France: I went to a French school, I had my French civilization, French language, and for me it was a gate out of Greece to see something else, a different culture, and to get out of my place, you know. That was the main reason at the beginning, then I started liking it and now, to be very frank, it's just because I like EU community politics so much that I am in Brussels. I don't exclude the fact to go back to Greece, but Brussels gave me the opportunity to deal with the things I like [Greece, 6: 19-24].

Going abroad, in fact, gives the opportunity to learn not only about different people and cultures, but also about themselves:

when you go abroad you learn a lot about your country also, you think that things are normal, suddenly they are not normal anymore, so you know better where you are coming from [Finland 1, 19: 22-24].

The following example sums up the category of search for experience:

Do you really think that these people are happy travelling around, maybe changing a country every two years?

Some of them are happy, some of them don't want to have habits, changing is a way to break the cycle, but for some of them it's just a way of living, they just need to see other things, to move, to find works they don't know, to see new people [...; Belgium 2, 10: 94-98].

In at least a couple of cases, it is evident at a narrative level that interviewees are interested in going abroad to escape from their reality, considered culturally narrow.

For the Swedish respondent going abroad is a way to higher his social status, coming he from a low class family living in a rural area. The Maltese respondent, instead, makes many references, during the entire interview, to the Maltese traditional way of living, which obviously she does not like:

I don't think my parents have formed me in a particular open way, it was normal, traditional way, like all families in Malta [5: 198-199; ...]

in Malta it was different, because I had friends who do not understand me: they think I am workaholic, but if my job is demanding it's demanding. [5: 222-223; ...]

You mean that you are living with your parents until you get married?

That's the trend, but now it's changing a bit. My friends of my age are still with their parents. So I also used to feel different in that sense. [5: 242-244]

kids in Malta are not used to be independent. [...] I have some former students and I really enjoy when I encourage them: "come on, go for a month to study in Germany, go ahead, go". And there is always the fear that the parents pull them back, because they panic: "oh my god, you will be a month on your own, and what will you eat?" [5: 262-269].

My mother never worked, she is a housewife and dedicated her life to me and to my sister. She is very traditional and very conservative, and the more conservative she is, the more her kids want to fly away [Malta, 5: 354-355].

At a narrative level the most of the respondents see the possibility to spend a period abroad as a very positive experience. Some of them even think of it as a necessary experience that everyone should pass through, for instance the Maltese respondent, who used to teach to teenagers and always pushed them to spend at least a month in another country. A narrative that I would label "It is a great experience to explore other countries" is fully present in respondents' minds, up to the point that some of them see the fact of going abroad as a dream or feel it as a duty:

What does it mean for you the expression "citizen of the world"?

To have a large experience of the world, it means to travel, to work... I don't feel myself like this because I don't have the experience to go really outside of Europe [...] but maybe later. Surely maybe later! [Belgium 1: 189-193].

Obviously this mentality reflects in the fact that the majority of the interviewees feel obliged to say that an experience abroad would always be interesting, even though deep down they believe it would not be worthy:

There are a lot of countries where I can be myself, I think, but in the Middle East it would be kind of hard to live there, although it would be interesting, but it would be hard [...] The Netherlands, 12: 60-61].

Such a mentality can be developed through education or during previous positive experiences abroad; in both cases, it is the result of the pressure exercised by the cosmopolitan environment to which the individual is or has been exposed, a pressure than in Brussels is particularly intense:

Living in Brussels don't you feel some sort of pressure that you must be international, you must be one of this kind of people travelling around?

Yes. Here you meet a lot of people coming from everywhere. Sometimes you try to say "I'm Belgian, I enjoy to be here and I want to be here", because the other people you meet are international people, they just left their families, their home, and came to Belgium to live. You feel a sort of pressure, that Belgium has the NATO, the European Community, you feel the international way, everywhere you can find someone who is not Belgian [Belgium 2, 10: 66-71].

8.2.2. *Why to choose Brussels*

In many statements, as already seen in the cases of the Netherlands and Estonia, Belgium is presented as a destination chosen almost by a random process as consequence of the presence in Brussels of good opportunities, often related with EU affairs:

I wasn't specifically looking for Brussels, I was looking for experience in an international company that could give me the opportunity to go back to Poland after finishing the traineeship, and my preferred location was Europe, but just because it's close to home, it was a good experience and I didn't need a work permit like, for example, for the US [Poland 2, 24: 77-80].

What happened is that when I left Belgium I bought a round trip ticket and I had a return ticket, and I didn't know whether to take it or not, and then coincidently two weeks before I just got people asking me for an interview, so I thought to take my return ticket, fly to Belgium on a stop to Greece for example: if I get a job I can stay otherwise I stay for a month and see and then if I don't get the job I can go home to California. But I got this job on the first day so I stayed [Cyprus, 7: 173-177].

In some cases, indicated by the last column at right in the table, the interviewee explicitly says that going to Brussels was a coincidence: so it was, for instance, for two diplomats (Malta and Finland 2). The girl from Malta links the curiosity to go abroad to a need that is felt both as an inner push and as a job-imposed necessity:

I can't blame my job, because I chose this job, you know. To be a diplomat requires a certain disposition to move around the globe. I think it's a need, I see very much as a need for me. I don't consider my own country to be the whole world, I consider... I mean, life is too short and you need to travel, that's how you grow up, how you become an interesting person, even for your employer. So in terms of even job affair I think is very much the trend to see the flexibility of the person, how the person can change from one thing to the other, from one country to the other, and that's a skill, not everyone can do it, ya. Besides being a need, it is also interesting, I mean, you get to meet so many people, you are always open to the experiences even in terms of culture, and that is something [that], from my own island, I cannot always get [Malta: 5: 34-41].

This necessity is something that can be experienced in daily life too:

if you spend some time abroad you gain other things, maybe you do not study or work, but you get to know people and you learn a lot, because most of all specialists [...] are not able to lower themselves to the majority of the people level [Czech Republic, 25: 68-70].

So a work experience abroad is seen also as some sort of vocational training that integrates individuals' qualification.

For some people Brussels represents the place where the fulfilment of one's own professional ambitions is possible:

When I went to college, actually for what I did in college I had to come to Brussels, and when I decided what I wanted to do in college I was very young, 17, but I knew that would be ended up in Brussels. So I always wanted to work abroad, but because of what I did in college Brussels was the natural consequence. I like Brussels but it's not just the dream of my life, it's only a consequence of my studies [Ireland, 16: 27-31].

For others, instead, Brussels is the place where to start a career in the EU institutions:

I came to Brussels because I had been accepted to have a stage in the Council.

And now?

Now I live here, I study here and work here.

But why did you decide to remain here?

Because I decided to study... It was random, because I have been accepted to this work, I had friends here, so now I'm here.

You work here and you'll remain here?

It's not that I had the idea to stay here. I didn't know it when I accepted here but it's OK, I can be here [Poland 1, 23: 22-30].

Another example of this is given by the Czech interviewee, who spent more than 4 years of her life travelling in North and Latin America, but who went to Brussels with a different spirit:

What does it mean for you to live in Brussels?

Well... to me is very much connected with the job, I did not come here to have a good time or walking around or I don't know what, I came here because of the job [in the EU affairs] [Czech Republic, 25: 170-172; my translation].

In some cases, the period in Brussels is a parenthesis in interviewees' usual work life, instrumental to get useful professional contacts:

So you came to Brussels because of the kind of work you were doing?

Yes. Here you can make relationships, acquaintances, with the Commission, the Council and with the Parliament [Hungary, 26: 35-37].

In several cases the interviewee was specifically looking for better work conditions, like in this example:

So, as the work conditions [in Spain] are bad, I did not find a job in my field and I started to work in other stuff; in Barcelona I used to work 14 hours per day, and I was paid 900 euro. So, as I was still liking my field, I did not wait that much [...], as I was willing to go abroad again... by chance it came out in Brussels, in Brussels I have family, and I thought it was interesting, something I could do [...] and here I am.

Let's see, things do not come out by chance. Was it really a chance, or did you look for it?

No, I definitely looked for it. [...] I received a scholarship for Peru, I refused it. I could be in Peru just now. [...] I used to spend all day long in the Internet, looking for opportunities, so it was something I looked for. But Brussels option seemed to me the easiest way, because I have family here, and the change was... was easier. Despite the fact that either here work conditions are not good.

What family do you have here? Close members?

No, it's not close members. It's my boyfriend sister. My boyfriend came here as well. When I received the grant he decided to come with me.

This means that you are living together.

Yes [Spain, 2: 33-51; my translation].

Different points come out from this quotation. Firstly, the main reason to move was the research for better work conditions. The girl did not accept her country's labour conditions and decided to look for other opportunities. Secondly, she was looking for new opportunities not just inside her country, not just in Europe, but all over the world, as she confirms when I ask her whether she would work wherever:

Yes, yes, everywhere, if something comes out... [...] The fact, you know, is that we [she and her boyfriend] are gambling, we are gambling. I'm telling you that we even applied to go to New Zealand [...] our mind is global, it's absolutely not like "we have to go back to Spain", no no: we go where conditions are better and what we do is more motivating, and possibly in a nice place. [...] As our hands are empty, we have nothing to win and nothing to lose. [Spain, 2: 114-120; my translation]

The reported quotation well describes the mentality of some of the interviewees, even though only one other respondent (Greece) thinks she is ready to leave for wherever in the world. This means that, even though it is implicit in her discourse, also for the Spanish girl there is a wide availability to go abroad, which confirms the conclusion that the most of the interviewees are first of all pushed by a will to discover something new, to wide their horizon.

It is interesting that the Italians and the Spanish respondents are the only ones who explicitly affirm that they chose to go abroad to look for better work conditions. This fact might confirm the low degree of satisfaction about work registered in those two countries respect to the other European countries [Eurobarometer, 2007b: 22].

A third consideration about the above quotations is that the opportunity in Brussels came out by chance while looking for any possibility. A fourth consideration highlights the importance given to a support, in this case the family, in the choice of the destination country. This leads to the personal push factors:

There are two reasons why people come to Brussels: for work or make experience or make more money, and second for personal reasons. [Slovenia, 15: 212-213]

The girl from Slovenia talks about personal reasons, which can be of different kinds. In some cases, a family member may have emigrated to Belgium, like in the Romanian and Bulgarian interviewees cases (his father and his mother respectively). In other cases, the person is following his or her partner, like it is often said about Commission officers' wives. The Portugal interviewee states that he accepts a job opportunity in Brussels also because Belgium is closer than Portugal to Germany, where his (Finnish) girlfriend is resident. The same answer was given by the Cypriot girl, even though in both cases this push factor is inextricably linked to professional push factors:

What are the reasons that pushed you to move from your country?

Different ones. One that I had previous experiences, and I enjoyed them, they were good experiences, so I was already willing to go abroad again; secondly, it was the job opportunity, we can say it was an improvement, and also the salary was considerably better; thirdly, for personal reasons, due to the fact that my girlfriend also is abroad, closer to Brussels than to my hometown in Porto.

Would you say that the main push factor was your job career or would you put the three motivations on the same level?

The 3 things, because it was a conjugation of reasons that made me accept [Portugal, 1: 21-28].

This time I just came back for working a little bit, he [her boyfriend] is in the army, that's not the best reason to return, I mean, it was my motive to come back ...instead of living in California I thought it would be better to live in Brussels, which is closer to Greece [Cyprus, 7: 144-146].

Finally, like in the Slovenian or the Bulgarian cases, individuals may go abroad to put a distance from a love disappointment. The following quotation illustrates a case in which the desire to go far from an ended love is made possible by the presence of a family member in Brussels:

My mother is working at the Embassy, I was working in Sofia and she asked me if I want to come. She came here one and a half years ago. But all the time I said "oh I don't know, I don't know, I'm not sure, I don't want to".

So she is working at the Embassy here? And asked you to come here?

Yes. To study French, to work something or to make an internship, something like that, just to change the environment, so I was not sure in the very beginning, there's nothing to do in Brussels but after I decided to try to see what's happening here and so on.

Why did you change your mind?

If I have to be honest it's because I had a very serious relationship with a girl in Sofia, we lived together for 3 years and we just split up and there was nothing to do there, I was a little bit disappointed from this situation, so I decided to change place and to look for something new, so I came here, but I think that very soon I will go back to Bulgaria [28: 19-31].

The Belgian interviewees also provide some of the reasons why people may not want to go abroad. For one of them the main reason is personal, related to a love relationship:

Do you envisage to go abroad for a long period?

No, I chose not to go abroad for a long period, because I have a relationship from the age of 18. I couldn't leave for a year, because then I would probably lose my boyfriend. [11: 8-10]. Ya, and I'm quite a family person. I think I would be feeling homesick. A couple

of months I always consider, maybe later I could do it, but not like a year or longer. Or I would like to travel for work for a couple of weeks, whatever. [Belgium 3, 11: 19-21]

This example reminds us how difficult is to manage a relationship in the distance. Nevertheless in the sample 7 people over 30 have their partners in another country, which seems to be an evidence of a difference in their mentality: they valorise the fact of being abroad over the everyday dimension of their couple relationship.

For one of the Belgian interviewees the explanations has an intimate root:

Did you take into consideration to go abroad for a significant amount of time?

Yes, but I don't really want to. Here in Brussels you can meet a lot of people coming from everywhere, and also I like my country, even though there are a lot of problems and things that should be changed, but I'd rather stay here.

You can't know it if you do not try another reality.

When I went in England I enjoyed it, but I had the feeling I was missing something back home, and when I left England, I had the feeling to leave something back also, that I was leaving something to go back to something else, but I had the feeling to be cut in two, and each time I go back to my host family it's always the same: I enjoy to be there, because it's another kind of life for me, but... I'd rather be in Belgium, and go to visit, and not live in another country [Belgium 2, 10: 39-48].

In this example common migrants' feeling of being divided among two lands is cognitively described ("the feeling to be cut in two"). Actually is not easy to leave a country to go somewhere else, especially when the reward is not clear. For the Moldovan girl Brussels constitutes her first time abroad, and the experience revealed to be satisfactory:

Which reason pushed you...

[She interrupts me] Nothing pushed me. I didn't even want to come. My parents insisted and everybody told it was a good chance for me to make experience, so I came [30: 21-23; ...]. It means a lot. I met a lot of people; a huge amount of people. I speak two languages I didn't speak before (I spoke English but I didn't use it everyday). And now I study French... it's like that all my life has changed. I changed my work, I changed the country I live, I changed the language I speak, I changed my friends.

With what consequences?

It is a great experience for me, I feel like I am more... (pause) I'm more developed, more open now, much more than I was before [Moldova, 30: 36-41].

For the people from Bulgaria and Czech Republic, being from the New Members Countries, going to Brussels meant a lot of bureaucratic difficulties:

Do you have a contract?

Ya. But the point is that it was very difficult in the very beginning to make a working contract, because you need the 'permis de travail', that's why [I have] the contract for an internship for one year [pause]. But it was almost the same like a working contract, because you have a minimum salary, you need a permission to stay here and so on, so it was like it took time to prepare the documents.

Because you need a work permit.

Ya. I thought I don't need it but after that they said that [I need it] because it's a Belgian company, not an international [one] [Bulgaria, 28: 59-66].

The only thing that surprised me is that we cannot work here, all the people from the East, what seemed to me a little shocking, because we don't have the work permit, and I spent one year [in a Master about EU policy] learning all the wonders [about the EU]... How can this be one of the most discriminating countries? And to obtain the work permit, it's like for a Mexician [...] And in the private sector in order to employ me they should get together all the documentation, and my CV is not that good. So this is my criticism about the European Union [Czech Republic, 25: 172-194].

To summarise, I list the main conclusions:

- a. the first reason to go abroad normally is an inner need, which intensity may vary from simple curiosity to a deep will to get experience by travelling; this feeling is often reinforced by positive experiences abroad collected during the years.
- b. The second reason is given by job opportunities, especially by the possibility to work in the EU affairs, which for many means the fulfilment in practice of what they have been preparing for through their studies; almost all the people are in Brussels just because they found or have been offered a position there. A minority of them are in Brussels by chance, because Brussels is where they found their job opportunity or they have been sent by the organisation they work for.
- c. Personal reasons are normally a secondary push factor that may lead to the decision to move, or just orientate the choice of the destination on Brussels.
- d. Interviewees seem to be work oriented.
- e. Interviewees have a global mentality.

8.2.3. Where would you go?

Even though the matter was not foreseen in the questionnaire, while conducting the interviews sometimes I found useful to ask whether the individual would go to live or would accept a job offer wherever in the world⁶³. Criteria used to select the destination country, in fact, are not so transparent; as João Delgado explains, they are not just cultural, but also economic, or linked to the language:

I also was an Erasmus and had the feeling that usually people tend to go to similar countries respect to their own one. Do you have any data about this?

No. I have exactly the same impression, but there are different factors that play. It's not only to go to a similar country, it can be very tricky; there are facts that are conditioning the training and the economical reasons are important. The fact that people go to a similar country can also be because it's less expensive, so it cannot only be interpreted with cultural reasons, but also with economic reasons. At the same time there is the language factor, that can be an important limitation, for instance countries where you speak English are much more demanded than other countries, and also, as you said, cultural aspects also play something, that's clear: you are not very motivated to go to a completely different country where it's difficult to control the language and it's very expensive [A: 66-75].

I would add that personal interests, career opportunities and the easiness to move to a country respect to others are factors as well. Interviewees, anyway, seem to focus on three main points: job offers, language and cultural diversity. Only two people firmly answer that they are ready to leave for any place in the world (Spain and Greece), while the others give different answers.

The most of the people prefer to travel inside Europe, because it's bureaucratically much easier than outside the EU, and because distances are relatively short, in any case, these arguments also hides an ideological position:

Have you ever thought to move to other countries?

Yes, I would have liked to work in Paris and I have not excluded it yet.

Outside Europe?

No, perhaps job-related travels, but not to go, for example, to the USA, this no [Italy 1, 3: 63-66].

⁶³ Unfortunately I did not collect this answer from the beginning, so I do not have data for each interviewee.

One of the problem may be the language. The most of the people already know a considerable number of languages, but do not appear ready to study a new one from the beginning:

Would you travel everywhere in the world, or just in Europe?

I think I would travel more or less everywhere, where I have access to the languages. So a country where my language skills would need another 1 or 2 years in order to improve is nothing, which is interesting for me. So at least, I don't know, I go to a country where you can survive with English, French, German, but it doesn't have to be the native language there.

So you wouldn't go to China?

For example. I cannot imagine at the moment [Austria, 14: 62-67].

In other cases the problem is related to the perception of the recipient country culture:

I think I would have found an opportunity in Australia.

Why?

It seems an exciting country for me. Of course culture is different as well, but it's not so different maybe like in China, but I wanted to go somewhere far away. When I came back from the States, then I was already thinking to go to Australia. I don't know, maybe because of the good climate there. But I wouldn't have considered anything else right now [Estonia,21: 37-42].

There are a lot of countries where I can be myself, I think, but in the Middle East it would be kind of hard to live there, although it would be interesting, but it would be hard; and I really like the cities, I don't think I would like to live in a very rural area [The Netherlands, 12: 60-62].

From a professional point of view, some interviewees are concerned with the difficulties they might experience abroad:

Only for England or any country?

To other countries too.

In the world or in Europe?

It would depend on the job, if it was a job like...if it was in the Middle East, or working in China, and you have a sure job, and you might work for three years and then you go back to England, or you could then go to France, for example, I might do that, but if it's meant going without any job security to Thailand to find a job, I wouldn't do that.

In principle you are open to travel outside Europe...

In principle yes, but for the moment I am more interested in Europe.

Why?

Because I studied European languages, because that's what I know more about, because I think that if you move to a foreigner country which is very different from your own, it is very easy to feel isolated, and I wouldn't really want that, so...

Would you feel safer in Europe?

Probably, I mean, I still feel safer here than I would feel living in Gaza [laugh] [United Kingdom, 17: 83-97].

Finally, a few interviewees realistically notice that moving to another country always implies difficulties. The more the destination country is culturally different from mover's, the more adaptation becomes hard:

maybe it's also a disposition of character for me, and after 5 years or maybe 8 I need to change. Living abroad gives me the sense of knowledge and always discovering something new. On the other hand I realised that there is a disadvantage in everything, so after a while you can get tired even of living abroad as well. It's not easy to just start from scratch in a totally foreign country. Image, I have to go to China, for example, which has totally a different culture and I think that adaptation would be much more difficult than within the European Continent, for example, where I'm familiar with the language and familiar with the culture [Malta, 5: 45-51].

Overall, interviewees show a very cosmopolite mentality. The restrictions that some of the respondents put to their potential destinations do not weaken the conclusion that they have a global mentality, they generally consider the whole world as the stage for their action. Inside this stage, they feel free to express preferences and choose the best place for them. Nevertheless, in a minority of cases there is the reasonable doubt that the declared cosmopolite attitude would not be transformed in action, like in the following example:

Would you like to have a professional experience abroad?

Yes, sure.

Why and where?

Why? Where? Oh! Mostly, I would say European Union, North America or Australia, or South Africa.

Why?

I can't explain that, but I really want to go there, to work, to visit, to meet people, to know about the cultures, the languages, to improve English. I don't want to go to China.

Why?

I don't know, it's a country that, it's not a country that attracts me. Just historically it can be interesting in cultural books, and I don't know why, because maybe it could be very interesting, but...

From the countries you mentioned I can say that maybe you have in mind an idea of West, of Western culture.

Yea. [...]

Do you think that you are scared from what is outside the Western culture?

Not at all. No, I've been to Tunisia, Turkey, different countries. I'm just not ready now. I had some problems in Tunisia... but Turkey was really great, best vacation of ever, but I

think now I'm not ready to explore the entire world, first the part I know better, then other countries [Belgium 1, 9: 39-57].

Up to here the interviewee seems trying to hide her reticence about culturally very different places, but remains in line with her first statement: she would remain in Western countries. Then a new obstacle to travelling abroad comes out:

So if they told you “come to South Africa and work here” you would go.

Yea, if I can go with my boyfriend, sure.

Do you say this because you don't want to stay without your boyfriend or because you would feel safer with him?

I can't stay without him more than two days [9: 60-64].

If the presence of her boyfriend is so important, what is quite understandable, but for any reason he cannot follow her, probably she will not go abroad. So in the most optimistic case her statements reflect dreams rather than plans, aspiration which might not become reality.

8.3 Life in Brussels

In this subchapter answers to Question 7 (“What does it mean for you to live in Brussels?”) and to Question 8 (“Did you have expectations about your permanence here? Which ones?") will be analysed.

8.3.1. *Living in Brussels*

The table 8.5 (referring to Question 7) shows the typical answers which describe the meaning that interviewees give to their experience in Brussels.

Q7		Table 8.5: How interviewees describe their experience in Brussels																
cases	T.A.	possibility to make a post-graduate course	possibility to start/improve my career	possibility to get experience to use in my country	possibility to work with/closer to the EU institutions	to work hard / for long hours	to work few hours	more satisfaction / stability	possibility to discover a new city / country	possibility to get in touch with foreigners	difficulties in getting integrated	difficulties in settling down	living in a quite / nice town	living in a dirty, chaotic town	living in a boring, anonymous, lonely town	living in a stimulating city	good geographical position	terrible weather
		1	Portugal		x			x			x		x					
2	Spain	x			x		x	x					x					
3	Italy (1)		x		x			x										
4	Italy (2)														x			x
5	Malta				x	x				x		x	x				x	
6	Greece									x								
7	Cyprus				x										x			x
8	France		x		x	x				x							x	
9	Belgium (1)	x			x					x								
10	Belgium (2)									x								
11	Belgium (3)				x					x								
12	Netherlands					x				x								
13	Germany	x								x								
14	Austria				x	x		x						x				
15	Slovenia			x		x				x							x	x
16	Ireland				x													
17	UK				x					x			x				x	
18	Sweden				x					x								
19	Finland (1)												x				x	
20	Finland (2)					x				x						x	x	
21	Estonia		x		x								x	x		x		
22	Lithuania									x								
23	Poland (1)	x		x	x					x								
24	Poland (2)									x			x			x		
25	Czech Rep.				x			x		x						x		
26	Hungary		x		x	x												
27	Romania						x						x					
28	Bulgaria			x						x					x			x
29	Switzerland				x					x	x							
30	Moldova					x			x									

Question 7 was intentionally vague, to let interviewees free of interpreting it according to their impressions. This process originated a great number of diverse answers, often only slightly different. I organised them in 5 categories:

- category A – **studies**:
 1. the possibility to make a post-graduate course;
- category B – **profession**:
 2. the possibility or attempt to start or to improve a professional career;
 3. the possibility to get experience to use once back in interviewee's country;
 4. the possibility to work with the EU institutions or in the sub-world of organisations which operate around them;
 5. to work hard and/or for long hours;
 6. to work few hours;
 7. to be professionally more satisfied and/or to have a more stable professional situation than in one's own country;
- category C – **life experience**:
 8. the possibility to discover a new city and/or a new country;
- category D – **social sphere**:
 9. the possibility to get in touch with people coming from other countries;
 10. to experience difficulties in getting integrated;
- category E – **urban life**:
 11. to experience difficulties in settling down;
 12. living in a quite and/or nice town;
 13. living in a dirty and/or chaotic town;
 14. living in a boring, anonymous or lonely town;
 15. living in a stimulating city;
 16. living in a town with a good geographical position;
 17. living in an area where the weather is awful.

Only a few of the interviewees went to Brussels to study, even though some of them had a previous experience in the Belgian capital and went back there after some

time. The professional aspect is instead very much discussed and remains the centre of people experience in Brussels. Different professional aspects are raised. Some of the interviewees found in Brussels a better or more stable labour situation than in their country, with reflexes on their personal life:

Personally it meant a lot, because my boyfriend and I [...] here feel more motivated, we began doing things that we like, and our couple relationship improved. In Barcelona [...] I did not have time to stay at home, because I was working many hours per day... he did not work, he could not find a job [...], so this had repercussions on our relationship [...]. And the Belgian concept, which we very much like, is that you work the time you have to, finishing at 5 and having 60% of personal life and 40% of professional life. This is the mentality we found here, and which in Spain we did not meet. And this benefited us as a couple [Spain, 2: 64-71; my translation].

Other people, on the contrary, complain about the long hours they have to spend in the office. This might appear a contradiction, but it is not, as I could realise working in Brussels. The Spanish girl is right about the Belgian work-time concept, which is definitely “9 to 6” hour. It is not a coincidence that at 6 the happy hour starts in the Expats meeting points (like place de Luxembourg, cited in almost all the interviews), calling hundreds of young professionals to specific bars and pubs. Nevertheless some people actually work for long hours: those who work in international private companies operating in the European projects field and those who work with social events (like embassies and national representation offices personnel). These professionals actually have a much longer schedule, especially if their boss is from the South of Europe, where spending much time at work is positively considered by employers. Work culture is in fact one of the most evident differences between Southern and Northern countries: whereas in the South people are required to remain in the office for at least one or two hours more, in the north this is rather unconceivable. However, many people affirm that they work a lot just because it is considered a status indicator. A clear example of this is given by the three interviewees working as Members of Parliament assistants. The Austrian and the Dutch both say they work around 10-12 hours per day:

How many hours a day do you work?

Very different. Minimum on a normal day maybe 8, but it's not very realistic, maximum about 14, but I think the average is from 10 to 11 [Austria, 14: 74-77].

Basically, spending 12 hours at work every day it's not a lot of hours left, right? [The Netherlands, 12: 117-118].

But the Romanian respondent, who is also working as a MEP assistant, exposes a different point of view:

How many hours do you work?

I tend to stay in the office around 10 hours a day from Monday to Thursday, but I don't work for most of them, for most of them I spend my time in Internet or reading the newspaper. I do work maybe 3 hours a day, and on Friday at noon everybody leaves. So I can't say that I work a lot: I spend a lot of time in the office, but I don't work a lot.

Yesterday I interviewed one of your colleagues here in the Parliament, and she said that she works at least 8 hours, but that it's not realistic, normally she works 11, and she seemd to be very stressed just by saying that.

They stay here, it doesn't mean that they work. They go to take some coffees and speak with people, and maybe say "it's very interesting what I saw today in the Committee meeting", but it's not interesting what they saw in the Committee meeting, because a Committee meeting is interesting for a few people: the rapporteurs and some guys who are there for lobbying. For the rest of the people is shit, and they are there just because they are waiting their time to speak. But people, especially stagiaires, say it's very interesting: it's always a sign of wealth, here in Brussels, like the badge you use to enter or the hours you spend in the office. You say: "I stay long hours in the office so I'm important to my company", you know this logic [...]. People who are really that important don't have the time to tell it. This is also why I strongly dislike the people that you meet here... this is the kind of bullshit that you here at parties: "I work so much", but it doesn't appeal to me, because I know exactly what they do. I strongly dislike this tendency to identify you as important because you work much, or you wear a suit. [...] I never believe them. I don't call it out, because business is business, but I wouldn't probably speak with him a second time, because I don't need him [27: 188-219].

It is interesting what he says in the last part of the quotation: "I don't call it out, because business is business". Actually an Expat subculture feature is that this kind of attitudes, well represented by expressions like "I work many hours", "I hold an important position", "I attended to an interesting meeting" or even "it is interesting to speak with you", are very frequent and no one really believes in them, but everybody respects the tacit agreement not to unmask them. I consider it as one of the most important Expat subculture social rules, which confirms how much career-driven Expats are and how much they identify their social position with their work position. Other strategies, in fact, are used to transmit a sense of professionalism:

Once I was shocked. I went to a person's place, I was quite surprised because they had books [sic], but they were all about whatever member of parliament did or what I can learn about him, or about policies of European Union. Come on, you don't have this kind

of books on your shelves at home, you have them in your office or take them at home because you need them to study, not near your bed. What kind of person does that? It's like American Psycho in Europe! [Romania, 27: 164-168].

The satisfaction that a great part of the Expats may get by the fact of being recognised as important professionals, however, is not sufficient to let many of them feel integrated in the city:

[In the FP7 infodays] you see people who work here, people who work there, who just go there for that [for business], people who are here [in Brussels] in the headquarters of many companies, but they tell you that they want to go away from here, and... I met people who work in the Commission, or in NGOs, and I was at parties, I spoke with the world, "I work in this", "take my card", a little boring... [Spain, 2: 132-137; my translation].

Considering the kind of job available in the city, Brussels is widely seen as the best place for people interested in EU affairs:

[...] it's like the heart of the EU, where things are constantly decided, you feel you are at the centre of the action when it comes to European policy making [United Kingdom, 17: 45-46].

Brussels appears to be a place where people move mostly or exclusively for professional reasons, to improve their skills, to establish useful contacts, to work in the EU environment:

What does it mean for you to live in Brussels?

The best opportunity I can have for my future work, for improving [Hungary, 26: 48-49].

Generally interviewees are quite happy that they have the possibility to work for a period in Brussels, both professionally and personally, because they get labour experience and at the same time they live in an international atmosphere:

It means I get to see interesting things. As I got a degree in political science, it's much the atmosphere that for me is more interesting, as there are a lot of European issues and big issues that are discussed here. I work for a regional office, so it's more at the local level, but still it's a wider policy area that you see. [...] I can actually practice what I've been studying being here, I think it's nice. And the more I work here, the more I get: there are a lot of subjects I'm getting more and more interested in, which is nice. [Sweden, 18: 28-39]

What does it mean to you living in Brussels?

To get international experience. Because you go to Athens and you have only Greeks, while here there is a very international environment, you go to some parties and you meet international people, you go somewhere in the institutions, it's very international.

And why is it so important to you having international experience?

Because I can get new experiences, like I can meet people from different countries, see their mentality, learn some languages.

The point is: why all that is important for you?

To have a broad horizon, a wide horizon I would say [Poland 1, 23: 41-49].

Why wouldn't you like to work for a Czech institution?

Because I would rather like to work in an international environment, a more European one, I do not want to work only for Czech enterprises, I see Europe as more global.

Why do you give so much importance to work in an international environment?

Because that way I can meet many people, learn a lot of different cultures, yes, I love to know different cultures[...; Czech Republic, 25: 158-163].

Despite this enthusiasm, working in the EU world often is not rewarding and after some failures to enter in the institutions people leave:

There are a lot of people here who are not happy, because they can't get a job in the Commission and they want it. That's why a lot of people are coming here, because they pay a lot, they pay very well and if you get a permanent job you don't really have to work hard for that. It depends on your expectations, on your ambitions when you come here.

Have you met these people?

Yes. I've been here for 2 years, I lived in Schumann, which is like, you know, where the traineeship in the Commission, in the Parliament, come and go every 6 months, and you see a lot of people coming and spending 6 months doing exams, interviews, then they finish their traineeship and they are out of money and have to go home. Or you see people with very little money working for lobby groups, but they stay in Brussels because they know they can get a job at the commission where the wages is 2000 a month up to 6000, to do the same work. You have a lot of frustrated people here [Ireland, 16: 63-73].

What does it mean for you to live in Brussels?

In general? Hmm... Good question... Right now my work is here, I have made new friends here, ya, I think that... just now to stay here a couple of years is a good opportunity to have experience at the Council and to live here, but what does it mean? I cannot say in one sentence [Estonia, 21: 43-46].

Actually almost all the interviewees reflect this scheme: only a minority of them has spent more than two years in the city, and some of them are there for very short time frames (see table Q8-9). This create a very peculiar situation in which a feeling of transitoriness is widely experienced:

I think Brussels is a unique case, in the sense that it's not a real city like all other cities in Europe, it's very much focused on EU work; people are very much professional and work-oriented and I feel a bit of a difference from other cities. That's basically it.

Can you explain deeper these differences with other cities?

Here you know that people are there for a temporary time [...; Malta, 5: 62-66].

Being the EU environment so dominant in Brussels, some people may find it annoying:

[...] the other thing that I hate here is that everybody are trying to get in this stupid European Commission or Committee Regions, all these stupid European institutions. It's like their dreams. Come on, wake up! This is the biggest mafia [...]. You are going to work 50 years on one table from 9 to 5 [he beats on the table] until the end of your life [Bulgaria, 28: 241-244].

Apart from personal opinions, working in the institutions may be different from the standard successful image many people have. One of the interviewee, from Finland, is a European Commission officer, and express his opinion about the Commission. The following long quotations is a lucid analysis not only about the Commission, but also about the difference between Northern and Southern Europe:

I had this kind of international idealism about international cooperation.

Do you still have it?

Not that much. It's sad but I've also learned that we stay very strongly prisoner of our origins: you see it in the Commission too: we have Italians, we have Greeks, we have Finns, in practical the people coming from the biggest nations have a strong identity, some of them in particular, like French. It's linked to the language, to the culture. Often when people are abroad, they have the tendency to search for the compatriots, so you have there Greek associations, French associations and so on. The Commission has different nationalities, in reality. It shouldn't be like this, but you just don't become European in the sense that you forget your origin, you have nostalgia about it more easily than when you are in your country, because you don't have the routine which sometimes makes you tired in your own country. There's a nostalgic approach: "it was so nice in my country". I can give you an example: Finland joined the EU in 1995 and ten years later 40% of the Finnish working in the Commission left the European Commission to go back to their country. So this is about nostalgia the way you're abroad, you don't use your language, the way of living is different and you just go back. It's very often and it happens not only to Finnish but to a lot of Nordic people. It's funny.

Is it the same for people from the South?

No. There is not this kind of social phenomenon, maybe it explains, if you want, why Brussels has still some of a Latin town, even though certainly you have not in the South of Europe this kind of place where all different traditions meet. But it's still a Latin town. [...] in the Northern countries we are living in a kind of social society, because

people working at the Commission certainly earn more than in their own countries, but it's not that important to these people, they can go back and have just half or less of their salary in the Commission. It may be more important for Mediterranean people, they don't have this family model where two people are working, both parents are working, so when they come here they still have this model, whereas Nordic people are changing their family life very abruptly, because one of them, the wife or the husband, just stops working while coming here, and for the person who stays at home is a total psychological disaster, ten-fifteen [years] of his career [thrown away] [19: 27-52].

Concerning the social sphere, it is generally seen as positive, with the exception of two cases: the girl from Switzerland says that she does not know how to meet people outside her job, but when I interviewed her, she was just arrived in Brussels, so probably it's just a matter of time before she gets integrated; the other case is the Portuguese consultant, who is working usually until late in the evening and does not have the time to go to Expats meeting points:

So don't you feel integrated in the city?

No, no, definitely not, not at all.

Why?

For lack of time and opportunities, basically. Lack of time due to job constraint: it takes a lot of time; and opportunity because since I'm living alone, it is much more difficult to know new people, and also because since I work in a small office there aren't many opportunities to make connections [Portugal, 1: 41-46].

Nevertheless these are two exceptions. Almost all the people see as a positive and rewarding fact the presence of a huge international community in Brussels:

It's easy to live here. Quite tolerant towards other cultures [Finland 2, 20: 61].

People here are very down, very boring, the only thing here is the international environment and the people you can meet here. You can meet a lot of people [from] all over the world [who are] making internships or whatever, so it's interesting to meet, to speak with them, to see how they are living, what they are doing and so on and so on, but I think that one year is absolutely enough to spend here in Brussels [Bulgaria, 28: 33-36].

What I really liked about Brussels, and is obviously the reason I shacked to that, is the international environment, everybody being around, all these languages, all people being from different cultures, and the most difficult part is to get to know the different cultures and to know what the background is. So every time that you call [during work], you have to think: "ok, I'm calling an Italian person", which means attitude different to them than if I call a German person [The Netherlands, 12: 40-44].

Brussels is a city where it's easier to live, because it's more international, more than Rome or Prague, and I do not feel like a stranger. Now for me it would be very hard to go back to Lithuania, as the mentality is very different [...; Lithuania, 22: 42-45; my translation].

The international community is so big that two of the Belgian interviewees do not need to live abroad because they are rewarded by the international atmosphere they find in Brussels. According to their description, they find the world outside Belgium right in her city:

Did you take into consideration to go abroad for a significant amount of time?

Yes, but I don't really want to. Here in Brussels you can meet a lot of people coming from everywhere, and also I like my country, even though there are a lot of problems and things that should be changed, but I'd rather stay here [Belgium 2, 10: 39-42].

Such an international community has an influence on people's life. The fact of meeting people from other countries represent an opportunity to establish useful contacts for one's career:

You mentioned the fact that you knew that here there was an important international community. Why was it important to you?

Both for work and for personal reasons. For work because I imagined I would establish contacts that would favour my career or give me the opportunity to go somewhere else after I finish in Brussels, maybe to some other European country, not back to Slovenia. [...] Personal reasons: in Slovenia I had strict Slovenian friends, [...] here I have friends from all over Europe and really it's interesting to me to see how they are, work and think, how they talk, and I can improve my English as well [Slovenia, 15: 59-72].

Meeting people from abroad allows to improve one's foreign language knowledge and enriches at a human level:

Why do you give so much importance to the multicultural environment? Which are your expectations with regard to this environment?

As I said, I love speaking foreign languages, I get a big bored when I speak only French with only French people. Then I think you meet so many nice people. When you are working with people from different cultures it enriches you, you discover so much from the others.

Do you think that European institutions can give you such an environment?

Well, being in the European Parliament I see how it works and I think it's really a nice environment [France, 8: 35-41].

Staying with foreigners also open people's mind and enlarge their horizon:

Does this cosmopolitan environment has some sort of influence on you?

For me as a person not really, but it's always nice to get to know people from different countries, it's like you're travelling and then you meet different cultures. That's the big advantage. You mean personally?

Yes.

Maybe I can see a broader picture. For instance at home they're always talking about Belgian politics and I react "Oh shut up, there are so many things happening in the world and not only here!" [Belgium 3, 11: 35-40].

Of course, sometimes this multicultural environment has its downside, as one of the respondent states:

To sum up, how would you say that the cosmopolitan environment of the city influence you?

Sometimes I don't have the feeling to be at home [10: 99-100].

Moreover, living in an international community constitutes a challenge for the individual, for his self-esteem as well as for his adaptability:

When we go to the high school reunion, for example, some of my ex school friends are still in college, or still studying, or some of them have dropped, and they say "Oh you live abroad, you work abroad, you are a star", but when you are here and you see that people speak five languages and they study in three different universities and they have PhDs and they are of your age, well, then you are not so wow anymore, so sometimes it can influence your self-esteem. [...] But here there's more international stimulation, you have daily contacts with people not much more educated but much more experienced, internationally experienced, and you are kind of stimulated to learn languages, to educate yourself, to open up and so on. [...] Since I came here I'm much more tolerant, open and flexible. For example in Slovenia if you get a permanent job you stick with it although you don't really like it, there are permanent contracts and you stick with it, you can stay until you retire, while here I have a temporary contract and when it finishes I have to find another job so you learn to be flexible and you don't worry what will be in two years because you are smart, educated, experienced and you'll find something [Slovenia, 15: 111-128].

The quality of urban life is quite important to many of the interviewees, even though they are divided in their opinions. A minority of them see Brussels as a nice place where to live:

A big flat with funny flat mates from different countries, especially compared to Paris, it would be impossible to have such a big flat in Paris for such a prize, so it was a big advantage. The first thing for me is to find a work that matches my expectations, at least I hope so. Brussel is so close to France and it's so easy to get home that it's not really a foreign country for a French [8: 53-56; ...] and my flat-mate coming back from England

she brings us all English things and my other flat-mate from Spain... it's a bit like an Erasmus here, but for graduated people [laugh] [France, 8: 72-73].

I just prefer to be in a medium, in a smaller city.

Why?

Maybe because the town I was living before wasn't a massive city. If I had come from New York then maybe I'd find Brussels really really boring, but I didn't, I came from a place that, you know, it was a city, but it wasn't very big [United Kingdom, 17: 50-57].

The majority of the interviewees agree in describing Brussels not as an ideal location, but as a place where you can stay, or at least as a good place for their careers:

[...] it's not the most beautiful city in the world, there are a lot of nice spots, but you have to know the city [The Netherlands, 12: 51-52].

[...] now I have the idea to remain 2, maximum 3 years, than to go back to Italy, [..., which] remains my country and the place where I want to live. Concerning the quality of life, there is no comparison. The idea is to make a significant experience and then to go back to Italy, hoping I will have more possibilities [Italy 1, 3: 58-62; my translation].

Other people needed to adapt, but now are enthusiastic about their life in Brussels:

I live close to Matongé, a black area, and we don't have blacks in Slovenia almost at all, I was kind of scared of them, when you go to the metro and there are these Moroccans talking, making comments, and I was really afraid of, I didn't go anywhere without my car (I have a car here). But eventually you get to know the area, the people, you see that they are not so dangerous like you thought at the beginning, you adapt, and now I almost feel that this is my home. For me my apartment is the best one in Brussels, and I really like to spend time in it although I don't spend much time in, because I am always out with someone... [Slovenia, 15: 97-102].

Many people compensate Brussels' gloom atmosphere with the easiness to travel around Northern and Central Europe that Brussels' geographical position offers, up to the point that some of them feel they almost have the duty to spend their weekends elsewhere. Guides and Expats magazines invite people to do so: "Weekend breaks. Enjoy life in the city, but don't forget to sample the joys of the rest of the country." [Expat survival guide: 61].

Some of the interviewees describe the city as a boring and isolating place, made even sadder because of the rainy weather:

What does it mean for you to live in Brussels?

Right now it means nothing to me: I'm waiting to leave. [...]

Professionally are you satisfied?

I am.

If you are satisfied why are you waiting to leave?

Because I don't like the weather, I don't like this place, it's boring for me, I just don't like it; it's lonely, people here don't have families, you just see bunches of single people, just one person, you know, everybody by themselves, you can't go to somebody's else and meet mother and father there who cook dinner, you don't have your family here, no one has her family here among the people I met, you just see bunches of single people by themselves, and everyone just talks about: "oh, in my country, I can't wait to go back, oh in Italy it's so much nicer, oh in France it's so much nicer, I just can't wait to go back", it's a very depressed atmosphere and very unstable, because you know everybody can leave at any minute. So it's not something you want to be, you can't be happy here, you can be happy temporarily but in a longer term this isn't the place to be to establish yourself. It's a good stopping for experience but it's not a good place to be [Cyprus, 7: 138-158].

The Cypriot girl raises an important problem: it is truth that Brussels offers a unique international environment, but this can be perceived as anonymous if the person is not able to create a solidarity social network. Being far from their families, Expats try to rely one on each other, but the fact that many of them are there for a limited time (see § 8.3.2) makes the creation of stable relationships extremely difficult.

To sum up, the following quotation resumes the main aspects of Brussels life, that is, the possibility to work in the EU affairs and the presence of a stimulating but socially problematic international community:

So overall what does it mean for you to live in Brussels?

[Pause] It's difficult to say. It's a good professional experience and it's a good intercultural mix. I can meet people of just any nationality, basically, and I can go to activities which might not occur if I've stayed where I was, so for me the environment is more stimulating than what I had before in Malta.

What about other realities that you discovered?

I don't feel as anonymous as in other cities, that's one thing [Malta, 5: 88-93].

Overall, living in Brussels has its upsides and downsides, but it is in any case an important experience that may prepare to other ones:

To summarize, the benefit in coming to Brussels is that your personality changes a little bit, you become more open, more flexible, more tolerant, more understandable, less afraid, you get experience, life experience and work experience, you can save some money; the downside is that I have less free time, less private life, I don't have deep relationships, all kind of relationships, not only love relationships: they are not so deep. I can say that I know more people but I have less friends. This is the downside... and of course the weather is a downside. But the good side is, geographically speaking, that Brussels is very well connected with all Europe. I travel much more: as I warn much more, I can afford it. My lifestyle, materially speaking, is better, but compared with Slovenia I do much less exercise, because I don't have so much time. There are of course bad sides and good sides. I would repeat this experience, and if someone would offer me a very good job in Spain or in Italy, I would go. I would have much less fear than when I came here two years ago [Slovenia, 15: 309-319].

8.3.2. Expectations before and after

As seen in § 8.2 and in § 8.3.1, interviewees describe Brussels as a place where people usually move in order to work in the EU affairs. Consequently their expectations should focus on their professional self-fulfilment. This is exactly the result obtained by Question 8, showed in the table 8.6: 5 kinds of expectations out of 8 concern people's professional sphere; moreover, all the interviewees who affirm that they had expectations mention at least one of these 5. In other words, all the people who had expectations regarding their permanence in Brussels had professional expectations.

The typical answers listed are:

1. (I had) no expectations;
- category A – *profession*:
 2. (my expectation was) to be employed after my post-graduate course or my internship in Brussels;
 3. to start or improve my career;
 4. to get skills or contacts to use once back in my country and/or to improve my CV;
 5. to work for the EU institutions or close to them, that is, in the EU affairs;

6. to make the job that I like, also in consequence of my studies;
- category B – *international context*:
7. to get in touch with people coming from different countries;
- category C – *life experience*:
8. to discover a new city and a new country;
9. to learn a new language.

Q8-9		Q8								Q9			
cases	T.A.	no expectations	to be employed after my post-graduate course / my stage	starting / improving my career	getting skills to use in my country	working for / closer to the EU institutions	doing what I like to do	getting in touch with people coming from everywhere	discovering a new city / country	learning a new language	been in BRX for...	Yes	I was expecting something better
1	Portugal			x					x		4		x
2	Spain		x		x			x		x	18	x	
3	Italy (1)					x	x				9	x	
4	Italy (2)		x		x						5		x
5	Malta	x									12		
6	Greece		x	x		x	x				18	x	
7	Cyprus		x		x	x					3	x	
8	France		x	x		x	x	x			5	x	
9	Belgium (1)					N/A							
10	Belgium (2)					N/A							
11	Belgium (3)					N/A							
12	Netherlands			x		x					18	x	
13	Germany		x								16	x	
14	Austria				x	x					36	x	
15	Slovenia			x	x	x		x			24		x
16	Ireland					x	x	x	x		24	x	
17	UK			x		x	x	x			6	x	
18	Sweden	x					x				22		
19	Finland (1)	x					x				48		
20	Finland (2)	x									60		
21	Estonia	x									24		
22	Lithuania	x									36		
23	Poland (1)				x	x	x				18	x	
24	Poland (2)		x		x				x		24		x
25	Czech Rep.					x				x	3	x	
26	Hungary				x						3	x	
27	Romania					N/A					96		
28	Bulgaria				x					x	9		x
29	Switzerland		x		x		x				just arrived		
30	Moldova	x									18		

Table 8.6: Interviewees' expectations about their experience in Brussels

Some people did not have particular expectations:

a lot of my colleagues said it is a boring city, an administrative city, it's raining all the time and "poor you, you have to go there", so I didn't dare to have a lot of expectations.

Was it true?

No, I think they were so wrong, maybe because they have only seen the institutional buildings, the airport and so on. I think they have missed quite a lot [Finland 2, 20: 76-80].

As already noticed in Q6 and Q7, job is a key issue in people's mind. Ambitions are different. Some interviewees want to find a good job in the EU related area after a Master in EU affairs or in international policy, or after an internship in one of the institutions:

I was just expecting to do my master and probably getting a good internship, I was expecting to add this to my C.V., probably find a better job later on, but because I didn't know where I wanted to be and I knew I wasn't ready to go back to California, that's why I stayed so long, because I didn't have anywhere else to go, so I just stayed here. Personally [on the personal level] I had no expectations, I stayed here because I had anywhere else to go [Cyprus, 7: 160-163].

I wanted to work in the institutions, I was planning a stage in the institutions and I was accepted at the Council, that's why I came here, otherwise I wouldn't come. Because I was learning about the institutions at school and then at the university and I wanted to see how it was like, how it works, and I applied for it.

Any special expectations about the town or other issues?

Expectation? About the work. What do you mean with expectation? Yes, I wanted to see Brussels because in Poland they say Brussels is so important. But what expectation do you mean? [...] In Brussels I came because I was accepted, it was not a "wow!" [Poland 1, 23: 50-60].

Other interviewees just wanted to start their career:

Well, I didn't expect it to be as good as it's being, I didn't realise that my job was, I mean, into the institutions, I didn't realise I would be able to go to the Parliament, the Committee of Regions, and everything. I didn't realise how much stuff I found out actually about: I found it very easy to learn about the EU and everything, and this is my first job, maybe it's like that in every job, you go somewhere and you start and then you learn a lot. I felt as I've learned a lot, more than I realised that I would have [United Kingdom, 17: 59-63].

Some of the interviewees had the objective to work in the EU affairs:

Did you have any expectations when you came here?

Yes. Hmm... I think I was more professional-wise one, professional because I came with the aspiration to find a job here even though I came for the stage, with the ambition I would find let's say my first proper job here in Brussels. Like, you know, the European dream a bit.

Did you realize your expectations?

Yes [Greece, 6: 46-51].

Many interviewees affirmed that they are seeking for a significant professional experience either to enrich their CV or to use what they learn once back in their countries:

Making an experience and then taking advantage of it by working, I do not know, I would like in Italy [...; Italy 2, 4: 42-43].

I worked here with my sister who came here to work with her boyfriend, and after this experience in Brussels she got a very good job in Poland, she is younger than me and she's a manager; she's younger than I am, but because of her experience in Brussels, it looks very good and they take you into consideration. In Warsaw, when you apply for a job, international experience is very important [Poland 1, 23: 73-76].

Only very few respondents spontaneously admits to be interested in gaining a good money, even though some of interviewees, stimulated by my questions, recognise that in Brussels have better salaries than in their country. Some interviewees transfer the desire of a better salary to the entire Expats community instead of referring it to themselves. The point is that those who want to work in international organisations always justify their motivation by connecting it to their ethic ideals, or by saying that to be an officer in the EU or in the UN system is what they studied for. Informally, that is, out of the interview contest, interviewees, as all the other Expats, result to be aware of the high salaries that they might receive working in the Commission, for example. Many people go to Brussels because they want to work in policy making and, at the same time, earn a lot of money. As Ans Persoons explains, it is very disappointing for many Expats to discover that easy gaining are not available, that the competition is so high that it is hard to find a place even outside the institutions, and that at the beginning their salaries might be extremely low:

That is changing, because before they thought that it's easy to make a lot of money with things that have something to do with the European Union, but it's not the case. Also

inside the institutions they are lowering the salaries, and in all the consultancies, and NGOs, and if you start there you don't make a lot of money at all. And those people hope they will one day, but the salaries are not at all the same [B: 156-160].

Still a number of people nourish the hope to gain the *concour* and work for the Commission. João Delgado and Helen Block try to explain this tendency:

Why do you think all those people want to work in the Commission?

That's a good question. I think it's a mixture of money, certainly, but also international surroundings. What we know from inside is that it can be also very boring, with a lot of administrative things, and it could be more interesting to be on the ground somewhere and work on concrete things, instead of making theories...

We have other activities which are very interesting, and I think it's appealing to work in an institution where the things are changing. I think to work in the Commission you have to be motivated by the European integration, by the European Union, and if you are interested in the European Union, it's a very interesting place to be.

And you have all these sectors where you can work in, this is very interesting... you are not limited to one subject for all your professional life, you have a lot of possibilities to open your mind, and I suppose this all plays a role [A: 214-223].

Concerning the international context, a few of the interviewees were already aware of its existence in Brussels, even though they had not experienced it directly:

I did have an idea of what it might have been because I knew people who had moved back to England [...]. But I've never... I knew that there was a large international community and I'd heard about the fact that there's a lot of Expats, and when I came there were, and most of them were kind of... approachable [United Kingdom, 17: 65-68].

The most of the interviewees declare to be generally satisfied about the fulfilment of their expectations. Nevertheless, the fact that they reached their goals does not automatically imply that they are totally satisfied for it. The Slovenian girl, for instance, openly recognised that her new job undermines her status:

maybe regarding work I was expecting a little bit more. In Slovenia I was... I was feeling more important, because I was in a small community, I had a pretty important job although I was still a beginner, but I had presentations in front of big audiences, I had meetings with the General Secretary in the Ministry or with the Ministry, but this because Slovenia is more community. Difficult to say if it's better first in a village or last in a city, to translate a Slovenian proverb [Slovenia, 15: 103-107].

The Bulgarian stress the fact that, even recognising that there are many professional upsides in his work experience, his personal relationships are quite unsatisfactory:

I'm happy about this. It's a good experience in an international environment. I've never worked before in Western Europe, [...] and [I am] improving my languages [...] people in Bulgaria are very poor compared to Belgian people or Benelux in general, but at the same time we live quite better than people here [Bulgaria, 28: 96-103].

Summarising, the most of the people are strongly professionally oriented and consider their experience in Brussels in terms of job satisfaction. Consequently, some of them are enthusiastic, some others are not at all, but in general they all feel rewarded by the international environment. To work in such an environment, in fact, allows them to learn a lot in terms of intercultural skills, adaptation skills and languages.

8.4 Permanence abroad time frame

In this subchapter answers to Question 10 (“In terms of time frame, how do you consider this experience of yours here? How long would you like to remain here?”) will be analysed.

Four different time frames have been identified (see table 8.7):

1. a short period (up to one year); normally people who affirms they want to remain for such a short period are quite sure of their answer, as either they have other plans, or they have to go back to their countries; consequently, I indicate this class of answer as “certainly short”; in the other cases people are foreseeing in the mid and long term, so they cannot be sure that they will actually do what they say; consequently I used the word “possibly”;

2. a variable period of around 2-3 years;
3. a long period (many years);
4. all life long, which obviously does not mean that they will remain in Brussels forever, but that they are prepared to have a family in Brussels, to settle down in a permanent basis.

Q10	T.A.	time frame				reason why just that time frame					
		certainly short	possibly other 2-3 years	possibly long	possibly all life long	it depends on my job	it depends on my partner's job	it depends on my personal life	I want to travel more	I don't want to stay more	I could stay more
1	Portugal		x			x				x	
2	Spain			x			x				x
3	Italy		x			x				x	
4	Italy	x								x	
5	Malta		x								
6	Greece		x	x				x			
7	Cyprus	x								x	
8	France				x						
9	Belgium	N/A									
10	Belgium	N/A									
11	Belgium	N/A									
12	Netherlands		x			x					x
13	Germany		x			x		x			x
14	Austria		x							x	
15	Slovenia		x				x	x	x	x	
16	Ireland		x							x	
17	UK	x				x			x		
18	Sweden		x					x			x
19	Finland			x			x	x	x		
20	Finland	x*				x					x
21	Estonia		x			x			x		x
22	Lithuania				x			x			
23	Poland	x**				x			x		x
24	Poland		x					x	x		
25	Czech Rep.		x								x
26	Hungary	x									
27	Romania				x						
28	Bulgaria		x			x					
29	Switzerland	x								x	
30	Moldova				x			x			

* = she ended her period in Brussels and was going to leave in one month

** = now she wants to go back to Poland, but she might come back to Brussels

Table 8.7: Interviewees' permanence abroad timeframe

As the table 8.7 shows, in the most of the cases it's also been possible to deduce the reason why the person chooses the indicated time frame, as well as his or her availability to spend more time in Brussels. Four different causes have been listed:

1. my job: if I keep liking my job or if my contract will be renovated, I will stay;
2. my partner's job: I will follow my partner wherever he gets a job opportunity;
3. my personal life: I remain or I leave in order to stay with my partner or closer to my family;
4. I want to travel more: sooner or later I will leave because I want to go somewhere else abroad.

The most of the interviewees are orientated towards a short or a very short experience, this way confirming what already noticed through Question 7:

It also means living in a city where everybody just comes and goes, it's not a city in general where people live their entire life: they just spend a few years here depending on their jobs and then move home again.

Do you think it will be the same for you?

I think so, ya [The Netherlands, 12: 52-56].

Explications are different. Some of the interviewees want to go where the job is, either in Brussels or abroad, putting a total emphasis in their professional sphere:

How long would you think that you will remain in Brussels?

I don't know. Because I'm thinking to go back to Poland and then I can work for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be diplomat, [...] and then I can come back maybe, but I have to see what I want.

It depends only on professional issues?

It depends on my work [23: 31-36; ...]

Are you still trying to enter in some European institution? To make concours?

Yes [...]. If I'll be accepted they will send me abroad, to some Commission's delegation outside Europe.

So you want to travel the world.

Yes. Brussels is not my final destination. [23: 63-67; ...]

I know you would like to change job: would you like to remain here or go back home?

No difference. If I had a good offer...

It may be linked to other personal things.

No, it would depend on the offer, I may think to go to France or to UK or maybe I prefer a bit warmer country [laugh]: Spain, Greece [Poland 1, 23: 168-172].

my internship is going to end [...] and after that, I want to come back here [...].

But I don't understand: you want to remain or you want to leave? Or you want to leave and come back here?

I want to leave to spend some time in Bulgaria, I don't know how much time. After that it will be good for me to come back to do the master degree and find another job because the point is that in Bulgaria the opportunities are lower than here, of course, the capital of Europe. [...] in Bulgaria it's like you have a frame you cannot go further and further. It's like you are working but you don't know why you are working.

Why?

I mean the salaries. For example: the minimum salary in Bulgaria is 90 euro... 90 euro!... This is funny. Of course, everything is cheaper there.

So, why do you want to brake with the work you have now for spending some months...

[...] The point is that the internship contract is finishing now and, if I want to get the permis du travail, it's a little bit complicated to get the documents, so they cannot make another internship again for one year with the same person. [...] Starting in a Belgian company with a working contract it's a little complicated. We [the Bulgarians] are completely new in the EU and we are not allowed to do whatever we want [Bulgaria, 28: 68-91].

A few interviewees want to remain close to their family. One of the Italians, for instance, says she definitely want to go back to Italy, even though her boyfriend will remain in Brussels:

If my priority were the carrier, I should remain here. But it is a general thing, you have to feel ok, you have to have your loves close to you, in my opinion [Italy 2, 4: 47-48, my translation].

A few interviewees would like to have a family in their country:

The truth is that when I think of my future I often image it in Prague. Family, for instance: I find it hard to image my family here in Brussels, for the moment [Czech Republic, 25: 334-336; my translation].

Some interviewees want to travel to other countries:

Remaining in Brussels: I consider it a short term experience; but in terms of being abroad overall, it's possible that it is a long term experience; I mean, I don't see myself having to spend my life in Portugal, I consider at least European Union as my country [Portugal, 1: 49-51].

Sometimes this explanation is mixed with other push factors, either professional or personal:

I don't think that I'm going to stay here long time now, but I might come back later and then stay for longer, I'm not sure.

Why?

Because [laugh], firstly I would like to live in London for a few years, and... I might, I'm likely to go to some other countries as well, possibly, and secondly if I was here living a long time I'd probably want to have a really good job, if you see what I mean, I'd probably only do that if I got actually a good job in one of the institutions, and I don't even know if that would happen, so... [United Kingdom, 17: 71-78].

Another reason why I'm thinking of moving on [...] it's also my family: they are always asking "why don't you stay in Poland, why don't you come back, it's such a nice country". Many people moved to the West, many specialists left Poland, so now it's a normal market situation: prices went up and also salaries went up, especially for specialists with experience from abroad and I might find a better job than one or two years ago [Poland 2, 24: 55-60].

Even among the people who affirm they could spend some years in Brussels, the idea is to go back to their country, unless a major change occurs:

How do you see your life here? On a permanent basis?

No, for some years. For the moment I'm thinking I'll go back to Greece, and then it depends on my personal life, I think.

In what sense?

In the sense that if I get married in Brussels I would stay here [laugh]; if I don't establish my life here, I would go back to my country.

What about having children in Brussels?

If I meet the love of my life and marry here, ya, I wouldn't mind to have children in Brussels [Greece, 6: 67-74].

I think 2 years is just the time when you get used to everything, and I think another 2 years would be just the right time to work, so right now basically I'm considering to stay here 4 years altogether, but of course uncertain because my contract is endless so some days I think to stay here another 2 years and then I think maybe 4 years, so my future is not very very clear. But is basically about to get this experience, and I like right now here, and I think I'm quite young, so why not to take this opportunity to work in the institutions, and after a couple of years go back and just live in Estonia again, or maybe in another country, yea, that would be great [Estonia, 21: 50-55].

A special case is given by the people working in the EU institutions. In the Expats community it is well known that everybody living in Brussels would say that he or she is there temporarily, not on a permanent basis, it does not matter if he has already been there for 15 years. Even though they laugh at it, all Expats are aware of this general will to go back home, which is basically the typical emigrant nostalgia. In other words, people who work in the institutions, having a stable professional

position, change their status from Expats to emigrants. While interviewing the Finnish Commission officer, I was surprised noticing that this prediction was absolutely right:

How long will I stay you mean? That's a good question. Something of which I think about regularly. For the time being I'm here, for sure I won't stay here for the rest of my life, it's something provisory, it's related to professional and private life at the same time. Sometimes I think time is going forward... [19: 71-73].

Each of the few cases of people who declare they could remain all life long in Brussels has some peculiarity. The French girl is living with her boyfriend, and coming from Paris she is at just one hour by train from home. Moreover, she is in a French speaking country, so as she admits, she does not really feel she is abroad. The Lithuanian woman is married with a Spanish Commission officer; her answer is particularly interesting:

I can stay. I don't know. My husband being Spanish and I Lithuanian it is more useful to live in a third country. If we lived in Barcelona he would feel ok, but I would feel a foreigner. Here we speak in English even at home [22: 55-57; my translation].

This answer witnesses a compromise that allows a mixed couple to find a balance. Concerning the Romanian interviewee, he is already living in Brussels on a stable basis: he is not properly an Expat, but the son of an emigrant. Finally, the Moldovan girl shows a more complex position:

I'm still thinking of it. There are plus and minus, but is the same in Moldova. [...] So plus is the level of life, I really like it; minus: it's not my country, it's not my language and all my family is in Moldova... and I don't really like the job... In Moldova I had a very interesting job, I still miss it [...].

Could you remain here for the rest of your life?

It depends on my personal life.

What do you mean?

I would not like to talk about my personal life.

But could you marry someone here?

I don't know... [pause] About staying here I can add something. I feel like now I still have 1 year and a half to stay here, so I think in 1 year and a half it would be difficult for me to leave everything again, after I built my life here for 3 years, and then I have to come back to Moldova, you see what I mean? It will be difficult like it was difficult to leave Moldova when I was coming here. That's the place where I'm living for 3 years and I'm pretty happy.

That depends on your personal relationships?

In general [Moldova, 30: 53-71].

Being so job-centred, interviewees do not show a special affection for Brussels:

professionally I cannot realise myself here, so what is the problem in going somewhere else? [...] Actually here I will not fulfil my professional needs, what I want, so I prefer to live in a nicer place [Spain, 2: 107-110; my translation].

I have friends who came here for a traineeship and many of them have decided that it's a nice place to live and stayed here, although they are always ready to leave, it's not forever. [Poland 2, 24: 90-91]

Not only do the interviewees generally remain for short periods, but also the people around them. This confirms the existence of a very unstable community, in which its members experience a strong feeling of temporariness:

Here you know that people are there for a temporary time, at least, the people that my job makes me meet: I know they are here for a short period of time, say 3-4 years, and they are going to leave most of the times; or maybe they are here only for a year and then they leave; or for a stage of 6 months, and then they leave. So the feeling here is that everything is temporary, everything is in transition, so you come here because of your profession, because you need your experience, and you can get a very good professional experience being so close and being into actually the work of the EU institutions, but you know that it's a transition, so then it can come up to a point where you miss home, because at home you have your people, and here things are a bit more in a state of flux all the time. And also the fact that people travel during the week-end [is] because they see Brussels, in my view, as a temporary destination, [so] they often fly home, or because of the ideal location of Brussels and they often spend week-ends away from Brussels [...; Malta, 5: 66-75].

The fact that people tend to remain in Brussels only for short periods have devastating consequences on their interpersonal relationships. The change happened in the Cypriot girl is illustrative of the difficulties experienced by those who only remain in Brussels for short periods:

I'm waiting to leave. When I first came here it was fine, I liked it, I had a great time and I had maybe one of the best years of my life here, then, because Brussels is so unstable, after the master all my friends left and I was by myself; [...] then I got stagier at the Commission, so I left after the Commission and I came back again, I mean, it was fun but after a while I wasn't going any further, it was just an internship, everybody just coming and going... [Cyprus, 7: 138-144].

Meaningfully, the Cypriot girl also admits that she does not have friends in Brussels (see table 9.1).

Summarising, people usually go to Brussels on a temporary basis, frequently pushed by merely professional reasons. They show an *opportunity-oriented mentality*: they are ready to move where better opportunities arise. Nevertheless, some of them are discouraged from remaining in Brussels, because they want to preserve their interpersonal relationships, either the family or the couple ones.

8.5 Perceived young Europeans' mobility

This subchapter analyses the answers to Question 11 (“In your opinion, how many young Europeans have this kind of experience abroad?”).

As indicated in the table 8.8, the majority of the replies agree in restricting high level migration to a minority of young Europeans, even though the different answers show important nuances at this respect:

1. definitely a minority;
2. an increasing minority: more and more people tend to leave, even for short periods or just for a study experience (like Erasmus), even though overall it is still a restricted phenomenon;
3. it seems a majority in Brussels, but generally is a minority: in Brussels there are so many young educated people coming from everywhere that living there one may have the impression that people travel a lot, but actually it is a warped impression;
4. many people in my country;
5. a minority in my country;
6. a great number;

7. many highly educated people;
8. many in the West and a minority in the East.

Interviewees, no matter what they think, seem generally very sure about their opinion, even though they are purely based on impressions (only the Romanian respondent quotes figures). The result is that they expressed opposite positions:

A minority, because it's difficult to say "I leave my family, my childhood, my friends", to live somewhere else, sometimes you don't know the city, the country, sometimes the language, you don't have any friends: not everyone is capable of doing that.

Are you?

I'm not. I don't mind travelling. I'm going abroad for about 3 weeks now but not for one year. I did it once and it was a good experience, but that was enough. I know that I'm better and happier at home [Belgium 2, 10: 60-65].

Many, at least in Estonia, but because of the law that coming here to work is not allowed...

So you need a work permit.

Yes, yes, but as far as other countries open their doors, people just go. It just happened in United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Sweden and Finland as well, so a lot of people from Estonia go to Finland to work [Estonia, 21: 79-82].

in Poland no, it's not so popular. Maybe Erasmus yes, but to work, it's not so popular [Poland 1, 23: 70-71].

In Poland you get quite a good level of education; to have people working in a bank with the same knowledge of UK students and pay the person maybe half of a UK student is more profitable for the institutions [read: foreign institutions may pay Polish graduate less than native graduate, with a obvious benefit].

You mean that for Polish it's easy to work abroad?

Yes, in some countries, those who opened from the very beginning to the new European countries [Poland 2, 24: 133-137].

A lot of people. They are coming here in Brussels, in Holland, Germany, France because the standards are higher, the salaries are bigger, and they are trying to do something interesting, but the truth is that most of the people are spending some time here working for internships, and all their jobs are for 1 or 2 years and after that they go back to their countries to have their lives, with their families and friends and so on [Bulgaria, 28: 127-130].

Q11		Table 8.8: Perceived young Europeans' mobility							
cases	T.A.	definetely a minority	an increasing minority	it seems a majority in Brussels, but generally is a minority	many people in my country	a minority in my country	a great number	many highly educated people	many in the West and a minority in the East
		1	Portugal		x				
2	Spain						x		
3	Italy (1)			x					
4	Italy (2)						x		
5	Malta		x						
6	Greece			x		x			
7	Cyprus			x		x			
8	France		x					x	
9	Belgium (1)	N/A							
10	Belgium (2)	x							
11	Belgium (3)			x					
12	Netherlands		x						
13	Germany							x	
14	Austria	x						x	
15	Slovenia	x		x		x			
16	Ireland	x							
17	UK		x						
18	Sweden	N/A							
19	Finland (1)	N/A							
20	Finland (2)		x						
21	Estonia				x				
22	Lithuania	N/A							
23	Poland (1)					x			
24	Poland (2)				x				
25	Czech Rep.								x
26	Hungary						x		
27	Romania	x							
28	Bulgaria						x		
29	Switzerland						x		
30	Moldova	N/A							

In fact it's not so easy to give a proper evaluation of the high level migration phenomenon, especially when living in Brussels:

if you are in Brussels you think everybody does it, but if you go back home you realise no one does it, that it's very rare. In Brussels you know how many people are here, away from their family and their home, but if you go back, for example if I go back to America or Cyprus, most people have never left their area, they might switch cities in the same country but they never go off on their own. [Cyprus, 7: 88-92]

A few interviewees connect the fact of living abroad with people age:

I would think it's a generational question [...and] it's related to the country. When I look at my generation in Finland, they tend to travel a lot and also use the possibility of the open borders, but when I look at my parents' generation, with some exception most stay at home for most of the time, but then again people from older member states maybe have been more abroad for more generations. In that respect our culture is quite young and my generation is the first spending such a long time abroad. Maybe more people have now the possibility to go than before [Finland 2, 20: 159-165].

Theoretically all young Europeans have the possibility to go and work abroad, except the new countries [...]. That's in theory. Practically speaking, it's very restricted, working mobility in general is around 2%, which is very low; within young people it is higher, not that higher, and more and more strongly it is according to the level of education, and not only the level but also the field of education. All these people who come and go here from wherever in Europe are from political science; they will move much more than other people [...]. But how many of them do it? Not that much, because it costs money to find a place, it costs money to go somewhere, just to move, then the time to find a job in your field sometimes takes some time, and people are not keen to do it unless [until] they have another choice, like the political science [graduated] are going to national government, national structures where most of the time, let's face it, all is set up and put in place by the powers in charge, by the political environment, so either you have an affiliation or you know those people [Romania, 27: 105-117].

These quotations, referring to possibilities instead than to attitudes, allow to trace *a difference between availability and possibility to go abroad*. Erasmus is seen as absolutely useless as study program, but good in offering to young people a first experience abroad. Nevertheless different opinions about his effectiveness in this sense have been recorded: the majority of the interviewees trace a difference between themselves and people who “just made the Erasmus”, that is, people who just spent some months abroad, in a sort of holiday:

I think the Erasmus program has done wonders for this. People who did Erasmus find it more natural [to travel], because they did it before, they know before how it is and they

find easier to start willing and move around. Let's face it: when you do an Erasmus program you don't learn of anything: you don't learn much the language, because you probably tend to hang out with people who speak the same language as you and come from your nation, because it's easier, you do party all the time, you don't learn anything at school, because you don't go there to study, you know how it is, and even teachers don't take you seriously. But what I think is the most important thing in the Erasmus program is that people learn how exactly to move and that's the most valuable experience [Romania, 27: 121-128].

[Going abroad] in Poland no, it's not so popular. Maybe Erasmus yes, but to work, it's not so popular [Poland 1, 23: 70-71].

Moreover, there is definitely a difference between just travelling and living abroad, and many people, after one experience abroad (the most quoted is Erasmus), go back to their country on a permanent basis. In other words, just a few people, according to the majority of the interviewees, are able to settle down abroad for an important period of their life:

I would say a minority. I don't know. It seems like a lot of Europeans travel around, but sometimes when I go to Greece and I talk to people about where I've been, they say "Wow, you travel so much, I've never left the city!", they are so surprised. Travelling is different than living. Europeans travel a lot, they are visiting other countries often, but living? They do a lot of Erasmus but actually living after the Erasmus: I don't think so. Maybe they stay abroad for six months, one year and then they go back home and that's it, they stay in the same place for the rest of their life [Cyprus, 7: 192-197].

I think that more and more people have the possibility to go abroad and they also realize how important is, when you are looking for a job, to have been abroad; also the feeling that being abroad with Erasmus doesn't mean anything anymore, now people know that Erasmus is partying, so now you have to go to Japan or China to have something special. But even if more and more people have the possibility to go abroad, I still have the feeling that so many people don't dare to go abroad, because they've never gone before and think it's much more difficult than actually is. I have friends in France who on one hand have been once and keep going abroad and there are more and more people in this group, but there is still a remaining group of people who don't speak English that well, they've been studying for so long that now they can't waste the time to go abroad and they use the word "waste" because they don't realize how important it would be for them [France, 8: 102-110].

In the following examples the availability to live abroad is linked to individual nationalities, and a difference is suggested between people from the North and people from the South of Europe (confirming what said in the quotation 19: 27-52 reported in 8.3.1):

I can only say that Irish people tend to work abroad but not to stay abroad. [...] Even for example the master course I did, which was specifically to work in the European Union: 20 people did the course and I'm the unique here, not because they weren't any good but because they just decided they wanted not to do it, they wanted to stay in Ireland. Irish people like travelling but they always want to go home. Maybe it's different with other nationalities. Italians stay here a lot, when they arrive they stay [...; Ireland, 16: 87-93].

I have the impression that Italians are more curious about the Europe, so there are a lot of them around. I don't see that many from France or from the Nordic countries. But I think it's not a lack of opportunities, they are just not so interested [Poland 2, 24: 141-143].

A difference is traced between Western and Eastern countries, whereas people coming from the New Members Countries (as already noticed in the previous subchapters) still do not have the possibility to go to work in all the members countries, but need a work permit which is not easy to obtain:

In the Western Europe yes [many people go abroad], but in the Eastern one no, because if I cannot work but in Spain or United Kingdom [...]. People from the East keeps on being discriminated [Czech Republic, 25: 203-208; my translation].

A few interviewees connect the availability to stay abroad with the education level:

It depends on education. Certainly it affect lots of Europeans with the University degree [Germany, 13: 103].

Maybe in average it's still a minority. But if you just focus on certain types of education or university degrees, or... let's put it this way: people with the university degree I think most of them are aware, that's an important thing [Austria, 14: 80-82].

In international organizations is common, but still an amount stay in their own countries. It's just that in Brussels it seems that everybody is travelling, but that's only the big cities. Outside people stay in their home cities, maybe take a train to go to some cities, but not far. So I think it's still a minority of high educated people in European or international affairs.

With "high educated" you mean with a degree?

Yes. Or of course people looking for a better job abroad, that's also a possibility. So two extremes: the well educated and the others [Belgium 3, 11: 24-30].

In the last examples the difference between traditional migration and high level migration is unconsciously traced.

Some of the interviewees seem to be well aware of being part of a restricted group; some of them find that living abroad is normal, others feel an ill-concealed pride:

I wouldn't say restricted to a minority, but that a lot of Europeans aren't used to that yet. For example, if I can talk about Greeks, I have a lot of Greek friends who admire me, or think I'm weird, or they don't understand why and how I move from one country to the other; for other people that I know living in Brussels I'm nothing special and I know that I'm something really common, but it's true that for the majority of Greek friends that I have in Greece, I'm a minority. If you live in the microcosm of Brussels, it's such a common thing, but if you go to the countries you see that it's difficult; even people who go out for Erasmus or for the masters, they go to countries, they stay for 6 months, one year with intentions to go back. It's difficult for them to move somewhere else, in general. So I wouldn't say restricted for some objective reasons, but speaking about Greeks it's not very wide-spread [Greece, 6: 77-85].

The social and cultural level of people's families seems to have a role in stimulating young Europeans to go abroad. The majority of the interviewees come from at least the middle class and have one or both their parents with a degree. Some of them were pushed from their parents to travel:

Firstly my family always pushed me and my brother to travel, to discover, so that already at 16 they let me go to study abroad, and the first experience was a little strong, maybe because I was young, but it was the input that allowed me to create an interest in travelling [...; Italy 1, 3: 21-23; my translation].

Schools are very important too:

In France we have the system that on one hand we go all'Ecole, where you have admitted with a competitive exam, and is the school of the élite, and on the other hand you have Universities. In the French case the people who go abroad very often, who love to go abroad and who speak a very good English, most of them have gone to the Ecole, because it has special programs, like a double diploma. Also when the exams are so competitive, then the number of students who have been admitted... like in my case, we were 130, and each one could go abroad, because my university has partnership programs that each one could go abroad, whereas in normal universities there are so many students and so few partnership programs that actually only the best students can go abroad. So I think it's a vicious circle somehow, because the ones who have been abroad once speak better English, so it's easier to go a second time abroad. [...]

Are you saying that the French school system is creating a sort of élite?

It's the way French administration talk about it, it's the way Napoleon saw it. [...] the purpose is to create an élite [France, 8: 113-131].

Nevertheless, people must be aware of the opportunities they can apply for:

[...] working in Brussels is something that anyone can do, anyone can do a stage but it's whether they know that it exists. I had no idea that there were so many stages going on in Brussels, until I started looking for, and so if someone is interested he'll probably find out, but you have to be interested. Most people know about the Commission stage, but they don't know about stages in the Committee of Regions, or things like that [United Kingdom, 17: 101-104]

Overall, it seems that a great number of people in the West and an increasing number of people in the East have the possibility to go abroad, but still only a minority are willing to do it for more than some months. International programs like Erasmus play an important role in breaking the possible resistance people may have to go abroad, but they seem to be insufficient to push individuals to live abroad. In the West, a difference is traced between Northern and Southern countries, being the people from the latest more disposed to live abroad.

Chapter 9

Interpersonal relationships

9.1 Relationship intensity

Question 12 (“Do you know many people here in Brussels? Do you consider them friends or acquaintances?”) investigates the quantity of friends and acquaintances that interviewees declare to have.

Five typical answers have been given:

1. few acquaintances and no friends;
2. few acquaintances and very few friends;
3. many acquaintances but no friends;
4. many acquaintances but few friends;
5. many acquaintances and many friends;

The possibility “few acquaintances and many friends” is not present, probably because the people who have few acquaintances have not the possibility to have many friends, for the reasons I am going to expose.

The table 9.1 shows respondents’ answers.

The most of the interviewees declare that they know many acquaintances. Some of them affirm that they have many friends too. Differences among those who maintain they have friends and the others are due to differences in their definition of the word “friend”. In order to clarify as much as possible this point, given the obscurity of the word “friend”, a definition of friendship has been asked to many interviewees. Before I proceed with Question 12 analysis, I will now go through their replies.

Q12							
cases	T.A.	few acquaintances and no friends	few acquaintances and very few friends	many acquaintances but no friends	many acquaintances but few friends	many acquaintances and many friends	Did you have contacts when you arrived in Brussels?
	1	Portugal	x				
2	Spain		x				yes
3	Italy					x	yes
4	Italy				x		yes
5	Malta				x		yes
6	Greece					x	yes
7	Cyprus	x					yes
8	France					x	yes
9	Belgium	N/A					N/A
10	Belgium	N/A					N/A
11	Belgium	N/A					N/A
12	Netherlands				x		no
13	Germany				x		yes
14	Austria					x	no
15	Slovenia				x		yes
16	Ireland					x	N/A
17	UK		x				yes
18	Sweden			x			N/A
19	Finland				x		yes
20	Finland				x		yes
21	Estonia					x	N/A
22	Lithuania					x	yes
23	Poland				x		yes
24	Poland			x			yes
25	Czech Rep.			x			N/A
26	Hungary				x		N/A
27	Romania				x		yes
28	Bulgaria					x	yes
29	Switzerland	x					no
30	Moldova					x	yes

Table 9.1: Quantity of friends and acquaintances

9.1.1. Definition of friendship

Different aspects of friendship come out from interviewees' answers. Some of them stress the dimension of "sharing", especially sharing time together:

A friend? Hmm... Someone who can check on you every now and then, you know, maybe if one or two weeks passes by and you don't contact each other either you or him or her just give a ring and ask "how are you?", or send a text message. Or someone for doing things together or trying to involve you in another group of friends, and I involve her in my group of friends, so trying to get to know more people together. Or spending a week-end together at least, sharing the costs, that's very important! [Malta, 5: 139-142].

I have a group of people in Poland that I would call my real close friends. They are coming from AIESEC as well, so we passed through many things together [Poland 2, 24: 294-295].

Friends also play a role of support:

If she knows I'm having a hard time at work, I know she's there to listen to me, or maybe I don't need to call her: she would call me. [Malta, 5: 143-144; ...] I think friendship is an intrinsic value beyond culture: I meet genuine people even from other cultures, and I see they are genuine when they offer their help, when they realize you are upset and keep asking you until you feel ok, so for me that's a best friend, you don't need to say you are best friends, but you can feel it [Malta, 5: 281-284].

Friend is something that if I'm doing something I would just stop it if they're in trouble [The Netherlands, 12: 91].

A person I can trust, to whom I can ask help and vice-versa. [22: 71; ...] My best friend is the one I studied in Rome with, because when I was just arrived I had hard times, I did not know the language and already after two months I was thinking to leave. We stayed 3 years in the same room and she helped me a lot. In Lithuania we have a proverb: if you pass through the sea and the fire, then you become a friend [Lithuania, 22: 89-92].

A person I know since a long time. I can trust this person, I know his problems, and we can talk about everything, and I know that if I have problems this person can help me [Poland 1, 23: 102-103].

In a support relation trust is a key dimension, and it is often the results of a long time relation:

A friend for me is someone I can trust, I can rely on, I can call in the middle of the night if my car break down and I need help, someone you can tell everything to, your secrets,

your worries, someone you don't have to pretend. My best friends are still in Slovenia, they are from university or from the elementary school. [Slovenia, 15: 206-208]

Sometimes the relation intensity is identified with the frequency you meet a person:

Close friends are those you meet often, not every day but often, acquaintances when you go somewhere and you meet people and say "hi, how are you?" [Poland 1, 23: 80-81].

The duration of the relation is in general considered important:

Someone you deliberately make an effort to socialise with and who also do the other way around. [...] And then you have the very close friends, of course they are very few, maybe the people I've known for 10-15 years. So maybe there are three levels in my scale: acquaintances, friends and very closed friends. Acquaintance would be someone that when you meet you would actually talk with them, they are all nice people and you like to talk with them, they are something interesting to say. But if you didn't see them for two weeks you wouldn't call them, while a friend: if I didn't see a friend for two weeks I would call him, like "ehi, how are you, you wanna meet up?", that would be the difference [Sweden, 18: 245-253].

A friend is someone you spend your free time with, you share common interests, then when you move acquaintances stay behind, whereas a friend tends to keep in touch. I'd like to think so, otherwise it'd be very sad to change country and to leave people behind. Because a friend is more like... for a long time [Finland 2, 20: 91-93].

The last quotation underlines the wandering condition that some interviewees face: with a geographical movement, daily life changes completely, and friends are wanted to remain as anchors of one own identity, as stable elements in a changing existence. Nevertheless, the duration of a friendship cannot be given for granted, as it may require some care:

If they are good friends, they are like sisters, you think they will be there forever. Then there are friends with whom you have a very deep relationship maybe for one year, and then it fades away. It depends if the two people take care of the relation: [...] if you are really interested in a person, the relationship does not end that easy, and if it ends, then I wonder how worthwhile was that friendship [Czech Republic, 25: 374-380; my translation].

There are different kinds of friends, the ones with whom you can have a very good relation, but they have a deadline, just because life wants it to be like that, I think for example of the very good friends I have [just] met in Canada and France, I know it will

be difficult to keep in touch with everyone of them; then there are childhood friends, which I will have all life long [Switzerland, 29: 147-150].

Many interviewees highlight the fact that a friend knows them well:

It's somebody who even if you don't talk for months you can just start talking again; someone who knows you so well, and deeply, that you don't need to explain things and they know your crazyness, when you are overreacting, they just know you [Cyprus, 7: 211-213].

Sometimes a friend is seen as someone you can share things with or do things together without being judged:

When you share really private stuff with, when you spend your spare time with, when you can speak nonsense and not necessarily about your work, when you sport together... somebody who doesn't judge you [Austria, 14: 92-93].

Some interviewees underline the intimacy of the friendship relation:

A friend is a person I can tell whatever I want without being judged, that I have fun with, and I won't get bored when I'm with them, that whenever I need something they will be there for me, and even if there is a misunderstanding, we are going to solve it, just because we are friends. My closer friends are kind of a family, a real family to me, these friends I'm talking I'd behave with them as I behave with my mum and they behave to me the same way [Greece, 6: 93-97].

Somebody I could talk about everything with, someone I call when I don't feel well and don't want to socialize, somebody who knows also my dark side and likes me even though I'm not the funniest person in the world, somebody I can really trust, not just somebody I can hang out at parties [France, 8: 137-139].

For me it's sharing personal emotional feelings and thoughts, I would say as one point. And that I can trust a person [Germany, 13: 111-112].

Surprisingly, only a few interviewees stress the mutuality of feelings:

A friend is somebody I can trust, somebody who can understand me and who always want the best for me. And the other way around as well [Poland 2, 24: 149-150].

A person that I like to understand and she understands me as well; someone I really love, which I worry about, if she asks me for advice I try to give her the best advice, or I like if I can make her a favour or help her somehow; a person I very much trust, with whom I

like to spend my spare time; I take care of the relation and I like to see her; I am interested in her life [Czech Republic, 25: 369-373; my translation].

In a few cases, the dimension of the “exchange” is taken into consideration:

Friendship is when you know someone and you enjoy spending time with them, you can build a relationship with them, when you can give and take with you something: for me friendship it’s a win-win situation [10: 147-148; ...]

How would you define the people you speak on the phone for years, friends?

Yes, because for me it’s still a win-win situation [Belgium 2, 10: 236-237].

Even though the expression “a win-win situation” (an expression actually used on *Together Magazine* n° 2, page 6, March 2007) might appear very nice at the beginning, it may actually hide a material mentality: friendship seems to be an instrumental relation based on mutual exchange rather than on feelings.

Overall a friend is a person associated with some or all the following dimensions:

- *trust and mutual knowledge*:
 - a) someone I trust;
 - b) someone I know well;
 - c) someone who knows me well;
- *intimacy and confidence*:
 - d) someone I can talk with about many subjects;
 - e) someone can talk with about personal feelings;
 - f) someone I can be myself with;
 - g) someone who does not judge me;
- *support*:
 - h) someone who plays a passive (listening) or active (looking for me, helping me) role of support;
- *sharing*:
 - i) someone I spend time with;
 - j) someone I do things together;
 - k) someone I have fun together;

- l) someone with whom I shared or I am sharing an important experience or a period of my life;
- *time*:
- m) someone I have been knowing for long.

As seen, some people do not only distinguish between acquaintances and friends, but recognises three different levels: acquaintances, friends and good or close friends.

I still cannot call friends the friends I've made in five months.

Why?

Because for me friendship is last longing. There are people I rely on, if there is a problem I call them; they are not just acquaintance. But I don't even consider them friends [Italy 2, 4: 63-66].

This imply the need for a correction in the interpersonal relationship model I assumed: the category of real friends needs to be split in two different categories, as shown in the table 9.2 in the next page⁶⁴.

⁶⁴ I report only the relevant section of the model, the one of the presence relations.

CATEGORY	CLASS	INTENSITY	TYPE
Presence Relationships	Not formalised roles relationships	Very weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Occasional meetings without reiteration, for example with shoppers, bar customers, etc.; - repeated meetings with people known by sight (for example, with the newsvendor where one buys the newspaper everyday or the neighbour met every morning at the bus stop);
		Weak	Acquaintances.
		Strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Friendship based on sharing an experience and on mutual support (can end or reveal itself a close friendship); - flings, last longing sexual relations; - flirtations.
		Very strong	- Close friendship based on feelings, trust and intimacy (usually in a durable relation);
	Formalised roles relationships	Weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work colleagues; - never met or occasionally met distant relatives on whom one can rely in case of need; - instrumental friendships (people who are considered instruments for one's own personal affirmation).
		Strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parents and close relatives; - couples (engaged, living together, married; cheating lovers).

Table 9.2: Interpersonal relationships model corrected (presence relationships)

9.1.2. Not formalised role relationships in Brussels

Some interviewees have their group of friends. In one case, this constitutes a large social network composed by acquaintances, friends and close friends:

I have a lot of friends, real real friends, and I have a lot of acquaintances as well. I have around three extremely good friends that are like family to me, I have around 20 friends or even more, and I have hundreds of acquaintances. I'm a sociable person! [Greece, 6: 89-91].

In another case, a couple tries to respond to Brussels environment with a solution that resembles Erasmus life:

[...] we [she and her boyfriend] were thinking about being in a shared flat because we don't know so many people in Brussels and we think it's the best way to have an exciting social life to mix with flat-mates friends. I guess that in 2-3 years we'll have as many friends as we have in France. If we have a social life we can move to a flat... I have some friends here from my university, but we thought that it would have been funnier with other people, and our flat is so huge that we won't have any problems [France, 8: 77-81].

Unfortunately these are exceptions. Being the relationship duration essential to many interviewees in order to define a person as a friend, Brussels high turnover makes it extremely difficult for many people to make new friends, up to the point that the mutual support dimension tends to prevail and even to become purely instrumental:

Would you define them acquaintances or friends?

Acquaintances, because people here are so on a short term that you can't really get to know them, people, in a way to be cynical, they are using each other, you know, "I'm alone here, you're alone here, my best friends are in my home country, but let's have fun together while we are here". You can't get to know people very well. I have kept in contact with people that I made here but the majority of the people are just acquaintances that you meet and you go out for a drink, you have some fun, that's it [Cyprus, 7: 204-209].

Would you define the people you know here more as acquaintances or as friends?

Acquaintances. People are coming and going a lot, so it's hard to have the time to develop a good friendship. And I know people who say that they don't really dare to make friendships, because they know that people will leave, and it's not a worth effort to work on a relation when you know that they will leave very shortly anyway, so I think that people can become cynical here after a while.

Is this your experience too?

On a bad day! [Laugh]. Well, after a while you tend to choose with whom you socialise, you tend not to spend that much time with people who are spending their intern here, you tend to focus on people that you know will stay here for a bit longer; but also when you get here you are very excited, but after a while you get tired of the people who want to go to all the clubs and all the pubs, and to do everything. I think that's why you tend to stay with people who are in the same phase of life as yourself [Sweden, 18: 130-140].

People's professional-oriented attitude can be an obstacle to the formation of sincere emotive relations, as the following quotation reveal:

Personally, I would like to establish contacts, first of all professional ones, to be used in the future. [...] I am not planning to create a network of friends [...]. So I am here mostly for a professional reason. [...] I don't know anyone in Brussels, and the people I meet, I meet them through my job. Outside my job I often am in Switzerland [...]. But if it happens, well, I am not closed. It's just that it is not my first objective to meet people here [Switzerland, 94-104].

This approach, which is common to other interviewees (to the Hungarian, for instance), includes all the already highlighted peculiarity of Expats' attitude: they are in Brussels for a relatively short period (and sometimes they often go back home), they focus on their job, they want to meet people in order to use them as contacts once back in their countries. In particular, some interviewees want to create friendships in order to have the possibility to travel abroad easily in the future:

If I have to be honest, the purpose that I want to reach, my aim is like to find friends and after that...because nobody is here forever [...]. I want to save my contacts and relationships, to visit each other in our countries, to see different cultures [...; Bulgaria, 28: 235-238].

This instrumental approach leads people to divide their social network, definitely separating the useful people from the real friends, as the following long quotation clearly explains:

You speak of two different social networks, the professional one and the other one, what are the differences?

Well, you can't use the professional network to the same extent.

Do you include your colleagues in the professional network?

Yes, some of them are overlapping, as some of my colleagues I socialise with and with some other I only meet as colleagues, and the same with other people from regional offices, from the commission, and so on, some of them you only meet them professionally and some in an informal way.

Back to my previous question: which are the differences between the two networks?

Well, the professional network: I want something, that's why I meet them, I need to get an information, I go to a meeting, it's a need driven, and you have to do a task, so the social interaction is secondary to the task, while in my private meetings the social interaction would be my main goal, not the activity I do. And of course some practice overlaps. I just got a new job and I got it partially because I knew someone who knew someone who came here and offered me a new job, so of course it overlaps sometimes, but the professional network is someone I need to know 'cause I need to perform a duty or a task or to get an information, while my private network would be the people I like socially because they are interesting, or funny, or something like that.

Did you ever meet someone of your private network to achieve something professionally?

No, not deliberately. It had happened a couple of times. Of course you should never underestimate, if you know something and you have a good relationship, that it would be easier to call them in their professional role and get something, and they will know that they can call you and that you are a good contact, but I don't socialize with people because of their position in, say, the Commission or something.

Is it frequent to meet people professionally who have something in common with you, and then starting to go out?

Yes, definitely. Quite often you meet people a couples of times, at conferences or something like that, and then you meet them at pubs. Place Luxembourg would be an astonishing example for a sociologist, to have all those young people there, who meet there, it's like that there is some kind of scheme behind that makes all those people from all over Europe meet there [Sweden, 18: 53-78].

People are grouped in a “network”, which becomes an anonymous object that the professional can “use”, or better, has to use, because he is “need-driven” and has “to do a task, so the social interaction is secondary to the task”. Even though the interviewee is not aware of that, he applies the same *forma mentis* also to his private meetings, in which establishing a social interaction (and not spending a nice time together, or flirting, or creating a friendship) becomes “ the main goal”, not even the only one. The dreadful opportunism showed by the respondent indicates an instrumental approach to social relations, used to satisfy individual's needs, both the professional and the intimate ones. I will call this kind of relation *opportunity-driven relationship* and analyse it in Chapter 9.2.2.

Fortunately, however, not all the interviewees share such an instrumental vision:

In my professional environment it's always about human beings and with some of them you have a good chemistry, you become very easily a friend, you can rely on them. All of us working at the Commission, except Belgians of course, have a similar situation, coming from another country, with our family left behind, and you have to create your

social network, so some of them just become your friends because you have this chemistry; there is no separation: there is no separation like that a colleague can't be my friend; for me it's totally natural, I don't understand why you should separate them artificially [Finland 1, 19: 133-138].

As showed in the table 9.1, a high number of people affirm that they have friends in Brussels, either few or many. This data needs to be explained. Obviously the fact that expatriates are in the same situation is a push factor for the creation of new relationships (see answers to Question 16), but these relationships may be, as the Cypriot girl reveals, just instrumental acquaintances:

Here you are living a double life in a way, in Brussels, because they always say "all my real friends are back home, and my best friends are back home", you don't hear people here who have good friends, they just have friends, or room mates, or a friend of a friend [Cyprus, 7: 213-215].

While making the interviews, an unexpected data started to appear: many people already had contacts when they went to Brussels. The most of the interviewees had contacts who were already living in Brussels, people that they had met during the university or the master years, or friends and family members who moved to the Belgian capital before them:

I have to tell you that my best friend here is Spanish.

Do you think the fact that he is Spanish is just a chance?

The fact is that he came here with me. My boyfriend came, but he did too [Spain, 2: 166-168; my translation].

[...] my best friend lives in Brussels. She's been living here for two years, and will remain for some more months. She works here. Her boyfriend is a friend too; the rest of the people are more acquaintances [Italy 2, 4: 60-61; my translation].

I have 3 or 4 really good friends, from my university, from France, I've known them for 2-3 years now [8: 133; ...] I met quite many people I had been with in Sweden, we got in touch again, it was very funny to meet them again in Brussels, most are from Germany but also from other countries [France, 8: 141-142].

I had some friends from before, Slovenian, for example my ex roommate. She moved to Brussels before me [...; Slovenia, 15: 79-80].

The reported examples show an impressive tendency to be centralised in the same place. It is possible that people follow their friends, emulating their experience, or use them as a support to orientate their destination choice at the moment of going abroad. In traditional migration, migrants either leave alone and then find abroad a community of people from their country, or follow the members of their family (frequently the wife or the husband) who have already left and settled down in the recipient country. In high level migration, both this functions seem to be taken up by a social network made of friends and close friends.

Crossing answers to Question 12 to answers to the question “did you already have contacts or friends in Brussels when you arrived?”, it appears that many interviewees who declare that they have many friends in Brussels already had at least one friend in the city. This means that their friends were an important source of social capital to them:

So, many people you met abroad live in Brussels.

Yes, they live in Brussels.

That’s why..

I have so many friends, ya ya.

So it was easy to create...

I didn’t create, I came here with the network. When I came here I already knew 50 people [Greece, 6: 157-162].

I was really fortunate because a lot of students I met in Venice came here to work, maybe 15 out of 100 got a work [here], so I had already a social network here [Finland 2, 20: 74-75].

I was lucky when I came here, because a friend of mine she came here to make a stage at Coca-Cola, she had a lot of friends here, then really a big company.

So everything began through your friend from Moldova?

Yes. She came earlier than I. She made her studies in Paris and then came here for her stage.

So you entered her group of friends and you still go out with the same people?

Yes [Moldova, 30: 73-78].

I had a couple of contact people, that was a big relief for me. I was still in contact and I did find quite a lot of support from them [Malta, 5: 118-119].

It’s probably significant that different people agree in defining themselves “lucky” because they already knew people in Brussels.

To recapitulate, the great majority of the respondents say that they have many acquaintances. Many of the interviewees also state that they have at least a limited number of friends in Brussels, but also that it is very difficult to get new friends in the city, both because people tend to stay for short periods and because of the wide diffused job-centred mentality. Nevertheless people meet again in Brussels friends they have first known in other experiences abroad, or follow their friends who already are living in the Belgian capital.

Friends who are already in Brussels often leave before the person, but they were useful to create a social network that remains:

You said you had already a social network when you came here.

Yes. But at this point, when I'm leaving, most of them have already left, and this is very characteristic to Brussels: it's a sort of crossroads in your life for a couple of years, and then you go. All those who were here when I came have left to different jobs abroad or returning to their home country. But then I got new friends [Finland, 20: 94-97].

The image of the crossroads well describes Brussels, a place where people coming from different directions meet for a while, passing close to each other, and then go on for their destinations.

9.2 Interpersonal relationships networks

Answers to Question 13 ("In which occasions and contexts do you meet people from abroad?"), Question 14 and 15 ("Generally speaking, in Brussels do you have the tendency to stay with people from your country, with foreigners or with Belgians? Why?"), Question 16 ("Generally speaking, do you find it easy to establish new relationships in Brussels? More or less than in your country or than in others where you have been?") and Question 17 ("Which nationality are the people you mostly mix with here?") will be now analysed.

9.2.1. International environments

As the table 9.3 (referring to Question 13) shows, interviewees identify different opportunities to meet people from other countries:

1. in the office;
2. at the university, for those attending post-graduate courses;
3. in bars and pubs;
4. at parties and Expats clubs;
5. during cultural events;
6. during sport activities and dance courses;
7. at language courses (especially French courses for foreigners);
8. in the church;
9. attending associations;
10. by friends;
11. in the flat;
12. through my children (I meet the parents of my children's friends).

Looking at the table 9.3, some data stand out:

- a) a traditional social institution like the church is mentioned only in one case, moreover by a person who is permanently living in Brussels;
- b) national associations, either spontaneous (like football clubs abroad) or politically recognised (like, for instance, the Società Dante Alighieri), are not mentioned, even though they are fully present in the city;
- c) only one of the interviewees has children and meet people through them;
- d) only one respondent use cultural events to meet new people;
- e) on the contrary almost all the interviewees meet other foreigners during their ordinary professional activity;
- f) only a few interviewees meet people at the university, but some of them have met their friends during a master run in a previous experience in Brussels;
- g) social events, sport activities and language courses are the most frequent opportunities to meet people.

Q13													
cases	T.A.	internship / work	university	bars	parties / Expats clubs	cultural events	sport / dance courses	language course	church	associations	friends of friends	flat mates	through my children
		1	Portugal	x						x			
2	Spain	x	x		x			x					
3	Italy (1)	x	x		x							x	
4	Italy (2)	x			x			x			x		
5	Malta	x		x			x				x		
6	Greece	x		x	x	x	x				x		
7	Cyprus	x	x	x							x		
8	France	x										x	
9	Belgium (1)	x	x		x						x		
10	Belgium (2)	x			x		x						
11	Belgium (3)	x											
12	Netherlands	x		x			x						
13	Germany	x					x	x			x		
14	Austria	x		x	x								
15	Slovenia	x		x	x			x			x		
16	Ireland	x		x			x	x					
17	UK	x			x								
18	Sweden	x		x			x						
19	Finland (1)	x					x						x
20	Finland (2)	x									x		
21	Estonia	x			x			x			x		
22	Lithuania	x		x	x				x				
23	Poland (1)	x		x	x						x		
24	Poland (2)	x			x		x	x		x		x	
25	Czech Rep.							x				x	
26	Hungary	x						x					
27	Romania	x									x		
28	Bulgaria	x		x	x			x			x		
29	Switzerland	x										x	
30	Moldova							x			x		

Table 9.3:
Meeting places for foreigners

These latest results (d to f) may explain why the most of the interviewees do not need to affiliate to a church or to associations: it is so easy to meet people at work and in the necessary activities after work (like the French course or the gym) that the interviewees do not need to look for them by affiliating to organisations of various kind:

Brussels is an international environment. [...] the thing is that in Brussels is very concentrated and, you know, this is especially for work, and everyone is in the same kind of area, as far as I know most people are in the same area and so it's all very concentrated and you are more aware of being in international... [United Kingdom, 17: 121].

Moreover, there are many meeting opportunities through bars and parties, which should not be considered as differentiated from the work: going to place the Luxembourg for an *aperitivo* after job time is a ritual that many people do like a part of the daily activity. Results may also be considered as a confirmation of the precariousness that characterises many people experience in Brussels. Furthermore, the fact that many interviewees meet new friends through the friends they already have underlines the importance of social relationships as a source of social capital.

Going through the answers, we better understand Expats' professional reality in Brussels:

Professionally there are opportunities [to meet foreigners] all time long, you know, all time long [...]; in this kind of events [European Commission FP7 infodays] I am always in, [...] I am in a lot of events, and then is when I meet... the fact is that it is utterly international. And then when you go out to parties. [...] In the language course you normally find people who are couples of people who work in the Commission, who come here, who do not have any choice and do not have anything to do [Spain,2: 147-156; my translation].

All my colleagues are from abroad, I am the only Belgian. They are from England and Italy, my boss is French and in the office there are German people, Dutch, Polish [Belgium 1, 9: 94-95].

Also the working culture is completely different. One of the Belgian interviewee moved from a company in her hometown (at one hour from Brussels) to an international company in the city, and may well explain this difference:

How do you consider your job: is there an international atmosphere or you are just used to that?

No, this is international because I worked in a typical Belgian atmosphere as well, in [town], in my previous company, and it's different: [there] people talk about different things, about their home life, their children, also because they are older, here we are all young people. Here people talk more about what's going on in international facts and politics. You don't find this in the home town, although it was a big company, it's not that it was a small company, this is smaller, but here the atmosphere is completely different. Sometimes I felt more at home when I worked there, but here you learn more. We discuss more things that are actually going on in the world, you know, actual topics, also professionally [Belgium 3, 11: 53-60].

Expats are normally young people, so it is easy to socialise even at work:

Funny thing here is that I don't have any Belgian friends, I know some Belgian people, but all my friends are Expats basically here: they work here, but they are from Hungary, Estonia, US, Australia, Spain, Portugal, Poland and then of course Slovenian, half of my friends are from Slovenia. Although I have very good relations with people connected with my work but we don't socialize, don't go out together but we have a really good relation at work: people are my age, so it's pretty informal, and that's what I like in Brussels because in Slovenia all the work connections I have are pretty much formal [...; Slovenia, 15: 30-35].

Outside the office, there are different opportunities to meet people. The bars and pubs elected as Expats meeting places are mainly of two kinds. There are those were people from all the countries go, located in strategic areas of the city: place the Luxembourg (familiarily called "place Lux"), in the centre of the business neighbourhood, where mostly people go after work time, from Monday to Friday, from 6 to 8; and place de Rogier, where the popular Cafè Belga attracts people from everywhere but Belgium: located at a walking distance from the Commission, it is full at the happy hour time and, because of his nice position close to a park, also on Friday night, Saturday and Sunday. Apart of these areas, there are the national bars, often managed by foreigners, where people from a specific country know they will mainly find their compatriots: English and Irish pubs, Italian cafès, Spanish bars, etc. There are dedicated bars almost for every European country.

Parties, instead, usually refer not to private events, but to international social events organised by institutions of various nature in order to celebrate a conference,

an exposition, the end of an important project, and so on. Very often they are open to public. The *Together magazine*, in an article speaking about a EU officer, writes:

Once a month, he holds parties designed to bring people together, to establish important professional contacts as well as friendship, love and sharing [VV.AA.: 6].

Another kind of party is that organised by nightclubs: regularly, some discotheques organises evenings explicitly dedicated to Expats. There are also Expats and meeting associations which organise similar such events. Ans Persons, after a first reticent reply, finally gave her opinion about this kind of events:

Do you also organise @7 [an event designed for Expat who want to meet for an aperitivo between 7 and 11]?

It's one of our partner. Do you know what it is? It's in the Mirano. The organiser told me that a lot of Belgian people go there too, but I don't know, sometimes I go there, but I don't like it.

Why?

I don't know... It's just that I go there because it's my job to see what is going on for the Expat community. Because... people are a kind of élite... because the guy who organises it remains outside and sais "you can go in, you can't come in", you have to show your card...

Really? And how do you get the card?

They have to subscribe on their list, and they check if your profile is good enough to be on the list, that's what they say, most of the time you get in, but I don't like that atmosphere, and it is full of people who just show off. But a lot of people really like that, because the night starts early, the food is not good at all and it's expensive, but then people dance and you can mix up with other European people. The organisers gets a lot of sponsoring, because if you do stuff for the Expat community... it's financed by a bank, because banks and other companies like that find there really their ideal public, with high salaries, so they try to get in touch with them. There is also a magazine, called *The Bulletin*, for the Expat community, and it is also financed by sponsors. [B: 80-96]

If you go to @7, the Belgian people who go there do that in search of a guy who has money, so... that's what they told me [B: 185-186].

The exclusive ambient guaranteed by @7 organisers is the centre of their advertisement on the guide *Newcomer* [spring 2007: 27]:

Visitor pass.

@seven is a community of friendsetters from all corners of the globe; people in their late twenties to forties of all nationalities meet directly after work and exchange cultures in a relaxing setting every Thursday at 19.00 at the Mirano Continental Brussels. The international community @seven offers professionals a perfect extension to social life from the office. Companies, institutions and staff can become members, which is a community of "world wide people" with a passion for life.

International Community @seven

when business meets pleasure.

In any case the presence of organisations dedicated to the Expats community facilitates the meeting among people:

When I arrived I didn't know so many people, so I thought that maybe one way would be to join a website called "xpats.com", and then there they had a lot of information about parties and groups and conversations and things you can do [United Kingdom, 17: 137-139].

Overall, there are many opportunities to meet people in Brussels: the Maltese respondent lists some of them, expressing an idea of easiness to meet people; actually she is one of those who said, in Question 16, that it is not easy to meet people in Brussels, especially at the beginning. Consequently, her enthusiasm sounds like a narrative: "in Brussels it is easy to meet people":

In which contexts or environment in Brussels do you meet people from other countries?

Basically, through my job, obviously, because I do meet with other EU people or delegates, and then if you are invited to the conferences or to the receptions, which is not so often but can happen, or at my dance class, or I simply go out to Place Luxembourg: I know one person, one friend invite me there or I invite her, we go for a drink, then we go to Place Lux: it's so open that if you have someone next you automatically say Hi, so that's the way it is here. Then yes, you have an Expat club, the @ club, they organise events, you subscribe and they send e-mail so they have activities for the week-ends or for a French conversation night. And maybe in the future I may consider to go to a language class, which is a good opportunity for meeting people, maybe Spanish or Portuguese [Malta, 5: 147-155].

The mentioned testimonies show how an Expat in Brussels may live, work, study and have fun practically without any contact with Belgians, and certainly without a proper knowledge of French. An Expat may spend years in Brussels always remaining inside the Expats community, and this kind of behaviour is socially approved among Expats. However, this does not mean that socialising inside the Expats community is easy; concerning this, some Expats tend confirm a narrative that focuses on multiculturalism: "It is nice to meet different people". But being cosmopolite, as I will soon show, is not sufficient to integrate in a community and to create satisfactory interpersonal relationships. The Maltese respondent, for example, stresses her cosmopolite attitude: "I don't think it's difficult [to meet people in

Brussels]. I mean, human nature is human nature everywhere.”, she says in one point of the interview (5: 159), but in another point she shows a more complex reality:

sometimes it's hard or not easy to socialize within the city. I mean, there are clubs, there are possibilities that you build your own network, but no one is here forever, although if you compare with other cities I guess the same can be said, there are diplomats everywhere. But somehow Brussels is more extreme, so I can see the difference, even from Stockholm, for example, [where] you meet much more local people than you do here in the centre of Brussels [Malta, 5: 75-79].

Human nature certainly remains human nature everywhere, but there are many environment conditions that may prevent people from get along together.

9.2.2. Meeting people in Brussels

Answers to Question 16 confirm Question 12 and Question 13 results: the majority of the interviewees find it easy to meet people in Brussels. Nevertheless, this reality hides several downsides and respondents' opinions are many-sided.

The table 9.4 shows the different typical answers provided, which are:

1. it is not easy because I don't have time: the two respondents who indicated this difficulty said they are too busy with their work to find the time to go out and meet people;
2. it is easy, because there are a lot of foreigners, and many of them are lonely: this is the most frequent answer, which confirms the fact that in the Expat community people are in the same situation, far from their countries and from their families, and in the need of a social network useful both for psychological and practical support;
3. it is easy because there are many cultural activities: this answer has one only occurrence, given by the same person that in Question 13 explains that she meet people in cultural events; not accidentally, this is the same respondent who affirmed to have dozens of friends;

Q16													
cases	T.A.	it's not easy because I don't have time	it's easy, because there are a lot of foreigners / of lonely people	it's easy because there are many cultural activities	it's easy because the job leads you to meet people	it's easy to meet people but not to get friends	it's less easy than in my country	it's easier than in my country	here at the beginning it is very difficult but then becomes easier	it's easier here than in big cities	it does not matter where you are, but if you are a student or a worker	it does not matter where you are, but if you can make an effort to know new people	in my country I have my friends and family and I don't need new people
		1	Portugal	x									
2	Spain				x	x	x				x	x	
3	Italy (1)		x		x			x					
4	Italy (2)					x							
5	Malta		x						x				x
6	Greece		x	x	x								
7	Cyprus		x			x		x					x
8	France				x	x							x
9	Belgium (1)		x										
10	Belgium (2)		x										
11	Belgium (3)		x									x	
12	Netherlands		x		x						x		
13	Germany		x							x	x		
14	Austria		x										
15	Slovenia				x	x							

16	Ireland										x	x	
17	UK		x					x		x	x		
18	Sweden				x			x					
19	Finland (1)				x			x					
20	Finland (2)		x		x							x	
21	Estonia		x										x
22	Lithuania		x		x			x					
23	Poland (1)					x							
24	Poland (2)					x			x				
25	Czech Rep.		x										x
26	Hungary	x			x						x		
27	Romania					x							
28	Bulgaria		x										
29	Switzerland										x		
30	Moldova						x						

Table 9.4: Easiness to meet people in Brussels

4. it is easy because the job leads you to meet people: the high frequency of this typical answer confirms Question 13 results, which show the work place as a theatre of encounters;
5. it is easy to meet people but not to make new friends: overall Brussels is described as a place where meeting new people is easy, but the kind of relationship that people establish may be weak.

Invited to compare the situation in Brussels with the situation in their country, interviewees have given the following typical answers:

6. it is less easy than in my country;
7. it is easier than in my country;
8. in Brussels at the beginning it is very difficult, but then it becomes easier to meet new people: this answer is an indicator of the difficulties that at least a couple of interviewees experienced in their insertion in Brussels life;
9. it is easier in Brussels than in big cities: the small dimension of the city and the concentration of institutions in the business nerve centre of the capital facilitate the meeting among Expats;

Typical answers 6 to 9 are not particularly significant. Others are, instead, interesting in raising some points about establishing new relationships:

10. it does not matter where you are, but if you are a student or a worker;
11. it does not matter where you are, but if you can make an effort to know new people;
12. in my country I have my friends and my family, and I do not need to look for new people.

Some interviewees affirm that it is very easy to meet new people, but not to get friends:

Do you find it easy to create new relationships in Brussels?

No.

Why not?

Hmm. Do you find it easy? [Laugh] It's easy to meet people. But to become friends it's not easy [Poland 1, 23: 94-97].

The reasons they mention are different, but in any case this is an undeniable fact which all the people who do not already have a social network in Brussels pass through, and which newcomers hardly understand:

I met this Italian couple [...], we [she and her boyfriend] went to the cinema with them, we went out with them that night, then we haven't heard anymore about them, they disappeared; they said: "we keep in touch", and then... another couple who were working in the Commission: [...] we spent a wonderful night together, we got drunk... And they disappeared from our life. So I believe this happens a lot here [Spain, 2: 242-247; my translation].

At the beginning one could interpret this testimony as the prove that the speaker is a nasty person, unable to make friends. In fact, many people experience the same, and it takes time (and many, many conversations with those who have already spent some years in Brussels) to realise that people do not disappear because they dislike you, but because they are opportunity-focused. In other words, many people know that their time in Brussels is to be short, and try to take the maximum advantage of the situation both for their professional and personal life. Consequently, the following possibilities may take place:

- a. individuals try to stay with "useful people", that is, to create useful friendships, both for their career and for their social status; something that newcomers immediately note when they first arrive in Brussels is that the very first two questions people ask them are "where are you from?" and "what is your job here?", and not person's name, age or other amenities;
- b. individuals tend to mix together because they are alone: they often do not find someone else especially nice, they do not have that special "click" that some interviewees describe, they just stay together because they need someone to go out, or to travel around, to break with their routine. So some people choose to stay with a group or another according to what each group offers to them each time, and they may skip from one to the other, following the best entertainment offer: this week-end staying with person A because he is going to go to place Rogier and that is what they are in the mood for, the following staying with person B because she is going outside Brussels, and it is a nice opportunity to share the costs of renting a car;

- c. moreover, individuals know that there are many people in Brussels and that it is easy to meet them. Consequently they feel free to choose the people and, eventually, to change their group every now and then. In other words, people may not grow fond of each other, but rather try to regularly change their companies, in order to find someone nicer, or more useful, or more interesting (maybe because coming from a different country), or more sexually attractive;
- d. besides these cynical cases, which are more frequent than what one could imagine, even in those situations in which people really like each other, they often do not have time to dedicate to social relationships, because they might have to study for the *concour* (to enter in the European Commission), or because they are travelling home or somewhere else. In this case, they have the tendency to remain with their closer friends (maybe someone they met at the beginning of their experience in Brussels, or before), and it is very hard for the people outside the group to enter in it;
- e. finally, many people are not available to an emotive investment in a friendship, as they know that all the relations they establish are soon going to end because of the short time people spend in Brussels.

All these reasons transform the encounter between two people in a very peculiar situation, characterised by the strange fact that even when the two individuals like each other, they may stop to meet *ex abrupto*. For newcomers this is even more difficult to understand because when one of the two individuals call the other to see what happened, the other is normally extremely kind, spend some time at the phone, but very likely ends up saying that he or she is very busy in that period (everyone is always very busy in Brussels) and that will call again, of course without doing it.

In more sociological terms, I would say that *the solidarity relationship is often replaced by an opportunity-driven relationship, where the opportunity may refer either to a precise goal* (for instance, to acquire a new contact useful for lobbying), *or to the satisfaction of an inner need* (for example, not to stay alone on Friday night).

sometimes if you meet someone actually you are not interested in the character of this person but you are always like asking yourself: “ok, how can I benefit from this person, where does she work, will this help me at work?”. I think everyone is like that. For example you go to place Luxembourg on Friday evening, you are only interested in meeting someone from who you would benefit, you have a beer and a small chat, but you are always hoping that this person next time call you or that you can call her at the Commission, that she will remember you and help you somehow. When I came here I had the feeling I was in prison, because everyone is asking you why are you here, where are you coming from, how long will you stay here, you know, exactly like in prison, always the same question, and where do you work of course. So I think there are lots of contacts here, but they are at a very superficial level. For example I have some friends who are very good lobbyists, they go every Friday to place Luxembourg and every Thursday to place Chatelain, to these informal points, and they just go around and say hi, but this is very superficial, is not that they remain friends or something [Slovenia, 15: 190-201].

Here everyone is a foreigner, everyone goes for a drink after job, before he goes home. In Malta everyone lives with his parents. [...]

You mean that you are living with your parents until you get married?

That’s the trend, but now it’s changing a bit. My friends of my age are still with their parents. So I also used to feel different in that sense. If you live with your parents your need to socialize with people is reduced, because you have your contacts at home, you are not [alone] in your apartment, with your food in front of the TV, you know what I mean? Here, for example, there is a book club. Why? Because all these foreign people maybe have some free time, they like to read, then they get together, they organize a social event, and that’s it, because everyone is in the same boat: you are a foreigner in a foreign country and you need to get to know people [Malta, 5: 239-248].

I think that the main thing is that everybody is a foreigner here, so you have to meet people otherwise you’ll have to be alone [Greece,6: 117-118].

Obviously an opportunity-driven relationship for the most of the people is not as rewarding as a real friendship:

That’s why I wouldn’t go to stagier parties, assistant parties, and stuff like that: it’s always the stereotypic questions: “where are you from, what are you doing here, who do you know in the Commission”, and maybe one of the last question is “what is your name” or something like that, and then the last question, you know, the social question is “what about the weather?”, or some bullshit like this; so you can actually interact with most of them in sleep, because you have these five questions, you give the appropriate data and it’s always the same thing: it’s very superficial, and it’s boring, because it’s not useful. So I tend to know people most because I work with them and I need them or they need me, because we work together and of course some are very qualified, and apart from that of 100 people that I know maybe one or two of them may be interesting enough for me to visit them and have fun, and out of these two or three maybe one would be a friend. I think it’s a sort of normal procedure, except that I find the percentage of boring people quite elevated [Rumania, 27: 154-164].

The time frame of an opportunity-driven relationship may be extremely short (one meeting) or very long (always going out together), but its intensity may remain extremely weak (as seen, some interviewees say that they regularly go out with a group of people without considering them friends, but just acquaintances). Consequently, a vicious circle is triggered: people have a lot of relationships, but they are not satisfactory, so they are pushed to leave in order to return closer to their real friends:

There are a lot of people who come to make an experience abroad, I think, and living inside the big Expat international community, after a while it's superficial, because it's always going to party and "where are you from?", always the same kind of conversation, and it's hard to build a friendship, because the people are coming and leaving all the time; there are people looking for more stability and this Brussels has difficulty in offering, and then they wanna go back to their countries... [B: 162-166].

The weak intensity of opportunity-driven relationships also depends, as indicated in point c, by the abundance of opportunities that people experience, especially if coming from smaller or more close-minded urban realities. Some individuals do not have any attachment to a specific group:

My best friend is from Slovakia. Sometimes I do things with Maltese people, colleagues from work, but not all the time: I like to switch between groups [Malta, 5: 121-122].

Ans Persoons gives a clear vision of this phenomenon:

I think everybody who comes here thinks it's only for two years, except the functionaries in the Commission, who know it's going to be for their whole life.

You said that frequently they settled down.

That happens: they fall in love with somebody of another nationality, and if you really live in an international community for some years, it's really difficult to go back to your little village in Portugal or... it's such an environment, it's really interesting, but there is a lot of loneliness, I think the Commission has the highest depression rate, a lot of people are really lonely. But it's difficult to go back to a non international environment after it. That's our experience.

Why do you have this sensation of loneliness?

There was somebody saying "there are so many possibilities!". You don't settle down, because there is always so much to do, after one girl another girl, and you always meet a lot of people, it's not that easy to settle down. You don't have a family, a lot of people are lonely, they don't have like a family cocoon, and there are people coming and leaving all the time, and they have all kind of hobbies because they don't have a family environment that you see all the time. And it's really difficult: they have all superficial going out relationships. That's what I hear about, it's my perception, it's not that for

everybody is the same. But depression inside the Community is really a problem, they have a cell inside which deals with it. And that's only the Commission. [...] you can see couples here, they break up all the time, because somebody is going back to his country, and if you live that several times then you don't start again a new relationship, because people move [B: 168-188].

Thus there is some sort of tendency to privilege quantity, that is, superficial but heterogenic relationships, to quality, that is, deep and durable relationships. This also affects couple relationships nature:

[...] people come and go, don't stay here for long, and everyone know that eventually they will live, so they have superficial relationships, they meet from time to time and just do things together, but it's not really like they would fall in love or be prepared to sacrifice their lifestyle for someone else [Slovenia, 15: 244-246].

In their spare time, people tend to make plans choosing among the different opportunities, and this leads them to have always something to do:

Everything here is less spontaneous, you have to plan everything here, because you have such a lack of time that you really have to plan. For example in Slovenia I can wake up on Saturday morning and call someone and decide to do something, while here you can't call someone on Saturday morning because you must plan in advance, because no one has time, everyone has plans [Slovenia, 15: 217-219].

Another quotation confirms the contrast between potential quantity of available meetings and relationships quality:

[...] you do not get too much involved in Belgian normal life because so many people are international here and you hardly know if they are Belgian or Dutch or French, you don't know; sometimes you don't even ask the nationality, it is not important to put that question. So maybe I've met a lot of Belgians without knowing it because you talk in English. That's it [Austria, 14: 108-111].

The interviewee affirms that she meets many people, but this implies that the relation is so superficial that she does not even know where they come from⁶⁵.

Of course an opportunity-driven relationship may become deeper, but it is unlikely to become a real friendship; in the next quotation the Cypriot respondent use

⁶⁵ It is not true that the nationality is not important, as it becomes an essential information when you cannot give it for granted; it is like speaking at a normal phone or at a mobile phone; while speaking at a mobile phone, the first question is "where are you?"; in absolute terms, knowing where the interlocutor is does not matter, but individuals find it necessary to collocate him in the space.

the word “friendship”, but in Question 12 she says she has no friends in Brussels; so her last sentence should not be taken literally:

Yes [it is easier]. Definitely more than in Cyprus and I would say more than in America as well. Because here a lot of people are alone and looking for friends as well, while when you are home you have your family, your friends from high school, from college, so you are not so often looking for new friendships, but here you are like “I’m bored tonight, let me call a friend and let’s go out”, then you build a friendship more [Cyprus, 7: 235-238].

Another problem is that already formed groups are quite closed, both because they have already shared a lot and because they are passing through the same type of experience:

I’d rather choose [...] spending more time with the people I already know. So in this sense it’s closed.

“You” are closed. Why do you say “it’s” closed?

[Laugh]. Looking at my group of old friends, it is not accepting new persons, because we have known each other for two years or at least one year [...], it’s something more in terms of common experience, so in the sense that the group is more closed and stable. But let’s say that there is a common trip, for example to Germany, if somebody new wants to join us, why not? We have nothing against the people, it’s just difficult, because the newcomers tend to stick together, because they have the same experiences, like looking for a flat. Of course that they can ask people here for advice, but it’s not the same kind of relationship: [there is a difference] like living the thing and observing the thing. I can help a newcomer to find a flat but it’s not the same experience like for another newcomer who also looks for the flat, I would not share it at the same level. So the newcomers tend to stick more to the newcomers, and the people who have been staying for long tend to stick together as well. That’s my impression. But then, if there is for example a couple, and the boyfriend is from the old group and the girlfriend is new, there is no problem, she would be accepted. But why should I go to the newcomers? The old group would understand me better [Poland 2, 24: 205-220].

Moreover, some people are so work-oriented that they have short time to dedicate to social relations or a limited intention to make an effort to look for people they really like, so they may conform to the easiest solution, that is, staying with their colleagues or with the first people they met:

Sometimes I meet them [the people I met here]. We go to events in the week-end. But I don’t think they will be very good friends after a few weeks. It’s just that we cannot be together, and no one wants to go alone [26: 59-61; ...].

Do you find difficult in Brussels to create relationships?

Quite difficult. Probably it’s not me, I’m not the only one who works hard and for long hours and after work you don’t have any energy to go anywhere, so it’s not because of

me. It's all about your job. [...] And if you go to a bar, you will go with your colleagues, but it's not what you want to do, because you want to meet other people [Hungary, 26: 110-114].

To go a little deeper in the relationship requires an effort that is not possible to do with many:

I have many acquaintances, I really know a lot of students and people in general, so I think at some point I just became tired to meet new people and getting more involved. I started to have the feeling that if I'm a bit interested in everybody is like that I'm not interested in anybody.

Why did you choose the people from the AIESEC?

Many reasons. With those of AIESEC it was easier because I had already made the effort to know them. It's easier to keep all the acquaintances going [Poland 2, 24: 166-171].

I think it's more and more difficult. I have many opportunities but it's not like that I'm using a lot of them. At the beginning I was ready to know people much better, but after one year I was meeting so many people that I couldn't keep up, getting to know them better. So I have a group that I know, but the knowledge is very superficial.

So now you have a stable group of friends, and with all the other people just a superficial knowledge?

Yes. But if it comes to new relationships, it's more difficult. Why should I make the effort as I'll move or the person will move? [Poland 2, 24: 194-200].

The fact of knowing many people without establishing deep relationships in the long term may become wearing:

It was easy at the beginning, but now I feel like it's enough. [...] I don't know, you get tired of getting to know new people. [...]

Do you think that it depends on the fact that people you meet here are from different countries?

Yes [Moldova, 30: 110-124].

In some cases, isolation may become a serious problem, like the existence of a help line seems to demonstrate:

Just arrived in Belgium? Lived here some time? Community Help Service is here for you. The CHS Help Line is an anonymous 24 hours English language crisis, support and information telephone service. It is staffed by volunteers trained and supervised by CHS professional staff. The CHS Mental Health Centre is staffed by a professional team of psychologists, psychotherapists and psychiatrists who can help with a wide range of problems, such as [...] depression, acute distress, marital and family difficulties. [advertisement published on *Newcomer*, Autumn 2006: 84]

The listed difficulties in creating real friendships provoke an ambiguous situation, characterised by a multiplicity of meetings and social opportunities, but a general superficiality in relationships. The problem is socially recognised, as the text of the Cornerstone International Church advertisement, publishes on *Newcomer*, testifies:

Making new friends isn't easy. Real friends are hard to come by. Maybe you've moved away from some true friends and you're suffering withdrawal symptoms, We understand. We've felt that hurt, too. But we've discovered there is only one remedy for the ailment... build new friendships. Cornerstone International Church is a place for friendships. Hope to meet you there soon!! [Autumn 2006: 54]

These consideration leads to an integration of the interpersonal relationships model by adding the category of the opportunity-driven relationships (see table 9.5), which have the intensity of an acquaintance relationship, but may be concealed as friendships. It is important to note that opportunity-driven relationships do not correspond to instrumental friendships. The first are not-formalised role relationships, the second are formalised role relationships: in these sense, instrumental friendships are somehow institutionalised and socially accepted. For example, an employee might cultivate his relationship with his boss by developing an informal relation. In comparison with instrumental friendships, opportunity-driven relationships are more heterogenic, more superficial and are not institutionalised, even though some of them can become instrumental friendships.

CATEGORY	CLASS	INTENSITY	TYPE
Presence Relationships	Not formalised roles relationships	Very weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Occasional meetings without reiteration, for example with shoppers, bar customers, etc.; - repeated meetings with people known by sight (for example, with the newsvendor where one buys the newspaper everyday or the neighbour met every morning at the bus stop);
		Weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acquaintances; - opportunity-driven relationships.
		Strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Friendship based on sharing an experience and on mutual support (can end or reveal itself a close friendship); - flings, last longing sexual relations; - flirtations.
		Very strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Close friendship based on feelings, trust and intimacy (usually in a durable relation).
	Formalised roles relationships	Weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work colleagues; - never met or occasionally met distant relatives on whom one can rely in case of need; - instrumental friendships (people who are considered instruments for one's own personal affirmation).
		Strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parents and close relatives; - couples (engaged, living together, married; cheating lovers).

Table 9.5: Interpersonal relationships model: definitive version (presence relationships)

In any case, not all the people would describe their interpersonal relationships as such, not because they pass through a different experience, just because they take opportunity-driven relationships as normal. Moreover, especially those who already have old friends in Brussels do not care if the people they meet disappear, or if their acquaintances leave, because they do not need them: they already have their friends, and the rest are just acquaintances among the many that they daily meet. So many interviewees recognise that they have superficial relationships, but they may find it absolutely fine, because they have the possibility to meet different people from different countries and exchange experiences. Furthermore some respondents find meeting Expats very easy, because people share similar interests and follow a similar lifestyle (see also § 9.3.2); obviously, as seen above, the downside of these similarities at such a superficial level is that interactions become quite stereotyped:

[...] in the Parliament, and in general in this environment, people tend to stick to stereotypes, which is study in political science, then some master in European affairs and then they go to Brussels; this leads to very boring people, most of them have never opened a book in their life apart the books they use for studies [27: 150-152; ...] Also the relations with the opposite sex are very very boring. Most of them [women] look nice, because they are young or whatever, and you think “I would go with that one and that one”, then to go to sleep with them you have to make hours of conversation which is not worthy, it’s not, because it’s boring. [27: 169-172; ...] The easy fact is that they are quite open, their openness. I think it mostly derives from the fact that they are people who are not native here, so they are not in their normal context, and all the social barriers that might held them from making new acquaintances or making new experiences back at home here don’t exist: you don’t have the same social environment and the same social obligations as in your native place, where you come to do this and that because of your family’s name and this kind of stuff. You have social rules that everybody respects for tradition or stuff like that, but being here you don’t have to follow them; most of them speak English so that’s also easy level; most of them have the same experiences and that makes things easier, and the positive thing is that, I don’t know, some of them might be nice people but I don’t think that it depends whether they are from a special place or because they travelled a lot, I don’t think that people who travelled a lot are more interesting, it doesn’t make difference [Rumania, 27: 223-232].

[...] here I find it easier because I meet many people I have much in common with. Maybe this depends on the fact that I live [in Italy] in a small reality; the more I grow up, the more I become aware that in my Italian environment I don’t have much to share, while here I am integrated. Anyway I obviously have old friendships which are there, remain there and there will always be [Italy 1, 3: 94-97; my translation].

The latest quotation shows that the closest friends may remain at home, but going abroad offers the possibility to find an environment composed by people with similar interests. Of course this phenomenon is much accentuated for those who come from a village or a small town, and regards more the movement from the province to the big city than the movement from a country to another one, even though in Brussels there is a peculiar and quite unique concentration of people interested in political science and EU affairs. The real problem, once again, is the time frame, that is, the high turn-over that becomes an obstacle to many Expats to relationships formation:

That's the sad [side] in Brussels: that people tend to come and go. At a quite high speed. They stay 2 years in Brussels and then go somewhere else [Poland 2, 24: 152-154].

I don't know [if it is easier or not]. If I remain here for one year, I think I will have real contacts, real friends, not just acquaintances. So, in my opinion, it depends on the time you spend in a place. I know it seems a quantitative thing, it's not just the time, well, partially it is. Because I'm thinking to Erasmus; maybe you meet the most beautiful person of your life, then after one month you don't see them again, I can't explain it. I would say that abroad it is easier to meet people, but creating real relationships is harder [Italy 2, 4: 88-93; my translation].

It's easy to be in contact with a lot of people, because everybody is really nice and the feeling is that here anyone is a very socializing person, everybody is smiling and is nice, open-minded, but the fact is that a lot of people come and go and are planning to stay like 4 or 5 months and they go back home, so since I'm here I've met so many nice people that I started to become friend when they go home actually, so it was always really sad because we were starting a really nice relationship. So it's easy but you don't have time to have a deeper relationship to become really friend, to have long experience in friendship, because people leave [France, 8: 153-158].

There's a lot of people coming here from abroad and they don't have an established social network here, so they tend to be very open in contacts seeking, so it's very easy to meet new people here. Then of course you have the downside that people are moving a lot as well, so it's hard to keep friends here, you meet a lot of new people, and then they stay only 6 months or 2 years and then they go back home again, that's the problem that I've been discussing with other people staying for a couple of years, and most people agreed that it's hard to keep a working social network here, because people move out [Sweden, 18: 98-103].

An objection is that people should be able to maintain relationships in the distance, if they are strong enough (and if they are not, maybe they are not worthy).

Actually it is not that easy, because many interpersonal relationships are based on the sharing of a common daily experience:

The downside is that people move a lot. [...] if I am in Prague I stay with Czech people and there is no danger that someone leaves [...]. Then, if someone leaves, you can remain friend, but the relation becomes different, because you do not share your daily life anymore [Czech Republic, 25: 322-328; my translation].

As seen, some interviewees link the possibility to meet people with the phase of their life they are going through. Person's age and experience may increase his or her ability to get in touch with other people:

I don't see the correlation between being in Brussels and being in Ireland for establishing new relationships. Being your age, when you are 18 you are shy, but at 25, 26, you talk to the world, you don't care. Now if you are 18 and come from Ireland and you don't speak French that's different, but if you are 25 you are more confident, you can speak, I don't think it matters [Ireland, 16: 126-129].

The fact of being single or not influences the time one can spend with other people:

In Barcelona it was very easy to meet new people, but that also because I was in a different phase of my life, because now I live together with my boyfriend, which is so really different, I mean, I spend more time at home. In Barcelona I was by myself, so you go out a lot more [The Netherlands, 12: 114-116].

The activity carried on by individuals are relevant too. According to the interviewees (with the exception of the British respondent), student life provides a great number of meeting opportunities and makes it easy to meet new people, while working life takes much of professionals' time, this way preventing them from potential meeting situations:

I am not going to tell you that in Brussels is easier or less easy. If I am here as a student, then for me it's easier, but if I am working a lot, then I won't have time [...]. What I mean is that it is easier in my country, but it depends on the situation in which you are in a country [Spain, 2: 187-190; my translation].

In Holland I was a student and was very easy to make friends. In the UK I had to work: I had few acquaintances and few good friends. [...] To be a student is always a different thing [...; Hungary, 26: 124-126].

Only the British interviewee see student and working life in an opposite way: students have to study, and can make that practically avoiding any contact with other students (the provided image is of a student silently concentrated in a library), while a professional is obliged to interact with his or her colleagues on a daily basis:

Generally speaking do you find it easy to establish new relationships here in Brussels?

I think people are generally quite... keen to meet people, I think people are quite friendly, so they might not necessarily be... this might be superficial things, but people are quite approachable.

Do you have the feeling that it's easier or less easy than in your country?

I find it easier.

And respect to other countries...

Well, I mean, I find it easier because of the situation, I mean, I'm working here and when I was in Italy, in Spain or whatever I was on an Erasmus exchange. I mean, when you are a student you can kind to go to the university and study and live the university without having to speak with people, meet people, if you want. But if you are working you are more likely to meet people [17: 150-159; ...].

Do you find any difference in the kind of relationship you have here respect to the one you have in your country?

Yea, but that might just be because I'm doing something different: when I was in England I was studying at the university, here I'm working, so that changes the relationships.

Which are the differences?

At university you tend to stay with people of the same age as you or younger, and here I'm with people who are younger and older and that makes things different. At university you work in a library where you are separate, you work individually, while here if you work in a office you are in close proximity and you see the people everyday in the same place.

How does this influence you?

I quite like the fact it's more structured, whereas at university... I think it's different, because... you might not see the person every day, you know most people do not go to their lectures, all them regularly, sometimes you have people in a lecture sometimes other people [United Kingdom, 17: 194-206].

In the following quotation the possibility to meet people is correctly related to a number of factors: city urban structure, student or worker status, individual availability and ability to meet people, hospitality towards foreigners that may or not characterise a national culture:

What about the other countries where you have been?

No, it's not exactly the same. Paris, for example, is a very lonely city. It's huge, you don't meet people very easily, it's a difficult city to me. Parisians are not particularly friendly people; you meet eventually people but not as here in Brussels and there are not as many foreigners as in Brussels. Strasburg was a student city, ya, you had the

opportunity to meet a lot of people, you know, going out a lot, but nothing compared to here. I personally meet people more easily, of course also because I'm older, as well as I'm a bit more sociable, in a way I know how to approach people better than when I was 20, because when I was 20 I was afraid, afraid also of the language barrier; I'm not anymore, no. I can make mistakes in English, in French, I don't care anymore, when I was 20 I did care. But I think that Brussels give the opportunity to meet people all the time. It's the setting of the city. That's how it works, I think [Greece, 6: 119-128].

Actually the city structure, as well as its culture and amusement offer, contribute to isolate or group people:

I lived in Berlin for 2 years and it is like Paris or London, those are not very personal cities, it's quite an anonymous city, it's not easy to make the first step, but it's also personal. In a place like here, where everything is concentrated in one spot and everybody is more or less used to meet new people also on a rather superficial basis, it's very easy [Germany, 13: 154-157].

Some interviewees maintain that in their country they do not need to look for new contacts. The need to look for new people also explains why some respondents found answering to Question 16 difficult: the situation at home and the situation abroad are not fully comparable, as in one's own country there are long-time relationships (family and childhood friends), while abroad a new social network has to be developed:

Ya, it's true that you bond a lot with people when you are abroad, because you don't have your family, you don't have your friends that you met when 5 years old [Greece, 6: 99-100].

The point is that in Estonia I don't need to make friends any more; when I came here I looked for somebody to click and to hang out, but in Estonia I don't need it anymore, because I have already my friends there, like 20 very very good friends, and I don't have the time for everybody [Estonia, 21: 103-104].

This consideration, however, cannot be accepted uncritically. Many interviewees are coming from capital cities, where a cosmopolitan environment, even though maybe different from the Brussels one, is fully available. Consequently it sounds odd that many respondents declare themselves very interested in what is international and multicultural, but then do not look for foreigners while in their country. Consider for

instance the following statement, released by the French interviewee, who is from Paris:

Do you think that here is much or less easier than in your country?

It's a difficult question. In my country, I have my old circle of friends I've known for 10 years, so I don't make new friends that quickly in France because I don't need to. Here I don't know as many people as in France, so I'm more in demand, I want to meet new people, and so many Expats are in the same situation, they all want to make friends. I think it's easier, the problem is that we don't have enough time to build the relationships [8: 159-163; ...]

Why didn't you make an effort to meet people from other countries even in Paris?

First, I didn't study in Paris, but in Lille. Actually I'm still in contact with some nice Erasmus students. When I go to Paris I see my family; I used to go there only in weekends and on holidays so it was just to see my family and my friends, not to make new friends. In Lille of course I was studying and making new friends with Erasmus students. I think it's common to everywhere. When you have your family and your home, your old friends who you don't see so often, when you go back home they are your priority. In Sweden I made so many friends from Germany, from Belgium, from The Netherlands, from Italy, from Poland, from the world but especially from these countries, but it was much harder to meet Swedish people because they knew that you were staying only a few months, they had their family, their friends, of course they were curious and nice to me, but they wouldn't build a friendship [France, 8: 166-175].

According to this quotation, local people (wherever they are it is the same) do not approach foreigners, because they do not have time and they do not want to invest in a relationship which will be hard to maintain. Erasmus exchanges are seen as an opportunity to get in touch with students from other countries, but it is evident that the relationship is superficial ("I am still in contact with some nice Erasmus students"). It seems that this answer tries to hide the fact that at home she remains mainly with people from her country, after several statements of the good that meeting foreigners is. By the way, also in Brussels she has French friends from the university, as well as her French boyfriend, with whom is living together. I believe this is an example of a narrative which contrasts with the factual statement, a narrative of which the logic is: "having foreign friends is nice and socially rewarded". Of course the existence itself of this narratives shows that she has a cosmopolitan spirit, even though it might be less deep that what she wants it to appear.

The weakness of the French respondent explanation seems to be confirmed by another statement, from the Czech respondents:

The first year of university I was very much involved in the North American environment, and I used to say: in Prague there are so many Americans! While when I am with my small group of Czech friends, I never meet other nationalities, because I do not go to the city centre bars, I do everything inside the group and if I see some Italians I do not feel like to go to them, because I don't need them, because I have my group [Czech Republic, 25: 247-251; my translation].

According to this quotation, living in a capital city if you want to meet foreigners you can easily do that, but if you are with your friends you just do not feel the need to do it, as also the French respondent affirms. Another confirmation of this comes from a Belgian interviewee, who is very interested in meeting people from abroad, even though she has a Belgian boyfriend with whom she lives and a Belgian group of friends:

How can this [cosmopolitan] environment influence you?

[Pause] Because if I don't know cultures, if I don't know something about people I like to interest myself in their cultures, in their background.

With "their" do you mean people from other cultures?

Yes, because I like to know things that I don't know, and as they come from abroad they have different backgrounds and everything and they can bring me things that I don't have, like ideas, or even cultures that I don't know, books, everything. Even cinema: I was in touch with a Spanish girl and she was at a Spanish cinema thing in Brussels and I had no idea of this event and she said "Come with me" and I went and it was really good, so I saw two movies in Spanish that I wouldn't ever seen at the cinema.

As much as I can understand you are speaking about cultural exchanges.

Yea. People are different, so they listen kinds of music that I don't know, they do things that I don't know, they teach me that there are different things than mine that I [can] listen to, that I [can] go forth, so... [Belgium 1, 9: 25-38].

Consequently, going abroad may represent a positive experience which develops the cosmopolitan attitude of individuals, facilitating the enriching meeting with people of other nationalities and pushing towards the formation of multicultural groups, even though the link among group members may remain weak. Both in his country and abroad a person can choose to remain with people of his nationality or to open to people from other countries, but the fact of being in a foreign country, in a place characterised by a high presence of foreigners, facilitates the process of getting in touch and establishing a relationship with people of different nationalities.

This does not mean, of course, that abroad it is easier to establish deep relationships. Firstly it is not correct to say "abroad": travellers need to be were

people from abroad is, that is, in those towns and cities where it is possible to find an international community:

It is easier, because the international community is bigger. There are people from different countries, people who speak different languages, more open-minded people. If I were living in a small village in Belgium maybe I would feel more as a stranger than in Brussels. Here is more international [Lithuania, 22: 104-106; my translation].

Secondly, interviewees refer to their experiences, describing the people of the countries they spent some time, and everyone has his individual impression. While the Czech respondent (already cited) maintain that it is very easy to create an intimate relationship with Italians and Spanish, the British respondent describes a different experience:

In Italy they are very friendly, at the beginning they will be really interested in you, but then you are not really getting to pass that level, or you have to stay there a long time to get to know well, to get passing that level. In England it's more difficult like the initial contact, people are more distant, but when you do get to know them it's maybe... I'm saying that, that... well, Italian are socially extrovert people, British people are less socially extrovert, so whereas it's easier to meet people in Italy, you might meet lots of people but not really go to a different level, in England you might not meet that many people, but if you get to know them, if you make the effort with the people you meet, you might well get to a different level in a quicker amount of time [17: 162-168].

Curiously Italians say the same of the Northern people: they are described as very much available to chat, for example, but it is difficult to go further. What is more, even a person from Sweden, by the common sense considered a cold people country, express an opposite opinion:

It's much easier here than in England.

Why?

English tend to keep a distance with people, you know, they don't let you in [...; United Kingdom, 18: 174-176].

Consequently, even though it is undeniable that there are colder and warmer peoples, as well as people who get more time than others to develop a friendship relation, I rather believe that individual personality and the circumstances he finds abroad are much more important than general national characters in determining his or her meetings and the possibility to make new friends abroad. Individual

personality and particular circumstances have such a strong influence on people experience that it is hard to generalise. I agree with those interviewees who affirms that it does not matter where you are, but if you are willing (and able) to make an effort to meet new people. I would say that it is not so important where is the traveller from, but who he or she is; it is not so important where he goes, but the people he finds.

To resume Question 13 and Question 16 results, Brussels is considered an ideal place where to meet people, thanks to its concentration of foreigners with similar curricula from all over Europe. The most of the people meet in their office and in social environments which are very much work-related. Meeting new people is considered extremely easy, but relations are usually very superficial. Close, intimate friendships, that is, very strong not formalised intimate relationships are quite rare, and often are the legacy of the past (either friends already known when still at home, or people met during previous experiences abroad and met again in Brussels). Many people have flirtations or adventures, that is, a kind of strong not formalised intimate relationships, but they are unlikely to have a long length. Despite the fact that many interviewees underline that Expats are all in the same situation, solidarity relationships are often replaced by opportunity-driven relationships, oriented either to the fulfilment of a precise goal (for instance, to acquire a new contact useful for lobbying), or to the satisfaction of an inner need (for example, not to stay alone on Friday night). Moreover, even when the relation is genuine, its temporariness prevents it to become a strong or very strong not formalised intimate relationship. Overall, taking part to the Expat community is rewarding for what concerns cultural exchanges, even though these might become repetitive in the long terms and may not present anymore novelty elements. As regards the possibility to establish intimate relationships, both friendships and love stories, the Expat community may be very deceiving.

9.2.3. Belgians and Expats

The Belgian interviewees are quite enthusiastic about living in such a multicultural city like Brussels, as they see people from other countries as a source of cultural exchange and enrichment.

I like to interest myself in their cultures, in their background.

With “their” do you mean people from other cultures?

Yes, because I like to know things that I don't know, and as they come from abroad they have different backgrounds and everything and they can bring me things that I don't have, like ideas, or even cultures that I don't know, books, everything [Belgium 1, 9: 25-29].

Nevertheless there is some sort of invisible barrier between Belgians and Expats:

It is funny, I don't have any Belgian friends and I don't have any foreign friend who would have Belgian friends: Belgians stick with each other, they don't really want to make friends within the foreigners, because foreigners are here only temporary, they come and go, so they don't really want to invest in a relationship or in a friendship, because they know that eventually people would leave. And this is also why you can't have really a deep relationship with people: because on average people are here for one year, and in one year you only start to know somebody. For me, maybe because of the culture, because Slovenians are like that, I need to develop a friendship, you can go out a lot with a person, but you are not a friend until you develop the relation in years. So my friends have been my friends for 10 years or more [Slovenia, 15: 222-230].

Some interviewees admit that they are not interested in meeting Belgians:

If I was living here a long time then I would probably try to integrate more with Belgian people, to spend more time with them. But now it's a transitory thing for me, yea, I'm not going to stay here for a long time. It's hard to get to know Belgians if you are not working with Belgians, and I think Brussels is quite divided and many people have no interest in meeting Belgians, I think, many people who work for the EU, institutions, I mean EU related jobs. You can kind of keep yourself separate from it [...; United Kingdom, 17: 143-147].

Many interviewees link the fact that Belgians do not mix with Expats because of the short time the latest remain in Brussels. This might be occasionally true, but does not represent a complete and convincing explanation of the fact that actually there is a separation between Belgians and Expats. Ans Persoons treated deeply this point:

[...] if you consider all the people working in the EU institutions, in the lobby and in NGOs, you reach a rough estimation of about 100.000 people, and that's one out of 10 people here in Brussels, so it's quite a lot. The general public thinks that they make a lot of money, that they push up the prices of the houses, because Brussels used to be really cheap, because they make much more money than the average person here and can pay the double or three times, so it creates an envy. Also institutions buildings ruin the neighbourhoods. For example, where there are the Parliament and the Commission: before there were neighbourhoods with houses, and all the people who lived there were like forced to move. [...] We still have a lot to do to change people minds, because they do not realise that people in the Commission make more money, but they also use their money to go to restaurants here, to go to shops, and they spend their money in Brussels, and that makes the economy work in Brussels. And they create a lot of jobs, too, because the institutions are here, but also the people who work for the institutions: catering, cleaning, taxi. But people don't feel like that. People have really a bad idea. Because a lot of people who work in the institutions don't send their children to Belgian schools, but to European schools... it is an élite, because they make more money and they live in certain areas of the city, not all of them, but a lot of [B: 44-63].

[...] there are people who come here and they really want to know the city, and try to learn French, and some Dutch too; people who send their children to Belgian schools, who buy their houses in Belgian neighbourhoods or at least in places where they can get in touch not only with Expats. But you also have people who come here and make a scene because in an official office they don't speak in English, and who really refuse to learn any French, and who go to shops and restaurants and if people do not speak English it's a shame, everybody should speak English. We see it more and more often, especially with the new European countries. We have problems with them, or not problems, but they are not polite, because they have an attitude like: we have waited for so long, and now we are here and we want what we have right to. Not all the countries have the same attitude: people from Italy, or Spain o France, they speak some French, in the new countries it's not the case [B: 108-116].

One of the Belgian interviewee provides a similar insight:

Sometimes I don't have the feeling to be at home. For example, I'm living in front of the European Community school, and when they have meetings, because they are working for the EC, they can do everything, when you call the police because they can't park correctly and you can't go out of your house or come in, they just don't move, because they work for the European Community and we have to understand that they are not at home, so they don't know all the rules in Belgium, and when you speak to them they say "but you have just to move, if you are not happy just go and live somewhere else" [they are arrogant]. But we have been living here for 20 years and they only for ten years, we were here before. They just don't understand, [they say:] "Ah, we don't know the country" and like that, but they just have to get it. It was like that a lot before, now it's getting easier, because people understand they are living in Belgium and you have Belgian people living in Belgium, and we have also a culture and you don't have to adapt to it but just to respect it as we respect the others [Belgium 2, 10: 100-109].

Some Expats feel that there is a social barrier between them and the Belgians, due to a sort of unjustified elitist thought:

Also the European community here, the Expats so to speak, they tend not to socialize with native Belgians, so many people here do not know Belgians at all, they only know other people from other European countries.

Why do you think it's like that?

Well, I'm not sure really. It's a language barrier, a social barrier, the people who come here they are very high educated and they are here for something especially, and the people you might meet in the street is just an average European, maybe it's a cultural balance, it's not only about incomes, but with goals and education [Sweden, 18: 103-109].

Obviously there is nothing like "an average person", but just more or less educated people, like everywhere. The respondent, however, transfers his elitist thought also to other expatriates communities, like the Dublin one:

I know some people who were working in the IT in Dublin, and they had a sort of the same thing, maybe not a uniform dress, but anyone was working in IT, and also had their special way to talk, you know, everyone knew that everyone you met had a work in something in the computers, while the normal Irishman probably was working at the store, at the factory or something like that [Sweden, 18: 125-129].

Besides the fact that such a vision does not correspond to reality, education is not a trustworthy indicator neither of intelligence nor of being nice. What certainly differentiates Expats from other people, no matter their nationality, is that they move abroad, that is, they show a minimum international attitude; many Belgians, instead, are just people who live their lives and may not be interested in what is different in comparison with their national or even regional world. Consequently, local people, no matter of which country, may find tiring to establish a relationship with a foreign person, first of all because of the linguistic problem:

At the beginning it was a little bit more difficult for the language. For example, when I wanted to make my circle of friends a little bit bigger in Poland I tried the salsa lessons, here it didn't really work out, [...] everybody was French speaking, so I was making an effort to speak English and they were as well, but especially the French speakers are not that great in speaking English. In Poland, well, at least in the AIESEC in Poland, when we have a stranger in a group of Polish people, everyone would speak English, [...] some foreigners find it surprising, but we find it polite. In my salsa class environment it wasn't so obvious [...; Poland 2, 24: 222-229].

Actually, it is not possible to blame the Belgians who do not want to speak in English while in their country. What is really strange is that after all people who get

in contact with the Belgian culture are glad about it. The Swedish respondent himself says:

I have a Belgian girlfriend, and maybe that makes me assimilated a bit more in Belgium, because I understand Belgium a lot better through her. She says that I need to understand Belgium, which is very nice: I feel like that I'm closer to her [Sweden, 18: 260-263].

Evidently he needed to be pushed to discover the Belgian culture, but he must admit that it makes his couple relationship better.

Even though Ans Persoons would probably maintain the opposite, for one of the scope of the Brussels-Europe Liaison office is to meeting opportunities between Belgians and foreigners, very little efforts are spent by Brussels' public and private organisation to promote this kind of integration: it is not needed. Under an economic perspective, for Belgium is much better if Expats do not integrate, that is, do not marry with natives. This way they are more likely to stay for a limited period and then leave: this means that they spend their (sometimes very high) salaries in Brussels, revitalising the market, but they return to their country for their retirement; as the majority of them are paid by foreign organisations, it is also probable that their retirement pension will be paid by the social system of their origin state, so that they do not weigh on the Belgian one. A short article published on *Newcomer* is astonishing, as it clearly affirms that it is hard for foreigners to get in touch with Belgians, but instead of providing advices to overcome the matter, it just push people to join the Expat community. The article title significantly is "Join the Club":

Unless you marry a Belgian, it is very difficult to integrate in Belgian society. Most Belgians are fairly reserved and like to spend their weekends with their families. They also tend to leave Brussels on a Friday evening, spending the weekend in the family apartment at the coast or in a cottage in the Ardennes [sic]. As a results, there is little opportunity for meeting Belgians informally. If you are the gregarious type, it is easy to strike up a conversation in one of the many Irish pubs in the city [rarely frequented by Belgians]. But if you are not wild about spending a night in a noisy boozier, you should check out the network of expat clubs and associations that have developed in Brussels [the list follows; *Newcomers*, Autumn 2006: 53].

A convincing explanation of the separation between Expats and Belgians requires to mention all the aspects pointed out up to now:

- Belgians are in their country and feel somehow invaded by foreigners;

- not all the Belgians have a cosmopolite attitude and are interested in multicultural contacts and exchanges;
- the Expat community is composed by people who have many things in common and share a similar experience;
- many of them do not speak neither French nor Flemish;
- they know they will spend a limited amount of time in Brussels and at the same time have many opportunities to meet other Expats, so they are not keen to make an effort to meet Belgians, who, on their side, usually tend to keep separated from the Expats, as they do not share their same experience and community spirit;
- moreover some Expats treat Belgians with an unjustified superiority complex, making the cultural barrier even deeper and contributing in the affirmation of reciprocal stereotyped visions;
- finally, few informal meeting opportunities are organised to put in contact natives and foreigners.

9.2.4. Nationality preferences

Answers to Questions 14, 15 and 17 are very much connected and will be analysed together.

The table 9.6 shows that almost the half of the interviewees declare that they do not make distinctions regarding nationalities when they choose the people they stay with. On the contrary, a third of the respondents have the tendency to stay with foreigners. It is significant that only a minority of the interviewees have a tendency to stay with Belgians, and those are mainly the ones who settled down in Brussels (Finland 1 and Rumania), as well as two persons who have a boyfriend who is more integrated in the city (the Moldavian and one of the Italians; in particular, the Italian girl says that her best friend is Italian, but that she goes out with her boyfriends' colleagues, who are mainly Belgians).

Q14-15		Q14				Q15		
cases	T.A.	with people from my country	with foreigners	with Belgians	I don't make any distinction	because I want to meet different people	because I more frequently have the possibility to get in touch with them	because it's easier to communicate with
		1	Portugal		x			x
2	Spain				x	x		
3	Italy (1)		x			x		
4	Italy (2)			x			x	
5	Malta				x			
6	Greece				x			
7	Cyprus	x						x
8	France	x					x	
9	Belgium (1)				x			
10	Belgium (2)				x			
11	Belgium (3)				x			
12	Netherlands				x			
13	Germany				x			
14	Austria		x				x	
15	Slovenia	x						x
16	Ireland	x					x	
17	UK		x				x	
18	Sweden				x			
19	Finland (1)		x	x		x		
20	Finland (2)		x			x		
21	Estonia	x					x	x
22	Lithuania				x			
23	Poland (1)				x			
24	Poland (2)		x					
25	Czech Rep.		x				x	
26	Hungary	x					x	
27	Romania		x	x				
28	Bulgaria	x	x					
29	Switzerland				x			
30	Moldova			x				

Table 9.6: Nationality preferences

Nevertheless, the fact that they have mainly Belgian friends does not imply that they would not like to have friends from other countries or at least from their country, as the Moldavian declares:

Of which nationality are they?

Mostly they are Belgian, no, all of them. Flemish.

Don't you feel the need to go out with someone of your country?

Yes, I need it, but not someone from Belgium, I need someone from my country, that's why I'm spending hundreds of euro to call them by phone [Moldova, 30: 79-83].

The majority of the interviewees have the tendency to stay with foreigners. Some of them explicitly affirm it: "Being a foreigner it's easier to understand each other with foreigners" (Lithuania, 22: 108-109; my translation). Some others say that they do not make any distinction based on nationality while choosing their companies, but looking at their answer to Question 17 (see table 9.7), it appears that almost all those who affirm that actually stay mainly with foreigners. This tendency may be explained in several ways. Once again, the work environment and the time spent in it have a role in determining people frequentations, as many interviewees spend in international offices a considerable amount of time, and tend later to go out with their Expat colleagues:

The problem in Brussels is that it's easy to meet people, but you transfer a lot of them from your job; it's not that easy to meet people living in Brussels, being in Belgium, because you're spending so many hours in this building and when you go out for example on Thursday a lot of people go and have a drink after work: you almost always go to place de Luxembourg, which is really close by and everybody who is there is working in the European institutions. [...] Basically, spending 12 hours at work every day it's not a lot of hours left, right? [The Netherlands, 12: 106-117].

Reading this quotation, the impression is that Expats' world absorbs every single moment of expatriates' life, and that escaping from the community is really hard, as the Czech interviewee seems to confirm:

Q17											
cases	T.A.	mainly Belgians	mainly from my country	mainly from EU Southern countries	mainly from EU Central countries	mainly from EU Northern countries	mainly from EU Western countries	mainly from EU Eastern countries	from all the EU countries	from all Western countries	from all over the world
		1	Portugal			x					
2	Spain										x*
3	Italy (1)								x		
4	Italy (2)	x									
5	Malta								x		
6	Greece										x
7	Cyprus		x								
8	France		x								
9	Belgium (1)										x
10	Belgium (2)										x*
11	Belgium (3)								x		
12	Netherlands				x						
13	Germany	x									
14	Austria				x						
15	Slovenia								x		
16	Ireland		x**								
17	UK						x				
18	Sweden				x	x					
19	Finland (1)								x		
20	Finland (2)									x	
21	Estonia		x								
22	Lithuania										x***
23	Poland (1)		x								
24	Poland (2)										x
25	Czech Rep.			x							
26	Hungary		x								
27	Romania			x	x						
28	Bulgaria			x				x			
29	Switzerland										x
30	Moldova	x									

* = but my closest friends are from my country

** = but also Spanish and English

*** = but I don't have real friends from Belgium

Table 9.7: Main frequentations according to nationality

But where are the Belgians? I almost have no opportunity to practice French language. In the street you hear all nationalities, and if you here French language, I don't think they are Belgians. Here it's not that you want to stay only with the Expat' community, it's not that it is not a Belgians' city. I don't know the rates, but... my perception is that there are more strangers than Belgians.

In fact it is not like that.

Ok, but in the office how many Belgians do you count? Maybe it's the environment I move inside [Czech Republic, 25: 231-236; my translation].

The tendency to go out with expatriates rather than with Belgians even results obvious for someone:

Brussels in terms of size is very good, and you can easily bump, if you are out for a drink and you go out to some club, you can easily bump into the same faces again. So there is a kind of social circle, but then obviously you always hang out with Expats, so it's not that I have a lot of contacts with the real Belgian people [Malta, 5: 59-62].

If there is an evident tendency to stay with foreigners and a parallel tendency not to stay with Belgians, this may be explained in three ways. Firstly, Expats have few opportunities to get in touch with Belgians in informal contexts:

Do you have friends here?

Yes, but not Belgian, very few Belgians.

Why?

Because it's easier. In Brussels more than 50% are immigrants and because I work in an international environment [...] and my husband as well [is from another country] [Lithuania, 22: 64-68; my translation].

Secondly, Belgians may have little in common with Expats and their peculiar situation. Thirdly, there might be serious cultural problems and orientations that prevent expatriates from spending their leisure time with Belgians, as the following quotation demonstrates:

[...] people in Bulgaria are very poor compared to Belgian people or Benelux in general, but at the same time we live quite better than people here. I'm telling you, really better. We are spending every 3 minutes to have fun, enjoy our lives and here people, I don't know, they have problems, mentally. Because of the weather, because of the boring life, because of everything. You are Italian, you can catch the difference, because the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Greeks, the people from the South are completely different from the North. They are just working, working, working, running after their children and doing nothing exactly. [Bulgaria, 28: 102-108; ...]

Don't you think that this impression depends on the fact that your social level here is not the same as the one you have in Bulgaria?

I don't know. I tried a couple of times to have fun with Belgian people but it's absolutely impossible. At the same time, I have a lot of friends, from the East, and most of them are Italian or Spanish. I'm telling you, they are having a very good time here. They know how to do it. I mean: you are in Belgium and you have to spend all the time with foreigners to feel good. This is stupid [Bulgaria, 28: 116-121].

What comes out from this sentences is that the respondent tried to mix with Belgians, but could not, in his words because of a different way of spending spare time. He rather prefers people from the East of Europe, not just from Bulgaria, because he has many common cultural references, and people from the South of Europe. People from the Mediterranean countries, as many respondents underline, are more open, more easy-going than people from the rest of Europe, and they are often indicated as people is nice to have fun with:

Here I stay in a Spanish, Italian or Greek environment, so that you go out every evening [...]. Here I don't know any Belgian [25: 197-199; ...].

In my French class I move a lot with Spanish people, because through a Spanish person you meet 20 Spanish, with an Italian 20 Italians. People from the East are not fro grouping [Czech Republic, 25: 240-242; my translation].

Besides the tendency not to stay with Belgians, but rather with foreigners mainly but not exclusively from the Europe Union, it is also significant that only a minority of the interviewees have the tendency to stay with people from their country: this means that many people do not have a special need to stay with their compatriots, and can be considered as a good indicator of cosmopolitanism:

Certainly I'm not searching for Finnish company, that something self-evident for me. I don't need Finland in Belgium, so to say. Sometimes Finnish associations are contacting me and they make different activities but I'm not at all involved in them; somehow I want to be integrated in this Belgian society [...]. I want to meet interesting people, wherever they come from, Africa, Europe, America, Asia, wherever. I'm interested in different people, different thinking that are linked somehow structurally to where they come from [Finland 1, 19: 84-90].

Interviewees' answers confirm the presence of an openness to multiculturalism which pushes them to stay with foreigners in order to stay with "different people" and discover cultural differences:

What I don't like is that all Spanish people [...] use to stay together, to group, like the Italians. It is a stereotype, but I think it's true when we are abroad. So, as this is against

all what I meant to do, I committed myself in avoiding it, because if I had done it, I'd have missed something. I have already met a lot of Spanish during my life. I have been meeting Spanish since I was born. Now that I am abroad, I think it's time to meet people from other countries, to know other things [...]. In the university a very clear example that frightens us [her and her boyfriend]: we eat there, and [...] there is a very long table with Spanish people, they are all Spanish, who always meet there and eat all together, and they never mix with other people [...] and they always invite us "come to the table and eat with us!", no!, the fact is that we don't like it, we don't like it. [...] it seems to us that you loose something [...]. [they are] complaining all the time about everything, about the weather... come on! If you feel like that when abroad, then go back to Spain and let us be! [Spain, 2: 194-213; my translation].

[...] it's even beyond languages, I mean, human relationships... this all issue of culture... if you want an excuse then you can use culture as an excuse and as a barrier, but the only barrier is in your mind, I think [Malta, 5: 182-184].

This openness is even stronger than the worry that people might leave at any moment:

So, the fact that they have to leave is not an obstacle for you to establish a relationship?

No. Otherwise you would loose something because everyone can give you something and you can learn, I don't see why it should be an obstacle [Belgium 2, 10: 86-88].

Some of the interviewees have the possibility to get in touch with non-European people. The majority of them see it as a quite normal thing, even though with serious cultural problems. A few of them are quite enthusiastic, as they have the feeling they are discovering the rest of the world:

What has been wonderful is meeting people from the Unesco master [coming from Africa, Asia and South America; ...]. I used to stay only with Europeans, and this has been the first time I have the possibility to interact with people from outside Europe. [It was wonderful] Not only because they are from the Third World, as I do not even know people from the United States or Canada, I only know Europeans; it is the first time that I get along with people from outside, and this is great, it makes you wish to move more. The fact is that Europe is already getting to be homogeneous, from a country to another one it doesn't change so much, you have to go elsewhere [Spain, 2: 234-240; my translation].

The same openness to multiculturalism is registered also in the Belgian respondents:

My closest friends are Belgian but I have a lot of friends who are not Belgian [Belgium 2, 10: 143; ...].

Would your boyfriend likely be Belgian or where from?

Whoever. Why should he be only a Belgian? Of course if he is not Belgian he might want to go back to his country, and I said before that I don't want to leave Belgium. But I would see the situation, what I could do, to move away or...

Love could be more powerful than your love for Belgium.

Yes! It depends, maybe, I don't know.

And did it happen?

Yes, even though I had more Belgian boyfriends than foreigners. It was interesting, but it wasn't so easy because cultures are different, the distance, he had to go back to his country, I went to see him sometimes, but we had both to study and that was the difficulty. But you can have the same problems with a Belgian: maybe he has a work opportunity in Canada and wants to go there and it's up to you making a decision; with the globalisation you can move a lot, it's up to you. In the past you just got married with someone living in your city, now sometimes I have the feeling that the world is a big city and you don't have a specific city [10: 169-182].

This answer shows how some people, even aware of the practical difficulties of a mixed marriage, do not have cultural restrictions. Nevertheless some respondents, like the American-Cypriot one, find communicating with foreigners quite difficult; these respondents prefer to remain with those who perfectly speak their languages, even though not necessarily from their same country:

Do you tend to stay more with people from your country or from other countries?

I usually hang out with Greek people, but I also like to go out with Americans [...].

Why?

Because I find that sometimes it's very hard to communicate: sometimes people from Italy or from Spain, or Germany, they take so long to say what they're thinking that you don't know what they are talking about: it just takes so long to understand them. So when you speak with somebody from the UK, or American or Canada in English, it's easier, or with someone in Greek, it's easier, and you don't need to explain like "in Greece we do like this", etc.

Do you think it's a language problem or it's the mentality?

I don't know what it is. One of my best friends here is Swedish, but she went to school in Canada and she speaks perfect English, so I can speak with her easily, I can use slang [6: 219-231].

Not only the language, but also the fact that many interviewees already know their friends when arrive in Brussels contribute to push some respondents to stay with their compatriots. With them, communication is easier, and mutual comprehension is facilitated by common cultural references and shared memories.

Consequently, even in some of those cases in which interviewees declared that they do not make distinctions, they actually do:

I don't have any preferences but I have more contacts with Slovenians.

Why?

First they were my friends from before, second we speak the same language, third we have more common interests... ya, I have more contacts with Slovenians but it's not that I would choose that. But if I compare myself with friends of other nationalities such as Hungarians, Portuguese, Spanish, Estonian, they all have best friends from their own countries, although sometimes we socialise all together [Slovenia, 15: 181-186].

Overall, the multicultural environment is seen as a richness, and people who do not have the possibility to meet foreigners at work try to mix with them outside the office:

How would you describe your social network?

I would describe it an international network, I work daily in a very Finnish environment, legally it's Finnish territory here [in the Embassy, where we ran the interview], and I work with Finn people here, and our language is Finnish. I feel like outside the work it's good to have international contacts, so I try to keep it that way: multicultural [Finland 2, 20: 98-102].

So you try to find people in different groups just to experience different cultures?

I don't really try to find them. I know them just accidentally or by coincidence.

Do you choose people for their culture or for their personality?

Just because of personality. Even though I might be interested in a country, I would not go to these events which are special for them [...; 20: 200-204].

With regard to looking for foreigners, Expats may adopt two approaches:

- a. a non-critical one, described by an adherence to the narrative "it is nice to meet different people";
- b. a critical one, in which more personal selection criteria to choose one's own company are adopted.

The non-critical approach places a general vision of the foreigner as an unquestionable richness before personal criteria; expatriates' international environment is seen as multicultural and cosmopolite, and as such is perceived to be the most concrete expression of those ethical values of equality among all human beings, no matter their flag colours, promoted by the European Union. This multiculturalism in practice is the European dream which comes to its fulfilment:

Do you have any perception of the Expat community values?

I think you need some kind of openness, because you are in contact with people from everywhere all the time, so you have to be open to people with whom you don't share the same background. I think it's the realisation of the European Community in real, because you see people living together, mixing up, sharing experiences, that's what happens in Brussels, there are so many nationalities here in Brussels living together, that's what all Europe is about [B: 193-197].

The critical approach focuses on individuals' personality more than on the sense of belonging to the Expats community:

What do you mean, that I should stay together with all the Expats and feel united to them because they are in the same situation as I am? I don't know. You can keep a conversation with someone, "why are you here?", the same conversation of every party, "I am here because I work in an NGO, because I came to make a stage", or whatever. If this is the empathy that I am supposed to have, it is a little boring, [...] because everyone tells the same story. I prefer to stay with people who are not in the same situation as I am, or to meet people from here, or from wherever, but people who do not do the same as I do [Spain, 2: 324-329].

One of the very few interviewees who really settled down in Brussels provides a description of his life in the city which sounds like an exception in comparison with other testimonies:

Did you experience some sort of process like the other Expats?

No, I settled down. Really I didn't have any particular need to meet Expat people, I can meet them already at work, some of them became my friends, but I'm not searching for their company in particular. I meet people, Belgian and others, that's it, I didn't have a particular necessity to go to Place Lux or whatever. I rented a house before I came and it became my home. I did some sort of process I could do anyway: I brought my home to Brussels, my things, my music, my family, I have them around, that's why I feel home wherever I go, and it's not linked to a certain territory or a certain place. I can have my home wherever almost [Finland 1, 19: 192-198].

This quotation raises a doubt: is it more cosmopolite to stay with people from different countries, and only with them, or to be able to settle down in every country, mixing with local people and making the new place one's own home? In Chapter 10 I will show that there are different position regarding this question. For the moment, I would say that these two tendencies are not opposite, but complementary: cosmopolite people are those who really do not make any distinction while meeting another person, but this does not mean that they lose their origins. Staying with

people from other countries is, by itself, an indicator of cosmopolitanism, because it implies that nationality is not a selection criteria for companies: “I do not take into account this parameter when I meet someone: nationality is not a friendship criteria” [Switzerland, 29: 155]. On the other hand, this cosmopolitanism may be mitigated by the fact that many people abroad are in the same situation, so it is easier to get along remaining inside the Expats’ community. Moreover, as table 9.7 shows, more than the two thirds of the interviewees stay with people from the European Union, having much more in common with them than, say, with people from North Africa, who, despite their strong presence in Brussels, are never mentioned in respondents statements. Many Expats, in fact, may stay with foreigners just because they have a similar background, and consequently the adoption of both the non-critical and the critical approach leads to the same results: an Expat can choose to stay with foreigners because he or she finds it rewarding from a moral point of view (“I am open to diversity”) *and* from a personal or cultural one (“I find people I like”). This position is well represented by the following quotation:

If you meet another Swedish, or another Scandinavian (because we are quite similar, and with Danish and Norwegian we understand each other), you have a common language, and you grew up seeing the same tv shows, and you have the same cultural background, it’s easy to communicate. On the other hand I try not to focus myself on people of my own language or with the same cultural background, because I like to meet people and try to see new things. It’s interesting to speak with someone, say, from the former Soviet block, they grew up under the Communist dictatorship, and had a completely different life than the one I had before the Berlin wall falls down, so it’s interesting to meet people with different backgrounds and talk to them. Generally I don’t have any difficulties in communicating with people from, say, South of Europe, or Eastern Europe, or outside Europe. Maybe it’s because the people who come here tend to have a similar background, everyone has a degree in political science basically, so you have some kind of common references even if you have completely different cultural backgrounds [Sweden, 18: 155-165].

As seen in Chapter 9.2.1., interpersonal relationships among Expats maybe extremely superficial. This superficiality also affects the possibility of a real cosmopolite integration among people from different countries. Consequently, on one side Brussels expatriates community results to be more cohered and multinational than other expatriates communities in the world: it does not represent that negative multiculturalism that sees different national groups living peacefully

side by side, but avoiding intercultural contacts; it rather tends to Sartori's [2002] pluralism, to an effective integration. On the other hand, even Brussels Expats community members show that culture (not the national one, but in a broader sense) is still decisive in orienting people's relationships:

[...] here it's like a melting pot, everything comes together, so compared to those experiences [her previous experiences in other countries] this is like a mosaic of cultures, whereas the other ones have been more representing singular national cultures.

Do you feel there is some sort of integration among people from different countries? That there really is a community of people that come from different countries?

The Expats. There is one community. Do you know the publication "The Bulletin"?

Yes.

When you read it, it makes you believe that there is like an international community, but I think there are many national communities. I know that I'm an expatriate, but I don't have this kind of community feeling of being an Expat. But I think that it might be a personal thing.

So would you say that there are many national communities that interact?

Ya, I would say something like that, I wouldn't say that all the Expats are one homogeneous group. I would say that there are many grouping [20: 189-199; ...].

I see the Expat as smaller groups, not as one big group, but I also see that there is a certain Expat culture as such, which is different from the one they have at home, so the Finns here are different from the Finns at home [Finland 2, 20: 232-234].

According to this quotation, there are many groups inside the Expats community, even though there is also a common cultural layer that makes possible to all Expats to stay together. I would say that this layer is their cosmopolite attitude, while their tendency to form groups is the results of the influence of both individual personality and cultural traits. Many respondents, in fact, say they stay with foreigners, but not with every possible foreigner: when it comes to real friendship, less than one third of the interviewees have friends coming from all over the world (see table 9.7), the others preferring people from their country or from specific parts of Europe. In the next quotation, the possibility to meet people from different countries is conditioned by the environments one has the possibility to stay in:

I think it depends on your environment or where you work. If you work at the institutions you can meet people from other countries, because all the nationalities are there. For example I don't meet people from all the countries. When my sister had the stage at the Commission she knew people from Brazil, Argentina, otherwise she would never meet them. It depends on the environment if you have the possibility to meet people from other countries or not. I would like to meet Brazilians or Russians but it doesn't happen. Also if you meet them you can decide if you like them, otherwise how

can you say it? If you don't meet them you can't say if you like them or not [Poland 1, 23: 119-125].

The fact that expatriates do not have the possibility to easily meet people from everywhere means that the Expats community is not as heterogeneous as it is described to be. It is true that in Brussels there are people from 160 countries, but they are not equally represented in numerical terms, and they are not completely mixed in one only international expatriates' community. In the following quotation one of the interviewee makes an explicit reference to the existence of different groups that she prefers to people from her country:

I stay more with people from other countries. Why? I don't know. Sometimes I feel like I miss Polish, so for example one month ago I organized a Polish dinner [...]. But I go out with different groups.

Why?

Why? I never thought about it. I know them, [...] it is usually very international, so why not? I also think I don't need to choose. Almost all my friends speak good English, like Polish friends, so I can go out with them and I'm not restricted inviting other people; when I say international I mean exactly that: people from different countries, including Poland, it's not that there are no Polish [Poland 2, 24: 173-183].

Concerning this, table 9.7 interestingly shows that respondents' do not always choose friends coming from their same geographical area: for example, many people from the East have friends mainly from the Southern countries. This confirms that nationality is not a criteria (and in this sense Expats generally are cosmopolite), but that people's culture is (and in this sense Expats are not fully cosmopolite). One of the interviewee is very clear at this regard: "here you make your own culture, and you have to make an effort to look for the people you want" [Czech Republic, 25: 197-198; my translation].

This should not lead to underestimate the national factor, but rather to put it into a broader perspective. For example, many people who firstly approached Expats community in a non-critical way may get frustrated by the superficiality of the exchanges they have with people from other countries, and pass to a critical approach:

I like the first question: Where are you coming from? It's not: What's your name? How do you do? What's up? What are you doing here? [...] That's why I like here: it is quite international. [Bulgaria, 28: 254-258]

People here are very nice, very kind, but they are not friendly [28: 130-131; ...].

So here are you going out with the Bulgarian community?

No, in the very beginning, for 5 months, I tried to go out only with foreigners, to speak with them, to have more information, to see what they are doing here, what they think of the life here, but later I was fed up with all foreigners and started to meet not exactly Bulgarians but Eastern European nations. [Pause].

Why Eastern people?

Because we share the same culture, the same living, we have our way to feel free, to have fun and so on, so it's easier to stay with them than with Western European people [28: 138-144].

Other people may have friends from all over the world, but still find more in common with people from their country:

Of what nationality are your friends here?

The three very close ones are Greek who live abroad, the rest from all over the world.

Have you met the Greeks here?

Yes. [...]

Why do you think your best friends are from Greece?

Why? Hmm... It's also a mentality thing, it's also some common ideas and past experiences that we share, it's also the language [Greece, 6: 103-112].

Moreover, many newcomers tend to look for people of their same country or at least who speak their same language to start their process of adaptation, and only after that they may get in touch with people from other parts of the world:

What nationality are your friends?

My flat mates Indonesian and Hungarian. I changed the flat once and when I first came I was staying with a Russian girl, one from Poland and one from Singapore.

Did you choose them or you went with them by chance?

I firstly met the Polish one and she already stayed with the other girls [Poland 2, 24: 245-249].

The last quotation highlights how the first solidarity contact was established with a person from the same country, who introduced the respondent to other people from different countries.

A minority of the interviewees also feel fed up of staying with other expatriates, and would like to reach a better integration with Belgians:

Now I would like to start other activities, painting, dancing, and there I hope will meet Belgians, because I would like to meet local people, otherwise it is like being in Spain [she said she mainly goes out with Spanish people] [Czech Republic, 25: 269-271; my translation].

To sum up, on one side the Expats community certainly is an example of people from different countries living together and sharing an important international, multicultural dimension: people have in common a global horizon, the situation of being a “stranger in a strange country” (Heinlein), and also their curriculum profile. On the opposite side, this commonality of experience and ideas only supports weak ties, and when it comes to strong ties people tend to refer to more personal parameters, among which there are important cultural factors.

These cultural factors do not fully coincide with individuals’ national identities, so that people do not stay only with compatriots; but they surely concern national features, like having common cultural references, or being more open to establish new friendships; this national features lead to grouping people into broad geographical areas: south of Europe, north and centre of Europe and East of Europe. It is difficult to define these areas only in national terms: for example, a French living in Provence is likely to be considered from the south, while a Parisian might be considered from central Europe. Moreover, there is a great variability from person to person, so that an Italian may be cold and a Norwegian very open.

All this considered, a comparative approach that put nation and state as critical variables do not seem fully adequate to study international interpersonal relationships, and the necessity to group states in broader geographical areas is confirmed.

9.3 Intercultural relationships features

Answers to Question 18 (“In your opinion, which are the difficulties and the positive aspects in having a relationship with a person from another country?”) and 19 (“Do you find any difference in the relationships you have here with respect to the relations you have in your countries?”) will be now analysed, so to determine the reasons that push people towards foreigners or compatriots.

9.3.1. Intercultural relationships: plus and minus

The table 9.8 shows the typical answers received to Question 18, which are:

- among the *difficulties*:
 1. different languages, and consequent troubles in communication;
 2. different languages, and consequent difficulty in understanding jokes and slang;
 3. different cultural references (movies, book, tv programs, singers, etc.), especially in popular culture, and consequent lack of common reference point;
 4. possible (not serious) misunderstandings due to different cultural habits;
 5. possible (serious) misunderstandings or lack of mutual comprehension due to a totally different mentality;
 6. time and efforts needed to overcome the superficial level of a meeting and getting to a deeper relationship;
- among the *positive aspects*:
 7. different languages, and consequent possibility to learn one from the other;
 8. different culture, and consequent cultural exchange;
 9. stimulus to become more open-minded and democratic;

10. possibility to learn about themselves and one's own country through the confrontation with other cultures;
11. possibility to be excused in case of gaffes.

Individual personality and social skills have a great importance in determining the success of his or her international communications and relationships; moreover people of the same country may differ a lot because of the area they are from:

Which are the difficulties and the positive aspects you may find in a relationship with someone from another country?

[Pause] That's difficult to explain. You can have different types of persons from a same country with different personalities, different nationalities with different traits, it's hard to generalize [Ireland, 16: 130-133].

Nevertheless some generalisations are possible. Among the pointed out difficulties, there is a tendency to consider differences in languages and cultural habits as main obstacle to international interpersonal relationships. At the same time, differences in cultural habits are also considered a richness by the great majority of the interviewees, while only three of them think the same about the language. The following quotations explain the three tendencies:

I had French friends there [in England] who stayed all the time together because it was easier for them to speak French, also with different cultures you have problems of understanding, you can make mistakes thinking it's normal to do something while for the other culture it's not normal, so it's also difficult, but interesting to see the other point of view [Belgium 2, 10: 14-17].

Communication problems, misunderstandings, because either the person doesn't understand what you are saying, because they don't know the language well enough, or you don't understand what they say, just linguistic, comprehension stuff. And then it's hard to make jokes and understand humour when it's in a foreign language. This isn't a problem I've encountered, but you have cultural differences and different ideas about certain issues that could create conflicts, you know, clashing of opinions [United Kingdom, 17: 183-187].

Cultural differences obviously affect also the way people establish a couple relationship:

Q18		difficulties					positive aspects					
cases	T.A.	language and consequent hard communication	possible misunderstandings in jokes	different cultural references (movies, music, books...)	possible misunderstandings because of different cultural habits	a totally different mentality	hard to overcome the superficial meeting and establish a deeper contact	different language and consequent exchange	different culture and consequent exchange	it makes you more open-minded and democratic	by the confrontation you can learn about yourself / your country	you are excused if you make something wrong
		1	Portugal	x						x		
2	Spain							x	x			
3	Italy (1)					x		x	x			
4	Italy (2)	x										
5	Malta	x									x	
6	Greece	x	x		x							x
7	Cyprus	x						x				
8	France				x			x				
9	Belgium (1)							x				
10	Belgium (2)				x			x				
11	Belgium (3)	x			x							
12	Netherlands	x			x			x			x	
13	Germany						x	x			x	
14	Austria		x		x						x	
15	Slovenia						x	x				
16	Ireland					x						
17	UK	x	x		x		x	x				
18	Sweden	x		x					x			x
19	Finland (1)				x			x			x	
20	Finland (2)								x		x	
21	Estonia	x								x		
22	Lithuania	x										
23	Poland (1)				x			x	x			
24	Poland (2)				x	x		x	x			
25	Czech Rep.	x	x	x	x	x			x			
26	Hungary	x							x			
27	Romania									x		
28	Bulgaria								x			
29	Switzerland					x		x			x	
30	Moldova			x								

Table 9.8:
Intercultural relationships
difficulties and positive aspects

For example Swedish people don't talk that much and I remember my neighbour, who was French: she really couldn't understand the reaction of her [Swedish] boyfriend and she felt he liked her, but she expected he would call her, in France we say that in 3 days you should call otherwise it means that you... but after three days it's ok, but the Swedish guy didn't fit in this model, in the way of reacting in a relationship of my mother, sister, friends... [France, 8: 184-188].

Language in particular may be a barrier to communication, also because certain national cultures know English better than others; cultural differences among Europeans may be crossed over, but language remain an obstacle:

Obviously the difficulty is the language, I mean, you have to understand each other in order to build up a friendship or a relationship, so the language; I think that's one of the reasons that the Dutch in general get along very well with the German or the Scandinavian people: we all use English quite well so it's very easy to get along with them; we get along very well with English as well, and French it's a lot harder for us. With Belgian people I need to speak French, so it's already quite hard, and Italians or Spanish don't speak English very well, so there's already some kind of barrier [The Netherland, 12: 137-142].

Which difficulties do you find in the relationships with people from other countries?

It depends. You know, it depends on culture, maybe language barrier is the biggest. Hmm... it depends on culture: Southern countries are different... but I even don't see that problem, typically it's the language barrier.

Would you say that there are countries with a culture that you don't understand very well?

Hmm... In Brussels I haven't seen it yet. The foreign countries for us are China and so on, but you really cannot meet them every day here, so basically Europe is still the same, so differences are not so huge [Estonia, 21: 138-143].

Language, however, is not the only obstacle to a proper and fluent communication. Due to cultural differences and the lack of common cultural references, "it's hard to make jokes and understand humour when it's in a foreign language" [United Kingdom, 17: 185].

The lack of common cultural references make some people feel different from the mainstream:

It's difficult because we have different... Moldova was part of Soviet Union and we were all educated according to the Russian culture, the Russian movies, and people from here, of course they know nothing about it. And that's all my colleagues say also. I talked with one colleague here and she's attending a French course too, and they discuss

about moving, but no one [knows the Eastern one]... and she knows about two hundreds Russian actors [Moldova, 30: 131-134].

People from outside Europe may be so different so as to require a special tolerance and understanding effort. Even saying “yes” or “no” may become a complicate matter. Inside Europe it is already hard; the Czech and the Irish respondents, for example, complain about the fact that Italians tend not to be straight forward in their judgments and opinions as they are:

I say all what I think, because I do not realise that people can get offended. Now I try to control myself, but [...] we [the people from the East] say things very frankly, without thinking of the others, of if we are hurting them [Czech Republic, 25: 283-285; my translation].

Here people like to talk in circle instead of just saying something. [...] as such as Italians also the French seem to be afraid just to be direct in the way they speak, and that causes problems socially as well as professionally [Ireland, 16: 150-156].

When the meeting is from a direct individual from the East of Europe and a totally indirect person from far East, even such a basic level of communication may become extremely hard and lead to a dysfunctional communication:

I must say I'm quite trained now, but it was very difficult for me at the beginning to live with a person from Singapore, because it's difficult for her to say something straight, like 'I don't like it' [...]; of course you can see if someone is not happy with a solution, so I was asking her why: “why don't you say it upfront?”. I'm having the same problem with my flat mate from Indonesia. [...] It's a very cultural thing: they are trained not to say 'no' directly, it would be very impolite in their culture [Poland 2, 24: 277-283].

On the positive side, even though only two interviewees notice it, there is a point that has a special importance: when you are a stranger, you are excused if you violate some social rule:

Positive aspects... that you can find excuses for everything, because you are a foreigner [laugh], so you might not, you know, if the other guy gets misunderstood you are like: “oh come on, it's like we do in my country, I'm sorry” [Greece, 6: 132-134].

This tolerance towards foreigners' behaviours allow people to feel accepted by the community, and it is thus respected by all members, as everyone may fall into a

poor figure. Moreover, this tolerance represents a necessary condition to realise any form of cultural exchange, as diversity from the accepted social behaviours are considered as strange costumes to be analysed rather than deviances to be condemned:

It seems that there is some kind of common European standard of how to behave down here, it's not that you get offended if something is different with respect to your country [Sweden, 18: 186-187].

However, tolerance is absolutely necessary in international interactions, otherwise the risk is to get frustrated by a lack of communication due to different cultural orientations:

Some people get very frustrated with different nationalities, they get upset because they can't understand why this [anything] is so important to someone, but if you just accept and deal with it, it's ok [Ireland, 16: 139-140].

“If you deal with it, it's ok”, and many interviewees maintain that cultural exchanges allow them to know more about other cultures, and consequently to make comparisons between one's own and others' cultures:

When I talk with [name of one of her colleagues, from Cyprus] about Cyprus or with [name of one of her colleagues, from Poland] about Poland and with [name of one of her colleagues, from Italy] about Italy, it's funny to speak about our different countries, cultures, habits, traditions, everything [France, 8: 41-44].

To know their culture, which is positive, their mentality, how they think, their customs, their languages. To see the differences between yours and their country [Poland 1, 23: 127-128].

This opinion reflects the result of an Eurobarometer [2007c: 36] survey, reported in figure 9.1, about European cultural values, in which Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with three different statements related to the importance and role of culture and cultural exchange:



Figure 9.1: Agreement with statements on cultural exchange [Eurobarometer, 2007c]

The majority of the respondents partially or fully agree with the three statements (and the adherence to the three statements has a direct correlation with the increasing of the education level) .

Nevertheless, this is a very questionable point. How much cultural exchanges are really useful to get to know other cultures? One of the Finnish interviewees provides a deeper insight in cultural exchange dynamics:

So what can you really understand about other cultures being here? For example, what do you understand about Italians here?

That's actually really nice to get to know Italians here, because I understand a little bit, having been there, how is the culture, and is like finding a little piece of Italy here [...]. But people change when they are abroad for a long time, so the feeling of the culture is weaker [Finland 2, 20: 205-209].

A first point is that people abroad do not reproduce faithfully their culture when abroad, but tend to adapt to the new situation. The more they are cosmopolite and

ready to adapt, the more their national culture will result shaded. A second point is that generalising from a limited number of people may lead to warped impressions:

I don't know so many cultures, even though I have many friends or acquaintances from many countries, I haven't specifically lived there, so I taste my ideas on the people I meet, so I can't say, for example, that I know American culture...

So what you get from Americans here? Can you generalize about their culture?

No, I think that generalizations are quite dangerous in general, and I know 2 or 3 American, so I can't generalise, so it's more about their personality. I don't know if people can make generalization after having met 2 or 3 Finns. I don't think you can.

Actually it's what people say: I love this international atmosphere because I can meet other cultures.

That's true, it's a big point. In fact you meet only people and you get a notion of the culture but you don't really know the culture; only after having been in the country you can know the culture. [...] At all level it can be really superficial: exchange of customs, or you can learn very superficial things like afternoon tea at a certain time, and in your country you don't do that [20: 209-223].

What one really gets is, in the most optimistic case, a general notion of a different culture, made of superficial aspects, like some customs. If an individual only meets a few people from another country, or even many people but in a superficial way, that is, if an individual has not a broad and extensive experience of another culture, he will not be able to have a reliable knowledge of that culture: he can only makes an idea of some differences. This result should not be underestimated, as it can be already a great advantage for many people by improving their tolerance and their communication ability. It can also constitutes a way for people to learn about themselves:

[...] does this level of exchange enrich you?

Yea, I think I've learned more about myself as a person and about how react to differences in cultures, even though the culture is not exactly a national culture but something that has developed among Expats. Because I see the Expat as smaller groups, not as one big group, but I also see that there is a certain Expat culture as such, which is different from the one they have at home, so the Finns here are different from the Finns at home. But I think I have also learned more about my own culture [20: 229-234].

Cultural exchanges actually allow people to learn about themselves and their country: even though questioning one's own tradition is a difficult exercise to some of the respondents, and it may not lead to a change, it obliges people to think of what they give for granted:

The difficulties: you have different cultures and your culture is the base for your personality, it influences your thinking, it rules your relationships, what you do, how you live; what you think has a role, but the ground for it is the culture. It's difficult to explain to someone else the differences; sometimes someone can ask you "why do you do that?" and you say "it's normal" and it's very difficult to make the other understand the reason of your behaviour or of your thinking. But that's a way to know new personalities, to know where you come from. When I went to England I had a lot of exercises to learn English, [and they were about] how it works in Belgium, how it works in Japan, how it works in Korea, etc: it was difficult to me to say: "in Belgium we do that, that and that, but we don't do that", it's difficult to get into the situation and to explain why; but it's very interesting to think about it, to see that maybe you can do it in another way, because you have to know the other one and to respect [him and his way of doing things], and you have to learn things. So for me difficulties and positive aspects are linked [Belgium 2, 10: 191-201].

[...] if somebody has not your background, you have to explain. What I like very much is the fact that you have to define many things, so when you go out... sometimes things in your life are very easy because you don't know the difference, but if you are with a foreigner you have to reason, you have to argue, you have to think a second time why you are saying this and that. [Austria, 14: 123-127]

The interest in cultural exchanges may not be based exclusively in a genuine and disinterested curiosity towards diversity, but rather in a will to know more about themselves and to get useful instruments to interpret the complex global reality:

But why knowing more things enriches you?

Because I know my country more, because I had to learn more about me, about my culture and where I come from, and I can understand the others also in a way that... the word is globalisation, so even if you stay in Belgium when you look at the news about other countries, you have to know [a broader picture] if you want to understand the interaction in Belgium, I don't want to know about other cultures just to know, I want to understand about Belgian politics [Belgium 2, 10: 215-225].

Cultural exchanges may not lead to understand the other: "basically deep insight you don't agree with the foreigner, but still it's interesting to communicate and change your views" [Finland 1, 19: 112-113]. Sometimes tolerance and curiosity are the basis for acceptance: "I rather tolerate it, but I do not get to understand it", says the Czech respondent [25: 302-303; my translation]. Still, realising the existence of different and incompatible positions, and discovering that what is normal for me may seem absurd to the other, favour the growth of one's democratic sense:

I have already cited the positive aspects, that you get in contact with different realities, behaviours and way of thinking, which allow you to be more open and flexible towards the others; in my opinion this is very important and I notice a difference between me and those friends of mine who did not travel. This has its plus and minus: it can help you to understand and behave in a more open and democratic way, so to say, [...] you find people [...] who think in the opposite way respect to you, and often you cannot have a linear dialogue, a common point; but I prefer dispute to silence, in any case it is a symptom of richness, it always leads you to think, no matter the result [Italy 1, 3: 108-115].

There are different levels of international interactions, regarding their intensity. One of the interviewees traces a clear differentiation between travellers and people who live abroad and share their daily life with foreigners:

[...] if you live together with somebody from a different culture you tend to act differently.

In which sense?

Because you are already flexible when you travel, but you only see half of the story, whereas I think that when you have friends from other countries you see both the good and the bad sides, and you just have to be more understanding. So I think it makes you more flexible or you learn about yourself [Finland 2, 20: 180-184].

According to this position, a superficial contact with another culture is not enough to create the conditions for a real exchange: only when you stay with foreigners, and share an ordinary dimension with them, they challenge your social rules, which you give for granted, and require you an emphatic effort. If this is true, that is, if not all kinds of relationships are really able to provoke changes in identity or at least in one's own attitudes towards different habits, then international friendships become a powerful instrument to open people's mind.

To summarise, even though international interpersonal relationships present cultural and linguistic problems of various gravity, they also offer the possibility to learn about themselves and about the others. Knowledge about other people may be superficial and not lead to a real mutual comprehension, but what is important is the fact that an initial tolerance towards diversity changes in broadmindedness through repeated international contacts.

9.3.2. Characteristics of the relationships established abroad

Question 19 produced a great variety of not mutually excluding typical answers, schematised by the table 9.9:

1. there are no differences;
- *time*:
 2. the ones in my country have been lasting since I was at school / university, while the ones here (in Brussels) are relatively recent;
 3. the ones in my country have a future, the ones here might not have one;
 4. the ones in my country are more permanent;
 5. here I immediately found new friends;
- *culture*:
 6. in the ones here there is cultural exchange;
 7. here I found people with my same interests / lifestyle
 8. here it's more difficult to find people with my same interests and tastes (music, movies....);
 9. I can speak of certain items, like politics, only with people from my country;
 10. here people are boring, or closed, or shy;
- *opportunities*:
 11. I find differences, but exclusively because here I am working, not studying;
 12. in my country I used to meet friends at work, here I don't;
 13. abroad no one knows you, so you can start from the beginning;
- *nationality*:
 14. in my country I only met people of my same nationality.

Q19															
cases	T.A.	No differences	time: the ones in my country have been lasting for years	time: the ones in my country have a future, the ones here might not have one	time: the ones in my country are more permanent	time: here I immediately found new friends	culture: in the ones here there is cultural exchange	culture: here I found people with my same interests / lifestyle	culture: here it's more difficult to find people with my same interests	culture: I can only speak of certain items with people from my country	culture: here people are boring / closed / shy	opportunities: I find differences, but exclusively because here I am working, not studying	opportunities: in my country I used to meet friends at work, here I don't	opportunities: abroad no one knows you, so you can start from the beginning	nationality: in my country I only met people of my same nationality°
		1	Portugal		x	x			x						
2	Spain		x		x										
3	Italy (1)						x	x							
4	Italy (2)		x												
5	Malta							x							
6	Greece			x											
7	Cyprus				x										
8	France						x								
9	Belgium (1)						x								
10	Belgium (2)		x												
11	Belgium (3)	N/A													
12	Netherlands		x					x							
13	Germany		x												
14	Austria	x													
15	Slovenia		x				x	x							
16	Ireland	x													
17	UK											x			
18	Sweden							x							
19	Finland (1)	x													
20	Finland (2)						x								
21	Estonia	I don't know													
22	Lithuania												x		
23	Poland (1)														x
24	Poland (2)		x							x					
25	Czech Rep.		x	x											
26	Hungary		x											x	x
27	Romania							x							
28	Bulgaria							x		x					x
29	Switzerland		x						291						
30	Moldova		x			x									

Table 9.9:
Differences among
the relations
established abroad
and the
ones established in
the homeland

The differences between the relationships established at home and the ones created while abroad (no matter if with foreigners or compatriots) may be difficult to recognise because they also correspond to precise moments of life and to particular experiences. Consequently, the natural individual evolution would make different experiences basically incomparable:

When you are older, you see... The things you talk about when you are 19 years old when you are just on holiday in Spain are different from the things you talk when you are 26 in Brussels, because you think differently, slightly differently, not hugely differently, you shouldn't be pretentious [laugh]. You can't say in Ireland, in Spain... [Ireland, 16: 143-146].

This is a valuable but quite radical position. It confirms the importance of life phases while discussing about human relationships. At the same time, it is not sufficient to get to the conclusion that there are no differences among the two relation types.

From a spatial perspective rather than a temporal one, a few interviewees assumed an extremely cosmopolite position, declaring that nationalities have nothing to do with friendship, because the latter is more a personal issue among two human beings:

[...] human nature is human nature everywhere. Every human being needs to have friends, maybe the aptitude is that some people are warmer, they are very extrovert and they open to you, some people are more reserved, they take a bit more time, but you can still be their friends, maybe it's a little bit harder. One step after the other. [...] I mean there are cultures, but it's more your attitude towards friendship and the way you see a friend. Human nature and friendship are something beyond the culture. I don't let a different nationality or a different language to be a barrier to become a friend or a close friend [5: 159-165; ...] So I can understand that culture can increase the friction between two people, but I don't see it necessarily as an obstacle: it can be overcome [...]; Malta, 5: 195-196].

Of course to let the common aspects between two people gain the challenge of the cultural difference, it is necessary to be extremely open-minded:

I always criticize myself: "I need to be more open", so I am very sceptical towards people who say they are very open-minded, because maybe you discovered they are not as open-minded as they think they are. So it's how they perceive themselves but it's not necessarily the truth. What I think it's necessary to be done it's a sort, an issue of

personal and social education, and it starts with the school, it's something you grow up with [...; Malta, 5: 207-211].

According to this vision, there must be a predisposition towards broadmindedness and a vision of a multicultural society, which can only be increased, not generating from scratch. If this were true, it might explain why some people feel an inner curiosity, or even a need, to go abroad: to follow a natural disposition towards diversity. This is, however, a suggestion that remains far to be proven. More easily, individuals may want to go abroad in order to find other people, either from their country or from others, who also have some sort of international attitude:

[...] in Malta I never used to feel that I had friends who had the same mentality as me; they still are best friends but they were not of the same mentality as myself, whereas in Brussels I coincidentally got this job and I met Maltese people with whom I found the click, [...], but I still insist that best friends can be not only from my own country but also from another nationality [Malta, 5: 203-207].

This suggests, in any case, that there is a difference not between compatriots and foreigners, but between the broad group of non-cosmopolite people that an individual meets when in his country, and the cosmopolite minority he can get in touch with while abroad. According to different interviewees, the people from their same country who live abroad present diverse cultural traits and a more open way of thinking:

[...] after having left my country, after 1 or 2 years, I realized I cannot communicate with Greek living in Greece, I can communicate very well with Greeks who live abroad, because I really got a mentality which is Greek, but of an Expat. So I can more easily make friends, but, my best friends here, let's say, are Greeks, but they have lived abroad all their life. All foreigners [laugh]. And there is something in the Greek mentality that I cannot deal with any more [Greece, 6: 34-38].

Overall, what really seems to matter is not where someone is from, but his cosmopolite attitude:

I know few Belgians from AIESEC [an international student organisation], Belgian students, but of course they have a different approach, a different cultural approach, a European approach [Poland 2, 24: 114-116].

This different mentality originates different lifestyles. People abroad are discovering a diverse reality, and this brings them to be active and curious:

Belgian people are not really open-minded. They live the same things, they do the same things. I mean, I like to know people who are different from me, so that I can learn about the country, about the culture and I have so many questions to ask. [...] With people from abroad everything is good, all is positive, I enjoy doing things; with Belgian people it's like that we do always the same things, it is boring, they don't have the passion to do other stuff like... Take the Play Station, I know it's cosy, but I don't know any people from abroad who play with the Play Station: you go out, you visit something, you do an excursion, you go to museums, you have a drink [Belgium 1, 9: 108-115].

Moreover, with foreigners there is a cultural exchange that is more difficult to find in local people, even though only with people from the same country it is possible to talk about certain issues. For example, no matter the time two people have been knowing each other, coming from the same country people share common cultural reference points and can feel free to express opinions without being politically correct:

[with people from your country] you criticise the same things, also because people can be open, but I don't think you like that other people criticise your culture, you can complain about Italy, but if I say that Italians are miserable perhaps you get offended [Czech Republic, 25: 304-306].

On the other hand, also having many cultural differences facilitates communication, as it allows people to compare their diverse habits and provides them with a number of conversation topics which could not be discussed with someone from the same country:

It's easier with people from abroad, because you have different cultures, you can ask a thousand question the first time you see the people; with a Belgian you have almost the same background, you speak the same language, you have to go more inside to know the people, so it's easier to speak to people from abroad, they are more open. With Belgian people you have really to go inside, because you have a lot in common [9: 101-105].

I've been in France and Canada, where they speak a French different from mine, I really had fun, because we have differences in our similarities. [...] thanks to these differences a great contact is already established [Switzerland, 29: 167-169].

The main difference pointed out by interviewees among the relationships they have at home and those they have abroad is their time frame; the first have normally been developed during years, are more stable and have more possibility to last, while the ones born abroad have a more extemporaneous character:

Do you find any differences between the kind of relationship you have in your country and those you have here?

Hmm... It's difficult to judge, because when I think to my home relationships I think in terms of my past, I go back to my childhood, of long lasting friendships, and I don't think it that much in this kind of environment, [where] I think in a shorter term. This should be the main difference, I think [Portugal, 1: 89-93].

Differences are in their roots: the ones in my country have been lasting for all my life, they are like my family. [...] I have some friends I went to school with and they are still there [in my life]. Also the ones from the first day of university, and my friends from my small village: they are still there and do not change. New friends come and go, but they are like my family: they do not change [Spain, 2: 253-256; my translation].

The same distinction also affects the people one can meet abroad: if they are foreigners, the relation lacks of a perspective, of the idea that it will continue in the time, because sooner or later they will leave:

[...] there is just the fact that people weren't necessarily to stay for very long, so they might leave. That's the problem to have foreign friends, here in Brussels. It's that the friendship might not last for very long, because you might not stay in the same area [United Kingdom, 17: 187-189].

At the same time, this lack of perspective may lead to a relationship acceleration, that is, it may facilitate the connection between two people:

[...] when you are with someone of your nationality it's very possible that you continue to have a future together, like you want together to go back to your country, and with a foreigner you might not have this opportunity, you might but you might not; on the other hand that can be the positive aspect of having a relationship with a foreigner, because if you want to stay abroad or even if you don't want a superlong term relationship, you know that it is something temporary because you are abroad and you want to go back to your country, or it's a gate for you to stay abroad. So it really depends on what you want [Greece, 6: 136-141].

Many interviewees clearly differentiate the friends they grew up with and the most recent ones. The first are well known, and it is easier to communicate with them respect to new people:

I like to stay with both of them, but they [the childhood friends] are closer because I know their life and they know mine too, because it's not easy and you don't have to say all the time 'I have that problem' or 'I enjoy doing that', you don't say a lot of things about your past [...]. You need to know what they [new people] think about different things, when you meet someone new you have to say: "I'm X, I did those studies, and while I was studying my grandparents died and that was difficult, etc.": [with the oldest friends] you don't say that.

You mean that you need a long time relation?

Yes, for me at first you don't reveal yourself to people [Belgium 2, 10: 152-163].

On the other hand, also recently established relationships may transform in friendships, as an intense communality is created by the fact of sharing an experience abroad, with its difficulties and its rewarding sides:

There is one difference. To be really close to a person in my country for example it takes a lot of time, and here I met those people and in one month I feel very close to them, as I feel close to my friends in Moldova. [...]

Would you agree that very often friendships depends not on people' character but on what they share?

On the situation they are living in. Yes, I would agree. Maybe I'm a good example of this [Moldova, 30: 152-161].

As seen, the people one meets abroad can represent a cultural richness, but being in a new country can be very isolating, and in order to meet friends an individual may feel obliged to conform and adhere to the Expats community subculture:

[...] it would be easier to know people that are interested in the same things when I am in Sweden, while here I meet people because they tend to be in the same place geographically where I am. In Sweden I would not go to any pub because I would think that I could meet people [...], while here I go to the same place everyone goes, I'm becoming a little more mainstream. [Sweden, 18: 203-208]

On the other hand, being abroad provides an identity freedom, that is, an individual has the possibility to choose how to present himself:

I like the fact that abroad no one knows who you are, so you can start from a white sheet, so you are what really are, they don't know about your past, nothing [...; Hungary, 26: 136-137].

A two-sided picture raises from all these considerations: on one hand there are the long lasting friendships, often related to school or university time; they are those friendships that individuals have been carrying on for years, and provide the comfort and the safeness of a mutual deep knowledge; on the other hand there are the new people, either foreigners or compatriots, who are easy to get along with because of a mutual curiosity and availability to invest in the relationship; with them a large intercultural exchange is possible, and this exchange is based also on the communality of the experience of being abroad. All this considered, these two categories of relationships respond to different individual exigencies:

[...] there is a difference, you start from a different level. For example, a few friends I know from when I was studying: you went through so many things together and you truly know where those people are coming from, so it's a very different level you start from. For example, they quite often don't understand the job I'm doing here, because it's a quite different job to explain, although it's straight forward and concrete, so I can have an Italian person in Brussels who understands a lot better what I'm doing than one of my best friends in the Netherlands, who is Dutch as well, what I'm doing like 12 hours a day, so for a big portion of my life. So it's quite a balance. Which actually in the end means you just talk with different people of different subjects, 'cause you are thinking, you know, "he'll understand better this subject"... In the end there are a few friends obviously with whom you talk about everything: you can talk about everything [...; The Netherlands, 12: 151-159].

Recapitulating, some significant differences have been identified between the relationships an individual establishes in his or her country and those he or she has when abroad. One parameter has been identified to trace this differentiation: the relationship intensity. The table 9.10 sums up the combinations of the variable "intensity" with the variable "country".

INTENSITY RELATIONSHIPS	VERY WEAK AND WEAK	STRONG AND VERY STRONG
IN ONE'S OWN COUNTRY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - may lack understanding about one's international attitude; - are neutral. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - has a long history and the sharing of many experience; - has a future; - based on a deep reciprocal knowledge; - can become like a family member; - may lack understanding about one's international attitude;
ESTABLISHED ABROAD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - based on the communality of an international attitude in practice; - may be very superficial; - are important to reach objectives (opportunity driven); - are rewarding because they always offer the possibility to explore cultural and linguistic differences; - allows individuals to learn about themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - recent; - hardly has a future; - based on the sharing of a particularly intense experience; - can become like a family member because of an intense mutual support; - based on the communality of an international attitude in practice; - allow individuals to learn about themselves.

Table 9.10: Differentiation between the relationships in the homeland and the ones created abroad according to their intensity

Concerning the *very weak* and the *weak* relationships, either with a formalised or a not formalised role, there are three main differences:

1. at home the individual may not be understood in his international attitude, while abroad he can find easily other people in the same situation and with a similar international orientation;
2. people in the homeland may behave in a neutral way, while the people met abroad tend to be more opportunity driven (not only for career purposes, but also to satisfy the simple need to stay together with other people);
3. at home the very weak and weak relationships do not offer special stimuli, while abroad, either with compatriots or with foreigners, they offer the possibility of a constant contact and analysis of cultural differences. For example: a very weak relationship can be rewarding because it allows to discover new way of doing things (for instance, if you go to the bakery, you

can observe the way clients are served, the kinds of bread available, the typical expressions used to talk with clients, etc.); a weak relationship can already offer an insight on a totally different world (for instance, through colleagues you can discover a totally different job mentality); finally, either with compatriots, as the ones who live abroad are usually more open-minded and less focused on their nation typical cultural features, it is possible to recognise the traits of your national culture and to debate them.

Concerning the *strong* and the *very strong* relationships, differences are deeper:

1. the ones at home have been lasting for many years and people “have passed through many things together”; the ones abroad are more recent and are based on the fact of sharing the experience of being abroad, which is very intense: people abroad often are alone, without their friends and their family, so that new relationships take the place of all the social network one has in his country;
2. the ones at home are likely to have a future, because of the geographical position and, in the case of childhood friendships and family members, because “they have always been there” and there they will remain; the ones abroad may have a future, but in the distance, so that it is not possible anymore to share everyday life; moreover, they can be dissolve quickly, as they are often based on the particular situation the two people are living abroad;
3. relationships in the home country may be very intense and deep, but the traveller may feel not understood about his impulse to leave and going abroad; in another country, instead, he can find other people who decided to move, and this way create new relationships based on the communality of this cosmopolite mentality.

Finally, in the cases of both *weak* and *strong* relationships, the ones abroad allow the mover to learn about himself and his country reality.

9.4 Maintaining distant relationships

In this subchapter answers to Questions 20 (“Do you maintain the relationships with the friends left in your country?”), 21 (“Have you maintained the relationships with the people met in your previous experiences abroad?”), 22 (“Which instruments do you use to keep in touch?”) and 23 (“Do you believe that you will maintain the relationships with the people you met here?”) will be taken into consideration. Question 23 has been kept separated from the others, as it asks a projection in the future, and consequently analyses an idea, while the previous questions concern a situation in the present or the past, and consequently facts.

9.4.1. *Maintaining distant relationships: with whom and how*

The table 9.11 unites the typical answers to Questions 20 and 21, and at the same time shows the old and new media used by interviewees to keep in touch, as well as the visits they do to their friends (Question 22).

Both for Question 20 and 21 three possible degrees of maintenance have been recorded: the respondent maintains his past relationships, he does not or he does it only with a few of them, normally the best friends. Only very few interviewees affirm that they are not able to maintain the relationships in the distance:

[...] trying to maintain this kind of contact you cannot do it because you grow apart, you have differences, differences that you can't fill in by e-mail [...]. So I try to maintain more or less superficial contacts in case of events and then when I should go there try to catch up a bit. Obviously it's not the same.

So you prefer to visit them?

Yes, if I have the chance. Otherwise I don't keep contact, which is strange [Romania, 27: 250-257].

Q20-21-22		Q20			Q21			Q22										
cases	T.A.	yes	no	only with my best friends	yes	no	very few ones	letters	normal phone	mobile phone and SMS	phone centre	video calls by mobile phone	e-mail	chat	audio chat	video chat	occasional visits	frequent visits
		1	Portugal		x				x			x			x	x	x	x
2	Spain	x			x						x		x				x	
3	Italy (1)	x			x								x	x	x		x	
4	Italy (2)	N/A																
5	Malta	x			x				x	x			x	x			x	
6	Greece	x			x				x	x			x					x
7	Cyprus	x					x			x			x	x	x		x	
8	France	x			x								x	x	x			x
9	Belgium (1)			x*	x**					x			x	x			x	
10	Belgium (2)	N/A					x**			x			x	x	x		x	
11	Belgium (3)	N/A			x**			x					x					
12	Netherlands	x					x						x					x
13	Germany			x			x	x					x				x	
14	Austria			x	N/A					x			x					
15	Slovenia	x			N/A					x			x	x	x			x
16	Ireland			x			x						x	x	x			
17	UK			x		x			x	x			x					
18	Sweden	x					x						x	x	x	x		
19	Finland (1)			x			x		x	x			x				x	
20	Finland (2)	x					x		x	x			x				x	
21	Estonia	x					x			x			x	x	x		x (friends and family)	x (boyfriend)
22	Lithuania	x			x			x	x	x			x					
23	Poland (1)			x	x					x			x		x		x	
24	Poland (2)	x				x							x	x	x		x	
25	Czech Rep.			x		x				x		x	x	x	x	x		x
26	Hungary		x				x						x					
27	Romania		x			x												
28	Bulgaria	x			N/A					x			x	x	x	x	x	
29	Switzerland	x					x	x			301		x	x				x
30	Moldova	x			N/A					x								

* = she lived in Luxembourg for some years, the question refers to the people met there

** = the question refers to the foreign people, now back to their countries, who she met in BRX

Table 9.11:
Distant relationships maintainance

Being abroad are you able to keep the relationships in your country?

Not really, few of them, because I don't have the time or the energy to keep the contact with such a big group and because I don't like to get attached. If I live, I prefer to focus on the reality where I am.

If you came back would they start again or not?

Some of them yes, some of them no.

Do you suffer for this? Do you miss them?

Well, sometimes. But I think that at the end of my benefit is beneficial, I suffer a little bit, but I gain more.

Did you maintain the relationships created in other countries?

Some of them, but overall I must say that I maintain very few ones. Which is part of my tendency to focus on the present, not to look back. I don't have the time or the will to lose time with it.

Which are the reasons for that?

First of all it's a personal thing, not cultural: I don't like to look back [in my life]. You lose a lot of time to maintain relationships, because you have to write emails, make phone calls, or write letters and for me, well, I don't like it. Also because I don't like remembering the past. So if I try to maintain these relationships back home, for me is like trying to remain in touch with the past. Although I think that sometimes I should do it, but... [Portugal, 1: 105-120].

The problem in maintaining a relationship seems to consist in the sharing of the everyday experience. This is true both for friendship and couple relationships. For example, having a partner from another country appears appealing to the Slovenian girl:

A thing that I like here is that there are so many international families, people of different nationalities meet here, fall in love, get married. This also happens to me: I had relationships with boyfriends from different nationalities, it's pretty ok. I don't have a serious relationship right now, but maybe... Maybe I will find a partner from another country, so everything right now is like really open [...]. [Slovenia, 15: 135-138]

Nevertheless, she recognises that it might be difficult to maintain a serious international relationship, especially if one of the partners has to follow the other to another country:

If people have a serious relation then they usually bring their partner with them to Brussels, one of them follows the other, which sometimes can be really difficult. I know cases in which long term relationships here ended, because one partner works but one partner didn't work and couldn't find a work, and then their lifestyle just split and... [15: 276-279].

Seven interviewees are engaged with partners who live in a different country. Others find a distant relationship impossible to manage:

Your boyfriend is here or in Poland?

Here. I think it's impossible to have a boyfriend abroad, it would be ok for some months, but... [Poland 1, 23: 142-143].

[...] my social life is great, ya, I have a huge circle of people, but personal life no, it's difficult when you move from one country to the other to have a stable personal life.

But would you like to have a stable personal life?

Ya, but I don't, because of my way of living.

The problem was in finding here a stable relationship?

It doesn't happen, it's a question of luck.

But do you think that it's something in your lifestyle or the fact that you are in another country?

Until now that I was moving from a city to another, from one country to another, yes. Now that I've been stabilized, so I think that from now on it's going to be different; but until last year it was difficult because of my lifestyle [Greece, 6: 53-62].

Some interviewees find it difficult to have a regular personal life while travelling and moving from one country to another, but are aware that this is not impossible, is just their problem:

And on a personal plan?

No [laugh], no, but that's something I never... my social life is great, ya, I have a huge circle of people, but personal life no, it's difficult when you move from one country to the other to have a stable personal life.

But would you like to have a stable personal life?

Ya, but I don't, because of my way of living.

The problem was in finding here a stable relationship?

It doesn't happen, it's a question of luck.

But do you think that it's something in your lifestyle or the fact that you are in another country?

Until now that I was moving from a city to another, from one country to another, yes. Now that I've been stabilized, so I think that from now on it's going to be different; but until last year it was difficult because of my lifestyle [Greece, 6: 52-62].

Are you single?

Yes. It doesn't fit to travelling occupation, it's not the best... or maybe it does: a lot of my colleagues are married with kids [...; Finland 2, 20: 29-31].

Some interviewees remain in contact with their friends, but these contact are not sufficient either to maintain a complete relation or to find support for everyday difficulties:

I don't meet them [the friends left abroad] every day, so they don't know my everyday life, and then we talk or we e-mail each other, I'm not complaining to them, you know, I'm writing about good things, you know it's a different relation, different friendship. While to my friends at home, because they know what's happening in my life, I can tell anything [...]; [but] I don't think they might help me, because I don't see them [Hungary, 26: 145-151].

Sharing the everyday life is in some cases even more important than the duration of a relation:

Do you think it's enough to tell what happens, instead of living together and sharing it?

No, you grow apart with some people, it's quite obvious. And I noticed this just with some friends I went to university with from the United States, which I was quite tight with when we were about together, then I went back to Europe and they went back to United States, and our references sort of started to shift, because they had their own reality and I had my own reality and after a while it gets hard to communicate, you don't have any common experience anymore, so it's hard to continue to build on friendship. Other people that maybe I knew for a shortest time, maybe I knew for six months back in Sweden, they are someone I can still communicate with, we have the same references, it makes it easy to communicate, and common values [Sweden, 18: 227-234].

Moreover, being in the same life-phase and having common interests is important to maintain a relationship:

Do you maintain contacts in Poland?

With some yes, with some not. Some have different lives, for example some friends have a husband, so they are concentrated on their families and so we don't have common issues: if I meet some friends from the past they talk about their children, their families, it's different from me... [...] with some friends I was writing e-mails, but the distance between each e-mail become longer and longer and eventually we stopped it, while with others I'm in touch all the time [Poland 1, 23: 134-141].

Some of the respondents keep in touch with their friends in their country, but find much harder to do the same with the ones meet in other experiences abroad:

Did you maintain the relationships that you created travelling abroad?

No, not really, I mean: very few, via e-mail, though, and sometimes seeing each other. I'm very comfortable with some people belonging to some periods of my life and others belonging to another period [The Netherlands, 12: 168-170].

This can be due to the perception that the relation has no future:

With the ones in Latin America we know that I will not go back there, while with a friend in Prague we know that we will meet again. So affection remains, memories, but I do not tell my life to a guy in Ecuador: they are not close friends [Czech Republic, 25: 355-357].

This consideration confirms the different nature of the two types of friendships: the long lasting one are more stable and are linked to individuals' biography; the ones made abroad are more connected with that particular experience and lie on a thicker basis. At the same time, having common cultural references is very important too: even in the distance, it is much easier to maintain the relationships with people from the same country than with foreigners, because communication is easier, there are many common reference points, and there is the hope that, one back in the homeland, it will be easy to take on again the relation. On the contrary, foreigners met abroad remain in a totally different reality, and it may be hard to find a common ground to establish a communication flux. Consequently there can be many "small deaths" [12: 180], that is, many people who hold an important role in someone's life for a period, and then simply disappear from it, like if they were dead.

However, the idea of keeping in touch is somehow tricky: it hides a more multifaceted reality. Firstly, it may happen that also friends who live in the same town meet rarely:

I worked for a company in [town close to Brussels] and I had really a lot of friends there, sometimes we e-mail, sometimes we see each other, 2, 3 times a year only, and they only live 15 km away, but it depends on your spare time, on your work to have the chance to contact them [Belgium 3, 11: 131-133].

Secondly, some relationships can be maintained without any contact, because they are so strongly based in one's life as to be considered unalterable relations in his or her existence; others, instead, need a more or less frequent contact in order to keep them alive:

I have in my mind two kinds of relationships with the people I left in my town: the people with whom you don't have contacts while you are in a different place and that when you meet them it's like if you had never left, and there is a certainty, in the sense that even if I stay abroad for two years I know it will be always like that. And the second type of friendship is the one that needs an effort, trying to keep continuously the contact in order to be sure that when you go back it is still there [Switzerland, 29: 184-188; my translation].

Nevertheless, also in these cases having common cultural reference points facilitates the maintaining of the relation:

[...] with some people it's very easy, we write e-mails occasionally and then maybe we don't talk for three months and then someone writes again a letter. It's easier with the ones based in Europe, for some reason [Sweden, 18: 241-243].

[With] The ones in the United States for a year yes [I kept in contact], but they are already gone, and the Latin American ones sometimes I speak with them, when they appear in the Messenger, but they are not people I usually speak with, if I meet them [in the chat] I am always glad and I ask them about their lives, but it's ore asking for the affection than because I consider them friends of mine [Czech Republic, 25: 349-352; my translation].

In any case, maintaining the relationship is not the goal of the relationship itself. Maintaining a relationship means, to some respondents, knowing that it is not fading just because of the distance, and that there is always a friend out there they can count on:

Did it happen that some of your best Spanish friends went abroad?

Yes, it happened.

Are they friends yet?

Yes! Why, just because they left they shouldn't be friends anymore?

I mean that it might be more difficult to maintain the relationship.

Maintaining the relationship? It depends on what you consider maintaining the relationship. If maintaining the relationship means writing an e-mail, well, that is bullshit. I do not write an e-mail for months with a friend of mine who is not here, but when the summer comes, there we are the two of us, all the summer long. That's it: we do not call each other, we do not write each other, but we know we are there [Spain, 2: 257-266; my translation].

Have you maintained the relationships created in your previous experiences abroad?

No. Not in the sense that I continue to meet people. I still exchange e-mails with three people, but it's only on special occasions like birthdays. Nothing really serious. Though I

must say that if I needed to go to Serbia – one of these friends is from Serbia – and stay over, I might ask for hospitality [Poland 2, 24: 306-309].

Despite the certainty of these statements, when someone is abroad for months or years, going back might not find the same reality that he or she left. In other words, the fact of not sharing the everyday dimension has an influence on the relationships nature:

I had my life there [in England, where she spent 9 months], I had some friends, and it's really strange, because when I came back (I came back from England 2 or 3 times), I met some friends and it was really difficult, because they knew that I was away and for me the everyday life was in England, and it was a kind of holiday coming back to Belgium, and for my friends it was still their daily life and they didn't understand that it was a sort of holiday for me, and it was difficult to continue the relationships, and I felt that they had changed but they didn't know it, because their life just went on, and I had changed but they didn't see it too, so that was really a strange feeling [Belgium 2, 10: 43-57].

Before I came here [after almost one year abroad], I spent one month at home and I realised that I have been away for too long, that is, they made a step ahead in their life that I missed, I think most of all to my brothers. [Switzerland, 29: 217-218].

Thus what happens is that some interviewees do not make a special effort to maintain the relationships with distant people, thinking that those which will resist are the really good ones, the deepest ones, or at least those which are not inseparably linked to a certain experience (for example a travel abroad). Others do such an effort, but it might not be enough. In both cases, the results is that people lose some of their friends:

Also it means that one has left the used environment and friends that one had are more far away, and the family as well.

Do you miss them?

Sometimes. I'm not really sad in my everyday life, but it's not always easy to keep in touch, and sometimes you see that you lose the contacts [13: 52-56; ...]

Do you maintain the friendships in your country?

Yes, not with all of them. Each time there are just a few left, but... [Germany, 13: 180-181].

Did you maintain relationships you had in your country?

Oh yes.

And that do you find easy or not?

Getting weaker and weaker, and is getting less and less [Austria, 14: 138-141].

Do you maintain also the relationships with the people you met in other experiences abroad?

Some of them. Now I'm out of touch, but for a few years I was in touch with people.

What happened?

Just kind of shooting down, really.

Without a specific reason?

Yea [United Kingdom, 17: 209-214].

The great majority of the interviewees declare that they maintain their relationships with people living far, but about one third of the respondents remain in touch only with best friends. This can be explained by the existence of a "natural" selection of the people that one meets during his life and through his different experiences.

Concerning the way people maintain contacts, letters are still considered to be more intimate, to offer a moment of reflection, but just for this reason they are not adequate to the speed at which young professionals abroad live their lives. New media based on the Internet guarantee a type of communication that is very similar to the one it is possible to realise in presence. Immediateness is the password:

[...] if I didn't have modern technologies I would have probably lost a lot of contacts, because you can write letters, but you don't get the same direct communication that you share with people when you are there [Sweden, 18: 225-226].

The need to stay in contact with distant people, both friends and relatives, has been fully understood by private companies. "Staying in touch with friends and family will make your stay and work in Belgium more enjoyable", says an advertisement text published on *Newcomer* [Autumn 2006: 123]. And another one sounds:

For expats settling here, getting connected is a top priority to be able to keep in close contact with friends and loved ones, or read online versions of newspapers from home [*Newcomer*, Autumn 2006: 110].

Phone (normal one, mobile and via Internet), as well as e-mails are by large the most used technologies to keep contacts. The most of the interviewees use chat systems to communicate with their friends and their families, but there are still some

resistances respect to the e-mail use: the Greece respondent, for instance, says that she is too lazy for Skype:

[...] no Skype because I'm a big lazy going home and open Skype. I prefer to write an e-mail and get a reply. And I'm so lazy I never installed Skype on my computer. [Greece, 6: 151-153]

Such an explanation sounds a bit strange, as chats, once installed on the PC, allows a much quicker communication with people. Moreover, less than a half of the interviewees use chats to make phone calls, despite the convenient prices offered by Skype, Voipbuster⁶⁶ and similar free-call providers. E-mail is an instrument that everyone can use during work hours, and this makes it very practical also for those who do not have an Internet connection at home. Moreover, some respondents explain that they are too tired of the computer when they go back home after job, and this is also a reason why audio and video chats are less used than e-mails: they cannot be used in the office.

Curiously, the most of the interviewees do not use web-cams. Among the four that use also video chats, three are male and one is a female, but living with a male. According to the data provided by several surveys [European Communities, 2006; Seybert, 2006], males tend to use the computer and the Internet more and more frequently than females. Looking at the reasons brought by interviewees to explain their reluctance to avoid cams, the impression is that they sound as excuses:

Sometimes I use Skype, but only audio, no video [laugh]: I have a camera but I don't use it [laugh], I don't like it, at the beginning it was funny, but now no. And also not everybody has it. I also discovered that without a camera the quality of the audio is better [Poland 1, 23: 155-157].

My interpretation of this quotation is that cameras are considered to be too invasive. The fact that men use them more than women does not necessarily prove that males are more keen in technology use than females, but rather that women

⁶⁶ There are differences among these systems. Skype, for example, allows to speak for free among those who have installed the Skype program in their computer, and offers calls to normal phone in Europe and the U.S. at less than 0,02 € per minute. Voipbuster does not allow to speak among computers, but only from a computer to a phone, and calls to normal phones in Europe are free.

prefer softer media. For example, a girl might not want to show herself without being made up⁶⁷.

Besides the media, visits to distant people's places are considered an excellent way to keep the relation:

Everytime I meet the people, I have the feeling that I'm winning so much more than just talking to them [by Skype] [Poland 2, 24: 313-314].

In a few cases, having a contact abroad who can guest the respondent, so that he can travel cheaply and visit a new country together with a nice person, is the real purpose of maintaining a relationship (and this confirms the opportunity-driven nature of many relationships established abroad):

If I have to be honest, the purpose that I want to reach, my aim is like to find friends and after that... [...] I want to save my contacts and relationships, to visit each other in our countries, to see different cultures and, for example, I reach this contact in Italy, with two girls here, they are my first friends in Brussels, two sisters from Bari. So at the end of the summer, I'm going to go to visit them in Bari and after that they will visit me in Bulgaria on the seaside [Bulgaria, 28: 235-240].

An obstacle to visits is the lack of money: some of the interviewees are very young, at the beginning of their careers; others come from countries where salaries are low:

I always make all what is possible to make them come [to visit me], because I don't have money [Spain, 2: 267-268; my translation].

I would like to go to Canada [where she followed a master and had friends], the problem is that I don't have money. With other people it happened that I went to visit them, but this depends on the distance and on what I am doing in that period [Switzerland, 29: 132-133; my translation].

⁶⁷ An hypothesis, interesting but far from being proved, is that males and females might privilege different senses: women communication being more emotive and emotion driven, they might privilege the hearing, that is, words and their inflections, contents (what is said) over the form (how the speaker looks like); men, on the contrary, might value visual aspects.

Lack of money to visit far people, distances and lack of common cultural reference points are then the reasons why people find it easier to remain in contact with Europeans than with people from other continents:

And [do you keep in contact] with your friends in the US [read: that you met in the U.S.]?

Yes. For example last year we met all together in Germany. We arranged all together, because two of them now live in Germany...

Are they from Europe of the US?

From Europe. No, the ones from States, I haven't seen them since I came back [Estonia, 21: 163-1667].

The positive point in globalisation is that if you make friends outside [your country] there is the possibility to meet and keep the relation. [...] The problem is that even with the Europeans is not easy. I met a Bulgarian guy, and I invited him, but [...] the ticket perhaps costs 200 €, but he does not gain much more [Czech Republic, 25: 357-363; my translation].

Considering couple relationships, 7 interviewees admit that their partner is living in another country (in one case outside Europe). Only in three cases (Portugal, Estonia and Switzerland) frequent meetings are organised in order to keep in touch. The frequency of these encounters varies from almost every week (Switzerland) to every month and a half:

You said you might stay 2 years more or more. Doesn't this affect your love story?

Until now it hasn't affected it, I cannot say what it happens in one year or in one month, but we are considering... but maybe he has the opportunity to come here... but we haven't decided anything yet.

How many times do you go back home?

I'm going home every 2 months or 1 month and a half, and of course he comes here as well, so maybe every month and a half we see each other.

It's not that much...

Yes, it's not that much.

Because I guess you have only 2 or 3 days to spend home.

Usually it's 4 days, or one week [Estonia, 21: 63-74].

To summarise, the most of the interviewees maintain relationships also in the distance, but some preliminary conditions are necessary to guarantee that a distant relation may be carried on:

- there must be a reciprocal will to remain in contact;

- there must be a common reference universe to which people can base their communication; it can be constituted either by common cultural references, or by a common experience (for instance, an individual can remain in contact with a friend remained in his country by talking about other common friends);
- there must be the hope to meet again.

Two strategies are adopted to maintain relationships in the distance, which I will call *rarefied communication strategy* and *intense communication strategy*:

1. the *rarefied communication strategy* is based on the assumption that the relationship is so deep and certain that only a minimum contact is necessary while abroad: when the two people, even after years, meet again, it will be like it was before one of them had left; it is usually adopted with family members and close friends, especially the childhood ones, but also some kind of opportunity-driven relationships;
2. the *intense communication strategy* is based on frequent contacts, as direct as possible, through media able to transmit messages instantaneously and through visits; it is based on the assumption that those contacts are necessary to keep updated about other person's life, this way preserving alive the common reference universe that allows the communication between the two subjects; it is usually adopted to maintain acquaintances, friendships based on sharing a specific experience and couple relations.

Both the strategies cannot avoid surprises, like recognising that, even if the feeling did not change, people did and something in their biography has gone missed.

9.4.2. *Maintaining relationships established in Brussels*

The table 9.12 shows interviewees' typical answers to Question 23. Here, according to the typical answers provided to Questions 20 and 21, three possibilities are mentioned by those who feel they can make a prevision:

Q23					
cases	T.A.	maybe, I can't say now	probably not	only the best friends	many of them
		1	Portugal		x
2	Spain			x	
3	Italy (1)				x
4	Italy (2)			x	
5	Malta			x	
6	Greece				x
7	Cyprus				x
8	France	N / A (she does not mean to leave)			
9	Belgium (1)	N / A			
10	Belgium (2)	N / A			
11	Belgium (3)	N / A			
12	Netherlands			x	
13	Germany			x	
14	Austria			x	
15	Slovenia			x	
16	Ireland			x	
17	UK	x			
18	Sweden			x	
19	Finland (1)			x	
20	Finland (2)			x	
21	Estonia				x
22	Lithuania	N/A			
23	Poland (1)				x
24	Poland (2)				x
25	Czech Rep.	x			
26	Hungary		x		
27	Romania	N/A			
28	Bulgaria			x	
29	Switzerland	x			
30	Moldova				x

Table 9.12: Previsions about the maintenance of the relationships established in Brussels

1. I will probably not maintain the contact with the people I met in Brussels;
2. I will maintain it only with the best friends;
3. I will maintain it with many people.

Only three people, over 24 respondents, felt that they cannot say now what will happen with the people they meet in Brussels.

Answers to Question 23 confirm those received to Questions 20 and 21. The majority of the interviewees think that they will maintain some or many of their relationships in Brussels. There are two exceptions; one is the Portuguese respondent, who expressed a general incapacity to maintain relationships in the distance:

For me it's normal to meet someone and talk with them, to discuss, to create some kind of communication bond, but it doesn't mean that I can meet them in the future. Maybe in Portugal I immediately assume that if we communicate well we can have a long lasting relationship. [1: 95-98]

So do you think that you will be able or that you will desire to maintain the relationships you might create in Brussels?

Well, thinking of my past history: no [...; Portugal, 1: 121-123].

The other exception is the Hungarian respondent, who is planning to stay in Brussels only for three months and to concentrate on job relationships: she affirms that she will surely maintain her professional contacts, as establishing new work relations in the institutions is the aim of her period in Brussels, but also that she is not interested in personal relationships of any kind, so that she does not see any future for the acquaintances she spent her spare time with.

A less extreme but similar opinion is expressed by the Slovenian respondent:

I don't know. I think I will. Two, three, maybe, not everybody. And I think I will maintain a relationship with people I work with, you know, for work sake, because what I do now here it's so international I can do it in Slovenia, I can do it everywhere in Europe, and you have to have contacts all over Europe, because you are in European projects with European consortia and so on. I think that if I stay in this business I will maintain contacts [Slovenia, 15: 260-264].

Among those who believe they will maintain their relationships, the majority of them find it normal to lose many of them and keep only the best ones:

[...] the society changes, the environment changes, so it's really just the best one who stays: friendships. [...] I don't think it's a bad thing. It's very normal [Austria, 14: 131-135].

This happens also when people have the good intention to remain in contact:

In my past experience I met really nice people and I thought to keep in touch with everybody, but then the experience showed me that it's not the case. Even though they would like to, people get on with their own life [Finland 2, 20: 254-256].

Sometimes, even those who were best friends in a circumscribed situation, like being an Expat in Brussels, just lose their importance when circumstances change: "It's always happening when moving around: you lose some contacts even if they are best friends." [Finland 1, 19: 127-128].

The Irish interviewee believes that he will maintain his contacts through the rarefied communication strategy:

Do you think that you will maintain the relationship you created here?

It depends. It's like when you are in college and there's 20 people in your class. Then you leave and you e-mail your friends once every couple of months, but then when you go back and you are all in the same area, then you hang each other again. So at the moment there are people in Ireland that I see once every six months and that when I was in Ireland I saw three times a week, so when you say you maintain a relationship you just kinda leave and you are not as in contact as you were previously, but then if you come back you are, so if I left Brussels I probably stay in contact with people I am very friendly with, in Ireland when I go back it is the same as it was, unless they get married, or... [laugh]. When anyone lives anywhere, it doesn't matter if in Brussels, they are not going to have as much contact with people as they have when they live there [Ireland, 16: 169-177].

The Bulgarian interviewee raises a cultural problem: people coming from certain countries, especially from the central and Northern Europe, generally need more time than others to consider an acquaintance as a friend:

Do you think you will maintain the relationships you have here?

Very few of them.

Why?

Because for me it's not a problem, but the other people, I told you, they are cold. If I like them and I get closer with them for one month they need one year to feel the same for me. That's why the strongest relations here I have with Italians, Spanish and Portuguese people. Northern people are really cold like their weather. [Bulgaria, 28: 317-322]

Actually the results showed in the table 9.12 confirm this tendency: only the interviewees from the Southern countries and from the East think they will maintain many relationships, while the ones from the centre and the north of Europe are convinced that they will keep in touch only with their best friends.

Chapter 10

Identity

10.1 Describing identity

Responses to Question 24 (“How would you describe your identity?”) will be now taken into consideration. The table 10.1 shows interviewees typical answers:

1. I have a local identity;
2. I am a [his /her country] citizen;
3. I have a multinational identity;
4. I am a European citizen;
5. firstly I am from my country, than I am a European;
6. I feel European in my country and nationalist outside my country;
7. I feel European when I go outside Europe / when I am with people from other countries;
8. I identify myself with the Western values;
9. I am a citizen of the world.

Analysing the table, some main tendencies appear:

- only a minority of the interviewee have a local identity;
- more than a third of the interviewees have a multilayer identity, even though one of these layers may be stronger than the others;
- the interviewees from the East of Europe (with the exception of the Czech one, who spent more than 4 years living in the Americas) show a tendency to have exclusively a national identity;
- half of the interviewees feel to some extent a European identity, but with important differences in its intensity;
- only three respondents declare to be citizen of the world.

Q24										
cases	T.A.	I have a local identity	I am a [his /her country] citizen	I have a multi-national identity	I am a European citizen	firstly I am from my country, than I am a European	I feel European in my country and nationalist outside my country	I feel European when I go outside Europe / when I am with people from other countries	I identify myself with the Western values	I am a citizen of the world
		1	Portugal						x	
2	Spain	x	x							
3	Italy (1)				x					x
4	Italy (2)	N/A								
5	Malta					x				
6	Greece	x	x		x					x
7	Cyprus		x	x (shifting identity)						
8	France					x				
9	Belgium (1)				x					
10	Belgium (2)					x				x
11	Belgium (3)	x				x				
12	Netherlands		x	x (Dutch living in BRX)				x		
13	Germany		x							
14	Austria	x								
15	Slovenia		x					x		
16	Ireland		x							
17	UK				x					
18	Sweden		x							
19	Finland (1)		x		x				x	
20	Finland (2)			x (Scandinavian)	x					
21	Estonia		x							
22	Lithuania		x							
23	Poland (1)		x							
24	Poland (2)		x							
25	Czech Rep.	x		x		x				
26	Hungary		x							
27	Romania		x	x (shifting identity)						
28	Bulgaria		x							
29	Switzerland		x							
30	Moldova		Russian							

Table 10.1: Interviewees' identity descriptions

10.1.1. Identity layers

According to the last *Eurobarometer* survey available (2007e: 85), the European identity is increasing, but lives together with other identity layers:

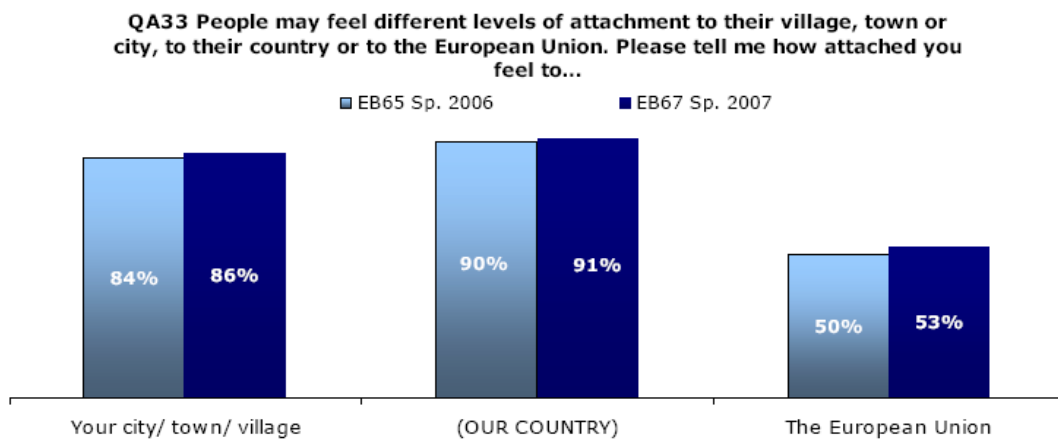


Figure 1: Attachment to locality, national state and European Union [Eurobarometer, 2007e]

According to *Eurobarometer* data, local and national identity are still dominant. Among the interviewees, proportions are quite different.

Four respondents affirm they have a local identity. Their positions about their local identity vary from person to person. The Austrian interviewee, coming from Styria, defines herself “more Alpine than Austrian” [14: 155], but at the same time she sees this identity like a helpful starting point to develop a career that allowed her to move from her region and have a better life than the average there:

I’m very proud of my roots but I’m also very proud of the fact that I have been able to leave my roots. So, that means going to university, getting some degrees, going abroad. All my cousins stayed and get married, divorced, having no work... I’m proud of my roots because they give me a lot of stability, but I’m also happy that I could come across it [Austria, 14: 155-158].

This local identity can live together with other identities. The Spanish interviewee, for instance, proudly describes herself as a Spanish *and* an Alicante citizen:

I am Spanish, but I am from Alicante. I have a bilingual community, and a slightly different culture. This is something I know, but it doesn't prevent me from saying that I am Spanish [...] In Spain you know what we have: fragmentation. There are many people who would not say: "I am Spanish", they would say: "I am from Valencia". I am Spanish, I am from Valencia, I am from Alicante and more locally I am from my village. [...] And I am not going to say European! [Spain, 2: 291-296; my translation].

The Czech respondent admits she has a complex local identity, as she comes from a town, but she lived many years in Prague. Over this local identity, she feels like having a multinational Eastern identity, based on cultural references common to other people from the East:

I also identify myself a lot as from the East, for example in Spain I had a group of Czech and Bulgarian friends, and we used to identify a lot like from the East: we knew the same things, the same movies... [Czech Republic, 25: 397-398; my translation].

This quotation fully confirms the idea of a multilayer identity, in which a multi-level local sense of belonging lives together with a national belonging. But the national level is not necessarily the last one, as there is space to feel European as well:

A French author, I don't remember his name, had said, and this is my motto as well: "when I'm in Tessaaloniki I'm an Athenian, when I'm in Paris I'm a Greek, when I'm in New York I'm a European". I think it's more or less what describes... but I tend to be European very easily [...]. I'm a Greek and a European. I have two identities that are shared, like that I'm an Athenian and a Greek [Greece, 6: 175-179].

[...] in Belgium we have this regional problem, you know [laugh], so firstly I feel Flemish, but then it depends, because when there is this world cup [football] then I feel really Belgian!, like we were one only nation. But I feel European as well, as I'm working here [Belgium 3, 11: 142-144].

Some respondents affirm they are part of the world, in a cosmopolite afflatus that always lives together with other identity layers:

What about your national identity?

As a Belgian. Part of the European Community, that is part of the world.

You have the feeling to be part of the world?

Yes. I have the feeling to be Belgian because I live in Belgium [...]; when I am in Brussels I really have the feeling to be part of the EC and for me it's a very important project, from the point of view of economics we have to do it, if we don't succeed, we will have problems with globalisation later; and [in Brussels] I also meet a lot of people from all over Europe. And I'm part of the world also, because when I watch the news my life is influenced by what's happening in the world. I can't say: "The rest of the world doesn't matter", [...] what happens in the world has an influence on my life, so I'm part of the world. And what I do can influence also the rest of the world.

How can you influence the rest of the world?

Because I'm part of something, I'm part of the EC, and for example I'm working at the university and the university is part of the European Association of all different universities, and it has not a direct influence, but when you look afterwards, you can have consequences. Indirectly [Belgium 2, 10: 257-272].

This quotation raises Greenpeace's idea of thinking globally and acting locally, and it is cheering to see that this attitude allows the passage from the noble but abstract cosmopolitan thought to a pragmatic indirect action. In respondent's words, there is a precise reference to the indirect influence she may exercise by operating in a university association; this is a clear reference to civil society activism, which can evidently be carried on without ideological positions, just in one's own everyday life.

The fact of having a multi-layer identity implies that one should not forget his origins, but rather be aware of them also when moving outside his country and integrating in other national societies:

Would you define yourself like that [like a citizen of the world]?

[...] no, I would define myself like that I make of my place my home. I find that expression dangerous, because it's over-used and you need to be conscious about where you are, to integrate where you are, but always keeping in mind where you are from and what you left behind. [In Europe like in Spain] We stay together, but we all must have consciousness of where we come from, it should not be forgotten, our culture should not be forgotten [Spain, 2: 313-322; my translation].

For the Spanish respondent the fact of staying together, in a multination-state like in a supranational aggregation like Europe, should not lead to forget our origins and our culture. What more likely happens is that a new layer grows up. But there are not only more inclusive layers, in a vertical ascension from the local to the global; there are also new identities that for some reasons start to live side by side with the others. It is the case of the German respondent: he still feels only German, but living in

Belgium, being married to a Belgian girl and having more and more Belgian friends, he feel that his identity is getting richer:

I guess I identify mainly with Germany, I would say. The cities where I lived I was very attached to and have been important. European identity... I have a lot of sympathy for Europe, but it's too abstract to really call it "identity".

What about your Belgian identity?

It happens that more and more I defend Belgium against all those stereotypes and prejudices, and so far it is a kind of... that I start identifying with the country and the people; of course it's due on my girlfriend as I see things through her perspective, and hearing all those issues even more inside, in a differentiate manner. So this is certainly changing something [Germany, 13: 213-220].

The interviewee from the Netherlands constitutes an interesting case: she was born in Germany and lived there until she was 6, then she moved to the Netherlands. She feels she is from this second country, so she adopted the identity of the place where she grew up, but without any local attachment:

[...] we went from a military base to another in the Netherlands [...], so I don't think I can tell you one place which I can say, you know: "I'm from that place", I don't really feel like that. There's no one place where I belong, I just lived in several places in the Netherlands [The Netherlands, 12: 6-9].

Her identity intensity changes according to the place where she is. Several layers are present in her, and they wake up according to the environment she is in:

Identity depends on where you are, really. When I'm in Holland with my friends I feel like a Dutch person living in Brussels, and when I'm in Brussels I feel like a Dutch person living in Brussels, but then being more Dutch than when I'm in the Netherlands. No, it really depends: when I'm in the United States I'm very European, but being in Europe doesn't make me feel very European. It depends on where you are, because I think in this sense it is a strange feeling of identity, so when I lived in Barcelona I was far more Dutch than I am now, because all the differences became clear, then, all of a sudden. [...] they actually want people to chose, which to me is really weird, but some people seem to think they can actually choose an identity [The Netherlands, 12: 187-198].

As seen, identity layers are not only from the local to the national, but also from the national to the multinational. Some interviewees have a local and a national identity, others have a multinational identity, like the already quoted Czech respondent. One of the Finland respondent, for instance, defines herself more as a

Scandinavian than as a Finn [Finland 2, 20: 265-266], and at the same time as a European.

The other Finnish interviewee has an identity problem which is common among people who have travelled a lot: he feels Finn, but does not identify totally with his national culture, because living abroad he became aware of all its limits. To solve this problems, he looks for a broader identity, the Western one:

I could live most in all the EU member states without difficulties. Somehow I am de-rooted from my Finnish roots, I don't have to be all the time in Finland. I'm going very rarely to Finland also. [19: 60-62; ...] I might say I de-rooted from Finn, but at the same time I feel Finn. It sounds contradictory but it is not that much. I grew up in Finland, I have Finnish education, Finnish traditions, my mother tongue is Finnish, I remain Finn and I have my Finnish parameters for my behaviour, but at the same time I am de-rooted. Finland is a very homogeneous country and the behaviour of people is very homogeneous, which means that when I'm coming out from there I'm questioning some ways of being in Finland and I'm not behaving like this, I'm not totally like them. [...] I'm European, I believe very strongly in Western values, freedom, human rights, democracy, which are not only Finn but are shared in all the Europe, and I am very proud of having these European and Western values, so I am Finn and very strongly a Western, Occidental person [Finland 1, 19: 154-163].

The Western world is seen as the land of freedom, democracy and human rights:

What's your concept of the Western part of the world?

As I said, freedom: we have freedom of speaking, freedom of speech, free opinions, respect of human rights. [...]

Can you qualify these countries?

The EU member states, at least in principle, in theory; the US, Canada, Australia, and I think also in countries where people do not have these rights but a big part of population would like to have them. Western societies and Western states have been the first ones having these freedoms, that's why I'm calling them Western values [Finland 1, 19: 164-171].

What is important is that he partially rejects his inborn identity, based on cultural national aspects, to choose a new one, based on elected values.

Choosing an identity becomes a need for two respondents, who have not a multi-layer identity, but a multiple identity: because of their biography, they identify with 2 or 3 national identities. The Romanian interviewee [27: 27-40] has lived 18 years in Romania, then he moved to Brussels, where he spent 8 years. He recognise himself in the same way in the two national identities, so he privileges the one of the country he lives in: Belgium. Nevertheless, he is ready to skip to a prevalent Romanian

identity if he moves there. The American Cypriot interviewee, instead, is not able to choose even a provisional identity, so she lets the other choose for her:

Before we started you said you are Greek, American, Cypriot. I'd like to put some order. Where are your parents from?

Cyprus.

How would you define yourself?

I don't know. It's a problem for me, actually. Because in America they don't think you're American, even when you are born there they ask you where are you from, and because they don't know where Cyprus is I always say I'm Greek, so you always say "I'm Greek, I'm Greek, I'm Greek, Greek Cypriot", and when you come to Brussels and they say "where are you from", I don't think they mean where you were born, they mean what is your nationality, so I say I'm Greek Cypriot, but I was born in America, and then it's very confusing because sometimes people in Brussels say I'm American some people say "no, you're Cypriot".

You grew up in the US [until she was 21], so for example to me you are totally American because that's the environment where you grew up.

Ya, but you don't get defined by that, you get defined by your nationality. What are you is not American, you were not born in America, I was born a nationality. If I had kids in America, for example they would be born in America, and would be American. [...]

But the fact that your origin is from Cyprus doesn't mean that you took its entire culture.

No, but I took a lot, because my parents maintained a lot.

So after these considerations how do you define yourself?

I don't know, because I'm not fully American and I'm not fully Cypriot. I'm neither. I'm not a hundred per cent of anything. So I say I could be both. I don't think like an American and I don't think like a Cypriot. You can choose [laugh]. Everyone chooses it.

So you just do not define yourself.

I don't know how [Cyprus, 7: 21-47].

Recapitulating, the most of the interviewees affirm that they have a multiple identity. This is composed by different layers, which can be internally organised in a vertical way (from local to global) or horizontally (multiple national identity). It is important to stress that *the adherence to a specific identity, in a very postmodern way, is the result of a conscious or unconscious choice: it can be modelled and adapted to individual exigencies during the time and according to the space, that is, the cultural environment one is in.*

Finally, no matter what identity a person chooses, the fact that interviewee somehow create their own personal identity when they do not have a defined one suggests that *everyone needs to belong to one place, making of it his home:*

Do you think it's important to belong to one place?

I firstly think so, because I've never had that. I've never been fully integrated. Never been fully into the American and fully into the Cypriots. I think it's very important, because I don't know what is like to say... you know, I hear people who say "I'm going home" and they mean that the entire family is in Greece or Italy or Spain. My family has never been like that. My parents were in America, my grandma and my grandpa, all my uncles, cousins, everybody was in another country, so during Christmas all your family is over there and you never have all this family around us, so you never have your own roots, everything in one place, and people who travel tend to be quite lonely [Cyprus, 7: 71-78].

10.1.2. Exclusive national identity

Over 29 respondents, 13 declares to have an exclusive identity; 2 of them affirm that they are Europeans, and I will discuss their cases in the next subchapter. Among the other 11, 8 are from the East of Europe. This number confirms the tendency, already indicated by Ans Persoons and João Delgado, which sees people from the Eastern countries, and especially from the new member states, more nationalist than the people from the Western Europe. Compare the following quotations, one from the Swedish respondents and the other from the Hungarian one:

I tend to be more and more Swedish the more I stay outside Sweden. I think it's quite common with people here. I was watching the game against Denmark on Saturday, it was just a qualification game for the Europeans, and I would have never watched a qualification back home, but here it's a bit more... going to my friends and cheer for Sweden. So I think you try to see your identity more when you are outside your country and it becomes a bit more important for you [...; Sweden, 18: 257-260].

There is a culture in each country so I think that member states should not lose their identity. We can be together in the EU, but I don't like this European identity, because the people will lose their national identity and start to make everybody the same face. I don't like that everybody has to know English, because it's important to have our own languages, but in many countries English is wide used, you can see English words, but this way slowly you lose your national identity. National identity keeps the nations together [Hungary, 26: 193-198].

They both have an exclusive national identity, but their identity perception in terms of intensity is very different: the first remembers to be Swedish while abroad, as a way to feel more at home ("going to my friends and cheer for Sweden"); the second shows a strong nationalism, which she declines in a defence of her national

culture, costumes and language. Her position is quite radical, and not all the people from the East show such a nationalism, but it is useful to highlight how identities can vary in their intensity. A different position, for instance, is expressed by the Romanian interviewee. He is not nationalist, but thinks that cultures (not necessarily national cultures) should be defended:

Do you think you have something in common with the other Europeans?

Hmm, not that much, no. It's like with everybody else. I don't think I have more in common... I have less differences with people from other parts of the world. [27: 268-270; ...] I don't see any point in staying together in one only big Europe, I think that we will lose more than what we gain. Economically we'll have a future but culturally I don't think so, because I don't feel I have this in common with other people. [...] I don't think we have much in common in Europe: everybody has his language and culture, and I think it's good to keep it this way, it's a richness. [27: 279-283; ...]

But I don't see a European identity: I think it's a good club, it's part of your identity, maybe, a small part, but you cannot say "yes, I'm European", it's a club of which you are taking the rules [Romania, 27: 313-314].

In terms of comparison, it is interesting to see how the Moldovan interviewee describes her identity:

I feel 100 per cent Russian. My parents are Russian, and we're just living in Moldova and they had to study Moldovan language. [...] we have to speak it, because we are living there, that's how they say [Moldova, 30: 176-185].

The fact that Eastern countries have been members only for a limited time respect to Western countries cannot be underestimated: there, a European tradition has been affirming only in the last years, and there is still little coincidence between the enthusiasm for the European project and the European identity adoption. Europe, in fact, is broadly seen more as a source of opportunities than as an ideal:

It's a paradox, but easy to explain, that people from Eastern countries are very nationalist, and at the same time most of them want to get away and see Europe as the possibility to go to work somewhere and maybe raise some money there, or to work at home but taking some money from a multinational company. It's a paradox, but it's easy to explain, because yes, we didn't have the same chances, but once we grow out of it, it's a very superficial and silly feeling, this nationalism, based on nothing, and the borders will just disappear and will remain the main borders [represented by the] language, the culture, but not the nationalistic borders. Because this is the difference: the nationalist borders are not the cultural borders or the linguistic borders, they are the borders drawn by the state lines, and when you ask to a nationalist what is the image of his country, he

will indicate the image of the country delimited by the borders on the map, not the image of a culture [Romania, 27: 314-323].

Institutional and national borders do not coincide with cultural borders. This also means, brought at a European level, that there might be a European political unit without a European unique culture. As nation-states did not fully succeed in eliminating local cultures and imposing a unique national culture, a European entity that does not respect cultural differences would have no chances. This is why the EU slogan is “united in the differences”. Nevertheless, the presence of nationalistic defence position towards Europeanization demonstrates that the message of a European identity meant as a further layer on the existing individual identity layers is not effective enough. The fact that some people feel menaced by the European identity confirms that the European Union is still unable to communicate clearly its message to its citizens.

10.1.3. Being a European

Many interviewees declare that they have either an exclusive or a multilayer European identity. This result confirms the fact that, among those who experience cross-cultural contacts, the European identity is stronger than the national one, as indicated by the *Eurobarometer*'s [2007c: 45] results showed in the table 10.2.

	More European than National	More National than European	Difference: More European - national
Friends from other European countries	43%	24%	+19 points
Enjoy eating foreign cuisine	59%	43%	+16 points
You sometimes read newspapers in foreign languages	21%	7%	+14 points
Travelled abroad ≥ 3 times in last 3 years	38%	25%	+13 points
Email/internet communication with other countries	25%	13%	+12 points
Watch foreign language TV/movies	29%	17%	+12 points
Friends from non-European countries	27%	16%	+11 points
Family/relatives living in other European Country	31%	21%	+10 points
Read foreign language books	14%	6%	+8 points
Job involves contact with other countries	15%	8%	+7 points
Family/relatives living in non-European Country	19%	14%	+5 points
None (SPONTANEOUS)	14%	29%	-15 points

Table 10.2: Cross-cultural contacts and European identity [Eurobarometer, 2007c]

Another relevant data concern the feeling towards European citizenships. A recent Eurobarometer survey (2007d: 116) affirms that 59% of the respondents are proud to be European, against a 17% who do not feel European, as shown in the figure 10.2:

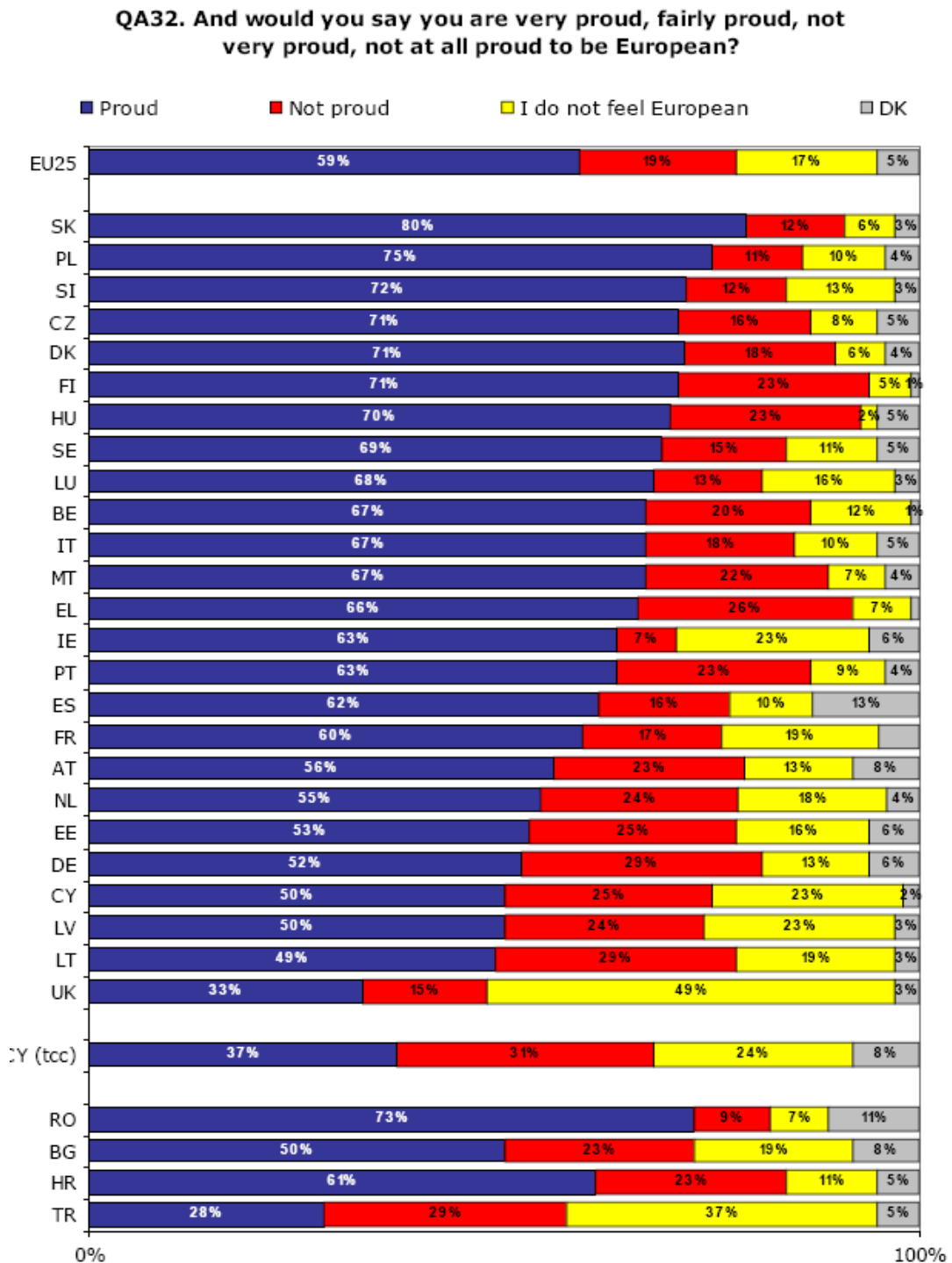


Figure 10.2: Pride of being European [Eurobarometer, 2007d]

Talking about European identity as such, however, is not enough: interviewees' answers show that there are different ways to be European. There is a very weak European identity, which is the result of living and working in the most European of the European cities:

National identity?! Do you mean: do I feel like a real Belgian or like a real European or whatever? [...] But I feel European as well, as I'm working here. When you go abroad and you meet people you do not say "I am a European", I would say I'm Belgian, and ya, I feel quite comfortable [Belgium 3, 11: 141-145].

There is a weak European identity, which only comes out when the person is abroad, or which comes after the national identity:

When you are outside your country, you identify with those who are closer: when I was in Argentina there was a big difference between north Americans and Europeans, and where you were exactly from in Europe was indifferent. And we, the Europeans, we felt all the same. Very often I think that the fact of being Europeans is underestimated, but I believe that it is very much inside us, and that when we go outside Europe we realise we are Europeans [...; Czech Republic, 25: 399-404; my translation].

I'm a European. Within Europe I'm a French with an important pattern of German identity.

So firstly you feel a European, then a French.

When I meet people from America or Asia, I feel more European than just French, I know the differences between me and them and the culture depends more on the fact that I'm from Europe than for my being French [France, 8: 207-210].

There is a strong European identity, which lives together with other identity layers:

A French author, I don't remember his name, had said, and this is my motto as well: "when I'm in Tesseloniki I'm an Athenian, when I'm in Paris I'm a Greek, when I'm in New York I'm a European". I think it's more or less what describes... but I tend to be European very easily, I don't have to go to the States to declare myself European, I declare myself European in Brussels as well [Greece, 6: 175-178].

Finally, there is an absolute European identity, which is, at least in respondents' declarations, more powerful than other identities. These cases, however, need to be pondered. As the Irish respondent says: "I don't think you will ever get an Italian or an Irish person feeling that they are European before than Italian or Irish. It'd never happen" [16: 195-196]. I also doubt about the possibility of an exclusive European

identity. I rather believe that the three interviewees who affirm to be just European citizens are expressing a narrative which sounds: “you must be European”.

Analysing interviewees answers, in fact, it comes out that many respondents feel that they should declare to be European. It is like a social rule that emerges through the answers of those who do not want to say that, or who just joke with it. The narrative is probably the result of the continuous pro-Europe messages that one is exposed to in Brussels, being inside the Expats community. Expats, in fact, normally studied international relations or European affairs, and work or dream to work in the European institutions. One of the reasons why they want to work in the institutions certainly is money, but that would be too mean to admit, so it is much better to say that they believe in the European Union project. This and other mechanisms of this kind contribute in generating an “artificial sense” of being European, or better, a sense of having to be European:

Everybody’s always some sort of European, I don’t know what that is, really. It’s the right thing to say, but it sounds silly. Identity depends on where you are, really [The Netherlands, 12: 187-188].

I will now report some of the answers that reveal the narrative, in each one highlighting the part that allows to discover the narrative: it will appear evident that respondents are just saying something that they think the interviewer will like, that is, they are making a socially approved declaration:

When I’m at home I feel European, when I’m in Europe I feel that I must defend my Portuguese roots. It’s a good answer, eh? [Laugh] [Portugal, 1: 147-148].

I am Spanish [...]. And I am not going to tell you I’m European! [laugh] [Spain, 2: 295-296].

Concerning your identity, how would you describe yourself?

I’m European! [We both laugh] [Greece, 6: 174-175].

National identity?! Do you mean: do I feel like a real Belgian or like a real European or whatever? Like this? [Laugh; ...] When you go abroad and you meet people you do not say “I am a European”, I would say I’m Belgian, and ya, I feel quite comfortable.

[...] So in which sense do you feel European?

Like I believe in the values of the European Union [laugh] [11: 142-152; ...]

Do you feel you have something in common with the other Europeans?

That's typical, they ask to Europeans what they feel being Europeans. Hmm... In fact there is not such a thing like... I don't think anyone says "I'm a European". You always feel attached to a country or whatever. You can say "I believe in European Union", that's something else than saying "I'm European" [Belgium 3, 11: 168-171].

Do you feel that you have something in common with the other Europeans?

The one you are friendly with [laugh]. You were asking about European identity, weren't you? [Ireland, 16: 182-183].

I am Lithuanian, I would never say I am European [Lithuania, 22: 117; my translation].

How would you describe your identity?

From the European point of view? [...]

What about the European level?

I must disappoint you, but... [Poland 2, 24: 318-325].

How would you define your identity?

Firstly Czech, I cannot say European, even though I consider myself very European [Czech Republic, 25: 394-395; my translation].

Concerning your national identity, how would you describe yourself?

Hungarian. You mean European or Hungarian? [Hungary, 26: 183-184].

Knowing about this narrative, it is now the time to analyse what the three pro-European identity respondents say. On one hand, the Italian associates the fact of having a national identity with being nationalist. This is why, when asked about her identity, she puts the European identity over the Italian one.

I am not nationalist. I am attached to my country because in my country I like the quality of life, but in this sense I feel very much European, or better, as identity I feel more a European citizen than Italian. I don't have such a strong and necessary bond with Italy; I have it from a personal point of view, as regards affections and the fact that I consider Italy a nice country, but I have never precluded me the possibility to change environment, to move [Italy 1, 3: 138-142; my translation].

But she had said something different a moment before:

[...] now I have the idea to remain 2, maximum 3 years, than to go back to Italy, [..., which] remains my country and the place where I want to live. Concerning the quality of life, there is no comparison. The idea is to make a significant experience and then to go back to Italy, hoping I will have more possibilities [Italy 1, 3: 58-62; my translation].

On the other hand, the Belgian and the British respondents have lived in more than one country and have not a marked national identity. In their cases, declaring a European identity is not bending to the narrative “you must be European”, but rather using it to define themselves: “you *can* be European”. The Belgian interviewee has lived in Luxembourg and Belgium, and feels confused about her national identity. So she finds in the European identity a way to clearly define herself:

How would you describe your identity?

I’m European.

What does it mean for you to be European?

Because I don’t feel myself as a Belgian, simply. I live there, I have a Belgian culture, but I was living in Luxembourg, where it was completely different. I would like to know people from every country in Europe, all my studies were for Europe, I’m really into it.

I don’t understand if you are confusing Europe as a political notion with Europe as a reality of most people who live there.

Ya, I think so, it’s more political. I don’t feel myself... I don’t belong to a country, because at the European school in Luxembourg my friends were from everywhere in Europe: Danish, Greek, Portuguese, and we had so much in common that I feel more as a European than a Belgian [Belgium 1, 9: 140-150].

The British respondent is in a similar situation; she defines herself European as a replacement for a weak national identity, but then, going outside Europe, she feels confused when people identify her as an English; on one side, in fact, she has to recognise that somehow she is English, on the other hand she keeps refusing this national identity:

How would you describe yourself with respect to your identity?

European.

What does this mean for you?

I guess that I feel that I am a citizen of Europe, but I don’t mean it like a cliché: I just mean that I don’t feel particularly British, because I wasn’t born in England and I’ve lived in a few European countries and I’ve met a lot of European people. [...]

So you can feel at ease wherever in Europe?

I haven’t been everywhere, so I don’t know. [...] But I feel European rather than English. Actually that’s not true, because when I went to South America I actually felt English, because taken out of the contest of Europe you are kind of aware of yourself in a different way, so when I was there I actually felt quite British, although I felt European, if you know what I mean.

Well, I’d say I don’t know. Why did you feel more British there than European?

Because when you travel in Europe, everyone is used to meet an English person, or an Italian person, is not rare, it’s quite normal, and so people would say “oh, you’re English”, and the recognition is different from when you go abroad [note that for her “abroad” means “outside Europe”], because you are all European. If you go somewhere

outside Europe, like I found when I went to South America, the way they saw me... because they didn't see me as another European, they saw me as an English person, I was "la inglesa". And it's just different, because they are perceiving you in a way that you don't actually perceive yourself, I don't identify myself as "la inglesa", but that's how they see you, and it's different [United Kingdom, 17: 242-263].

Obviously these last two cases are exceptions respect to the majority of the European citizens, but they are emblematic: the two interviewees use the European identity to fill the lack of a defined and marked national identity; they both affirm that they would like to travel in many parts of the world (see § 7.2.1.), showing a cosmopolitanism which, in identity terms, they reduce to an "Europolitism", that is, to a rhetorical tendency to identify themselves with the entire Europe.

This long analysis of three single cases has been useful to point out the existence of a rhetoric narrative, and to introduce a differentiation between Europe as a political project and Europe as a supranational source of identity:

I don't think anyone says "I'm a European". You always feel attached to a country or whatever. You can say "I believe in European Union", that's something else than saying "I'm European". [...] If you mean what is a European who believe in the EU value then ya... I'm also in favour to keep the national cultural values as well, because that makes Europe an interesting place [Belgium 3, 11: 170-174].

A few interviewees hardly see the connection among the European project and the European identity:

I think it [the European identity] might develop slowly. There might be something like that yes, but I would have hard time in defining that. Maybe in the history, in the culture, people feel they have something in common. But that having a European Commission makes people closer, I don't think so, and to vote for the European Parliament every five years, I don't think either. I don't think that makes a big difference [Germany, 13: 241-244].

To sum up, people who feel a European identity can be distributed on a continuum of positions delimited by two extremes:

1. a *lack of European identity* which comes together with the support towards the European Union;

2. a *Europolitism*, that is, an identification with the entire Europe (more in rhetorical terms than in concrete terms).

10.2 What Europeans have in common

According to the last available *Eurobarometer* survey [2007e: 65], economy and culture are the feeling that most create a feeling of community, a feeling of being European, followed by history. The following image shows the answers to the question “In your opinion, among the following issues, which are those that most create a feeling of community among European Union citizens?” (% EU27):

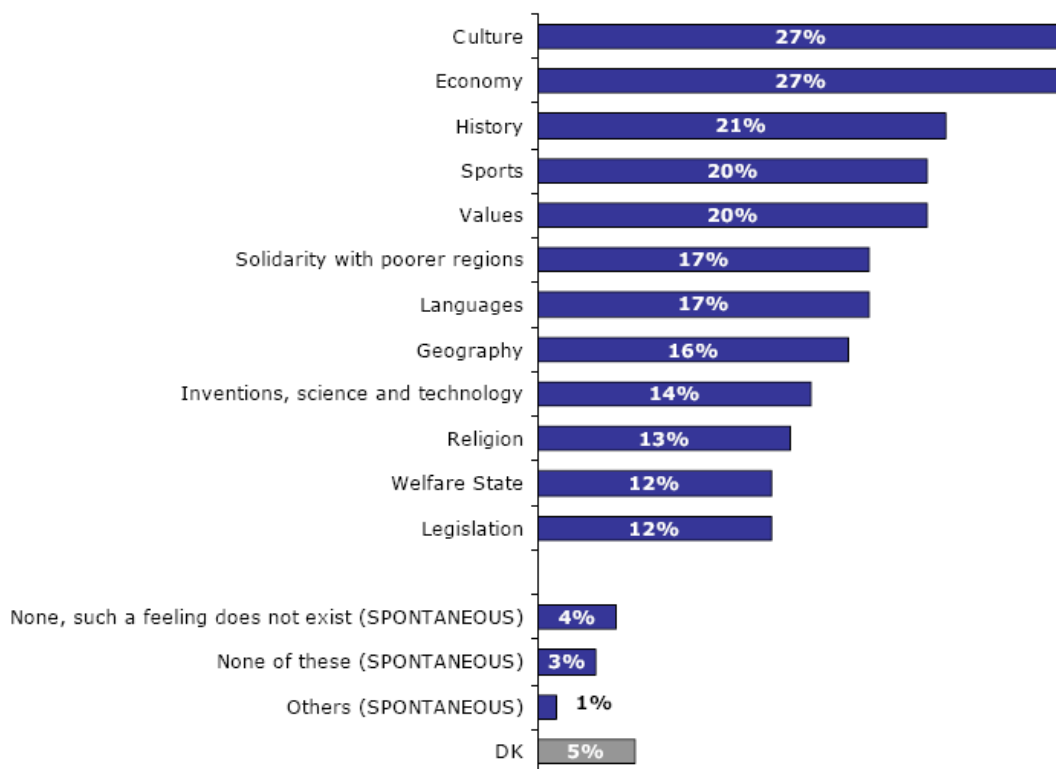


Figure 10.3: What creates a feeling of being a European [Eurobarometer, 2007e]

Let's compare interviewees' answers with these data.

The table 10.3 shows the typical answers received to Question 25 ("Do you feel that you have something in common with the other Europeans?"), which present a great variety:

1. easiness to move;
2. the land, that is, the fact of living in the European continent, in a circumscribed territory;
3. the side of the countries, compared to other global political realities;
4. the urban environment;
5. history;
6. common values, a cultural background and languages coming from the same root;
7. easiness to share and exchange experiences;
8. philosophic and religious values;
9. Europeans are very critical about their governments (with respect to the USA);
10. economic and social situation, welfare (all the countries have some kind of social protection system)
11. our (economic and political) enemies;
12. "we are united in the differences": every European nation is different from the others, but overall these differences are not so important as, for example, the differences between Europeans and North Americans.
13. the European Union and its policy;
14. I don't know, but we have much in common;
15. nothing.

Responses are quite scattered over the matrix, but it is possible to recognise some more frequent typical answers: Europeans would share history and values, and consequently a cultural background. The European Union aggregates Europeans under a unique project, in which we can be together while respecting and valorising each other's differences. It is significant that these tendencies are generally not shared by the Eastern respondents. Only two of them think that there is a common European history, and no one of them mentions a common culture, common values, or the fact of having relatively similar languages. One of them mentions the European Union as a political presence, but no one of them sees the EU as a *trait d'union* among the Europeans. On the contrary, they are more critical towards Europe: only 4 respondents (over 29 for this Question) do feel they have nothing in common with the other Europeans, and three of them are from Eastern Europe (other two respondents are not able to answer, but feel that there are common points).

I will begin the analysis going through these negative positions. The Irish interviewee questions the legitimacy of my question, implicitly saying that he might have things in common with people from other European countries, but that this does not mean anything, as he might have common points also with Americans; he shows a monolayer identity conception, based on the *or* rather than on the *and*:

If you ask me if I have something in common with American people, I would probably say yes as well, because there might be American people I like and who share my same interests. Coming from another European country is not the same as being Irish. I think the issue of the European identity, the all argument is just a mist [Ireland, 16: 185-187].

The Polish interviewee shifts the accent from the macro to the micro dimension, refusing generalisations: "I think you have to compare yourself personally, with a particular person, not with a country: you can't generalise" [Poland 1, 23: 187-188]. The Hungarian, who in other points of the interview shows a certain nationalism, focuses on the differences rather than on the similarities, and her answer evokes an old matter:

Like Asian common values, American common values? They are American or Asian, we are European, it's completely different. I don't know. I cannot think of any common

values thinking of Norwegian, thinking of Greeks. [...] Especially if Turkey will be a member of EU, so regarding the culture it's impossible to find common values [Hungary, 26: 202-205].

The Bulgarian focuses on the EU as a political project and expresses his scepticism:

I received congratulations from my friends here on the first of January for joining EU! But I told them "ok thank you very much, but I really don't care about it". EU! I will be 60 when something will happen in the EU. It happens so slowly, so slowly that nobody will understand it [Bulgaria, 28: 356-358].

The Moldovan respondent vaguely identifies with the other Europeans, even though she is not able to explain what Europeans have in common. Also the Maltese interviewee, despite her enthusiasm about Europe, is not able to indicate some common points among Europeans, but rather wonders what a European is:

In terms of your identity how would you describe yourself?

Deep down in my heart I have a core of Maltese values, but I'm very European [...].

Ukraine or Moldavia are European for you?

What do define a European? What's the border to define a European? It's a difficult question, because I think they are sort of European but in my mind, like the way I look myself, this kind of skin [she has a Mediterranean skin, bronzed-looking], but I know it's not true because I see from delegations people who look totally non European but with European citizenship, and they defend their countries. The skin doesn't make a nationality. With globalisation is different now. For us in Malta it's a shock to see people of different colour on our island, but where do the borders of Europe stop? I really don't know: I might start contradicting myself about what I said previously. For example I said that religion is not a barrier for me, but it might be a barrier. What makes us European? That's difficult. I don't think I have the answer for this question [Malta, 5: 306-317].

In these few answers it is possible to recognise some of the common critics moved towards the EU: the process slowness; the fact that it unifies culturally different realities; the lack of a precise European identity; the fact that it is hard to identify values which can be considered common to all Europeans, and just to them. In these answers, Europe as a political unit and Europe as an identity source are frequently mixed or confused.

Despite this criticism, an opposite answer is possible too: Europeans are extremely similar. For the Czech respondent, we are so similar that personal characteristics are more relevant than national traits:

I feel super-European and I don't see that much difference among Europeans. I also met Spanish girls who told me they could never stay with a German guy. I know there is a difference, but I don't see them so much diverse, because you take a Northern Spanish and he is much closer than me. It can be very individual [Czech Republic, 25: 438-441; my translation].

For the Spanish interviewee there are differences among the Europeans, but they are not significant, so that, for instance, a European can settle down in every European country without a cultural shock:

I compare my two experiences in the United Kingdom and Belgium and for me it didn't change a lot from one case to the other. There are some differences, but my situation is the same. [...] With some gastronomic differences or the fact that the weather can be better or worse, but more or less is the same. When it changes is when I go to Zambia, or to Beijing: there is where things really will strike me. This is why I consider that we are more or less the same from a [European] country to the other [Spain, 2: 301-308; my translation].

So it just depends on the point of view: if I adopt a European horizon, and I focus on the single European countries, I can recognise deep differences; but if I adopt a global horizon, and compare Europe to other continents, then I see how much we have in common. This demonstrates that Europeans actually share something and that common European features can be identified.

Beginning from geography and history, some interviewees believe that Europe is first of all a geographical notion, where thanks to EU's laws it is now easy to move from one country to another. The side of the countries is considered to be uniform, that is, generally small: evidently those who mention this point do not consider Russia as part of the geographic Europe. Also the urban environment is common to all European countries, if we compare our towns and cities with other continents' ones. Also the geopolitical dimension is raised:

[Europeans have] common enemies, which [...] are the best way to stick together. I don't know about the enemies, but the competition between Europe and US is something that makes the Europeans stick together. Maybe the Russian threat as well, the Russian power [Poland 2, 24: 330-332].

Coming to history, the Western Europeans frequently mention it as a common point for all the Europeans, but one of the Polish respondents underlines that there is a common history only for the Western part of Europe [Poland 2, 24: 333-335]. Probably Eastern Europe interviewees focus on the last century, on Communism and the Cold War, and this may explain why they do not mention history as a common reference for Europeans. However this explanation is not supported by *Eurobarometer* [2007c: 71] results. According to the *Eurobarometer* survey, 77% of the Europeans agree with the statement “the richness of European culture comes from its long history shared by European countries”. Nevertheless, their distribution for country is not the expected one:

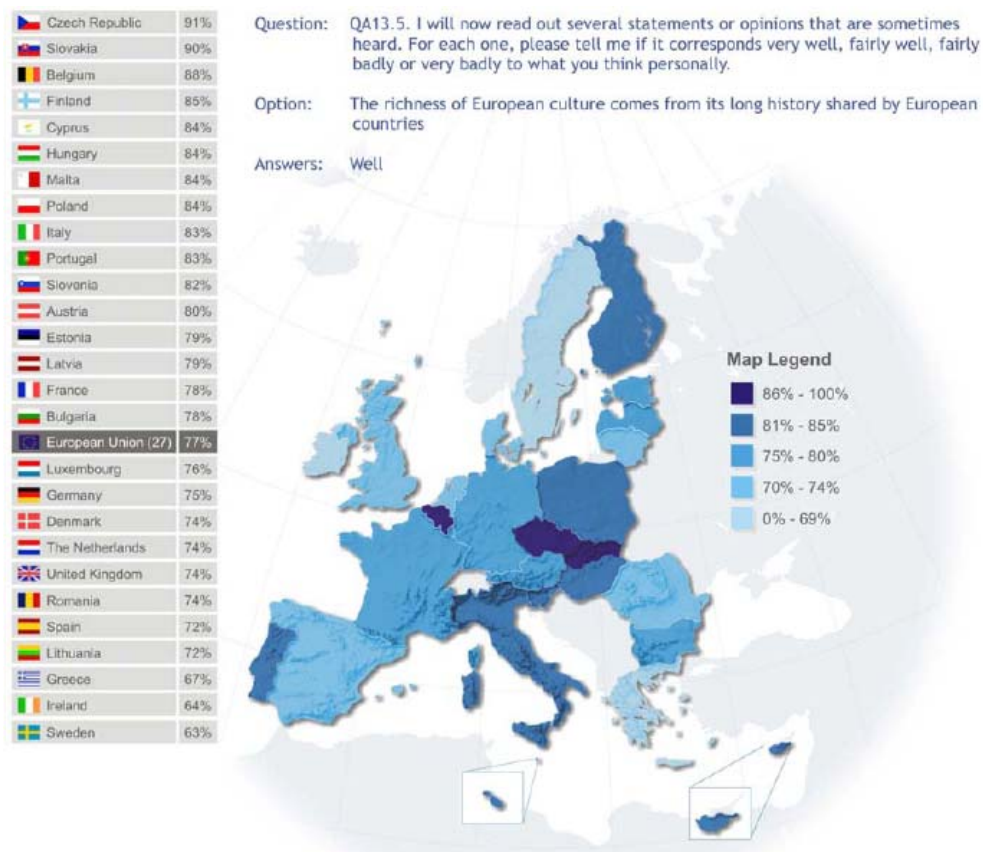


Figure 10.4: History as common richness for Europeans [Eurobarometer, 2007c]

Some interviewees correctly underline that history is important because it influences values development in a determined territory:

[...] in my opinion the basic values are equal for everybody, I don't believe in a strong national identity as according to the nationalism theory, I rather see common values that unite all the Europeans.

Why do they unite Europeans and not, for instance, the Australians?

[...] It's different because it depends on countries' history, on how their history develops, the constitution, the society [Italy 1, 3: 143-146; my translation].

History is obviously linked with culture, as having a common history implies the development of a common cultural background that may be difficult to describe and explain, but which facilitates communication among the Europeans:

Let me put it this way. When I go out, even for professional reasons, with Europeans, I know that even if we have different mentalities and different jokes, we are going to share a lot of jokes, we are going to share a lot of habits, we are going to share a bottle of wine, we are going to share a lot of things. When I go out with Americans, I know that I will tend to be more careful with what I say, not to be misunderstood. And we also do share a lot of history, that's makes things very easy with people [Greece, 6: 181-185].

The last quotation refers to what is perceived as a different culture, the American one, as to underline the similarities among Europeans. There are actually two ways to say that Europeans have a common culture: one is based on the comparison with other continental cultures, the other tries to identify specific cultural features. These features are identified in different elements: similar languages (many European languages have either a German or a Greek-Latin root), a dominant religion, a common philosophical tradition:

[...] we have similar languages, like Italian, Spanish, Romanian... and then Christianity. Of course I'm not to say that there aren't other religions, but there is the fact that a lot of Europeans are Christian [United Kingdom, 17: 265-266].

Nevertheless, the most of the interviewees who affirm that Europeans share a cultural and ethical background are not able to go further into details. So the comparison strategy is used to demonstrate that we have specific European cultural traits:

[...] when you speak with an American, I think [you realise] that Europeans have more values, for example about the human rights issue, and when I was studying in Italy in this human rights program we thought quite a lot about this issue and I think there are certain differences between the Europeans and the Americans or any other non-European country [Finland 2, 20: 278-281].

Finn's way of living is closer to America way of living than in some other EU member state for example, the rhythm of life, work and stuff, we are a very American population [Finland 1, 19: 174-176].

I tend to be European very easily, I don't have to go to the States to declare myself European, I declare myself European in Brussels as well [Greece,6: 178-179].

A few interviewees describe Europeans through positive stereotypes, especially when comparing with other societies. An *Eurobarometer* [2007c: 61] survey shows that 67% of the Europeans think of Europe as the continent of culture. By the interviewees, Europeans are seen as more democratic and open-minded, even though there is not a real experience of different cultures, and opinions are based only on indirect evidences, like a vague idea of religion differences:

Do you think you have some values in common?

Ya, sure: respect. For me if you don't have respect...

What do you mean with respect?

Respect of people, respect towards each other, trust.

What do you mean?

[Pause] It's kinda hard. It means you don't have prejudices on people, you listen to them before having a judgement, you respect what the other thinks, you respect who he is, where he's from, his culture, his religion.

Why do you think that this is typically European?

Because I've never been so much out of Europe, so I don't know if other... [9: 151-164; ...]

So we mentioned China, what is the fact for which you wouldn't like to go there now, for example?

I don't want to go first for the Communist regime [...].

Do you think we are different from Algerian, for example?

Ya, they have a different culture. For them women are stuff, first, and they don't have the same respect.

So let's focus again on Europeans: people from England or Spain, do you think they share the same values?

Yes.

And for example from Rumania?

Ya. I had a Rumanian friend here.

And for example from Peru: do you think we have the same values?

[Pause] Ya, I would say yes.

And what about India?

Not really. They are more spiritual.

So, maybe one of these values can be the religion, or the moral base.

Yea, I would say the religion [Belgium 1, 9: 171-186].

The comparison is very often done not with any possible country, but with the United States. North Americans are perceived by the majority of the interviewees (but not by all of them) in a very negative way:

I find that is quite striking here a common view of the United States.

Here in Brussels?

Among the Europeans, strong emotions about the United States [Germany, 13: 223-225].

The Czech interviewee provides a quite good analysis of the differences between Americans and Europeans, based on her personal experience:

The sense of humour, the depth: I see it very different in Europe respect to other continents. We worry about things that maybe we cannot change. Everyone studies philosophy in his general courses. Education is very good, it is not comparable with Americans': I met people that I think I wouldn't find in the last of the Czech villages, among farmers. As we live in very small countries, we have already gone outside out countries, we already are conscious that others are different, we already know a diverse food, we are more observer... Respect to North Americans, I believe we are not much arrogant; I think we are critical, towards ourselves, our country, Europe, globalisation, everything. When we receive an information, we do not always accept it, we look for other opinions. I don't know how to explain it: when you speak with an American, he seems very silly sometimes [laugh]. For example, the war theme: it's not that Americans are violent, they vote for the war because the government says it must be done, and they follow whatever the government says, and they are very nationalist [Czech Republic, 25: 423-435; my translation].

Despite this generic attitude, Americans are still considered Europe's natural counterpart, even by the more cosmopolite interviewees:

Why did you use Americans as reference term?

Because it's, ya, it's the other side. Of the world. If you compare the Europeans you always compare Americans and Europeans [Greece, 6: 185-187].

As seen in the quotations above, the couple U.S. vs. Europe is so much given for granted by practically all the interviewees that I can speak about a precise narrative, which sounds: "there are the Europeans and the Americans".

Considering European values, for a minority of the interviewees, European values correspond to Western values (Finland 2) or even to human values, even though still on a scale at which it is possible to put them into practice; on the global scale they represent more an ideal than a reality:

Then of course there are the so called universal values, which unite all the people in the world, like dignity [3: 156-157; ...]

Which are these values?

They are the classical ones, the Christian ones: peace, love, dignity, faith, respect, comprehension, those that are real Christian values and that then are interpreted by each society in a different way, sometimes even in conflicting ways, but they are the basic values.

So also the Islamic society?

Yes yes, I don't see discrepancies.

On the basis of these values do you think a global culture could be possible?

This is an utopia. [...] for contingent interests it cannot exist. Theoretically I can say yes, but in concrete terms I don't believe it is really possible to realise it [Italy 1, 3: 164-173; my translation].

It is now well worthy to compare these results with the ones pointed out in an *Eurobarometer* [2007c: 64] survey, in which respondents were invited to challenge the existence of the concept of European culture through two statements which argue separately that “there is no common European culture because European countries are too different from one another” or that “there is no specific European culture, only a global Western culture which is, for example, the same in Europe and the US”. A slight majority of the respondents agree that there is no European culture, but only a minority believe in a Western culture.

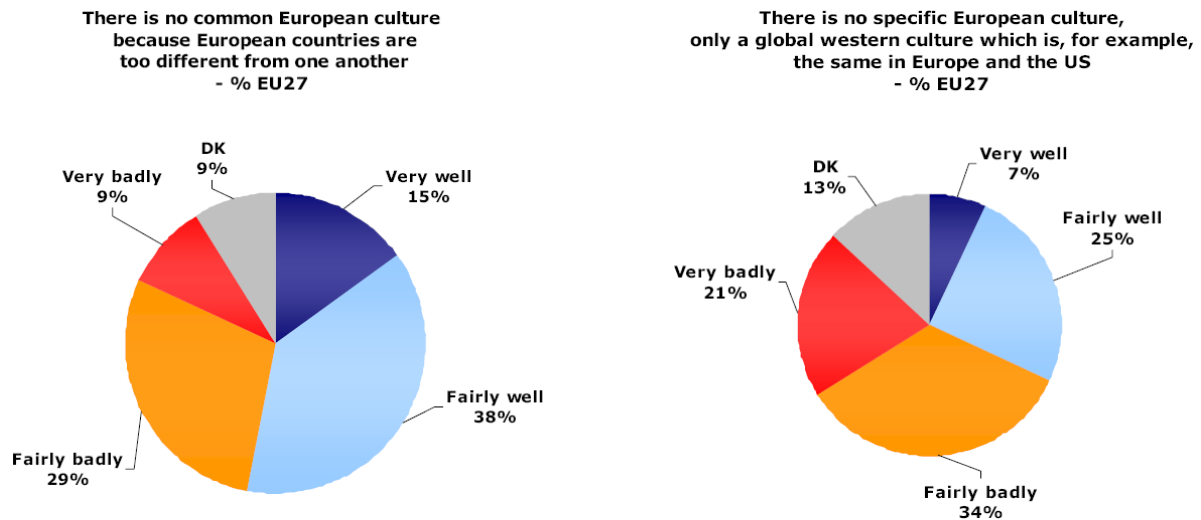


Figure 10.5: European culture [Eurobarometer, 2007c]

Respondents agreed with the statement against a common European culture, but also refused the idea of a Western culture. This result is explained by the existence of a negative perception of the U.S. widespread among the Europeans, a perception that is confirmed by our interviewees.

Nevertheless, also the quantitative panel respondents recognise that Europeans have something in common, as they believe that these commonality raise up when comparing Europe to other continents:

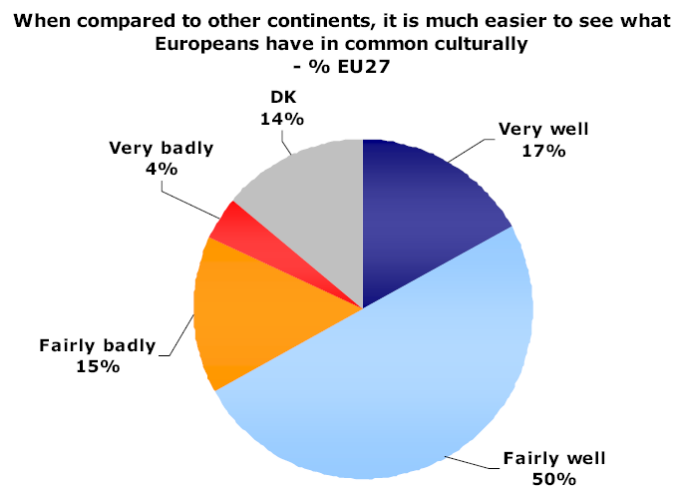


Figure 10.6: European culture in comparison with other continents [Eurobarometer, 2007c]

Overall, according to these data, there is a considerable degree of cultural difference within the continent itself that makes it difficult to speak of an absolute continental cultural diversity, but “when considered relative to other continents, Europe is seen as sharing elements of a collective culture” [Eurobarometer, 2007c: 65]. Apparently, these data coincide with the results of our analysis. Nevertheless, there is an important difference between *Eurobarometer*’s results and interviewees’ statements: interviewees recognise the existence of diversity, but *they tend to focus on similarities and to valorise them*. I believe that this tendency is due to a higher degree of cosmopolitanism, which leads interviewees to accept differences as a richness rather than as obstacles. For instance, interviewees mention cultural differences as a source of disfunctionalities in communication, but also affirm that these disfunctionalities originate a positive and fertile confrontation, which bring them to learn about other people and trigger a virtuous circle of tolerance and cosmopolitanism: the more they learn to accept the difference, the more they get enriched by them, and the more they are curious towards diversity.

One of the interviewees raises a twofold doubt: firstly, for people in Brussels it is easy to be European, because inside the Expat community all the people have a similar biography; secondly, this may bring to the conclusion that people’s social level has an influence on their adherence to the European identity:

Do you feel you have something in common with the other Europeans?

Yes, I do. On the other hand I meet people from Asia with whom I have something in common as well, so it’s kind apart: European identity is not very strong, the identity of the people working with the European Union is quite strong; but maybe the farmers in Slovenia or the factory workers in Denmark not as much as the Eurocrats from Slovenia and Denmark. I feel I have a lot in common with the people I meet here, it’s quite easy to understand them, ’cause we are a lot in the same situation [...], so I definitely find easier to identify with them than with Europe as a whole, I think we have a lot to do before we get to a “we” feeling about Europe [...; Sweden, 18: 266-273].

I believe that, more than the social level, what is at stake is the personal interest in the European themes: people working in the European institutions of course have a deep interest in European politics, as much as a farmer who receive subsidies from the EU, or has to produce a specific quantity of harvest and destroy the rest, but this

has nothing to do with identity. Moreover, I am not so sure about Eurocrats' Europeanism: during the interview with João Delgado and Helen Block, the latter at some point starts to complain about her work, and Delgado is obliged to intervene to save the face of the institution:

Why do you think all those people want to work in the Commission?

That's a good question. I think it's a mixture of money, certainly, but also international surroundings. What we know from inside is that it can be also very boring, with a lot of administrative things, and it could be more interesting to be on the ground somewhere and work on concrete things, instead of making theories...

We have other activities which are very interesting [...; A: 214-218].

Also one of the interviewees, who is a Commission officer, expresses a multifaceted opinion:

I met a friend of a friend working at the Commission who said about his job: "it's not a bad job if you don't take it seriously!". What's your comment?

[Laugh] I can understand it totally. It may be frustrating if you take it too seriously. You have to take it seriously in a sense that you are making what is expected from you, but you stop to philosophy a bit what we are doing there most of our time and you become frustrated very rapidly. I mean, you have to relativise the importance of things that you are doing, that's the point. It's a serious business what we are doing here, we are trying to do something extremely important for the European citizens, the European countries and for the world also, but your place in this huge machine, in this huge bureaucracy after all is a very small piece and you are submitted to very hierarchical rules, and in this machine your human value will be minimum. When you start thinking about this you become very easily frustrated, so I can agree with the person you met [Finland 2, 19: 143-152].

With this I am not denying that there is a correlation between citizens' cultural and social level on one side and adherence to the European project and the European identity on the other side, but rather that the political and the identity dimensions should not be confused. As seen, even among the Expats the European identity cannot be given for granted, even though the great majority of them are Europeanist. The expression "a 'we' feeling" [Sweden, 18: 273] is effective and telling, but can be misleading, because it hides the complexity of people's position towards Europe, which can be considered both under a political and an identity perspective. So, for example, the Romanian respondent does not have at all a European identity, but

recognises that there are social and political values and practices that unify European countries:

[...] in general Europeans do have something in common: a social democratic idea, which is everybody having good jobs, having a meaningful life that is not only for work, having the opportunity for everybody to achieve what they want [Romania, 27: 270-272].

Moreover, there can be a total scepticism about European identity and a total adherence to the European political and economic project:

I don't think there's a European identity or whatever, but I think we must be united, and I believe in Europe [...] in general is better to have a united Europe, at least economically, this is a good improvement. Look at countries like Spain: 25 years ago it was nothing, and now look at it. Look at Ireland, at Rumania and at what it will be in 10 years. The lives of their people is much better because of this. They wouldn't have had the same prosperity without Europe. People don't really realise this, especially in Eastern Europe [Romania, 27: 295-302].

History and the European Union political projects are interconnected. EU development is influencing European history, so that in every field there are now many common points among the Europeans. The EU itself is based on a common vision of our history:

Historically we have a common vision, about the religion I don't expose myself. In my opinion, I don't want to take the role of the Europeanist, I am sincere, but since the community has been created, a path has begun to unify countries in every field, market, political asylum, law, everything is connected with the European legislation, you like it or not all this have unified Europeans; perhaps Europeans do not realise it, because there is little information about what really exists and what Europeans verify as results [Italy 1, 3: 159-163; my translation].

The European Union is seen as an important unifying project that has lights and shadows, but which overall contributes to a general progress:

They started with not having wars anymore, I think it's still a very important issue, because since they exist there were no big wars anymore. And then of course economic reasons: with the Euro everything is much better, although I must confess it's not so good all this enlargement, it would create so many practical problems, because I noticed when I was attending this Union meeting, there is not enough space [time] to discuss subjects with 27 members, you can only say three words and then "ok stop, next", it's difficult the decision making if you get too big, but it contributes to the economy pursue, for instance like Ireland, and for the Eastern European countries as well [...].

Do you see other European values?

Economics especially and politics. The market and free borders, although we have to be careful with free borders for instance to criminals etc. Still we have to watch this. But it's good for labour force, because now it's easier to get all the best people, scientist and the best companies. There's a mobility factor, now we have all the same degrees [Belgium 3, 11: 153-165].

Up to know similarities among the Europeans have been analysed under a general perspective which sees Europe as an identity element for all the Europeans. Nevertheless, as already noticed in the previous Chapter, specific cultural features are more common to certain areas than to others, so that an individual, even feeling European, can feel closer to people from certain countries rather than to a not better defined European citizen:

I think in general Northern, Western European: they form the majority of my address book of acquaintances and friends. Because we understand each other on a very basic level: norms, values, lifestyle. So yea, I do think that I have something more in common with certain people than with others [The Netherlands, 12: 212-214].

[...] especially when you are coming from Vienna or you live in Austria, and your country borders are Slovenia, Slovak Republic, Hungary, the Eastern countries, you are very much involved in Eastern traditions, you like to go there [...] so we have always been in contact with Eastern Europe, it's not a big deal for us. Which is very amazing because my boyfriend is Dutch and for him Eastern Europe is completely new, and for me is somehow normal, I'm not that far away from their thinking [Austria, 14: 168-175].

[...] with Germany, Finland and Northern countries we are quite similar [Estonia, 21: 181].

These divisions are due to typical peoples' features considered on a macro scale. The main difference are between people from the South and people from the North, as well as from people from the East and people from the West. People from the East and from the North are considered to be direct, close and to need more time to establish a relationship:

I know an Estonian guy, for instance, who is very much reserved. I know that culture, so I know that he needs more time to open to the others. And he never comes with his wife, while Italians, for example, always come with anybody they know. But at the same time I can tell you that perhaps for him we are friends, that even though he might not be as expressive as Italians, for him it means much to meet twice per week with someone. So

the relation is slower. On the contrary, with a Spanish girl you begin the first day to speak about your life, because she tells you herself about her grannies, and she comes already the day year to eat at your house, and she let you meet her partner the third day, so that you immediately get to know the person [Czech Republic, 25: 259-266; my translation].

We are more direct, maybe not just for the Soviet influence, but for the fact of being from the north. [...] We don't speak that much, we rather think. For us from the former Soviet Union, it is easier to adapt, we are not so exigent, we don't need luxury [...] [Lithuania, 22: 129-132; my translation].

Estonian live more in the inside than outside.

What do you mean?

That we keep everything inside; Italian or Spanish are like living outside, Estonian are not, you know what I mean? They remain in their own and do their own things [Estonia, 21: 171-175].

People here are shy. They are not open minded and they are like... they keep distance in the relationships. In Bulgaria everything is going very fast, you know, today we are speaking in a bar and tomorrow we can go for holidays together. There is no problem. Here, it's very difficult to get closer to somebody. But this is typical to North people. All Northern people keep distance between them. You need 3 years maybe to get close to somebody [Bulgaria, 28: 288-292].

People from the South are described by the Bulgarian interviewee as having a much better quality of life:

Differences are huge, in general. [...] here people are [...] going to work and there is nothing else in their mind than working. I don't want to be rude, I don't want to blame them but I'm telling you they have a mental problem here. In my brother's school, maybe 10 percent has tried to commit suicide, 16 years old! This is ridiculous. It says the way of life here. [...]

Which countries do you consider being Eastern? Do you consider Poland like an Eastern country?

Poland not really. Bulgaria, Romania, the whole Yugoslavia, Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, all the Russian republics, Hungary maybe.

What do you have in common with these countries that you don't have with Western people?

Everything. [...] "They are sleeping". [...] They are working 5/6 days and they are waiting for one night to get drunk and to forget about their lives. Why doing this? For 2000 euro a month? To live a good life? Maybe it's not so good, I'm not sure.

Do you think this is common to most European countries?

No. The problem is not between West and East, it's more between South and North, because I've been in Spain, in Greece, in Turkey a lot, a lot of times. Greece can be in Eastern Europe but at the same time it is very Western, like way of living, standards, they have joined EU a long time ago, but you have normal people there having fun. Another reason is the weather, I think. Here it's always raining, it's dark. Where are you

going? Nowhere. [...] Here people [...] They are starting their life when in pension at 60 years. They don't have relationships with their children and their relatives, they have their houses in the countryside and they see each other only on special holidays [...]
[Bulgaria, 27: 146-189].

Bulgarian interviewee's pretension that Belgians make a miserable existence while Bulgarian and the people from the Southern countries know how to enjoy their life does not correspond to reality. In an *Eurobarometer* [2007b: 5] recent survey, a map of European peoples self-perceived happiness is published: Belgians result to be one of the happiest people in Europe, while Bulgarians are the latest.

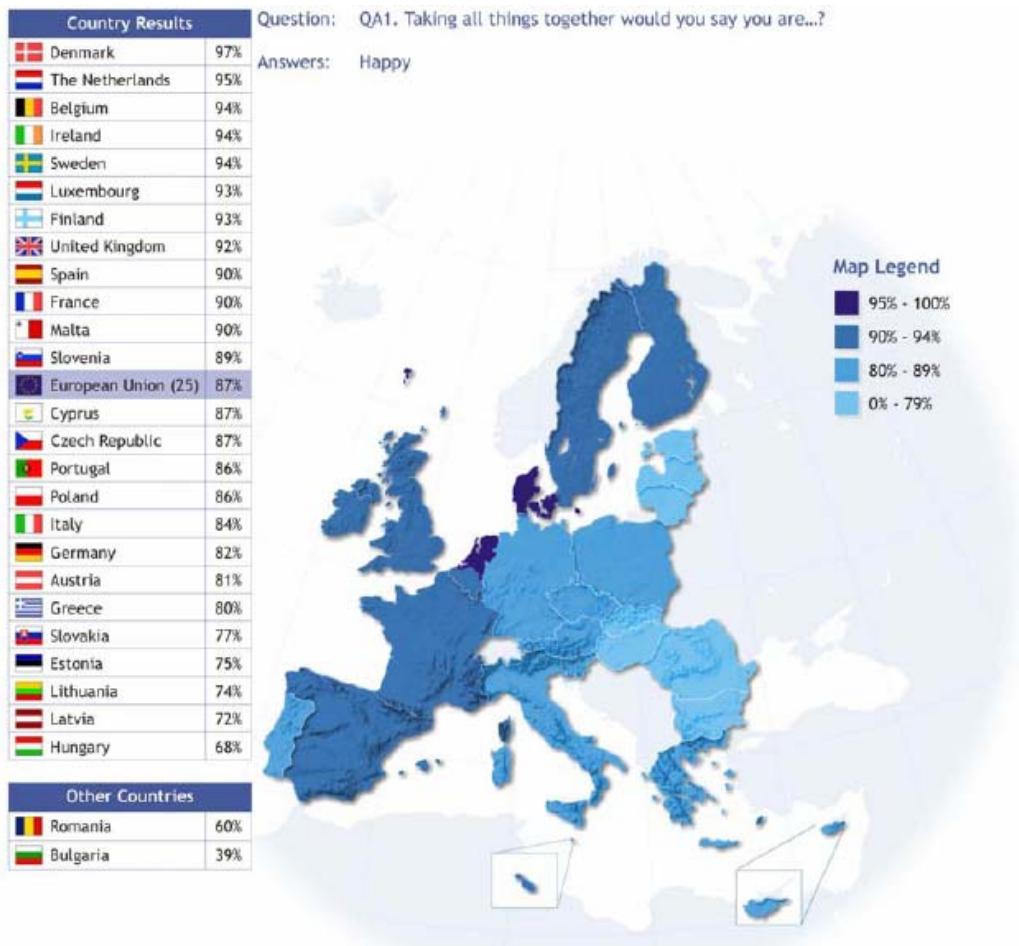


Figure 10.7: European's happiness self-perception [Eurobarometer, 2007b]

About the standard of living and the quality of life, Belgians are much more satisfied than Bulgarians [Eurobarometer, 2007b: 8]:

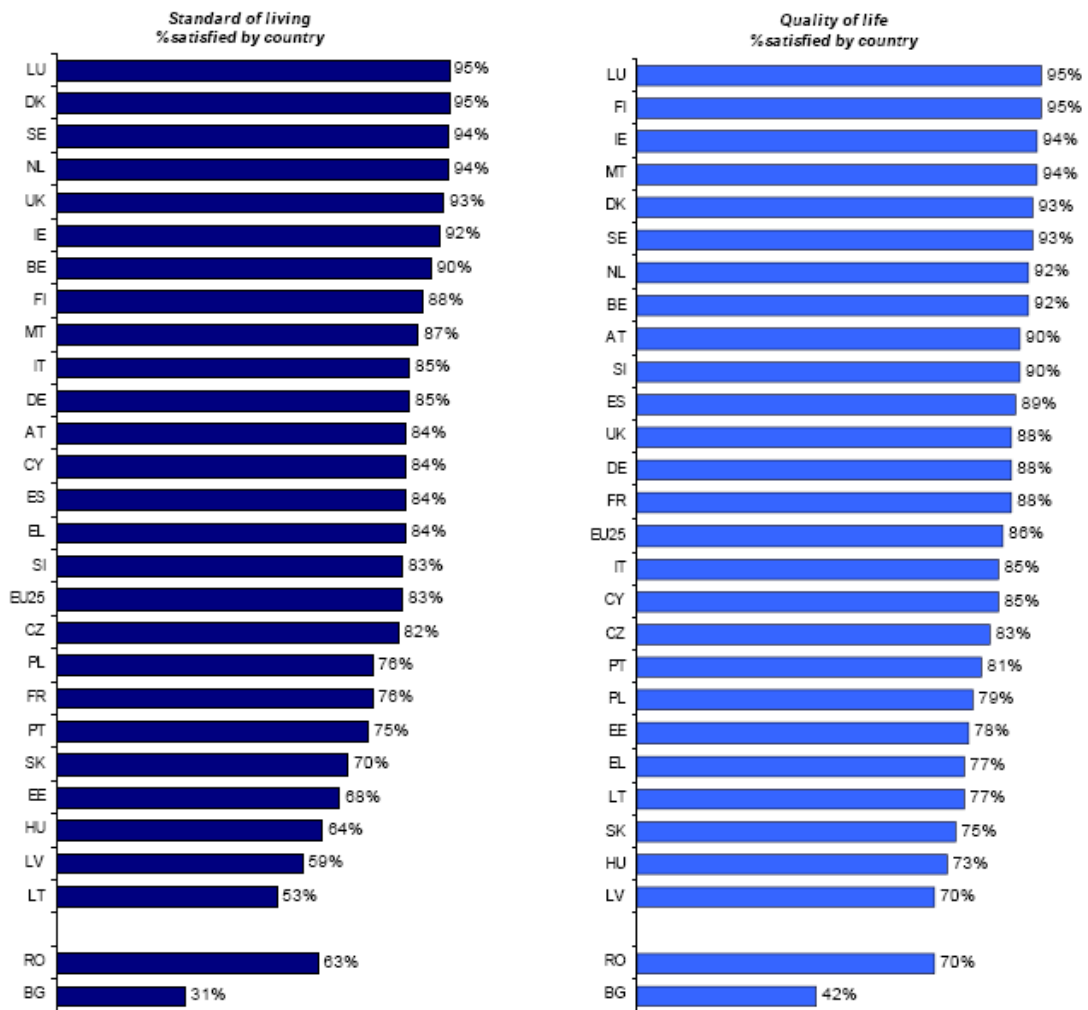


Figure 2: Europeans' standard of living and quality of life [Eurobarometer, 2007b]

Also the fact that Belgians only think of their work while Italians and Spanish do not is not true [Eurobarometer, 2007b: 15]: at the question “Please say for each of the following how important it is in your life”, 90% of the Italians and 87% of the Spanish indicate “work”, against the 84% of the Belgians. Finally, in job satisfaction

Bulgarians results to have the worst rating of all EU countries [Eurobarometer, 2007b], as even the Bulgarian interviewee expresses somehow:

the point is that in Bulgaria the opportunities are lower than here, of course, the capital of Europe. [...] in Bulgaria it's like you have a frame you cannot go further and further. It's like you are working but you don't know why you are working [Bulgaria, 28: 77-80].

Thus the Bulgarian interviewee is probably moved in his judgements by an inferiority complex respect to Western countries; nevertheless, his criticism correctly underlines a number of Western society negative aspects that would need some reflections.

Western people are also accused not to know the Eastern countries, but rather to be very much focused on their local reality:

And the funniest thing is that people here do not know anything about Eastern Europe and the rest of the world, don't tell me. I met a Swedish girl who told me that Bulgaria is an island [...]. This is Europe. It's smaller than Russia. There are 30 countries in this small area and they don't know anything. Go to Bulgaria, ask a 10-year old child and he will tell you all the EU countries and also where each country is. People here don't know where Bulgaria is, or Romania or Ukraine. That's it. They don't care anything outside Benelux. They know Spain because they go there for holidays, they know the French and Italian Alps as they go for the winter holidays to ski. And if you ask a French guy where are the Alps he would say in France, if I ask you you'd reply "in Italy" and if I ask a Swiss he'd say "in Switzerland" [Bulgaria, 27: 190-196].

Another difference consists in the presence of a welfare system:

[...] we don't have social policy, we don't have middle class, and this is the biggest problem in Bulgaria and the biggest political difference between the East and the North [Bulgaria, 27: 332-333].

The division between Eastern and Western Europe is very marked, even though in the *Eurolanguage* is not considered politically correct. Artificial definitions are proposed from above, as one of the Polish interviewee notices:

We do not define East and West, not anymore, not after Bulgaria and Romania came into, now it's called old and new Europe. For me it's just Europe, old and new makes it too complicated [Poland 2, 24: 335-336].

To sum up, it is possible to affirm that, regarding European identity, interviewees from the East show a different tendency respect to the Western respondents: they have not assimilated a European conception yet, and nationalist positions of various intensity tend to prevail over a European sense of aggregation. This data is, in any case, encouraging for European supporters: it shows that slowly, very slowly, some kind of European identity is growing up inside the European citizens. It may not be as important as their local or national identity, but it constitutes a ground that allows dialogue and exchange.

Many interviewees are not able to explain into details what being a European means, but they usually have a general notion that Europeans share history and values, which are more important than cultural features to determine a concept of Europe.

The fact of comparing Europe to other realities like the United States, the Islamic countries, Asia or Africa is an indicator of a global approach to identity: interviewees do not think themselves in a national scale, but rather on a world scale, and often give more importance to the differences among continents than to the ones among nations.

Finally, the majority of the interviewees are conscious that two dimensions need to be differentiated: the one that sees the EU as a political and economic project, and the one that focuses on Europe as a common identity source. In the same individual there can be different positions respect to each dimension.

10.3 Citizens of the world

The table 10.4 gathers the diverse typical answers to Question 26 (“What does it mean for you the expression ‘to be a citizen of the world?’”). It also indicates if the interviewee thinks his concept in a positive (“pos”) or negative

(“neg”) meaning. Finally, it indicates if the interviewee believes that his concept of a citizen of the world correspond to someone can be meet in the reality or remains an ideal. Answers are quite equally distributed: no matter the definition provided, the half of the interviewees think it is a positive concept, while the others see it either as totally negative or with positive and negative sides. Almost the half of the interviewee think it is an ideal, while the others believe it correspond to real individuals. Nevertheless, as showed in the table 10.1, only three interviewees describe themselves as citizen of the world.

All the interviewees are familiar with the expression “citizen of the world”. One of them immediately answered: “I know what you mean” [Hungary, 26: 217]. Following the received typical answers, a citizen of the world can be:

1. someone who identifies himself with the whole world, not just with one country;
2. someone who frequently changes places and identifies himself with the place where he lives *hic et nunc*;
3. someone who identifies himself with a mix of cultures or, more precisely, someone who does not belong only to the place where he is originally from, but who identifies with a syncretic mix of the cultures of all the places where he or she has been;
4. someone who has become open-minded by travelling;
5. someone who cares about what happens even in remote places and to distant unknown people;
6. someone able to settle down everywhere, who feels at home everywhere;
7. someone who simply travels a lot;
8. someone whose work is known and appreciated all over the world;
9. a citizen of a global nation;
10. it doesn't mean anything, it's an empty expression;
11. it's an expression that hides power differentials in different states' citizens;
12. everybody is a citizen of the world.

I will now go through the most significant answers. The first 6 typical answers notice different aspects of a marked cosmopolitanism that would characterise the citizen of the world. For example, the typical answer 1 (“someone who identifies himself with the whole world, not just with one country”) thinks of countries like bureaucratic machines that cannot contain the cosmopolite spirit of a citizen of the world:

It means that you consider yourself part of the world not part of a country; you think that countries are bureaucratic institutions and you have a vision to belong to the whole planet, to the Earth, and countries are just lines traced by some people [Portugal, 1: 178-180].

Such a global horizon is cherished also by those who gives the typical answers 5 (“someone who cares about what happens even in remote places and to distant unknown people”):

Have you ever used the expression “to be a citizen of the world”?

No, I’m a human being. Mainly citizenship implies many perspectives, something like civilization, living together under common rules and values, sharing common responsibilities of the Earth, having something in common with the human beings living on the earth, that concerns a citizen of the world... [...] Because of the media, because you learn about things happening in the opposite part of the world, you feel emotionally involved with what is happening to people in the other part of the world [Germany, 13: 245-252].

[...] being a globe citizen means that you have responsibility; and I am aware, in my profession [diplomat], that the national interest is built within the framework of the global context, so defending a national position sometimes requires you to feel responsible and to remind that besides the national interest there is the framework of the global [Malta, 5: 342-345].

The last quotation underlines an important aspect: individual and national responsibility towards the entire globe. States cannot defend their interest as they were isolated, and individuals, being part of a state, which is part of the world, need to think their action and its consequences on a global scale.

There is who, being really worried for the situation of people living in distant countries, believes that the expression “citizen of the world” hides an hypocritical approach:

Q26														
cases	T.A.	someone who identifies himself with the whole world, not with a country	someone who frequently changes places and identifies himself with the place where he lives hic et nunc	someone who identifies himself with a mix of cultures	someone who became open-minded by travelling	someone who cares about what happens even in remote places, to distant people	someone able to settle down everywhere, who feels at home everywhere	someone who travels a lot	someone whose work is known and appreciated all over the world	a citizen of a global nation	it doesn't mean anything, it's an empty expression	it's an expression that hides power differentials in different states' citizens	everybody is a citizen of the world	does this kind of people really exist?
		1	Portugal	pos										
2	Spain		neg											y
3	Italy (1)				pos									y
4	Italy (2)	N/A												
5	Malta					pos								y
6	Greece					pos								y
7	Cyprus			pos/neg										y
8	France										neg			n
9	Belgium (1)							pos						y
10	Belgium (2)												pos	y
11	Belgium (3)			pos/neg			pos							y
12	Netherlands				pos									y
13	Germany					pos								n
14	Austria										neg			n
15	Slovenia												neg	n
16	Ireland										neg			n
17	UK					pos								n
18	Sweden												neg	y
19	Finland (1)												pos	y

Hippie crap! [Laugh] I think it's bullshit, it's a very idealistic vision unfortunately not based on reality. When you hear somebody saying he is a citizen of the world, he's either some hippie, some join smoker who never actually got out of his place, or somebody who has travelled the world and feels a compassion for other people, but he puts himself or herself on a superiority position: "I will help those people". So I don't think it's a good approach if you ever want to do anything for developing countries [...; Romania, 27: 327-331].

Typical answers 2, 4, 6 and 7 are focusing on people mobility. The fact of having travelled is, to some respondents, essential to define a citizen of the world (and some of the interviewees do not think they are citizen of the world because they did not travel enough):

What does it mean for you the expression "citizen of the world"?

To have a large experience of the world, it means to travel, to work... I don't feel myself like this because I don't have the experience to go really outside of Europe [Belgium 1, 9: 189-191].

Someone who travels a lot, like diplomats or soldiers, someone who does not feel at home but always changes. [...] To me it would be difficult. I want to have a home, a place I can go back, where I can live [Lithuania, 22: 133-137].

Nevertheless, only the Dutch respondent underlines that the fact of travelling, by itself, is necessary but not sufficient to define a citizen of the world:

Then you have to travel a lot to be a world citizen. Travelling can help. But it also depends on the way you travel, right?, because there are so many people travelling, and they just go to the same place all the time, or they go to these compounds that you never leave and you only see the swimming pool and the hotel. So travelling doesn't necessarily help to become a world citizen. [...] I mean, you can travel, but it depends on what you do and what you learnt when you come back, and if you come back and you don't think "ok, I learnt this and that and I'm now going to incorporate it in my own life", then it wouldn't mean to change because of having travelled, and that is different: you can travel and not learn anything, not change anything, or you can travel and change a little bit [The Netherlands, 12: 223-233].

One of the Polish respondent, instead, underlines how travelling is important to get to know a country, but also that those who travel for tourism usually do not have the time to discover a country, and those who travel for business often are not interested in doing it. It may appear a contradiction, but thinking to the way Expats keep distant from the Belgian culture, it suddenly sounds reasonable:

What's your understanding of the expression 'To be a citizen of the world'?

[Laugh]. I think it's a weird expression. [...]

What does it mean for you?

Maybe a person who knows a lot of countries, who travels a lot, who knows every culture, every continent and then can give opinion and then can assess. But I don't know if something like this exist. I'm not. What do you think? Because it's difficult to meet people who know every continents, who can assess... Many people are forced to travel for work, and if so they have to work there, they cannot spend their time discovering the place; of course they also travel for tourism, but not for long, and if they are tourist they don't know local life: they are just there for holiday [Poland 1, 23: 189-199].

Despite these reservations, mobility is central to the citizen of the world concept for at least 10 interviewees. The typical answer 2 ("someone who frequently changes places and identifies himself with the place where he lives *hic et nunc*") refers to an individual who is often moving from a place to another, and who adapt his identity to the place where he is: "For me it means 'I am from where I am'" [Spain, 2: 310]. This concept is considered to be negative, because it implies that a citizen of the world forgets about his origins:

I think it's an interesting notion, but everybody always carries its own national identity. I think it's important to know your roots, because otherwise even though you are a citizen of the world, you are not attached to anything [...; Finland 2, 20: 291-292].

It is instead generally considered in a positive way in its meaning described by the typical answer 6 ("someone able to settle down everywhere, who feels at home everywhere"):

It's to be able to settle in every city, in every part of the world without having problems. I consider myself a citizen of the world. I would easily move now to wherever it comes up [Greece, 6: 193-194].

Obviously, in this meaning, the cosmopolitanism implicitly integrated in the concept of citizen of the world loses its nobility, to become just an adaptation capacity. In other words, from an emphatic relation to the world, its problems and its peoples' situation, this cosmopolitanism shifts to a global opportunism, which sees the entire world as a resource of opportunities for those who are able to catch them. So, even though interviewees think of this citizen of the world as a positive concept, it actually is a much more prosaic meaning respect to the previously analysed one.

Moreover, for a few interviewees their national identity is more important than a global mentality, so that their concept of citizen of the world lose completely the cosmopolitan dimension, to become exclusively the description of a very good traveller:

Feeling like you are at home in every country you are, and when people consider you like their own, like that you do not come from a different culture. [...]

A positive or negative [concept]?

A positive.

Would you like to be like that?

No.

Why?

It's like that you don't have your...I don't know, your own country, your own culture.

But you said it is positive.

Positive because it's good that people don't have any problem in another country [Moldova, 30: 212-223].

The cosmopolitan dimension is preserved in the fourth typical answer (“someone who has become open-minded by travelling”):

[...] a cosmopolite person, which basically means a world citizen. For me basically it means “without a lot of prejudices”: you look at people and you are curious about who they are and where they come from, not only geographically, but also socially and psychologically. Everybody has prejudices, you can't do without, [...] but you need to be able to either change them [...] or] lower them down before you meet someone [The Netherlands, 12: 218-223].

Being open minded means to be able to contrast the effect of the unavoidable prejudices that every person has, in order to really know the Other. Mentioning prejudices brings to speak about culture. The third typical answer (“someone who identifies himself with a mix of cultures”) focuses on the fact that if you embrace many cultures, you may lose your one:

People who travelled around. I would interpret that they don't relate back to their own nationality. It's like that you say “I'm not anymore Italian, I believe in a mix of everybody's culture”, so I would interpret that as somebody who is a bit disconnected with his own culture and more have a mix with other cultures. A bit lost! [Cyprus, 7: 61-63].

One of the problems that interviewees raise is if the concept of citizen of the world in his idealistic meanings is Eurocentric or not, that is, if it is a result of our

philosophical though or rather something that can be shared at a global level with every human being. The German respondent is very sceptical at this regard:

Do you think it is possible?

From the European perspective yes, whether you call it humanistic ideals. [...]

Whether every person in the world feels that or whether it has something to do with the European background, I believe is another question. I think in other cultures it is not developed, I think people don't even care about what is happening to people living in the next city [Germany, 13: 249-255].

The Swedish respondent sees in the concept of citizen of the world the rhetoric of the Western imperialistic policy to create a globalised world:

[...] it means to be part of the same globalised community now. I think this idea is going to back clash, because after a while people will see themselves back in their roots. And I am not that fond of cultural imperialism, to be honest, I think it would lead to a clash, and I think we can see it in these Islamic movements [Sweden, 18: 302-304].

The Romanian interviewee underlines how technology and economic differentials among diverse areas of the globe are still very pronounced:

Many people feel citizens of the world because they have Internet at home, which is very racist, very discriminator, because there is a huge continent where people don't have Internet. If you have a mobile phone, you are a citizen of the world, theoretically speaking, because mobile phone technology is now quite well implanted, but in practice in Africa nobody would ever call you because they don't have the money to do it [Romania, 27: 337-340].

For some interviewees the concept of "citizen of the world" is too broad or too vague, and they prefer to narrow it. The Czech respondent describes herself like a "citizen of Europe":

I rather identify myself with "citizen of Europe" than "of the world". It means that I worry for Europe in general like it was my state, I feel I want to change things, that I want them to be good, that I care about what policies are run. Of course I also care about the entire world, but I see it very far, I feel a little lost with "citizen of the world" [Czech Republic, 25: 443-446; my translation].

For one of the Polish respondents, citizens of the world are either those whose work is known all over the world, or those who work for the benefit of the entire planet:

With “citizen of the world” I think of someone able to join the world nations and be understood in the same way all over; in regard to Chopin, for example, his music is understood in the same way all over the world. This expression suggests me Al Gore, who’s crusading against global warming. I think this is a person who really care about the entire world, not just about a piece of it.

Can you try to give me a definition?

A definition brings me back to rules, so somebody having a passport valid for any part of the world, speaking a lot of languages, or maybe English is enough nowadays. I don’t think there is a tendency to create some people like this; I think that there is much more stress on the European citizenship, so on the European level [Poland 2, 24: 338-346].

A particular position is the ones of those who affirm that, because of the globalisation, everybody is a citizen of the world:

I’m part of the world also, because when I watch the news my life is influenced by what’s happening in the world. I can’t say: “The rest of the world doesn’t matter” [20: 263-265; ...] I am citizen of the world because the frontiers are not really existing. Before if you wanted to travel you could only travel in Belgium or in Europe, because you couldn’t fly, or going to America took a 3 months journey; now you can go everywhere and anyone can come to your country, and that means being citizen of the world. And for example we know now that regarding the pollution if you don’t pay attention to that, the problem is not only yours but of the world. So you have to understand that you are part of the world [Belgium 2, 10: 282-286].

In this case we can find some notions of both Giddens’ (contraction of space) and Beck’s theory (risk society).

Some of the respondents are sceptical about the idea of citizen of the world and express different kinds of criticism. For the Slovenian interviewee, such an individual is conceivable only by comparing with a broader reality:

[...] if there were people on Mars or on another planet, then maybe you would feel the identity of being a citizen of the world, but when everyone is the same... like in Europe: you feel that you are European when you are in another continent, you don’t feel European when you are in Europe [Slovenia, 15: 324-326].

For some interviewees, the expression is quite empty:

Have you ever heard the expression ‘to be a citizen of the world’?

Yea. I think is bullshit. It’s just people who travel a lot and they like it so much that they like to call it being citizen of the world, because they like the fact that they are travelling all over the world and living all over the world. I don’t think that there is such a thing. It’s like in a very good film, she meets a guy and she asks “where do you come from?”, and he says “I’m a citizen of world, I have no country”, and she says “ok, so you are Palestinian” [laugh] [Ireland, 16: 188-193].

Being so empty, and at the same time on fashion, it highlights the difference between the North of the world and the South:

To me it is a great expression that doesn't mean much. It's a definition of the human being today, in the sense that it is a fashion word to justify many things. [...] that expression is used by people of the north [of the world], in the sense that if you ask to someone from the abandoned countries of the world I would say that his thing is ridiculous; it's indicated for certain types of countries, certain types of relations in certain fields [Switzerland, 29: 263-267; my translation].

It's interesting that even an interviewee who declares she feel a citizen of the world admit that it is an expression she used when she philosophised:

Have you ever used the expression “to be a citizen of the world”?

When I was at the university yes, when I was deep in my thoughts and I used to philosophise. It's a positive expression, I like it, I recognise myself in it [Italy 1, 3: 178-179; my translation].

Reading this quotation, one can really doubt that the respondent affirms that she recognises in it just because she believes that it is the good thing to say. In any case, some of the sceptical interviewees about this expression maintain that it hides power differentials that would exist among citizens of diverse countries:

What's your understanding of the expression ‘to be a citizen of the world’?

...This is very funny... if you are from the US you are a citizen of the world because you are from the US, if you are from England you are a citizen of the world because you are from England, but if you come from Bangladesh you are nobody because you are from Bangladesh, [unless] you have a lot of money [...]. We [the Bulgarians] are in the European Union now since 6 months, we are travelling without any problems and when you tell somebody that you are Bulgarian, they don't know what you are talking about. I'm not even a citizen of the Europe, citizen of the world is very funny! [...] It doesn't matter who you are, it matters where you are coming from. That's the problem.

You mean that there like A series states and B series states?

Of course. If you are French and you go to England for example, nobody will ask you who you are, you are a good person, very nice because you are French, and if you are Russian, oh come on, you are not you, you are a very bad guy, you are just Russian; and when they look at your passport, at your nationality, full stop, it's finished. That's it. Forget about it.

You mean, to find a job, or something like that?

To find a job, to meet somebody. [...] I've met a girl and she asks me where I'm from, I said I'm from Palestine and after 5 minutes she's vanished, she disappeared. And if I said I'm Italian everything is ok. “Oh, you are Italian, oh that's cool”. Ok and if I was

Palestinian what is the point? I have a suit, what's the problem that I'm Palestinian? [Bulgaria, 28: 334-355].

Actually, the Bulgarian is not the only one who complains about the different treatment people from certain countries receive. The Romanian interviewee, who has been living in Belgium for eight years, can highlight the differences between being a Romanian and being a Belgian:

[...] different accesses that the fact of being Belgian opens, compared to Rumania: people do treat you in a different way. [...]

What does it mean that people treat you in a different way?

There is a difference between being Rumanian and being Belgian. You have less rights, for example, workers' rights are not the same. You may travel because your citizenship is on the level of the other member states; Rumanian cannot go and work to another country because procedures are much more difficult [Romania, 27: 72-80].

To sum up, there are four main ways to think of a citizen of the world:

1. like someone who pretends to appear cosmopolitan by using an effective but empty expression that hides a reality of global inequality; I will define him *fashionable mover*;
2. like a citizen of a globalised world where frontiers, due to globalisation, have lost their separation power, and events repercussions weighs over the entire planet population (and in this sense everybody is a citizen of the world); I will define him *globalised citizen*;
3. like an intensive traveller, able to settle down in every place and either to adapt to different cultures or to mix them with his own; in this meaning, the degree of cosmopolitanism is very low or inexistent, as it is meant just as availability to a high mobility level; I will define him *moving cosmopolitan*;
4. like an individual who is emphatic with every human being and who may work for the benefit of the planet; this definition contains a high degree of cosmopolitanism, meant as a noble sense of belonging to the human race; I will define him *moral cosmopolitan*.

10.4 Movers' similarities

The table 10.5 shows the typical answers received to Question 27 (“Do you feel you have values in common with the people who, like you, had or is having important experiences abroad?”), which are:

1. not really, we don't have anything in common;
2. empathy for other travellers' difficulties;
3. broadmindedness;
4. respect for or interest in diversity;
5. will to leave home to take new challenges by travelling;
6. better knowledge of languages;
7. capacity to travel and to face hitches, adaptability;
8. a common culture, similar interests.

Overall the results of this Question confirms the ones already analysed.

Over 25 respondents to this Question, believes that there are no common points between them and the other movers, but normally because they think just to the Expats community:

What do you mean, that I should stay together with all the Expats and feel united to them because they are in the same situation as I am? I don't know. You can keep a conversation with someone, “why are you here?”, the same conversation of every party, “I am here because I work in an NGO, because I came to make a stage”, or whatever. If this is the empathy that I am supposed to have, it is a little boring, [...] because everyone tells the same story. I prefer to stay with people who are not in the same situation as I am, or to meet people from here, or from wherever, but people who do not do the same as I do [Spain, 2: 324-329].

Obviously they had the desire to work abroad at some stage of their lives. Everyone who is here basically wants to work abroad, for a while or permanently, so you have definitely in common with them, yea. Then you might completely dislike some of the people who are working abroad and think that you have nothing in common with them but the thing that you are working abroad [laugh] [Ireland, 16: 198-201].

Q27									
cases	T.A.	Not really	empathy for other travellers' difficulties	broadmindedness	respect for / interest in diversity	will to leave home to take new challenges by travelling	better knowledge of languages	capacity to travel and to face hitches / adaptability	a common culture, similar interests
1	Portugal			x	x				
2	Spain	x							
3	Italy (1)			x		x			
4	Italy (2)	N/A							
5	Malta			x	x	x			
6	Greece				x				
7	Cyprus					x			
8	France			x		x	x		
9	Belgium (1)		x						
10	Belgium (2)	N/A							
11	Belgium (3)	N/A							
12	Netherlands				x				
13	Germany			x	x				
14	Austria			x				x	
15	Slovenia		x	x	x			x	
16	Ireland	x							
17	UK			x	x				
18	Sweden			x					
19	Finland (1)					x			
20	Finland (2)								x
21	Estonia			x					x
22	Lithuania			x					
23	Poland (1)	I don't know							
24	Poland (2)	x							
25	Czech Rep.				x		x		x
26	Hungary			x	x	x			
27	Romania	x							
28	Bulgaria	x							
29	Switzerland			x	x			x	
30	Moldova	N/A							

Table 10.5: What movers have in common

There is a tendency to think movers as open minded and democratic people, because travelling allows people to enlarge their horizon:

Do you think you have values in common with people that, like you, had experiences abroad?

Yes. One of them is the [fact of being] open mind: you see and accept other ways of conducting the rules; I think one thing that everyone has, having been in other countries, is this respect for diversity, a broader vision of the world; because people who don't share this experience tend to be more closed in their own city or at least in their own country, in their own culture, in their own language: they don't see the big picture.

Do you see the big picture?

I wouldn't say I see it totally but at least I see the European big picture [Portugal, 1: 183-189].

They have not many stereotypes. In every country people have stereotypes, while those who lives abroad lose these stereotypes [Lithuania, 22: 139-140; my translation].

Movers are described as having a similar mentality, projected towards the reality outside their world:

Yea: the same way of thinking. You know, in Estonia there are still so many people who say "why do you go there, what do you do there, why don't you want to stay home?", and when I speak with people here, all want to spend their time abroad. Then I see that you have the same thought [...; Estonia, 21: 191-192].

Getting in contact with other people also allows to develop a sense of empathy with the entire human race:

I don't think I can say "generally all the people who travel around are like this". I guess it's just the way you feel about your place and your country, you realise that it's just a coincidence that you are born in that place with your culture, so I think you realise we are all the same. People who don't travel tend to think that people from different countries are really different, but they are all human beings [France, 8: 231-234].

Being in the same situation, movers and travellers can be emphatic and helpful one to each other:

They are more open and they know how it is to live abroad, to work abroad, they know how difficult is when you come to a new environment and you have to adapt, they have the similar feeling and the same experience that you have: they experience the same fear, the same joy, new environment, new friends... [Slovenia, 15: 336-338].

Movers are sometimes described not as people who just left their countries, but rather as curious people who wanted to take the challenge to leave to go abroad. Of course they have to pass through practical and psychological or emotive difficulties,

but this allow them to develop an ability to travel, to improve their language knowledge, and most of all to learn about themselves:

[...] when you travel firstly you analyse yourself, you analyse the environment, so they are people who have already wondered a lot about their own culture, about being more open, and who is not close because you are different. It is also a lifestyle, you share the fact that you would go wherever it happens to go. Also usually these people speak more languages and communicate better. And you can speak about your experiences [Czech Republic, 25: 448-452].

Chapter 11

Interpretation and discussion

11.1 For a typology of movers

The importance given by the European Union to European internal mobility as an instrument to create and consolidate a European identity has been put into practice through a number of political initiatives. The most popular probably are the Schengen Treaty and the Erasmus program, as they have an impact on the everyday life of the majority of the European citizens. Many less known but not less essential initiatives have been promoted in order to reach the Lisbon strategy objectives, this way developing and improving the mobility of students, researchers and high skilled professionals. The European Commission, for instance, has put as a priority objective the implementation of the so called European qualifications framework (EQF), which has the objective

[...] to facilitate the transfer and recognition of qualifications held by individual citizens, by linking qualifications systems at the national and sectoral levels and enabling them to relate to each other. The EQF will act as a translation device and should aid citizen mobility for work and study [Eurostat, 2007c: 84].

Despite the efforts done in this direction, the rates of mobility in Europe are still very low. Considering, for example, the mobility of students in tertiary education within the EU (% of all students), it is a discouraging result the fact that in the oldest European Members its rate remained unchanged from 1998 to 2004: less than 2,5% [Eurostat, 2007b: 94].

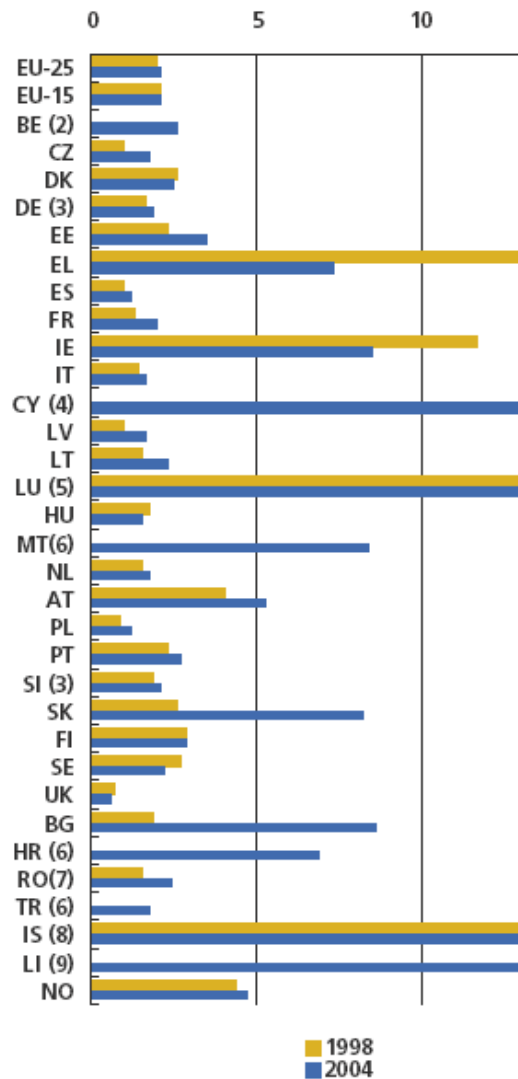


Figure 11.1: Mobility of students in tertiary education in Europe [Eurostat, 2007b]

The results of the present research about the *perceived* mobility of young Europeans confirm these quantitative data.

In Europe there are some cities which are like *movers' islands*, because of their great concentration of young foreigners with respect to their local population: Barcelona, Dublin, Brussels, as well as smaller university towns are some examples. Living in this *movers' islands*, the impression is that the rate of EU internal mobility is very high, especially among the young population. Nevertheless, these cities

represent exceptions, and the expatriates who live there are aware of being in special places.

According to interviewees' perceptions, Europeans are generally strong travellers, but tend not to move on a stable basis to another country. An increasing number of young Europeans do at least one experience abroad, for example an Erasmus or an internship, but then they tend not to move again. International programs like Erasmus play an important role in helping people to overcome their possible resistances to the idea of going abroad, but they seem to be insufficient to push individuals to live abroad. However, this conclusion should not bring to underestimate the importance of programs like Erasmus, as they offer a possibility to go abroad to people who, otherwise, would have never done it. Moreover, those who made such an experience find it easier to move again to another country. It is not a coincidence that almost all the interviewees had at least one previous experience abroad, and that the half of the respondents used a European funded program to go abroad.

Concerning the working mobility, the existence in many European countries of barriers to the entrance of people from the New Member States, like the need of a work permit, reduces Eastern people's displacement possibilities. Despite these difficulties, an increasing minority of high-skilled people from the New Member States are moving to Western countries to find better job opportunities than in their home countries.

Among the European Western countries, a difference is traced between Northern and Southern countries. Looking at the provenience of the thousands of candidates who regularly participate to the competition to enter in the European Commission, it comes out that the Mediterranean countries are over represented, while the Scandinavian countries are underrepresented. This data has a double explanation: on one side, people from the South show a high level of discontent with respect to the working conditions in their countries, and consequently find attractive the EU institutions salaries and contract stability; on the other side, people from the Northern countries are less keen to abandon their life model, based on an efficient welfare system and on high quality public services.

Overall, anyway, much can still be done by European policy makers to improve EU internal mobility, but it is undeniable that presently there are many possibilities to move abroad, either to study or to work. What lacks is people availability to move to another country for a significant period.

In such a landscape of reduced mobility, the uniqueness of the interviewed expatriates stands out, not only with regard to the fact that the majority of them have already travelled a lot, but also to their attitude towards displacements. I will call *Euromovers* this category of cosmopolite young European movers⁶⁸.

It is important to underline that *not only globalisation, but also the Europeanization process*, with its direct and indirect actions in favour of the internal mobility, *creates the condition for the existence of Euromovers*.

Considering an élite as a restricted part of the population that owns more than the rest of the population some characteristics that the population itself consider in a positive way [Gallino, 2004: 277], *Euromovers* can be considered as such. They present, in fact, a high degree of cosmopolitanism. They put it into practice by spending periods of their life abroad, what is socially approved and produces social prestige. Nevertheless, *Euromovers* do not constitute a political élite by themselves, even though the professionals who work in international organisation mainly are *Euromovers* (or global movers).

11.1.1. *Criteria to choose the destination country when moving*

To steer their choice on a precise destination country, *Euromovers* weigh up a number of criteria:

- their personal interest in discovering the recipient country;
- the study or professional opportunities available there;
- the possibility to live closer to their partner by moving;

⁶⁸ In this sense, it is necessary to point out that not all the interviewees are *Euromovers*. One of the Belgian interviewees, for example, after one experience abroad had decided not to leave her country anymore, as during her permanence in another state she betrayed an identity uneasiness.

- the easiness to move to the recipient country (distances, costs, need for a visa, need for a work permit, etc.);
- the presence of support contacts in the destination place;
- the foreseen adaptation difficulties (language, customs);
- the cost of life in the recipient country.

The importance attributed to each point is a personal issue.

Stereotypes are sometimes used to evaluate cultural differences (so that generally, for example, the US are seen in a bad way, Australia has a positive image, China is too far and different, Middle East is a place without freedom).

According to the importance they give to each criteria, *it is possible to classify Euromovers in two broad categories*, which should be taken as ideal-types: the *interested-in-diversity* movers and the *opportunity-driven* movers. The table 11.1 schematises the differences between the two groups:

EUROMOVERS	
INTERESTED-IN-DIVERSITY	OPPORTUNITY-DRIVEN
want to discover a different reality or to change environment for a while	want to escape from their home country reality
consider moving abroad as an essential experience to grow up as individuals	consider moving as a way to improve their social status
want to learn about different cultures and people	want to learn new skills and to make a professional experience
want to take a challenge, also by living on their own for a period, far from their families	want to take a job opportunity, able to improve their career or with a better salary
want to break the routine by doing something new	want to improve their CVs by getting new titles
firstly they choose the area they want to move to on the basis of their personal curiosity, then the opportunity	firstly find a well worthy opportunity, then they ponder their availability to go where the opportunity is
valorise their interest about the recipient country over the activity they carry on there	valorise the activity they carry on in the recipient country over their interest in the country

Table 11.1: Interested-in-diversity and opportunity-driven Euromovers

Of course, often Euromovers do not present a net profile, but rather features of both the indicated categories. The main difference is, in any case, that interested in diversity movers feel an intimate obligation to travel, while opportunity-driven movers see in the experience above the chance to improve their study or professional skills. Moreover, according to Leed [1992: 340], “a journey is clearly a consumable that confers status”. Consequently, if interested-in-diversity movers see a period above as a rewarding experience that surely enrich them, opportunity-driven movers will think of moving in terms of possibility to strengthen their curriculum vitae and acquire spendable prestige and social recognition. These diverse orientations also influence the importance given to destinations: interested-in-diversity movers gives primacy to it given, while the opportunity-driven movers are ready to spend some years of their life in a place they do not like in order to fulfil their objective.

This differentiation is clearly recognisable among interviewees. A few of them like to stay in Brussels, and many of them appreciate the unique international atmosphere of the capital of Europe, but the majority of them is there not because of Brussels itself, not because they are in love with the city, but rather because they hope that there they will have the career opportunity they are seeking. The most of the interviewees, in fact, describe Brussels as an interesting place, but quite sad; the majority of them would have chosen a different city. But they are ready to sacrifice part of their quality of life in order to get a study or a professional experience in the EU affairs, for which Brussels is the ideal location.

Euromovers can be interested-in-diversity and opportunity-driven in different periods of their lives. The majority of the interviewees chose Brussels with an opportunity driven attitude, but many of them had previous experiences before in places that they selected according to their personal preferences, and already dream about the next place they will move to.

An hypothesis that needs to be supported by further analysis is that Euromovers, according to their interests, studies and professions, tend to concentrate in specific movers’ islands: in Brussels there is a concentration of Euromovers interested in

political science, international relations and European affairs; in Barcelona there is a concentration of Euromovers interested in architecture and fine arts; etc.

In any case, Euromovers certainly tend to concentrate in specific places, in *movers' islands*: the interested-in-diversity ones because there they find an international atmosphere, the opportunity-driven ones because they find the possibility they are looking for. Movers' islands will be all those towns and cities where:

- there is the presence of international research centres of excellence or universities (for instance: Granada);
- there is the presence of international organisations (for instance: Brussels, Luxembourg, Strasburg, etc.);
- policies to attract young professionals have been promoted (for instance: Dublin);
- there is a sectoral internationally recognised competence (for instance: Milan for fashion, Barcelona and Rotterdam for architecture, etc.).

11.1.2. A global horizon to steer mobility choices

Euromovers show a peculiar mentality with respect to moving: they are somehow addicted to move. They are united by *an inner push to move* to other countries, a deep curiosity towards the diversity that is beyond the national border. Either taking a chance that fortuitously arises, or actively looking for opportunities to study and to work abroad, they start to move and, despite the difficulties that obviously they face, they like it and want to repeat such an experience. This inner push to move is a cosmopolite attitude in practice: it is not just an abstract and vague feeling of commonality with all human beings, it is *a concrete interest in diversity that Euromovers transform in action*.

The origin of this inner push to move may be different: some Euromovers grew up in different countries, others were educated to think internationally and not to be afraid of going abroad; some are determined in see with their eyes places that awake

their curiosity, others want to escape from a reality that they find too narrow. It is difficult to explain the nature of this intimate feeling of curiosity. On one side it is one of the various declinations of human beings will to discover the unknown. On the other side, it may be the result of what Jedlowski [1994: 125] calls *experience of surplus*. In the post-modern world we experience a surplus of images, news, “information, opinions, explanations, traditions, places where we could go, things we could do. It is like if the possible experiences had no limits” [Jedlowski, 1994: 126]. Probably some Euromovers are pushed by the hunger of experience that this social surplus of available experiences creates. In any case, what counts is that *Euromovers have a global horizon*, that is, *they consider the entire world as the stage for their action*.

It is important to specify that not only interested-in-diversity movers, but also opportunity-driven ones present a global horizon, even though it is put into practice in different ways. Opportunity-driven movers check for opportunities in a wide range of countries. They may not be pushed by an inner-push to discover all what is different, like the interested-in-diversity ones, but do not have mental barriers regarding moving abroad. From an experience born around a specific opportunity often arises an interest for the recipient country (even though, as I will explain in § 11.2, in some cases this interest can be only a pretended one, and not a genuine one). Consequently, an opportunity-driven mover can become an interested-in-diversity one during his experience abroad.

Regarding the effective extension of their global horizon, Euromovers are generally willing to move inside Europe. Some of them are prepared to travel inside the Western world, that is, the European Union, the Americas and Australia. Only a minority of the Euromovers is available to move to places with totally different culture and language, like the Far East or the Middle East. Anyhow, the restrictions that some Euromovers put to their potential destinations do not weaken the conclusion that they have a global mentality, because what is important is that they take into consideration the whole world, they explore all the possibilities they have

access to, and express preferences according to what they believe would be the degree of difficulty they would experience in a foreign country.

As I have showed, some Euromovers tend to declare an availability to go wherever in the world even though they would not like to. Such a pressure is particularly intense in Brussels, where everything is international: one feels obliged to be international himself. I believe this is a generalisable result to every *multicultural* expatriate community (in a monoculture community people tend to become homesick and try to reproduce their original culture in the place they moved to, to bring a piece of their own country into the new one): expatriates, in fact, reward themselves for the difficulties they face abroad (distance from friends and family, need to adapt to a new environment, difficulties in doing everything, etc.) by convincing themselves that they are discovering new things and that is really enriching. It actually is, but certainly for some people difficulties are also very important. This way expatriates create, by their conversation and their not always genuine enthusiasm, a narrative which becomes a social rule: “you cannot complain for your being here, you have to be happy about it, so do not underline the difficulties but only the positive aspects”.

Thanks to their global horizon, Euromovers undoubtedly enjoy a freedom unknown to those who are not available to leave their country. But *the freedom of movement does not automatically convert itself in life planning freedom*. Because of their usual character of temporariness, high level migrations tend to reduce people stability and, consequently, their possibility to plan their life. On the other hand, the availability to move enlarges enormously people’s possibilities, this way allowing them to reduce the possibilities of remaining stuck in their biographies because of bad contingent conditions. But it is just this increase of possibilities that produces uncertainty in movers: when they decide for any kind of moving, they find themselves in the need to choose among different lives, different social networks, different value systems, and this choice can be extremely problematic. For example, some interviewees are divided about their career in the host country and the desire to set a family in their origin country.

11.1.3. *Euromovers typology*

The great majority of the Euromovers apparently do not miss home, and this is the characteristic that allows them to stay far from their country for long, or to leave repeatedly.

The people who move abroad ones but then decide not to leave again feel like they are split in two: they may like very much their new environment and their experience abroad, but they are not fully able to uproot from their country and from the people they left there. This feeling of being split in two, of always missing something is outside Euromovers' experience. This does not mean that Euromovers do not miss home at all, but that they find strategies to feel well in their new country:

- a. if they miss their loved ones living in their home country, they organise themselves in order to keep in touch and, if possible, to return frequently back home;
- b. they valorise more the experience that they are doing abroad and the aspects they are discovering than the quality of the life they have left;
- c. they settle down in the recipient country and establish their life there, organising it according to their objectives and giving themselves a new routine;
- d. they carefully estimate the duration of their period abroad, and are ready to protract or to curtail it according to any change in their exigencies;
- e. if their experience is not successful in relation to their objectives, they are ready to go back home or to move to a different country.

Altogether, Euromovers are able to find the balance among the time they spend abroad, the fulfilment of their objectives and their possible need to go back home after a period abroad.

For example, in relation to their couple relationships, Euromovers seem to follow three main strategies:

- a. they renounce to a stable sentimental life: if frequently moving, they find themselves and their biographies too unstable to set a permanent couple, so

that they postpone their sentimental self-fulfilment to the moment wherein they decide to stop in a place for long;

- b. they keep distant relationships;
- c. they move together with their partner or go to the place where their partner is already living.

The first two strategies show a valorisation of the experience of being abroad over the everyday dimension of a couple relationship. The third strategy shows the capacity to settle down in the recipient country and to organise a life there.

Some Euromovers are not especially interested in cultural diversity, but need to change their environment frequently, so that they leave their country for some months or some years, then they go back, then they leave again, etc. Others, especially among the opportunity-driven ones, may have planned to spend a limited time abroad, useful to reach a specific goal. Finally, all of them may possibly find the adaptation in the new place quite hard, and consequently miss home. In all those cases, the experience in the recipient country necessary has a temporary character. Giving a defined time frame to their period abroad, Euromovers attribute sense to their experience and are able to see with the right proportion the possible difficulties they might face while abroad.

Other Euromovers do not need to define the time-frame of their experience. They leave without knowing how long they will stay abroad, and feel comfortable like that. They regularly think of moving to new places and wonder where they will establish their family, if they do not already have one, but are able to settle down in a stable way in the recipient country.

Crossing the time frame dimension with the moving attitude dimension it is possible to obtain a typology of movers (table 11.2):

	INTERESTED-IN-DIVERSITY	OPPORTUNITY-DRIVEN
DEFINED TIME FRAME	travellers	smart movers
NOT DEFINED TIME FRAME	explorers	professional movers

Table 11.2: Euromovers typology

- a. *travellers* are interested in discovering places and cultures, but are not available to remain away from home for too long; they remind the romantic idea of the traveller, who spent some years of his life living in foreign countries, in each one for a limited time, in order to make experience and to mature himself; if they fall in love with a place, they can remain there for many years as explorers, but they tend to go back to their home country sooner or later;
- b. *explorers*, as the travellers, are interested in discovering places and cultures, but they do not remain external witnesses, they rather try to adapt to their new place and to integrate in it; they establish a new life in their new place, and tend to consider the recipient country as much as possible as their new home; nevertheless, if the experience they have is not rewarding, they are ready to leave again;
- c. *smart movers* are always looking for the best opportunities, no matter where they are, and try to maximise the benefit they can get from their periods abroad in order to use the skills, the information, the contacts they got once back in their country; they are not really interested in moving, but rather in what they can obtain by moving; if the conditions they find abroad are favourable, they can remain to the recipient country and become professional movers;
- d. *professional movers* are pushed by their careers to stay abroad for many years; they can be happy with that or not, but in any case they tend to adapt to their new country in order to get career goals; the ones who adapt may convert themselves in explorers; the ones who are not able to adapt, but are

pushed to remain abroad because of good working conditions, may experience a deep sense of frustration that can fall into depression.

11.1.4. Brussels' Expats: an example of opportunity-driven mobility

Following the above expounded model, Brussels' Expats result to be, in their great majority, either smart or professional movers, and most of all smart movers. The majority of the Expats go to Brussels for their job. In this sense, they are smart-movers pushed by their profession. Only a minority of them remain for a long period in the capital. People, in fact, tend to remain in Brussels for short periods (between 3 months and 4 years, even though many people just remain for one or two years), and this time frame is often already set at the beginning of their experience. The short time frame produces a high turn-over of professional workers in Brussels' companies and institutions. In other European cities, for instance in Dublin and Barcelona, it is possible to find a similar turn-over of young people. So, even though this hypothesis should be appropriately verified, it is likely to happen that, wherever there is a high level migration, there is a high turn-over of people, as such a migration is like to be opportunity-driven.

Brussels, however, is not able to create loyalty among its expatriates. The most of them are attracted by the mirage of a position in the European affairs, but only a very slight minority reach a stable place. All the others improve their curricula and create useful contacts for their careers, but then tend to move again, often following better job opportunities. In many cases, people have clear in mind that they will stay for a limited and defined period, and have the intention to go back to their country with a stronger curriculum, hoping to find a good job in the place they like most.

This disloyalty to places characterises the opportunity-driven movers. The more they have a global horizon, that is, they are ready to take opportunities wherever in the world, the more they see places just as interchangeable and provisional sources of experience. This disloyalty affects also the interested-in-diversity movers, even though for different reasons. The more they are cosmopolite, the more they want to

travel to other places: this attitude leads them to appreciate where they are, because they are in a “different place”, but at the same time to long for new discoveries.

As many people go to Brussels to improve their career, and not because they like the city, one’s own profession is very important in the Expats environment and people use their position as a social status indicator. Showing the badge that indicates that one is working in the European Parliament, for instance, is a way to seem more important. Another strategy to appear more important through one’s profession is claiming about the long working hours and the stressful the job is. This attitude hides the fact that the most of the Expats are young people, trainee or recently employed, so they do not have a responsibility position and, with some exceptions, follow the Belgian schedule from 9 to 6. This lead to a paradoxical situation of bunches of Expats who complain about their long schedules while drinking a beer at half past 6 during the happy hour. And the situation is even more paradoxical because the most of the people perfectly know that who is complaining does not work for so long, but everyone plays the role and does not unmask the lye. This reflects Goffman [1959] theory about the roles that every person plays during a social interaction.

While some Expats, however, may feel important because they work in prestigious institutions, others have relatively ordinary jobs. Moreover, regarding their studies and their language skills, many people who work in Brussels have impressive CVs. People with more ordinary CVs can feel uneasy in an environment where everybody is a mover, everybody is high educated, everybody knows several or many languages. This is even more true if these people were used to be highly regarded in their countries because of their cosmopolite attitude and their ability to travel. Those who travel, in fact, in their home town often are considered important just because they are seen as brave and capable enough as to go beyond the local borders. But in Brussels they result to be quite in the average, so they “are not so wow anymore” [Slovenia, 15: 114], and it is “Difficult to say if it’s better first in a village or last in a city” [15: 107]. Consequently many people are pushed to exaggerate their work efforts and play up their position as a way to level their differences in skills and recuperate the lost prestige.

Furthermore, despite the fact that many Expats are pro-Europe, even though in different ways (as I will discuss in § 11.4), interviewees testimonies indicate that in Expats' general perception *there are still first class and second class states*. In the second category enter especially the new members countries: they are quite unknown to the people from the West, and their image is blurred by stereotypes that may possibly bring Western people to behave differently with a Romanian with respect, say, to a German. In such a context, the profession is taken as a common denominator able to hide countries' differences: it does not matter where you are from, but what you do. Consequently, Expats tend to raise their professional status in order to

Finally, talking about one's work in an environment where everybody worry about the same themes (that is, basically: lobbying, policy making, events organisations and European projects) becomes a way to facilitate social aggregation. Brussels' expatriates community is very heterogeneous and very multinational. Obviously there are subgroups, like the Latin environment, or the Northern one, but Expats also concentrate in places, like specific pubs or dedicated parties, where no differentiation is set up on the basis of people's nationality. I believe this is made possible by the fact that they are used to work together, people from the East with people from the West, people from the North with people from the South. The fact of working together put everyone on the same level as the others, and lead to overthrow part of the stereotypes that otherwise would dominate the relations among people from different countries.

Giving so much importance to their work, however, people may get frustrated if they do not succeed in the fulfilment of their objectives. Especially those who want to enter in the institutions may discover that it is much harder than what they expected, as it is a very selective process. The competition is at the highest levels, and some people may get sapped in their self-esteem. Outside the institutions it is not easy to find a job, not to mention a well-paid job, and many among the youngest take two or three internships.

People affirm that they find Brussels rewarding because:

- a. they can get experience in their field;
- b. they spend their time in an international environment.

This is the kind of result we can expect wherever there is a multicultural high level migration. I believe that people are sincere when maintaining that they go to Brussels to have an international experience, but at the same time many of them hide or understate their ambitions. Many Expats, in fact, do not mention the fact that they have or would like to have a well remunerated position, or list it as the last of the reasons that pushed them to go to Brussels. In particular those who want to work in international organisations tend to explain their ambition through their ethic ideals, or by saying that to be an officer in the EU or in the UN system is what they studied for. Obviously working in the institutions is seen as an opportunity to get prestige while, at the same time, earning a very attractive salary. So for many Expats it is very disappointing to discover that easy gaining are not available, and that at the beginning their salaries might be quite low.

Moving abroad always obliges individuals to face a number of difficulties. Movers need some sort of compensation for the troubles they have to pass through. If this compensation is identified exclusively with reaching a specific goal, the whole experience abroad may become extremely stressing and unsatisfactory. The nature of the goal, which can be a study or a professional, a personal or a social one, does not matter. In Brussels Expats may become frustrated by not realising themselves in a professional sense. In other cities other aspects may be important as well. An individual, for example, may decide to move in order to live together with his partner who already stays abroad, and find himself socially isolated and professionally unsatisfied, or even unable to carry on his relation. Consequently people need to find other ways to reward themselves while they are abroad. One of this way consists in learning new things and getting enriched by the contact with people from other cultures, that is, in interpersonal relationships.

11.2 Interpersonal relationships nature and intensity

As seen in § 11.1, Euromovers feel a need to travel. This need can manifest itself in two main forms: as an inner push, which I define *interest in curiosity*, and as the answer to a research of opportunities, which I refer to as *opportunity drive*.

One of my premises is that social relations are central in Subjects' lives, up to the point that for human beings every need is organised in a social relation. Consequently I maintain that *the need to travel can be transferred in a need to create new social relationships in a new social environment*.

As the need to travel is twofold, also *the consequent new social relations should decline in two main modalities: the ones based on a genuine interest towards the Other (not necessarily based on a cultural exchange), and the ones based on an instrumental interest towards what the Other can give*. The results of the present research confirm these hypothesis. I will now analyse how the two different kinds of social relations are organised among Euromovers.

11.2.1. Many acquaintances, few friends and opportunity-driven relations

To develop my arguments, I will begin analysing the Expats situation in Brussels. Expats find themselves in a paradoxical situation: they live in a city where meeting people is very easy, because of the great concentration of foreigners with similar curricula from all over Europe. Their work environment offers opportunities to get in contact with people, and it is also easy to meet people in the daily life, without looking for them: at work, at the French course, in the gym. The urban structure facilitates the meeting among Expats, as there is a working district (so called the European district) and a neighbourhood where the majority of the Expats go to live (Ixelles). Moreover, the Expat community is self organised for what concerns meeting new people: there are meeting places where Expats go just to socialise (like

Expats pubs, Expats special evenings, etc.), up to the point that traditional socialisation agencies, like the church, are generally not needed. The sole exception is the university, where many people meet during their masters and may create genuine relationships, based on the sharing of interests. But that is student life, and after their masters the most of the people leave and those who remain have to create again a social network. There are not only the conditions to meet people, but also the will to do that. No matter if they are sincerely interested in discovering other cultures or rather interested in creating useful contacts for their jobs, Expats usually want to meet new people.

Nevertheless, the majority of the Expats find their social relationships quite superficial, that is, they usually have many acquaintances but very few friends or no friends at all – unless they already had them before they came to Brussels. I will now explain the reasons that lead to such a situation.

As already noticed, Brussels' Expats community is characterised by two aspects:

1. people tend to stay in the city for short periods and there is a high turn-over of students and professionals;
2. people are very much focused on their work and their professional goals.

Both aspects, and especially the first one, are likely to be traceable in other high level migrants communities, but in Brussels they are exacerbated by the strong opportunity-driven connotation of the Expats community.

Brussels offers a unique international environment, but this can be perceived as anonymous if the individual is not able to create a solidarity social network, and Brussels high turnover makes it extremely difficult for many people to make new friends. Being far from their families, Expats try to rely one on each other, so that the mutual support dimension tends to prevail over the mutual liking dimension, pushing people into relations which are purely instrumental. In other words, Expats may stay together not to stay alone: they often do not find someone else especially nice, they just stay together because they need someone to go out, or to travel around, to break with their routine. Of course this result is not exclusive to Expats, but among them

the trend to choose friends on the basis of a necessity is accentuated and easily recognisable. Moreover, some Expats are not available to an emotive investment in a friendship, as they know that all the relations they establish are soon going to end because of the short time people spend in Brussels. Friendships as well as couple relationships are affected by the temporariness and the lack of perspective.

These premises, of course, cannot but lead to superficial relations that anyhow do not fully compensate the mover for his staying abroad.

Not finding a sufficient satisfaction in their new interpersonal relationships, movers tend to react in two ways:

- a. they more and more tend to focus on their professional objectives;
- b. they tend to valorise their past longest relationships over the new ones.

The fact that people focus on their professional objectives has some consequences. Not only it means that they intensify their work orientation, so that their jobs and their professional goals become more and more important in their experience, but also and most of all they tend to create social relationships which they can use for their job. It may appear normal that some Expats try to create a social network of instrumental friendships; the point is that this instrumental network may become dominant, up to the point that every new meeting is seen as an opportunity to create a new useful contact. This is why the first two questions people ask when they meet someone new are “where are you from?” and “what is your job here?”, and not person’s name, age or other amenities.

Therefore Expats face two needs, a first one for satisfactory human relationships and a second one for useful contacts. In the attempt to respond to both needs at the same time, some Expats replace the solidarity relationship, based on mutual liking, with an *opportunity-driven relationship*, based on the fulfilment of a precise goal (for instance, to acquire a new contact useful for lobbying) or on the satisfaction of an inner need (for example, not to stay alone on Friday night). Opportunity-driven relationships can last for long, but tend to remain superficial and, therefore, not satisfactory. The opportunity-driven attitude ends up characterising also people personal life, up to the point that many Expats do not show any loyalty to particular

friends (read: acquaintances) or groups of friends, but rather skip from a friend (acquaintance) to another, from a group to another, choosing the one which meets the mood of the moment. Therefore there is some sort of tendency to privilege quantity, that is, superficial but heterogenic relationships, to quality, that is, deep and durable relationships.

This tendency to privilege quantity, however, can reveal itself quite tiring. Meeting a new person always requires an effort, especially if the person is from a different culture. Moreover, in order to work any relationship needs time, and the more people someone knows, the less time he can dedicate to each one of them. Therefore, after a first stirring immersion in the Expats community multiculturalism, many movers feel the need to focus on their most important relationships, getting deeper in them, to disadvantage of all the others.

Generalising this finding, I maintain that movers find it easy to meet new people if they are in a place where an expatriate community is present. These new meetings, however, bring to a high number of superficial relationships. It takes a certain amount of time, which varies according to the situation, to individual personalities and to national cultures, to develop one or more friendships out of the many superficial relationships.

Finding the most of their new social relationships superficial, Expats tend to valorise their past longest relationships over the new ones. This happens in two ways:

- a. by idealising the best friendships (which are normally long lasting): the friends at home, or in any case those considered to be the best ones, in the distance are seen as even more precious;
- b. by privileging the already established relationships: many Expats meet again in Brussels friends they have first known in other experiences abroad, or go to the Belgian capital following their friends who already are living there.

Euromovers' mobility high level allow them to create relationships of various intensity in different countries. Some Expats have the possibility to meet again

people they first met in their country or in other experiences abroad, or even in a previous experience in Brussels. Most of all this is due to the fact that many Brussels' Expats followed masters in international relations or European affairs, and for them going to work to Brussels is the natural outcome of their studies. In some cases, people go to Brussels together with very good friends from their same country, or with their partner.

Those Expats who already have friends, or acquaintances or family members living in Brussels find it easier to create a genuine solidarity social network, because the people they know introduce them to their own friends, and the relation has more probability to be based on a mutuality of interests and on a sincere reciprocal liking. This way those who already have a friend in the Expats community are in the position to take the maximum advantage of the easiness in meeting new people. On the contrary, those who have to start from scratch the creation of a new social network are likely to establish a number of acquaintances before they get to know a person or a group of people they can consider friends. But these friends, as I will explain in the next subchapter, are not as friends as the ones at home are.

11.2.2. Social networks and relation intensity

Before I differentiate the kinds of friendships according to their intensity, it is necessary to clarify the concept itself of "friend".

I am not interested in providing a definition of friendship, as it would require a broad analysis of its many meanings, without the guarantee of finding some undeniable points to underline. Friendship is, in fact, such a mobile concept that there is no agreement even on basic issues, like if a family member can be considered a friend [Pahl and Pevalin, 2005] or not [Di Nicola, 2002]. My purpose here is to highlight those dimensions that, according to their intensity, can determine the classification of a person as an acquaintance or as a friend. Of course this classification is the result of the importance that each one of us gives to each dimension.

The identified dimensions, better defined in the table 11.3, are:

- trust and mutual knowledge;
- intimacy and confidence;
- support;
- sharing;
- time.

The higher the degree of each dimension is, the more the relation assume a personal character and an intensity that allow to call it friendship.

Dimension	A friend is...
trust and mutual knowledge	...someone I trust ...someone I know well ...someone who knows me well
intimacy and confidence	...someone I can talk with about many subjects ...someone I can talk with about personal feelings ...someone I can be myself with ...someone who does not judge me
support	...someone who plays a passive (listening) or active (looking for me, helping me) role of support
sharing	...someone I spend time with ...someone I do things together ...someone I have fun together ...someone with whom I shared or I am sharing an important experience or a period of my life
time	...someone I have been knowing for long

Table 11.3: Friendship dimensions

Analysing these dimensions, it results that two elements are particularly important to define the nature of an interpersonal relationship:

- a. the time the relationship has been lasting, which allows the individuals to get to know each other and to pass through many things together;
- b. what individuals share, in terms of values, attitudes and ideas, but also in terms of life experiences; in this sense, a life experience can create or not intimacy: I can spend years with a person, sharing many events with him, and still consider him just a colleague; or I can stay for some months with him,

sharing part of my personal life during an experience abroad, and consider him a friend.

Therefore, friends are those with whom much time has been spent, getting to an intimate relationship; but also those with whom an important experience has been shared, getting to mutual trust, confidence and support. Consequently, people tend to identify their best friends with their childhood friends, but also with those who helped them during a specific experience, like spending a period abroad.

Spending months or years far from their families and their all-life friends, people need to replace their affection with new relationships. At the same time, abroad people face difficulties and troubles that often represent real challenges for them. In these conditions, movers are available to get involved in solidarity relationships based on reciprocal support and on intimacy.

Nevertheless, the relationships based on the sharing of a particular experience abroad are considered less important, or less intense, than the ones which have been lasting for a life course, because some dimensions are weak or not present at all: if the friendships has a short history, the reciprocal knowledge can be superficial, and the level of intimacy can be partial. Moreover, the time dimension is immanent, that is, the relation is lived in the present, day by day: there is no past to remind, nor the relation is likely to have a future if one of the actors involved in the relation leaves.

Therefore there is a difference between the new friends that a mover get while abroad and the oldest ones, who are with him abroad or who remain in their country. Both are considered friends, but the oldest ones are more likely to be considered close friends, that is, are very strong.

The table 11.4 shows the resulting interpersonal relationships model. I clearly separate the opportunity driven relationships, the friendships based on sharing an experience and on mutual support, and the friendships based on feelings, trust and intimacy.

CATEGORY	CLASS	INTENSITY	TYPE
Presence Relationships	Not formalised roles relationships	Very weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Occasional meetings without reiteration, for example with shoppers, bar customers, etc.; - repeated meetings with people known by sight (for example, with the newsvendor where one buys the newspaper everyday or the neighbour met every morning at the bus stop);
		Weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acquaintances; - opportunity-driven relationships.
		Strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Friendship based on sharing an experience and on mutual support (can end or reveal itself a close friendship); - flings, last longing sexual relations; - flirtations.
		Very strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Close friendship based on feelings, trust and intimacy (usually in a durable relation).
	Formalised roles relationships	Weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work colleagues; - never met or occasionally met distant relatives on whom one can rely in case of need; - instrumental friendships (people who are considered instruments for one's own personal affirmation).
		Strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parents and close relatives; - couples (engaged, living together, married; cheating lovers).

Table 11.4: interpersonal relationships model – presence relationships

According to this differentiation, Euromovers may be involved in several social networks:

- a. a *professional opportunity-driven network*: acquaintances that the professional can use to get information, to do a task, to get to a position¹;
- b. a *personal opportunity-driven network*: a group of people that a mover stay with not to feel alone;
- c. a *solidarity network established abroad in the present experience*: friends that the mover meets abroad;
- d. a *solidarity network established at home*: close friends and friends living in the mover home land, with whom he keeps in contact; some of them can be abroad together with the mover;
- e. a *solidarity network established in other experiences abroad*: friends met in past experiences abroad with whom the mover keeps in contact; some of them can be abroad together with the mover.

The time a mover spend in a city and his availability to make new friendships determine his possibilities to establish one or another social network type. In Brussels opportunity-driven networks are very common, but there is no reason to think that in other cities it is the same.

The demotion of the relationships based on the sharing of a particular experience in favour of those based on a long term frequentation proves *the importance of the time factor in closer relationships formation*. The passage from weak formalised and not formalised role relationships to strong not formalised role relationships (that is, from acquaintances, colleagues or instrumental friends to real friends) needs the

¹ Accidentally I would like to add that the existence of a professional opportunity-driven network is a prove of the importance of interpersonal relationships in institutions functioning. Expats try to have contacts in key positions in order to get information or to improve their chances to have a certain work place. This can be considered as an evidence of a policy of patronage that still plays a fundamental role in order to bypass some bureaucratic mechanisms. The procedure to enter in the Commission is an example of the importance of such relations. The notorious *concourse*, the high selective competition that screens thousands of European candidates, only has as an outcome a list of suitable professionals: they are not inside the Commission, they are just fit for working in it. This list has a period of validity of two years, during which the selected candidates have themselves to discover all the positions which are opened inside the Commission, in order to respond to them as soon as possible. In order to check the opening of new positions, they need to know someone inside the Commission, who has access to reserved Commission databases.

conscience that people will be able to develop their relationships in a diachronic sense. Some Euromovers experience a deep frustration because of the high turnover that obliges them to a continuous research of new relationships. Individuals on one hand get tired of the first meetings ritual (always the same questions to know the other person), and on the other hand become less and less available to emotively invest in their relationships, knowing that the affection they can feel for a friend might change in sadness at his or her departure. More precisely, I would say that *the more a tie becomes intimate, the more it needs to have a perspective, and this perspective is realised through commitment and planning*.

With the word *commitment* I refer to the fact that individuals devote themselves to their relationships: they believe in it and are able to make efforts and to sacrifice to maintain it. As the commitment is often realised through compromises, its level depends on the degree of intimacy that characterises the relationship: the stronger the tie, the deepest and effective the commitment.

With *planning* I refer to the presence of a vision of the future, of a perspective that allows the actors involved in the relation to believe that what they do one for the other is just another brick in the construction of a more and more solid tie. In some cases, especially in love relationships, the planning is put in practice through an activity of sharing objectives and realising them together. Some friends, for example, may decide to go abroad together, or may agree that one will follow the other if the experience of the first one results to be positive. The sudden lack of the planning dimension explains why many couples which seem to be very strong split when one of the two lovers leave for another country: if the commitment would make up for the impossibility to share the everyday life, the lack of the perspective to return together may lead the lovers to think that their story has no direction. On the contrary, if the planning dimension is present, that is, if the lovers think of solutions to live together again, distances may become tolerable.

If some Euromovers seem not to be able to cope with relationships that from the beginning have a defined time frame, others are able to clearly separate their life in different periods, characterised by a certain experience lived in a certain place with

certain people. Each country they visit becomes the theatre of a defined moment of their life, and the people they meet are the actors together with whom they play their role, a role which can be changed whenever the stage changes. Consequently, their biographies seem to be composed by a set of different life experience separated in the time and in the space, in the lifestyle and in the established social relationships, and Euromovers' subjectivity remains the only thread able to re-compose and give a sense to this fragmentation.

In this sense, for these Euromovers life is not a flux, but rather a sequence of episodes. Moreover, each place is characterised by the interpersonal relationships that there have been lived, and vice versa, interpersonal relationships belong to that specific place.

11.2.3. Maintaining distant relationships

I affirmed that there are two main kinds of friendships:

1. the ones based on sharing an experience, on mutual support and on the sharing of confidences, and in a certain measure trust;
2. the close ones, based on feelings, trust, intimacy and a deep reciprocal knowledge.

Close friendships are likely to be set after durable relations, are very strong and durable: as close friends have always been there, they are thought to remain there forever². They are often related childhood, to school or university time. They are those friendships that individuals have been carrying on for years, and provide the comfort and the safeness of a mutual deep knowledge, not only at a persona level, but also of each other social environments.

Friendships based on sharing an experience, on the contrary, are weak, as they find their premises in the daily dimension of that specific experience. They can be established with foreigners or compatriots, but once the experience comes to its end,

² We can cynically wonder if such an idea is due to the fact that the present research focuses on young people. Would an old person state that a real friend is forever?

they risk to end together with it. If it does not, then it may become as well a close friendship.

As noticed, the friendships created abroad start as relations of the first kind: they develop around the sharing of the experience of being abroad at the same time, in the same place, spending time together. Such a friendship is characterised by a solid reciprocal support and by the fact of having much in common: same interest, similar biographies, and most of all the same experience abroad. A problem for movers, in fact, is communicating about their experience abroad with those (relatives and friends) who remained at home. Firstly, it is very difficult to explain to someone who has never moved abroad the nature of such an experience. Secondly, even in those cases in which the interlocutor had such an experience, it is hard for the mover to describe his new reality, the complexity of his new life as a whole, the people he meets, the sensations he feels. Only those who are there, those who live more or less the same experience are able to fully understand and, therefore, to support and advice. This commonality may origin very strong ties, but these ties are based on sharing the everyday life in a very peculiar situation.

When one of the two friends leaves, that is, when he does not share anymore his everyday life abroad with his mate, he finds that the relation with his counterpart has become a relationship in the distance, exactly like those with the people who had remained in his country when he had left. Their ordinary experience diverge, and they are less and less able to support each other. Moreover, also physical distances play a role in this: it is easy to chat by Skype or by phone, but going out together, having fun, meeting the same people, doing things together and then discuss about them is not possible anymore. Without the commonality of the everyday life, the two friends suddenly may discover that they have no more topics for concersation.

In such a situation, it is difficult to foresee if the relationships will last or not. Being in the same life-phase and having common interests is useful to create a common ground over which the relationship can find new basements. But if the two people live far one from the other (and the distance is not the geographical one, but

rather the economic one: how much it costs in terms of money and time to get there), they may lack a perspective of meeting again and slowly lose interest in their relation.

From such a situation it seems that there are only two possible outcomes: either the two friends remain in contact, or not. Actually, the outcomes are three:

1. in the distance the relationship loses its intensity and slowly the two people completely lose contact;
2. even in the distance the relation does not change, and the two people remain in contact constantly;
3. in the distance the relation changes, and the two friends keep sporadic contacts, sufficient to maintain it.

Some friendships, in fact, need a frequent contact in order to keep them alive, while others simply preserve themselves because both friends feel each other presence in their own life, and an e-mail once in a while is enough to keep this feeling alive. In any case, some conditions seem to be necessary to guarantee that a distant relation may be carried on:

- there must be a reciprocal will to remain in contact;
- there must be a common reference universe on which people can base their communication (common cultural references, common interests, memories, etc.);
- there must be the hope to meet again one day.

Accordingly to the two ways people can keep in contact, two strategies are adopted to maintain relationships in the distance, which I call *rarefied communication strategy* and *intense communication strategy*:

1. the *intense communication strategy* is based on frequent contacts, as direct as possible, through media able to transmit messages instantaneously and through visits; it is based on the assumption that those contacts are necessary to keep updated about other person's life, this way preserving alive the common reference universe that allows the communication between the two

- subjects; some movers use this strategy to keep in contact with important people who live in other countries, like their best friend or their partner;
2. the *rarefied communication strategy* is based on the assumption that the relationship is so deep and certain that only a minimum contact is necessary while abroad: when the two people, even after years, meet again, it will be like it was before one of them had left; an intense communication strategy may convert itself in a rarefied one after some months, because the two friends have less and less to share and to talk about.

When a mover leaves to go back home or to a new country, he normally loses the majority of the friendships he established abroad. Only the most genuine, intense and intimate relationships last, while the others simply remain for a while, and then fade away. In this sense I can say that every time a traveller moves, there are many “small deaths” [12: 180], that is, many people who hold an important role in mover’s life for a period, and then simply disappear from it, like if they were dead.

Euromovers are usually prepared to these small deaths. They know it is going to be like this. Some of them find it sad, while others find it normal to share different periods of their life with different people. Every Euromover, however, is able to valorise the nature and the intensity of what he learnt through his interpersonal relationships abroad.

In § 9.3 I analysed the differences among relationships according to the place where they have been made and their intensity:

INTENSITY RELATIONSHIPS	VERY WEAK AND WEAK	STRONG AND VERY STRONG
IN ONE'S OWN COUNTRY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - may lack understanding about one's international attitude; - are neutral. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - has a long history and the sharing of many experience; - has a future; - based on a deep reciprocal knowledge; - can become like a family member; - may lack understanding about one's international attitude;
ESTABLISHED ABROAD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - based on the communality of an international attitude in practice; - may be very superficial; - are important to reach objectives (opportunity driven); - are rewarding because they always offer the possibility to explore cultural and linguistic differences; - allows individuals to learn about themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - recent; - hardly has a future; - based on the sharing of a particularly intense experience; - can become like a family member because of an intense mutual support; - based on the communality of an international attitude in practice; - allow individuals to learn about themselves.

Table 9.10: Differentiation between the relationships in the homeland and the ones created abroad according to their intensity

I can now analyse their differences according to their probability to be maintained and to the communication strategy employed:

INTENSITY RELATIONSHIPS	VERY WEAK AND WEAK	STRONG AND VERY STRONG
IN ONE'S OWN COUNTRY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - likely to be lost during the period abroad. - rarefied communication strategy (because there is not a real interest in maintaining them). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - they last. in some cases they are valorised ("these are my real friends!"), in other they are reconsidered ("he is my best friend, but i cannot talk with him about my experience abroad"). - either intense or rarefied communication strategy.
ESTABLISHED ABROAD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lost immediately after leaving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - only the best friends remain. - intense communication strategy at the beginning, then rarefied communication strategy.

Table 11.5: Probability to maintain a relationship in relation to its place and intensity

11.2.4. Instruments to maintain distant relationships

To maintain distant relationships individuals can either use a communication medium or visit the ones who are abroad. For many Europeans, especially for the youngest ones or from the ones from the East, visiting their friends abroad is too expensive. For the majority of them, it is something that they can do once in a while. Consequently, for any mover the use of media results necessary to carry on even the most rarefied contacts.

Different kinds of media are used: letters, phones, e-mails and chat systems. Letters are disappearing, replaced by the more immediate e-mails. Phone is very expensive, and it is often replaced by chat system that also allow verbal communication. Video chatting is still quite rare.

To explain these findings, I identified five dimensions to differentiate and rank the different medium (see table below):

- *message deepness*: how much a medium allows the transmission of a deep content;
- *immediacy*: how quickly a medium deliver a message;
- *availability*: where it is possible to use a medium; how frequently the recipient has the instruments to be connected through that medium;
- *invasivity*: how much a medium has the power to penetrate in our personal sphere;
- *cost*: how much the use of a medium costs.

Medium	Message deepness	Immediacy	Availability	Invasivity	Cost
letters	very high	very low	low	none	very low
SMS	very low	high	very high	low	low
phone	high	very high	high	high	high
e-mail	medium	high	high	none	very low or none
chat	low	very high	medium	medium	very low
audio chat	high	very high	low	medium	low
video chat	high	very high	low	very high	low
Value	-	++	+	-	+

Table 11.6: Characteristics of the different media

- Message deepness: letters allow the writer to a moment of reflection, and consequently tend to produce messages which are quite profound. SMS, for their brevity, can only conduct simple reflections, even though many people use them to make entire conversations. E-mails are normally written quickly, with a not accurate language and with abbreviations. They are not able to replace letters, even though they offer the possibility to write longer texts respect to chats. A conversation, either by chat systems or by phone, allow people to express themselves in a clear way, to go deeper into details, to interact and to respond to interlocutor's questions. Moreover, the voice transmits feelings and emotions. The possibility to transmit articulated messages, however, is considered less important than the possibility to get an answer in the shortest possible time.
- Immediacy: letters require a long time from the moment they are written to the moment they are read; e-mails and SMS can be read instantaneously or after some hours, while voice contacts and chats are immediate. It is usually considered the most valuable dimension among the ones considered.
- Availability: theoretically letters can be written everywhere, but practically they require isolation, what is more and more rare in people life; on the contrary, e-mails can be easily written at work, during the working hours, being sit in front of a colleague; SMS are also fully available, as mobile phones are omnipresent objects. Chats requires that on both communicating computers a dedicated program is installed, so they are not fully available. Making phone calls through chat systems also requires a microphone and headphones, and video calls need a camera, which now is incorporated in every notebook, but that laptops still do not have and need to be bought separately. The possibility to use the medium in any moment makes this dimension highly regarded by media users.
- Invasivity: letters and e-mail are read when the recipient choose to do it, so they are not invasive at all. SMS, with the sound that accompanies them, may be annoying, also because it is difficult to resist to the curiosity to read them when they arrive; but still there are people who just forget to read them. The

phone, on the contrary, penetrates in people life, converting availability in a lack of privacy. A chat is not so much invasive, as to be contacted the program needs to be active. Nevertheless, video chat is very invasive, because it obliges the user to show himself and the place where he is. Media invasive dimension is highly underestimated in present days, as there is a tendency to see it as an ineluctable consequence of their necessary use.

- Cost: costs are normally quite low, as modern media require electronic instruments which are now very cheap. The only expensive medium is the mobile phone, as international calls by mobile phones are still very expensive. Obviously this is considered an important dimension.

All this considered, e-mails are by far the most used medium, because they allow users to establish different levels of intimacy with the recipient, they are quick, fully available and cheap. Phone, especially via chat, is considered the best system to get in touch, but it is not fully available, it may have a certain cost and require minimum computer skills.

Scholars still discuss about the effect of these media on social abilities and on their role in creating and preserving social capital. The use of e-mails in particular is associated with the number of distant friends, and a modest use of the Internet in general seem to be able to increase social capital [Ishii, 2006].

Euromovers normally use communication media in order to keep in touch with their friends, not to find new ones. E-mails and chat systems allow them to maintain distant relationships, this way preserving an already existing social capital. Working in front of a computer, Euromovers may use a chat all day long, but this full-time connection is likely to be reserved only to special people, usually partners. This kind of full-time connection during working hours does not draw on the possibility to establish new social relations or to develop the existing ones in the new social environment, as in any case the time spent chatting is time that the individual has to spend in front of his computer. On the contrary, if the mover spends his nights at home talking with his distant partner through a chat system phone, like some

Euromovers do, he is reducing the time he can dedicate to new social interactions, and consequently his possibility to get integrated in the new social environment.

Saying that a modest use of the Internet increases social capital is misleading. It is not just the amount of time dedicated to a certain kind of communication that influences social capital, but the nature of that time. If the time dedicated to the Internet could have been profitably used to preserve or to develop social relationships in the physical environment an individual is integrated in, then it must be pondered if the social relations preserved or created through the Net are more or less, and are more or less important, than the ones the same individual may create or preserve by spending that time in face to face interactions. On the contrary, if the time dedicated to the Internet is in any case time that could not be used for social interactions, then having the possibility to interact virtually with distant people is useful to maintain relationships and to preserve or increase social capital.

11.2.5. The role of interpersonal relationships in an experience abroad

One of the theoretical premise I assumed in the present research is that personal reflexivity partially compensates the uncertainty and anomy produced by social reflexivity. On the basis of this idea, I formulated an hypothesis: if people try to compensate their lack of control in the macro-social sphere with a concentration on the micro-social sphere, then in conditions of increased uncertainty people tend to rely on their social relationships as sources of information, of certainties and of social capital.

Applying this hypothesis to movers, who live in a situation of increased uncertainty when abroad, I maintained that:

- a. they look for fixed points in their environment as elements they can count on;
- b. also the most superficial relationships, that is, the weakest ties acquire a certain importance in the construction of individual reality, and may contribute to give to individuals a sense of certainty more than what they would do at home;

- c. the necessity for the mover to confirm his mental maps may increase his reflexivity, pushing him to look for new opportunities to collect experiences; in this sense, acquaintances are seen as a valuable source of experience.

The findings of the present research confirm these hypothesis.

As noticed in § 11.3.2, movers establish a number of superficial relations, that is, they increase the amount of their acquaintances. These acquaintances are used both in an instrumental sense and as sources of experience, for movers valorise intercultural exchanges with them. Up to a certain point these relations are satisfactory, but after a while the mover gets tired of having a quantity of superficial relations, and starts to focus on the quality of his relationships. So, unless the mover already have friends when he arrives in the new country, he tends to concentrate over some of his acquaintances and to make friends out of them.

This process is not neutral: it rather shows a high level of reflexivity and self-consciousness.

Firstly, Euromovers are aware that their possibility to establish new social relationships when abroad are linked to a number of factors:

- individual phase of life: if I am young, for example, I might be more shy;
- being abroad in a couple: if I have a regular partner, I have a minor need to find other people and less time to dedicate to new social relationships;
- city urban structure: it can be dispersed or centralised, facilitating or not the meeting among people;
- student or worker status: students have more free time to dedicate to social interactions, even though may have more occasional relations; workers have less time, but are obliged to socialise with their colleagues;
- individual availability and ability to meet people: a mover can decide to focus on a single social network, for example the professional opportunity-driven one, this way disregarding his personal social relations;
- specific national culture features: some national culture are generally described as more open and fast in making new friends.

On the basis of this awareness, Euromovers tend to change their conditions according to their social objectives. For instance, if they are workers, but do not want to meet only their colleagues, they may start to attend to a language course in order to meet other people from abroad. At a urban level, they show a certain tendency to concentrate in specific neighbourhoods.

Secondly, Euromovers are aware that they can use their social networks in order to reach specific goals. Not only is this true for opportunity-driven relationships, as already noticed, but also for friendships: Euromovers know that having a friend in another country, for instance, it will be easier for them to travel to that country. In this sense, the fact that many Expats already have friends in Brussels shows an impressive tendency to be centralised in the same place. This tendency can be explained thinking that Euromovers follow their friends, emulating their experience, or use them as a support to orientate their destination choice at the moment of going abroad. This means that their friends are an important source of social capital to them, and work as a support at the moment of moving.

One of my theoretical hypothesis has been that movers are the centre of social networks without any connection one to each other. The results of this research bring me to correct this idea. It is true that Euromovers are the centre of different social networks, as they create a new network each time they go to a new country. In many cases these network has no link one with the others. For instance, an Euromover can spend 6 months in England for a work experience and meet 5 new friends; then he moves to Brussels, while his 5 friends remain in England; therefore, he will have a social network in his country, a social network in England and a new one in Belgium, and all of them without any contact but him. Nevertheless I have shown that friends are often used as support contacts to orientate the destination choice, so that the social network that he creates abroad can find its origin in a person who already is a friend. In this sense, different social networks may cross because of the activation of support relationships.

Thirdly, the interpersonal relationships that Euromovers have abroad may respond to different cultural needs. As seen, Euromovers usually claim that their closest friends are the ones they have been knowing for long, therefore they are often identified with childhood and university friends, who remained at home. Some Euromovers, and especially those who come from a village or a small town, complain about the fact that, even though the friends at home are and will always remain close friends, they cannot share with them some passions, like their pleasure in travelling abroad, or a specific cultural interest, like the one in the European affairs in Brussels. Going abroad to specific cities, chosen because of the high concentration of people with the same orientation, people are able to create new social relationships based on a commonality of interests. Therefore people who move to Brussels find many other expatriates with the same cultural orientation (cosmopolite, interested in international relations, etc.), and have the possibility to create relationships characterised by a different kind of exchange respect to the ones they have in their country. This way Euromover are enriched by their social relationships abroad, and this enrichment is sufficient to compensate them for the troubles of living in a new country.

All this shows that *Euromovers use their interpersonal relationships in a reflexive way, in order to realise a life project, or at least some life objectives*. Opportunity-driven relationships are an example of reflexivity applied to interpersonal relationships. The fact that Euromovers seem to be generally aware about the benefits of their relationships abroad can be taken as an evidence of the reflexive process that leads them to have experiences in other countries.

The use of interpersonal relationships leads to the creation of networks, which are not just human networks, that is, they do not affect only the movement of people, but also the exchange of information, opportunities, objects, images, impressions, emotions, feelings, ideas, risks, etc.

Urry [2000: 194] defines these networks *global fluids*, claiming that they have “no clear point of departure or arrival, just de-territorialized movement or mobility”. Global fluids are hybrid networks which move humans, information and objects, in a

complex way that has no precise direction or purpose. Therefore the Subject has no real control on these fluxes, but can take advantage of them. Euromovers are those people who are particularly able to take advantage of global fluids to determine reflexively their life project. At the same time, this life project is not a stable structure, but rather a continuously changing set of objectives, desires, passions. Euromovers are thus able to take advantage of the opportunities that globalisation, through global fluids, offers them, and at the same time are able to adapt to changes in their life course, reformulating their life project.

Of course such a continuous process of adaptation and redefinition of oneself and of one's life implies a renounce to stability, meant as a set of conditions that can be given for granted and that allow the Subject to operate inside them without having to redefine them. Euromovers are exposed to the need to redefine continuously and reflexively these conditions. Some of them like it: this is the nature of their inner push to move, of their need to change environment every now and then. Others find it tiring, and try to fix some stable points by defining secure social networks. In this process, friends are essential to provide fixed points, secure elements in a world where everything is flowing away.

11.3 Intercultural relationships

11.3.1. Avoidance in intergroup relations

Duronto et alii [2005: 550] remind us that many theorists, like Tajfel or Turner, “make distinctions between interpersonal (intragroup) and intercultural (intergroup) communication”. I use here this distinction to stress the fact that I will now analyse the intercultural aspects of interpersonal relationships set abroad by movers.

Intercultural relationships present a number of difficulties for the actors involved in them:

- a. actors speak in different languages, thus they cannot fully express themselves or comprehend each other;
- b. coming from different nations, often from different geographical areas, speakers lack of some or many common cultural references, like foods, television programmes, institutions, etc.
- c. actors have different cultural habits, that is, behaviours like taking the tea with milk or lemon;
- d. actors may have deep cultural differences, like following diverse values, or believing in a diverse faith.

Superficial and deep cultural differences (points c and d) saps the certainty of our behaviours, as they question the validity of our social rules:

The major problem strangers face in their new surroundings is a lack of security and information.

Communication between strangers is characterized by a limited amount of information about each other, by ignorance of the means to reach a goal, and by ignorance of the probable outcomes. To deal with the ambiguity that characterizes these new situations, we need information (managing uncertainty) and we need to reduce tension (managing anxiety) [Dumont et alii, 2005: 550].

Euromovers seem to be particularly able to manage this uncertainty. Among Euromovers the first social rule claims that when you are a stranger, you are excused if you violate some social rules. Thanks to this base of tolerance, broadmindedness and curiosity towards diversity, Euromovers tend to consider cultural differences like stimulating and thrilling challenges. Consequently, Euromovers present a very low degree of avoidance, that is, of tendency to avoid the contact with another cultural group. Obviously, for a number of reasons each Euromover may prefer some national groups to others, but generally Euromovers declare to focus more on individual features than on national culture ones.

This is due to a conflict between the ideal cosmopolitanism that characterises Euromovers attitude towards diversity, and an objective, unavoidable difficulty to stay in the same way with every person from wherever in the world. Many

Euromovers feel that they have to be pro-pluralism, up to the point to force themselves to be as more tolerant and open-minded as possible. Therefore Euromovers may adopt two different attitudes when meeting a stranger:

1. a *non-critical cosmopolite approach*, moved by the conviction that it is always nice to meet different people, as in any case they are a richness; it does not matter if the interaction does not bring to an agreement or even to mutual comprehension, because the exchange of different positions is by itself enriching;
2. a *critical personal approach*, in which more personal selection criteria are adopted to choose one's own company; according to this approach, there is not a specific commonality among people just because they meet abroad and they share the same experience: the commonality has to be searched in individual biographies and in individual personalities.

According to the non-critical cosmopolite approach, multicultural expatriates communities, like the Brussels one, are the most concrete expression of those ethical values of equality among all human beings which are the basis of Western democracies and which are promoted by the European Union. This multiculturalism in practice is the European dream which comes to its fulfilment. Also the critical personal approach is a very Western one, but in a different way: it stresses the uniqueness of each individual, and the fact that everyone has to prove he deserves respect.

What is important is that both approaches avoid to refer to national stereotypes and prejudices. According to the first approach, a fruitful exchange is always possible, whether it takes or not to an agreement over ideas, behaviours, etc. According to the second approach, people has to be judged individually, and not on the basis of a generalisation around national characters. Consequently, it is not really important which of the two approaches the Euromover prefers: he will always give a chance to the Other, he will not avoid to meet the Other.

This does not mean that Euromovers have no prejudices. The present research show that even those who are more interested in diversity may classify some people because of their nationality or religion (so, for example, Americans as a people may be perceived as the opposite of the Europeans, and Muslims may be partially identified with Islamic fundamentalists). Nevertheless, in their everyday life Euromovers do not tend to avoid individuals because of their nationality or culture, so that the same Euromover who speaks badly about the Americans can have an American friend, and can end up saying that of course you have to judge person by person.

In this sense I maintain that Euromovers generally show a high level of tolerance, cosmopolitanism and democratic spirit, and rather than of prejudices, I would speak of group-based judgements. Group-based judgements are constituted on the cultural distance between the two groups, the possible conflict history and the knowledge of each other culture [Goto and Chan, 2005]. They provide a good explanation of Euromovers distrust attitude towards certain cultures. Americans, for example, are considered to be Europeans counterparts: both are part of the Western world, but they represent to different and conflictual Western models. Muslim countries, more radically, are seen as historical enemies with a different culture, and sometimes are thought to lack of some principles that are fundamental in the European civilisation. These judgements, however, do not bring Euromovers to racist or xenophobic positions, but rather to cultural preferences: they feel more at ease with some cultures because the communication is more immediate; at the same time, they are afraid that with other cultures a major effort would be required in order to establish a dialogue.

11.3.2. Intercultural exchanges and Self

Euromovers, especially the interested-in-diversity ones, worry about having an effective cultural exchange when they meet a person from another country. In this sense, they claim that:

- a. there is a difference between travellers and people who live abroad and share their daily life with foreigners;
- b. moving abroad is not enough to learn about other cultures, for all depends on whether a person is available and able to learn or not;

The idea that originates these two claims is that a superficial contact with another culture is not enough to create the conditions for a real exchange: only staying with foreigners, and sharing an ordinary dimension with them, an individual discover the relativity of the social rules he has always given for granted. This confrontation requires an initial effort of tolerance: if the individual is closed to diversity, the confrontation will carry him to dogmatise his identity, instead of modifying it; on the contrary, if the individual is tolerant, that is, if he initially has faith in the idea that diversity does not represent a danger, he can trigger a virtuous circle in which he is more and more open to diversity, and more and more able to learn by cultural exchanges.

Tolerance is thus the presupposition to begin any intercultural exchange, and Euromovers seem not to lack it. They go further, showing an availability to face the difficulties that the communication with a stranger presents. Linguistic troubles are considered to be the most annoying, but also the funniest ones.

The lack of common cultural references, instead, on one side may produce an interesting exchange, but on the other side limits the communication. Therefore Euromovers may need to communicate with people from their country, because compatriots are the only ones with whom they can speak about certain issues (like national politics) in a certain way (with certain references that only people who grew up in the same country share).

Cultural differences represent the real challenge for Euromovers, and at the same time the most rewarding part of a cultural exchange, for they allow people not only to learn about the others, but also to learn about themselves. They show to the individual, in fact, that what for him is natural can be thought or done in many other ways: ideas, behaviours and habits cannot be given for granted anymore.

In this sense, intercultural exchanges push movers to an increase of their reflexivity, which provokes uncertainty and anomie: when the confidence in a habit falls, when ideas and behaviours that have always seemed natural suddenly appear to be fragile, all the certainties need to be confirmed through reflexion, or replaced by new ones. But the direct contact with the Other allows the Euromover to change, because in the moment he loses something, he also gains something. Through interpersonal relationships with people from other countries, in fact, the mover has the possibility to learn new ways of doing things, to discuss new ideas, to see and imitate new behaviours. In other words, I am affirming that intercultural exchanges produce a *dialectic process of mutual learning*. Therefore *reflexivity ceases to be an isolating, intimate mental activity, to become an action in process, a transformation that occurs in the daily life while doing something concrete*: while cooking, while discussing, while living together, etc. Thus reflexivity has not to be considered as a falling back of the Subject on himself while searching for the lost harmony of certainty, but rather as *a thrilling process of discovery and ripening*. And this is possible thanks to social interactions, which provide new solutions whenever they make pointless the oldest ones. *Only inside the social interaction the dialectic process of learning can take place*.

Exposing themselves to this process, *at the beginning Euromovers lose their certainties and experience a phase of disorientation; but this phase may help them to realise that they do not need certainties: in the moment they renounce to them and accept diversity, Euromovers have the possibility to become more free, more independent, more self-confident*. In my opinion, it is in this conquest that the reward of an intercultural exchange consists: it is a process of creative destruction which may bring to radical changes in people's attitude towards the new and the diverse.

11.3.3. Intercultural exchanges as a way to discover the Other

According to the results of the present research, Euromovers often get to the conclusion that meeting the Stranger produces changes in their own identity. This

brought me to say that cultural exchanges are useful to Euromovers to learn about themselves and to ripe as Subjects. In addition to this, when asked to explain why they want or they like to go abroad, Euromovers usually affirm that they do that “to learn about other cultures”. Is going abroad really useful in this sense? How deep is the intercultural exchange that Euromovers realise while abroad? Answers to this questions seem to lead to a quite different reality.

Firstly, any generalisation from a limited number of people may lead to warped impressions. Unless there is the possibility of an intense frequentation of a wide group of people from a specific country, it is hard to distinguish between personal and national features. In order to operate this distinction, the intensity of the relation is important: if it is superficial, it will only allow to explore superficial differences between the two actors involved in it, aspects like the diverse degrees of punctuality, or the different alimentary habits between two cultures.

Secondly, according to Euromovers themselves, expatriates do not reproduce faithfully their culture when abroad, but tend to adapt to the new situation, this way mitigating some of their national features for a more open to diversity attitude. Therefore, the more they are cosmopolite and ready to adapt, the more their national culture results shaded.

Consequently, the majority of intercultural interaction leads to nothing more but a general and imprecise notion of a different culture, that is, to a stereotyped image of the Other. This stereotyped image can be already existing, and thus reinforced, or created *ex novo*. In any case, if an individual meets foreigners only in a superficial way, that is, if an individual has not a broad and extensive experience of another culture, he will not be able to have a reliable knowledge of that culture: he can only gets an idea of some differences.

In my opinion, however, this result should not be underestimated, as even a superficial knowledge of another culture can constitute a basis for intercultural dialogue. Moreover, discovering alternative ways of doing and interpreting things, Euromovers become more tolerant and open-minded. It does not really matter if the stereotyped images resulting from the interaction is a negative one: as I have tried to show, both the critical and the non-critical cosmopolite approach adopted to meet

new people do not imply definitive closing positions. As some Euromovers clearly state, intercultural interactions may even not lead to a mutual comprehension, but through the contrast, through the disagreement, they favour the growth of one's democratic sense, that is, of individual ability to accept differences. Furthermore, the exercise of confrontation among people from different countries can lead interaction actors to improve their communication ability.

11.3.4. *The role of cultural differences while choosing companies*

In § 11.3.1 I have explained that Euromovers do not adopt individuals' nationality as a discriminating factor. At the same time, I briefly mentioned the fact that Euromovers may have nationality preferences. I will now go deeper in these considerations.

As seen, Euromovers usually declare that travelling is an opportunity to meet different people from other countries, what in their vision constitutes an enriching activity, as it allows them to discover other cultures. Curiously, Euromovers relegate the activity of meeting foreigners to their periods abroad and, with some exceptions, generally do not try to meet them in their own country. Some Euromovers come from small towns, where the presence of strangers is limited, so they do not have the possibility to meet foreigners. But also among those who live in capital cities there is a low level of activism orientated towards meeting foreigners, like participating in international students organisations.

A sound explanation seems to be that they do not make a real effort to meet foreigners because, having in their city an already established network of long time friends, they do not need them. If we accept this explanation, then we can come to the conclusion that *what is really important is not having international friends, but just having friends. As Euromovers do not see national identity as a discriminating factor at the time of choosing their ties, when abroad they naturally establish relationships also with people from other countries*: having English as a common communication language, they have no reason to avoid intercultural relationships.

The interest in intercultural exchanges does not necessarily bring Euromovers to international friendships, but just to superficial intercultural relationships. International friendships among Euromovers rather seem to be based on factors like the presence of an opportunity drive, the sharing of cultural interests, a similar education level, the sharing of an important experience, the creation of an emotive link based on mutual liking or on reciprocal support.

This conclusion is supported by an empirical evidence come out in the present research: the existence of a division between expatriates and Belgians. As the analysis of the interviews clearly shows, an Expat in Brussels may live, work, study and have fun practically without any contact with Belgians. An Expat may spend years in Brussels always remaining inside the Expats community, and this kind of behaviour is socially approved among Expats. Expats often do not even do the effort to learn French or Flemish. We can expect this result to be generalisable to all places where there is a big expatriate community. For example, it is common knowledge that Erasmus students normally remain inside the Erasmus community, and have little contact with people from the country they moved to.

If we believe in Euromovers declarations about their strong interest in meeting other cultures, we are not able to explain why they do not establish a deep intercultural exchange with their host country citizens, but rather get to the point to avoid the contact with them and refuse to learn their language. On the contrary, if we accept the idea that Euromovers establish their interpersonal relationships on the basis of their personal interests or of their opportunity orientation, the separation between Expats and Belgians appears clear. In fact, the two main reasons brought by Euromovers to explain why they do not search for a deeper integration with Belgians are:

- a. the fact that Belgians and Expats are different communities, with different interests and cultural orientations, diverse goals and separate environments;
- b. the idea that, spending the Expats a limited amount of time in Brussels, the effort to break the wall between the two communities and cultivate the relationship is not worthy.

Behind these explanations, there is an implicit assumption: Expats have more in common with other Expats than with Belgians, and it is thus easier to establish a relation inside the Expats community than outside. Therefore, Expats do not avoid Belgians because they do not like the Belgian culture, but rather because *they do not share the same everyday life*.

The same argument helps to understand the apparent contradiction between the fact that Expats do not choose their companies according to nationality preferences, and the fact that at the same time their choices present nationality preferences. According to the results of this research, and considering that interviewees show no evidence of a tendency to prefer people from their own country or from countries with a very similar culture, *nationality preferences are not the results of narrow-mindedness or intolerance towards certain cultures, but just of contingent conditions*. Contingent conditions can make it easier to establish a relation with people from a certain country rather than from others. These conditions are of three kinds:

1. if the Euromover finds in the host country friends from his own country or from previous experiences abroad, he will probably stay with them, no matter their nationality.
2. Being abroad, that is, in a condition of increased uncertainty and difficulty, the Euromover is likely to establish relationships which present a certain degree of control and uncertainty reduction. In this sense, he will probably stay with people coming from those countries that he knows better, or whose culture he feels close to his own. For example, Scandinavians have similar languages, a similar lifestyle and common cultural references, so it is easy for them to communicate and understand each other. Spanish and Italians are another example: they have a similar culture and tend to mix together. If the Euromover in previous experiences abroad learnt about cultures different from his own, he can easily stay with people from those cultures. This is the case, for example, of the Czech interviewee, who spent some years in South America and Spain, has a Spanish boyfriend and in Brussels stays with a

Spanish group. Having a good knowledge of certain languages, of course, may be fundamental in determining which peoples one feels more at ease with.

3. Much depends on who the Euromover gets in contact with: he may work with people only from certain states, and not others; he can find an apartment to share where people from certain countries are already living, etc. In this cases, the Euromover has no choice about the people with whom he will spend the most of his time, but he can choose the ones he likes more and pass from a weak to a strong tie with them.

Finally, staying *mainly* with people of a certain nationality does not mean staying *exclusively* with them: Euromovers may *tend* to stay with people from a certain country or group of countries because it is easier for them, or because the most of the people they meet are from there, but then they can have a very good friend from a totally different culture, even from outside Europe.

This set of reasons explains why the majority of the interviewees stay with people from the Western world: they do not do that on purpose, it just happens by chance. Brussels's Expats community is mainly composed by Europeans, with a minority of people from the U.S., Canada and Australia, as well as from Japan. Consequently, it is easier to get in contact with these nationalities rather than with people, for example, from the Middle East or from the South of Asia. Nevertheless, those interviewee who had the possibility to meet people from North Africa, India, Singapore, etc. did not avoid them, but rather established ties of various intensity with them. So, for example, the Spanish interviewee met people from Asia, North Africa and South America at the master she was following in Brussels; despite the fact that it was the first time that she met people from outside Europe, her master colleagues became friends of hers.

11.4 Identity, identities

11.4.1. Identity transformations

During the Renaissance the humanistic idea that the journey leads to a moral improvement had been contrasted by the identification of the journey with a subversive activity and of the traveller with a liar, as he had the possibility, and in many situations he was obliged for his safety, to hide his social position, his wealth, his destination, his origin, his religion or his nationality [Leed, 1992]. Also in this research some interviewees describe the experience of going abroad as *a possibility for the Subject to present himself in a different way*: as no one knows him, no one expects him to be in a certain, specific way. Consequently, the Subject has the freedom to transform his identity without being judged for it.

As I noticed in § 4.1, it is possible to recognise two dimensions in the concept of “personal identity”: the “factual identity”, which indicates what a person thinks he is, and the “value identity”, which indicates what a person would like to be. Taking into account the shift that may exist between these dimensions, it is necessary to differentiate two types of identity transformation³:

- a. a *self-driven transformation*, that leads to a new identity which the individual assumes in order to present himself in a different way with respect to what he does in his local environment; the self-driven resulting identity can be more genuine, more in line with what the individual really feels he is, or on the contrary more artificial, more set in order to appear in a better way; this transformation can be conscious or unconscious;
- b. a *hetero-driven transformation*, that leads to inner changes in the sphere of personal attitudes towards diversity; this transformation is mostly

³ I remind that in this work I adopted a definition of identity as *cultural* identity. This means that I do not consider a psychological concept of personal identity. Therefore, I do not take into account personality transformations, like the one that may happen in an individual who always lived with his parents, and going abroad starts to live alone for the first time.

unconscious, at least at the beginning, and is the result of a personal elaboration of an external cultural stimulation.

Self-driven transformations affect individual behaviour and are the consequence of individual biographies. An example of self-driven transformation is the one of those Brussels' Expats who depict themselves as professionally oriented in order to adhere to Expats professional subculture.

In this research, I will exclusively take into consideration hetero-driven transformations.

11.4.2. Cultural diversity and identity changes

According to some theorists, going abroad and meeting people from other cultures, individuals pass through an experience of re-definition of their inner social rules and symbolic knowledge. As Melucci [1991] states, travelling produces a twofold results: on one side, it offers a symbolic knowledge through the discover of the world; on the other side, it obliges to an operative knowledge, acquired because of the (new) proves that the individual has to pass through in a different environment. Leed underlines that “the benefits and transformations of a journey have their origin in a loss”⁴: the journey deprives the traveller of associations, certainties, identities, obliging him to think again what he used to consider obvious. At the same time, this re-thinking activity shows him new solutions to old problems. This is what makes a journey a difficult experience at the beginning, but an enriching experience if the individual does not totally close himself in his own culture, using it as a sort of shell.

The results of the present research confirm these hypothesis. Travelling, by itself, is necessary but not sufficient to make an individual more cosmopolite. The simple fact of moving might not change, or might not change significantly, an individual: all depends on whether he is able to renounce to his certainties and is available to learn something. If he is, he can be deeply enriched by a travel, often without knowing it, just in an unconscious ripening process.

⁴ “I benefici e le trasformazioni del viaggio hanno alla propria origine una perdita” [Leed, 1992: 324; my translation].

Moving abroad, in fact, an individual discovers a new country, and has the possibility to see other places as well (for example, being in Brussels it is easy to go to Amsterdam, Paris, London, Luxembourg, etc., and the most of the expatriates travel frequently to the bordering countries). While abroad, a mover may not fully fulfil his study or work objectives: an Erasmus student, for instance, is thought not go abroad to improve his studies. Nevertheless, he has the possibility to learn transversal abilities, like the capacity to adapt or the ability to face journey difficulties. He also becomes more tolerant towards other cultures and flexible, as well as more self-confident and ready to cope with uncertainty (for example, the uncertainty of a temporary job). In this sense, a work experience abroad is seen also as some sort of vocational training that integrates individuals' qualifications, highly improving their *curricula vitae*. Moreover, during his permanence abroad an individual can get useful contacts, either of personal or professional type, which increase his social capital and can be later used as support while organising further periods abroad. Consequently, the more an individual is able to take advantage of his permanence abroad, both by learning skills and creating contacts, the more he will find easy to leave again.

It is evident that, to trigger this virtuous circle, a first positive attitude towards the positive and the negative sides of a journey is needed. The more individuals have this attitude, the more they are likely to leave and then to leave again. This is confirmed by the fact that people who move to another country are seen as likely to be curious, interested in diversity, open minded, tolerant, able to adapt, emphatic towards the difficulties of other travellers and more skilled in foreign languages.

Concerning cultural interactions, the contact with foreigners is thought to lead individuals to learn about themselves and about the place they come from. As seen in § 11.3, at a personal level individuals can become more open-minded and can develop a democratic spirit. Respect to their national identity, individuals may become more critical about it, more aware of its up and downsides. Once again, the precondition to this transformation is that the individual does not totally close himself in his national culture. If he does not, he may progressively change some

features in his national identity, refusing part of his culture in such a way that he may even find difficult to accept his compatriots, unless they have been living abroad for long too.

In practical terms, at an identity level becoming more cosmopolite implies gaining much but also losing much: *people gain the ability to stay with people from other countries, but become more intolerant towards their own country idiosyncrasies.*

11.4.3. Identity layers and Euromovers' identity

In traditional migrations emigrants are divided between the loyalty to their origin identity and the acquisition of the host country identity. The origin identity normally prevails, unless a total adherence to the acquired identity is considered as a status symbol, as a sign of integration in a culture which is considered superior. Generally speaking in traditional migration a “or” logic is adopted: “I am either Italian or German, either Algerian or French”. At the second or third generation the two identities start to be mixed, and a person who is integrated in the host country discover again his roots. When this happens, an “and” logic is adopted: “I am an Italo-American, I am an Algerian born and living in France, or I am a French Algerian”. The “or” logic implies two monolayer identities in conflict, while the “and” logic implies a multilayer identity, composed by different layers which coexist, even though to some extent they can be conflictual.

Does it happen the same in high level migrations? The findings of this research allows me to reply in a negative way.

Euromovers do not face the same choice between an “or” and an “and” logic as traditional migrants, for three reasons: firstly, normally they are not compelled to move, but rather choose to do it, so they can be occasionally homesick, or even nostalgic about their country, but do not need to exacerbate their national culture features; secondly, they normally are abroad for limited periods, so they do not need to renounce to their national culture; thirdly, they are high educated and usually able

to reject any presumed power differential between the origin and the host cultures. At the same time, I have noticed in § 11.4.2 that living in a foreign country may produce changes in cultural identity. Consequently, what may happen is that the origin country identity becomes weaker, while some features of other identities are absorbed.

In order to better analyse the identity transformations that can happen to an Euromover through an experience abroad, I will now propose a systematization of the different identity types of identity based on the different cases encountered among the interviewees. The table 11.7 illustrates this model, which is useful to illustrate how cultural identity can be distributed according to some factors, like its intensity and the object it focuses on (one or more states, one or more geographical areas).

monolayer (or)		multilayer (and)						
		horizontal		vertical				
defensive	consolatory	dominant	shifting	local	regional	national	multi-national	global

Table 11.7: Identity types

The *monolayer identity*, based on the “or” logic, can be of two kinds:

- a. *defensive*: a strong exclusive national or local identity; in its highest degrees, it can manifest itself in nationalistic and xenophobic positions;
- b. *consolatory*: a weak identity that arises when the individual is abroad, as an element of self-definition; it is based on a banal nationalism⁵, which manifests itself in outward behaviours, like supporting the national soccer team; it normally arises when the person goes abroad.

The *multilayer identity*, based on the “and” logic, can be of seven kinds, distributed in two main categories:

⁵ Billig, M., *Banal Nationalism*, London, Sage, 1995, cited in Szerszynski and Urry, 2002.

1. *horizontal*: two identities of the same geographical level that live together;
 - c. *dominant*: a prevailing identity is mixed with some features of another identity; for example, a person born and grown up in France, but with one German parent, can define himself a French with an important German component;
 - d. *shifting*: a double national identity; having more identities, each one felt as equally important, the individual skips from one to another; for example, a Romanian citizen emigrated to Belgium, who feels Romanian in Romania and Belgian in Belgium;
2. *vertical*: two or more identities of different geographical level that live together;
 - e. *local*: covers all the levels of the locality (village, town, sub-regional geographical area) up to the regional level;
 - f. *regional*: covers the administrative regional level. In some cases it is ambiguous, for example it is not clear if Cataluña has to be considered as a regional or a national identity; moreover, regions are not uniform internally; Italian regions, for instance, are divided by a number of parochialisms;
 - g. *national*: corresponds to the identification with a nation state;
 - h. *multinational*: for example the Scandinavian identity, the European identity, the Western identity;
 - i. *global*: corresponds to the perception that human beings are human beings everywhere, and that cultural differences are weaker than the commonality created by human dignity and human universal values and rights.

On the basis of this model, it is now possible to analyse what kind of identity Euromovers show to feel. As seen in § 10.1:

- a. only a minority of the interviewees have a local identity: they either have a strong national identity or a multinational identity; this results allows to

- believe, generalising, that *Euromovers' global horizon reduces the importance of locality in their self-perception*;
- b. more than a third of the interviewees have a multilayer identity, even though one of these layers may be stronger than the others; in the most of the cases, this multilayer identity is multinational (national + European), but in some cases it is shifting (national + national);
 - c. the interviewees from the East of Europe (with one exception) show a tendency to have exclusively a national identity;
 - d. half of the interviewees feel to some extent a European identity, but with important differences in its nature and intensity;
 - e. only three respondents declare to be citizen of the world: the “global” identity is not widespread, neither as a multilayer identity.

Generalising from these results, it is possible to affirm that Euromovers present two contradictory tendencies:

1. a monolayer identity, usually a national one (only one interviewee identifies with his region rather than with its state), prevails. In these cases, it seems that the Euromover has very clear who he is and where he is from, and that *this very defined identity becomes a source of certainty* to him. Such a position is obviously accompanied by a rejection of the European identity, sometimes by the assumption of strong defensive positions. This tendency especially affects the people from Eastern Europe. The fact that Eastern countries have been members only for a limited time respect to Western countries can explain this tendency: there, a European tradition has been affirming only in the last years, and there is still little coincidence between the enthusiasm for the European project and the European identity adoption. Europe, in fact, is broadly seen more as a source of economic opportunities than as an ideal;
2. a multilayer identity is used to combine different and sometimes conflicting identities. In these cases, Euromovers solve the problem of loyalty to the origin or to the host country by adopting an “and” logic: some Euromovers

shift from an identity to another one, others feel more than one belonging, and others use broad labels, like the European one, to define themselves in addition to their national identity. These tendency especially affects the people from the South of Europe.

An interesting notion that arises from this analysis is the reconciliation of a defensive monolayer identity with a cosmopolite attitude of openness towards strangers. Euromovers may have a defined identity and at the same time be interested in other identities. As seen in § 11.4.2, the contact with other cultures realised with an openness attitude leads to an identity change. Therefore it is true that Euromovers claim to have a national identity, but this identity inevitably changes during the time. For example, the Lithuanian interviewee lived in Italy for some years before she moved to Brussels and married a Spanish. She defines herself as Lithuanian, but at the same time she admits that she would find difficult to go back to her country. This means that, even though she still perceive herself as Lithuanian, her *way* to be such has changed. This means that even a monolayer identity is not stable and immutable; on the contrary, it can be lived and perceived in different ways during the lifetime.

Another important conclusion supported by the collected data is that, no matter which identity a person chooses, *everyone needs to belong to one place*, making of it his home. Those interviewees who have not a precise identity make a great effort to define themselves by recognising in something: those who do not have a precise national identity, for example, recognise in all the places where they have been, or recognise in a more inclusive identity, like the European or the Western one. Therefore, it seems that cultural identity is necessary for self-definition and even for self-perception. None of the interviewees is satisfied with an exclusive global belonging, that is, with the idea that he is just a human being. Some interviewees mention the fact that they are citizen of their nation, which is part of Europe, which is part of the world, but they always go from the smallest to the biggest: they are from their state, *then* they are from Europe and are citizen of the world. Mariás writes:

There is not a *purely* human reality, undifferentiated, to which you add at a certain point a difference. This is definitely a false scheme [...]. There is nothing in the human that is just human, undifferentiated, neutral⁶.

He follows a famous Joseph de Maistre claiming:

“In the course of my life”, he said, “I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, etc.; I even know, thanks to Montesquieu, that one can be a Persian. But as for man, I declare that I have never met him in my life; if he exists, he is unknown to me”. Maistre’s observation provides the basis for sociology [Ossewaarde, 2007: 367].

If we accept this position, it is not just that everyone *needs* to be defined by a number of characteristics, among which the provenience is an essential one, but also that everyone *is* defined by a number of characteristics. As the majority of the individuals come from a place, and are defined by this provenience, it seems that those who do not have a marked and immediately recognisable identity create their own one. This way they identify a place that they recognise as their *home*, they choose their home.

In this sense, I can affirm that *identity*, in a postmodern way (see Chapter 3), *is the result of a choice*. Identity can be modelled, can be adapted to individual self-definition exigencies during the time and according to the space or the cultural environment one is in. So everyone is from somewhere, but to define this where is a personal decision.

11.4.4. European identity

As noticed in § 10.1 and in the previous subchapter, European identity plays an important role in Euromovers self-definition. Nevertheless, the expression “European identity” hides a variety of different positions and meanings, which need to be made plain.

⁶ “No hay una realidad *meramente* humana, indiferenciada, a la cual se le añade en cierto momento una diferencia. Este es un esquema absolutamente falso [...]. No hay nada en lo humano que sea simplemente humano, indiferenciado, neutro” [Marías, 1980: 157; my translation].

In § 2.2 I differentiated the identification in the European Union as supra-national political entity from the identification in a cultural historic European identity. The results of this analysis confirms the necessity of such a differentiation. The European Union is usually seen as an important unifying project that has lights and shadows, but which overall contributes to a general progress of the countries that take part in it. The European identity, on the contrary, is sometimes perceived as an artificial construction. What is interesting is that the same people who believe in the European Union may be sceptical about the European identity. Therefore there is a difference between *EU supporters* and *Europeans*, whereas the firsts manifest sympathy for the European political project, and the seconds feel to some degree that they belong to the EU.

But there are also differences in the way one can be European. As noticed in 10.2, *Europeans may define themselves as such on the basis of three different processes*:

1. they can feel European in comparison with other continental cultures; in this case, the fact of being European is used as an *opposition* identity, often in defensive positions against cultures somehow perceived as very different (like the Muslim one or the American one). The statement that describes this position is: “I am European because I am not like them”.
2. They can feel European on the basis of the recognition of similarities which are common to all European states; in this sense, the individual feels he *belongs* to Europe. The sentence that resumes this position is: “I am proud to be European because I recognise myself in this society and in this values”.
3. They can feel European because they do not fully recognise in a single national culture; in this sense, the European identity is used to *fill* the weakness of less inclusive identity layers. This process is observed in those people who have been living in different states since they were children. The sentence that resumes this position is: “I am European because I am not anything else”.

Concerning the European belonging, normally this identity is multilayer, that is, presents itself together with other identities, like the national one. In some cases, however, people claim that they are exclusively European citizens, that is, they declare that they adopt the European identity as monolayer. Nevertheless, I have shown that these cases are doubtful. I believe that this kind of affirmation is either the effect of living in a very multicultural environment, or the manifestation of a strong enthusiasm for the European political project. The people who declare to be Europeans rather than anything else see this identity as a status symbol, as a way to show their cosmopolitanism and their international orientation. I would define this external Europeanism with the word *Europolitism*.

Considering also the EU supporters, and ordering the ways of being European according to their intensity, I obtain a EU identity typology which has to be considered as a continuum (table 11.8):

type	<i>EU supporting</i>	<i>opposition</i>	<i>belonging</i>	<i>filling</i>
dimension	political	cultural	cultural	cultural
intensity	very weak	weak	strong	very strong

Table 11.8: European identity types

The existence of these four ways of being Europeans (five, if we include *Europolitism*) shows a complex scenario that the quantitative research about European identity, like *Eurobarometer*'s, fails to survey. What still seems to be weak in the creation of a European identity is the definition of those cultural, historic, political and geographical similarities that would define a European and would allow EU Member States citizens to recognise themselves as Europeans. Using the terminology I introduced here, the feeling of *belonging* to Europe is still without a basis.

The introduction of symbols like the European flag or the European passport have been determinant in creating a European identity that is like an empty shell which overlaps the national identities. This empty shell is perfect for those who have a weak national identity, and are able to *fill* this gap through an adherence to a broader identity. But many of those who have a defined local or national identity perceive the European identity not as a further layer that they can add to the existing ones, but rather as a new monolayer identity which is supposed to replace their monolayer national identity. To say it differently, I have shown that there are people with monolayer and people with multilayer identities. Those who already have a multilayer identity find it easier to add a new layer. On the contrary, those who, for their mentality, have a monolayer identity, feel an external pressure to substitute their existing identity with the European one. It is thus obvious that they resist to this imposition by closing themselves more and more in their existing local or national identity. Even Euromovers, who present a high degree of cosmopolitanism, tolerance and broad-mindedness, often protect their local or national identity. To break this cycle it is necessary to clarify what *culturally* Europeans have in common, because, as I will show in the next subchapter, the notion of Europe is still very vague to EU citizens.

At the light of the different identity types illustrated in § 11.4.3 and § 11.4.4, it is possible to create a matrix (figure 11.2) that organises identities according to two dimensions: intensity and number of layers.

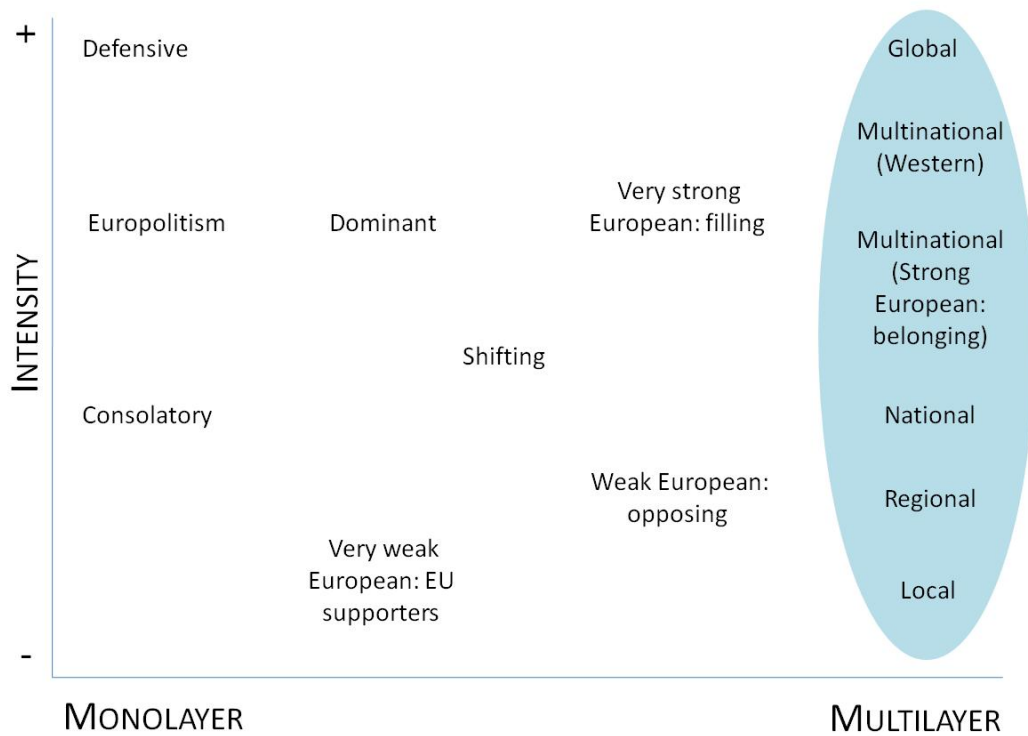


Figure 11.2: Identity types according to intensity and mono/multi dimension

11.4.5. One Europe, many Europe

What do Europeans have in common? For the Western interviewees history and culture are the most frequent replies, together with the European Union policy. For the Eastern interviewees it is more difficult to find common aspects, and this confirms the weakness of their European identity.

Nevertheless, the results of the present research show that *the idea of Europe is a confused mix of many dimensions, without a clear conception of what really defines it*. This is quite serious, considering that the interviewees are all high educated people, usually keen in EU affairs and international relations. Only in a couple of cases the idea of a cultural root that develops from the Greeks and the Romans comes out, and only in three cases religion and philosophy are mentioned. No reference is

done, even in discursive terms, to the humanistic anthropocentric ideas or to the development of the Western philosophical and political thought.

Moreover for many interviewees what Europeans have in common changes according to the adopted perspective: if we look at Europe from outside the EU, like an American could do, or a European if comparing Europe with another continent, then we see that Europeans do have enough in common as to represent a specific cultural model in the global scenario; but if we look at Europe from inside the EU, like a European citizen could do, focusing on the reality of the different states, then we discover deep cultural differences. For example, one of the Finnish interviewee, as well as the Irish interviewee, feel that they have more in common with a North American than with a Spanish or a Greek.

The figure 11.3 shows interviewee different positions respect to what Europeans have in common, according to the adopted perspective.

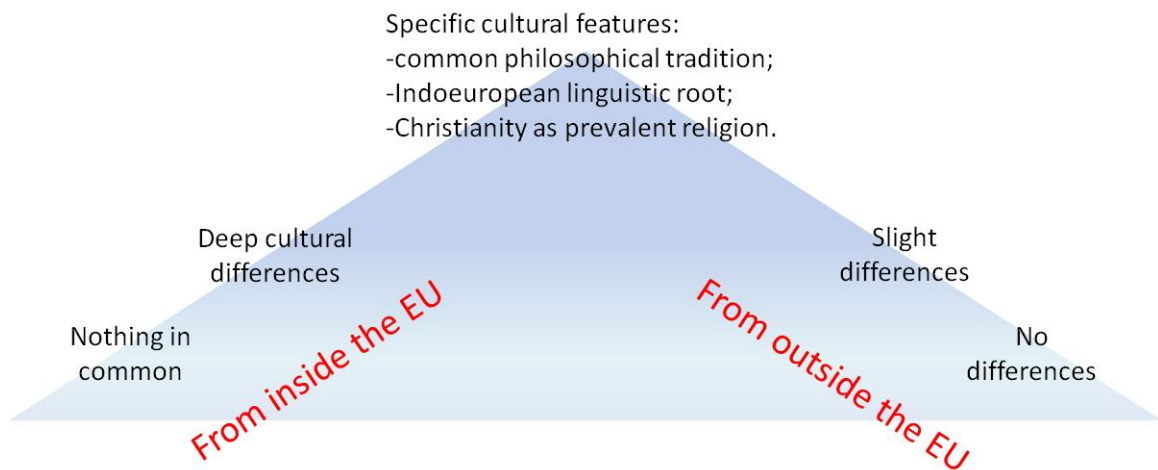


Figure 11.3: Perception of the differences among the Europeans from inside and outside the EU

From inside the EU differences are important, up to the point that some interviewees affirm that Europeans have nothing in commons. On the contrary, from outside the EU European peoples do not present differences or present just slight differences.

Adopting an internal perspective, it is possible to throw light on the differences that separates the European peoples. Interviewees tend to group European people into broad geographical areas:

- South of Europe (Portugal, Spain, Italy, Malta, Greece, Cyprus);
- Northern and Central Europe (France, Belgium, Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Denmark, Luxembourg, Ireland, United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland, Norway);
- East of Europe (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova).

Interviewees are aware that this broad generalisation does not follow rigorously states' borders, as there are strong regional differences inside states: for example, a French living in Provence might be considered from the South of Europe. Moreover, some states are difficult to collocate. Poland, for example, sometimes is considered by some interviewees as an Eastern country, and by others as a Central country. In addition to this, there is a great variability from person to person, so that an Italian may be cold and a Norwegian very open. These limits considered, it is possible to compare the three broad areas according to *shared stereotypes*, which give an idea of the *perceived* differences among them (table 11.9):

Geographical Area Dimension	North and Centre	South	East
tendency to return to the home country after few years abroad	very high	low	high
availability to move abroad	low	high	high when possible
speak English...	well	badly	badly
tend to stay in group	no	yes	no
need time to establish a friendship	yes	no	it depends on the country
are open	no	yes	it depends on the country
in their relations are direct, they say what they think	yes	no	yes
degree of nationalism	low	high	very high
tend to have a multinational identity	yes (only Scandinavian countries)	yes (European identity in addition to national identity)	no, but tend to recognise strong similarities among Eastern countries

Table 11.9: Perceived differences among European geographical areas

In this differentiation the political dimension (the states) is secondary to cultural dimensions. Also the geographical dimension is not taken into account (the Baltic Republics are grouped in the Eastern countries rather than in the Northern ones). The sole important dimension is culture, which influences the behaviour of the people who live in a conceptualised area.

It must be noticed that people from the East have a clear opinion about Western Europeans, while the seconds are accused to have a very limited knowledge of the Eastern countries, often based on old stereotypes. Moreover, *Eastern countries are often perceived as second class states, and their citizen complain that they receive a different treatment* respect to richest countries citizens.

11.4.6. *Citizens of the world: globalisation and cosmopolitanism*

In § 9.2.3 I have noticed that a minority of Expats show a superiority complex towards Belgians. Some Expats may feel superior because they believe that they constitute a power élite, committed to the European Union functioning; this explanation may be true, but it is not completely satisfactory, as Belgians as well are in the EU institutions.

Analysing the quotations reported in § 9.2.3, what really comes out is a strong differentiations between the movers and the locals, which are considered as “normal people”, “average people”. Such a differentiation is only understandable thinking to what Bauman [1998] has been strongly affirming: mobility across borders acts as a new form of social or cultural capital that enshrines new divisions among classes and individuals. On the basis of this theory, movers would be better than locals because mobility is seen as an activity that raises the social status. Evidently, behind this idea there is the implicit conviction that by moving an individual becomes a better person. From the locals point of view, in fact, the mover is seen as someone able to leave the security of the locality, of the well known, to take the challenge of a new and different environment. From the mover point of view, going abroad is an opportunity to ripe as a person, to become more open-minded and to learn many new abilities.

At the same time, some interviewees underlined that not all the people are able to change while abroad, as many movers close in their own identity: it depends on move's attitude towards diversity if he will become a better person or not. Then a question remains open: what is this characteristic that allows some people to positively change while abroad, but not others? In this subchapter I will try to reply to this question.

Sennett [1998] counters stable local workers with mobile (often as interim) cosmopolitan managers, saying that the seconds oblige the firsts to move to new places, this way breaking their social network and transforming them in strangers. I agree with this description of the professional reality, but not with Sennett's idea of cosmopolitans. Sennett describes them as beyond social relationships: as they are not

limited by local or national restraints, they would not need neighbours and colleagues, which they consider as an inconvenient source of social control. The results of this research confirm these ideas. Euromovers enthusiastically experience the freedom of re-moulding their identity when moving abroad, and this can only be explained by saying that they get rid of the social control they were subjected in their homeland. Moreover, they do not mix with the locals, which in Brussels are meant to be the Belgians, but remain in their own enclave. Of course, this does not mean that they do not need social relationships: their opportunity-driven attitude is the evidence that they *need* them to set their professional career. A manager is such *thanks to* his opportunity-driven relationships, and not just because of his global horizon. Moreover, I showed that when abroad everyone needs to establish his own social network, in order to give a sense to his experience and to the new place. So cosmopolitans are strangers as well, even though they are endowed with high adaptation skills.

Sennett implicitly adopts a conception of cosmopolitanism as detachment from the local, from the group life, from the particular experience, in favour of a fusion with the universal. Moreover, he takes out from this conception the sense of empathy with mankind that would characterise such a world citizen, highlighting exclusively his adaptation ability, the fact that he would not need any geographical or social reference. Sennett's cosmopolitan is somehow an isolated and egoist individual interested in his business more than in people. Once again, I do think that we can attribute the quality of cosmopolitanism to such a man, but in the very restricted sense that he moves from a country to another for business sake.

Globalisation literature [for example Heller, 1994] often describes, with a tone of surprise, what Sennett calls cosmopolitans, that is, those professionals who are in constant movement from a continent to another. In order to have the impression to feel at home wherever they are, they remain in Western enclaves, in five stars hotels with international cuisine. When asked about how they can manage such a wandering life, they proudly affirm that they feel at home everywhere. Are these people real cosmopolitans, or rather what air companies call *frequent flyers*? In more general terms I have already raised this question in § 9.2.4: is it more cosmopolite to stay

with people from different countries, and only with them, in a standardised international environment, or to be able to settle down in every country, mixing with local people and making the new place one's own home? The cosmopolitan definitions arisen in the present research help me in answering this question.

As I stated in my theoretical remarks, the word *cosmopolitanism* is used in this work in its more general meaning of doctrine that refuses territorial and political divisions in favour of the human being right to define himself a citizen of the world [Riciperati, 2006]. Nevertheless, this general meaning can be declined in several ways. When asked about what a citizen of the world is, interviewees referred to some dimensions:

- the degree of his national identity with respect to his global spirit;
- his mobility level;
- his ability to adapt to places;
- his capacity to create a syncretic culture.

Moreover, when asked about what is common to highly mobile people, interviewees indicated:

- will to leave home to take new challenges by travelling;
- capacity to travel and to face hitches, adaptability; better knowledge of languages;
- empathy for other travellers' difficulties;
- respect for or interest in diversity; broadmindedness.

Overall, these dimensions are in line with the ones surveyed by Szerszynski and Urry [2002], according to which

Cosmopolitan predispositions and practices involve some or all of:

- extensive mobility in which people have the right to 'travel' corporeally, imaginatively and virtually and for significant numbers they also have the means to so travel;
- the capacity to consume many places and environments en route;
- a curiosity about many places, peoples and cultures and at least a rudimentary ability to locate such places and cultures historically, geographically and anthropologically;
- a willingness to take risks by virtue of encountering the 'other';
- an ability to 'map' one's own society and its culture in terms of a historical and geographical knowledge, to have some ability to reflect upon and judge aesthetically between different natures, places and societies;

- semiotic skill to be able to interpret images of various others, to see what they are meant to represent, and to know when they are ironic;
- an openness to other peoples and cultures and a willingness/ability to appreciate some elements of the language/culture of the 'other'[Szerszynski and Urry, 2002: 470].

Szerszynski and Urry do not try to come to a definition of cosmopolitan, what would be difficult, given the number and heterogeneity of the dimensions considered. The way these dimensions mix together, in fact, can produce different results. Interviewees as well provided a number of different definitions of citizen of the world, which I grouped under four main labels:

1. *fashionable mover*: someone who pretends to be cosmopolitan and describes himself as such, but he is just the citizen of a richer country who can take advantage of global inequality;
2. *globalised citizen*: a citizen of a globalised world where frontiers, due to globalisation, have lost their separation power, and events repercussions weighs over the entire planet population; in this sense, everybody is a citizen of the world, as we are all interconnected and share the same risks;
3. *moving cosmopolitan*: an intensive traveller, able to settle down in every place and either to adapt to different cultures or to mix them with his own;
4. *moral cosmopolitan*: an individual who is emphatic with every human being and who may work for the benefit of the planet.

Apparently, the closest definition to the idea of a professional frequent flyer is the third one, the moving cosmopolitan one, but there is an important difference between the two concepts: while a professional frequent flyer, displacing from an international hotel to another, is escaping from cultural differences, a moving cosmopolitan is someone who settles down and adapts in different cultural environments by *mixing* with the local culture. The label that better defines professional frequent flyers is the first one: they are fashionable cosmopolitans. They think they are cosmopolitans just because they travel the world, but actually they remain in the same place, or better, in the same kind of place, that is, the branch of a multinational company, or the standard room of a Western chain hotel. These are the

people that Sennett refers to: professionals who do not need to settle down, who are there without being there, always ready to move elsewhere. As they do not belong to the place and its community, as they are detached from the local lifestyle and way of working, they can operate as to fragment the locality and to break the cohesion of working social relations (for example the cohesion among factory workers).

Fashionable movers are not considered to be real cosmopolitans, because they lack what I will call the *cosmopolitanism ethos*. The best example of fashionable mover probably is the tourist who goes to an exotic country to remain confined inside a Western style holiday village: he takes into consideration the whole world for his holidays, but he displaces without really changing place, and establishing a very superficial contact with the local reality.

The concept of *global horizon*, which I introduced at the beginning of this Chapter, is here very useful to distinguish between cosmopolitanism ethos and availability to take a chance wherever in the world. Fashionable movers are somehow globalised people, able to move in a global scale, thus they have a global horizon, but this is not enough to define them cosmopolitans. At the light of this differentiation between people with a global horizon and cosmopolitans, we are now able to answer to my previous question: is it more cosmopolite to stay with people from different countries in an international environment or to be able to settle down in every country, mixing with local people? The ability to travel and to interact in an international environment is necessary but not sufficient to define a cosmopolitan, as Szerszynski and Urry's cited list of cosmopolitan practices implicitly suggests. Not all the people, of course, are able to reach such a high degree of international mobility, so that it is important to underline international travellers' global orientation, and I do this by saying that they have a global horizon. In this sense, Sennett is right in highlighting the fact that the top managers he talks about present a high level of mobility. According to the perspective I am carrying on in this work, however, it would be a mistake to confuse mobility and cosmopolitanism. A cosmopolitan has something more than a mover: an ethos which is based on values able to direct his behaviour and his attitude towards the Other.

The *globalised citizen* reflects the idea of Beck's [2003; 2007] necessary cosmopolitanism: people do not chose to be citizens of the world, they *must* become such, as cooperation at a global level is the only way to solve global problems, perfectly exemplified by the ecologic matter. The problem is that being a globalised citizen does not correspond to being a cosmopolitan globalised citizen. In this sense, Beck is making a praiseworthy effort to transform the cosmopolitan ethical ideal in a positive political base for transnational cooperation. Nevertheless, theoretically he is confusing (on purpose) the cosmopolitan ethos with a political necessity of global cooperation. But global cooperation might be reached in other ways, for example adopting the economic idea that cooperation is the more rational and convenient behaviour to maximise everybody's benefit. So, even though it is desirable that a globalised citizen develops a cosmopolitan attitude, this is a result that cannot be given for granted.

In order to clarify what the cosmopolitanism ethos is about, we have to analyse the other two definitions.

In the image of *moving cosmopolitan* mobility has a primary role: in this meaning, a cosmopolitan is someone who travels a lot and to many places, also to those ones which are very different from his own. What really defines him as a cosmopolitan, however, is not the fact of travelling, but rather the fact of being able to adapt to different cultures, up to the point of absorbing different cultural traits and integrating them in his own culture. This definition implicitly recalls the cultural interpretation abilities mentioned by Szerszynski and Urry [2002].

The fact that mobility is considered important in this definition suggests that moving abroad is necessary to establish intercultural contacts. This implies that one cannot have a really deep experience of a different culture remaining in his own country. On the contrary, a real cosmopolitan is the one who immerses himself in a different culture, changing his lifestyle in consequence of the adaptation to a new place.

It must be noted that a moving cosmopolitan, *before* his ability to travel or to adapt, needs to be interested in doing so. Thus what really defines him is *his attitude*

towards diversity. A moving cosmopolitan is interested in and open to diversity, and *because of this* he is able to mix with the locals and to partially change his identity.

The *moral cosmopolitan* is the type of individual who reflects the most ideal conception of cosmopolitanism, that is, the vision of the world as one only nation. In this sense, its realisation is considered by the interviewees as an utopia. Nevertheless, there are individuals who have such a high degree of tolerance and openness as to be able to be emphatic with any stranger, or, to say it differently, to reduce strangers' strangeness. In this sense, a moral cosmopolitan does not make any distinction, while meeting another person, regarding his nationality.

Moreover, there are some individuals who, being *globalised citizens*, that is, realising that we all live in a world of interconnections, and at the same time feeling a moral duty towards all the global citizens, carry on personal struggles for the benefit of mankind. Consequently, maybe we will never get to a global nation (nor it is clear if this is desirable), but we can act thinking that, even though we are different, we are all human beings.

According to this vision, what defines a cosmopolitan is his universalism, thus again a total openness towards diversity, together with an ability to valorise the similarities among the human beings, which leans upon a universalistic value basis.

Overall, considering the moving and the moral cosmopolitan types, *the cosmopolitan ethos is based on an openness towards diversity sufficient to guarantee not only intercultural communication, but also a transformation in the subject or a concrete commitment to a cause*.

Hannerz [1996] talks about cosmopolitanism as a stance of openness towards divergent cultural experiences. At this regard, Roudometof [2005: 114] underlines the difference between those "who possess sufficient reflexive cultural competencies that enable them to manoeuvre within new meaning systems", that is, the cosmopolitans, and those, ranging from migrant workers to exiles or refugees, who just move out of their place, that is, transnational people. In this sense, the differentiation between cosmopolitans and transnational people is not innocent

[Roudometof, 2005], as it hides respectively a positive and a negative vision of the mover. Limiting this differentiation to high level migrations, we come to my distinction between cosmopolitans and people with a global horizon.

We are now able to reply to the question which opens this subchapter: what is the characteristic that allows some people to positively change while abroad, but not others? It is their cosmopolitan ethos. Many movers have just a global horizon, that is, they travel, they take opportunities all over the world, they take advantage of the possibilities offered by globalisation, but they are not touched in their identity by what they experience: they are closed to diversity. Other movers, instead, go through a personal transformation, which is made possible by their pre-existent stance of openness.

In political science and sociological literature, since decades a debate remains open: the debate about the relation between cosmopolitanism and national identity. In § 11.4.3 I mentioned the fact that “human beings cannot only be defined by their *humanity*, but any self-definition has to include *sociality*” [Ossewaarde, 2007: 367]. Because of that,

[...] identity is perceived as being dependent on social roles within a local or national group [...]. The nameless without social characteristics, however, is in cosmopolitan thought, the starting point, motivation and aim of cosmopolitanism. In its self-definition, cosmopolitanism is an ethos of world citizenship [Ossewaarde, 2007: 367-368].

Ossewaarde, analysing Merton’s and Gouldner’s concept of cosmopolitanism, observes that a cosmopolitan

[...] is a temporary, mobile element of the locality itself, whose group membership involves strangerhood and confrontation as well as professional credentials and occupational status. The cosmopolitan is someone who is not limited by the boundaries of the town or workplace, because cosmopolitan knowledge about things and the cosmopolitan’s professional career easily extend beyond such local boundaries [...] The cosmopolitan is flexible and mobile enough to move through localities and jobs, while the local is rooted and fixed in neighbourhoods and workplaces [...]. But in the global era, cosmopolitans have emancipated themselves not only from their neighbourhood roots and their workplace, but also from their national grouping [Ossewaarde, 2007: 372].

In this definition, which is very much similar to Sennett's idea of transnational professionals, it is well described what I call the global horizon that characterises some movers. According to the analysis that I have been carrying on, anyway, a cosmopolitan does not need to be a citizen without social characteristics and, consequently, without a defined national identity. Considering the interviewees, for instance, I have noticed that some of them have a precise national sense of belonging. Moreover, in the provided definitions of moving and moral cosmopolitans there is no element in contrast with the idea of a national identity, which may be varied or lived together with broader identities. As Roudometof states,

[...] patriotism (or attachment to the nation state) does not necessarily imply ethnocentrism [...]. Cosmopolitanism should not be confused with the negation of national identity – and vice versa, localism is different from nationalism [Roudometof, 2005: 122].

In this sense, Tomlinson [1999], followed by Szerszynski and Urry [2002], introduces the notion of *glocalised cosmopolitan*, that is, a person able to transcend the global-local opposition and to live in a *glocal* cultural universe. At this regard, as Roudometof [2005] suggests, we may think to a continuum in which cosmopolitanism and localism are just the two extreme of a variety of intermediate positions.

Having defined cosmopolitanism different declinations, I can now explain why, introducing the concept of Euromover, I described it as cosmopolitan. Euromovers present the following predispositions and practices:

- a. they do not judge people or select their ties *a priori* on the basis of others' provenience;
- b. they do not think to themselves in a national scale, but rather on a world scale, and often give more importance to the differences among continents than to the ones among nations. They have a global horizon, considering the world as the theatre of their action.
- c. They have a global horizon *and*, at the same time, they are already interested in diversity before they leave to go abroad; it is this interest that allows them

to settle down in the new country. Movers who do not have this positive disposition towards diversity, and consequently are not able to valorise what they discover while abroad, tend to experience a feeling of irreconcilable division between their origin local dimension and the new one. This feeling prevents them from settling down and integrating in the new environment. Many movers, for example, try to fly back to their country every time they can, even every week, and to consider their real life the one at home, being the one abroad just a temporary necessity due to study or professional reasons. So, in practice, they may limit their experience abroad to its professional aspects, and continue their personal life in their origin country. Euromovers, on the contrary, are able to create a new life in the host country by adapting to the new conditions and possibly changing their lifestyle. If they already had a couple relationship, they are able to keep it going in the distance.

- d. They recognise the existence of diversity, but they tend to focus on similarities and to valorise them. When they meet people from totally different cultures, diversity is seen as a richness rather than as an obstacle. For instance, interviewees mention cultural differences as a source of disfunctionalities in communication, but also affirm that these disfunctionalities originate a positive and fertile confrontation, which bring them to learn about other people and trigger a virtuous circle of tolerance and cosmopolitanism: the more they learn to accept the difference, the more they get enriched by them, and the more they are curious towards diversity.
- e. Euromovers, with their tolerance and openness, have what I have called a *cosmopolitanism of values*, meant as a set of minimum values that can be used as a basis for the intercultural dialogue, in the respect of reciprocity and disagreement dialectic.

Taking this all into consideration, it appears that *Euromovers are described by the image of the moving cosmopolitan*. In this sense, Euromovers can be considered as a first step towards a *citizenship that does not level diversity, but rather valorises*

it. Moreover, I have showed that Euromovers often tend to identify with their nation or with Europe on the basis of an identification with precise values, which they cannot find in other continental cultures. In this sense, Euromovers demonstrate that it is possible to conciliate a national or supranational belonging with a stance of openness towards the entire glob. This openness can be put into practice, that is, can be transformed in effective communication thanks to the cosmopolitanism of values. With tolerance, broadmindedness and openness, the intercultural meeting is always possible, and may eventually lead to a change in both the actors.

In this sense Euromovers show that globalisation is producing cosmopolitanism. Cultural identities do not disappear in favour of an utopian global citizenship, but at the same time they are weakened in defining what strangerhood is. Euromovers belong to one place and are aware of their cultural identity. At the same time, this identity is just a self-definition element that allows them to better communicate with different people.

In other words, I am suggesting that *if cosmopolitanism cannot be reached by aspiring to a uniform human society, in which everybody is simply defined by his humanity, then it can be reached by a valorisation of the difference, that is, of the strangeness. To Euromovers, the difference does not represent a boundary, but rather the origin of a genuine interest towards the Other.* Without differences (ideal cosmopolitanism), without a defined cultural identity, people risk to be overwhelmed by anomy and insecurity. With too marked differences (nationalism), intercultural communication can be sapped by anxiety. Globalisation is creating an intermediate level, in which locality peculiarities and the consciousness of globality overlap. This overlapping produces the ground for communication, for it shows that human beings are different, but at the same time share the same destiny on the Earth and the same risks. In this sense, I can say that globalisation offers an atheistic non-ideological base for intercultural communication.

Conclusions

The purpose of the present research has been to analyse a multicultural expatriate community in order to answer to three main research questions:

1. How does globalisation influence interpersonal relationships, in particular the non-family ones?
2. How and how much does the encounter with the Other during a permanence abroad determine an identity and value change in the Subject?
3. Are globalisation phenomena creating an élite of cosmopolite professionals?

During the research and the analysis, these three main questions produced other operative questions:

- 1.1. Which is the nature of non-family relationships?
- 1.2. How does mobility influence interpersonal communication?
- 1.3. How does new media influence interpersonal communication?
- 2.1. What is the role of intercultural relationships in the identity and value change?
- 2.2. How is it possible to classify identity?
- 2.3. What kind of identity do Euromovers show to have?
- 2.4. Can globalisation produce cosmopolitanism?
- 3.1. Can mobility produce freedom?
- 3.2. Is globalisation producing the conditions to guarantee Subjects' action freedom?

To answer these questions, I will start from question 3 and question 3.1, which give me the possibility to introduce concept of *Euromover*, necessary to understand all the other points.

3. Are globalisation phenomena creating an élite of cosmopolite professionals?

Both globalisation and Europeanization are creating the conditions that allow a growing minority of people to maintain a high level of mobility. This mobility can be put into practice in two ways, either by repeatedly going abroad or by spending many years in one foreign country. In both cases the mobile Subjects constitute a category of cosmopolite young Europeans that I define *Euromovers*.

Euromovers are characterised by:

- a. their *global horizon*, which allows them to consider the entire world as the stage for their action;
- b. an *inner push to move* to other countries;
- c. the ability to find strategies *to adapt* in the host country.

Even though further investigation is needed to support this hypothesis, my opinion is that Euromovers tend to concentrate in very international towns and cities, which I define *movers' islands*.

To choose their destination, Euromovers weigh up a number of criteria. According to the importance they attribute to these criteria, they can be classified in two broad ideal typical categories: the *interested-in-diversity* movers, which valorise the fact of staying in a culturally different environment, and the *opportunity-driven* movers, which valorise the experience they can get through their period abroad. Moreover Euromovers can leave with a predetermined timeframe or without a defined timeframe. Crossing the timeframe dimension with the two ideal typical categories, it is possible to differentiate 4 types of movers (as shown in the table 11.2):

	INTERESTED-IN-DIVERSITY	OPPORTUNITY-DRIVEN
DEFINED TIME FRAME	travellers	smart movers
NOT DEFINED TIME FRAME	explorers	professional movers

Table 11.2: Euromovers typology

In the common sense of the word, Euromovers can be considered an élite for their cosmopolitanism, but not in its sociological meaning of political or power élite.

3.1: Does mobility produce freedom?

Thanks to their global horizon, Euromovers undoubtedly enjoy a freedom unknown to those who are not available to leave their country. But *the freedom of movement does not automatically convert itself in life planning freedom*. Because of their usual character of temporariness, high level migrations tend to reduce people stability and, consequently, their possibility to plan their life. On the other hand, the availability to move enlarges enormously people's possibilities, this way allowing them to reduce the possibilities of remaining stuck in their biographies because of bad contingent conditions. But it is just this increase of possibilities that produces uncertainty in movers: when they decide for any kind of moving, they find themselves in the need to choose among different lives, different social networks, different value systems, and this choice can be extremely problematic. For example, some interviewees are divided about their career in the host country and the desire to set a family in their origin country.

1: How does globalisation influence interpersonal relationships, in particular the non-family ones?

Globalisation, meant as a set of phenomena, influences interpersonal relationships by including individuals in complex networks of people, objects, information and meanings. It is thus necessary to focus on precise globalisation dimensions. I chose to focus on mobility and communication.

1.1: Which is the nature of non-family relationships?

Before replying to question 1, it is necessary to better explain what I mean with "non-family relationships", that is, those relationships which are not based on a blood tie or on marriage. To do this, I adopted a model which classifies any possible kind of interpersonal relationship according to different criteria (table 11.3). This way I avoid to define concepts like friend or acquaintance, which suffer of a

subjectivity indeterminacy, but I am able to restrict the variety of the real situations to specific predetermined types.

To the light of the present research results, it has been possible to enrich the initial model including three kinds of relationships:

1. *opportunity-driven relationship*, based on the fulfilment of a precise goal (for instance, to acquire a new contact useful for lobbying) or on the satisfaction of an inner need (for example, not to stay alone on Friday night);
2. *friendship based on sharing an experience and on mutual support*;
3. *close friendship based on feelings, trust and intimacy* (usually in a durable relation).

The fact that close friendships, which are normally developed during many years, are considered more intense than friendships based on the sharing of an experience is an evidence of *the importance of the time factor in closer relationships formation*.

1.2: How does mobility influence interpersonal communication?

According to the results of the present research, Euromovers use their contacts abroad as a source of social capital. The presence of a contact or of a friend in a specific country may orientate the Euromover to choose just that country as a destination. Once in the host country, the Euromover can use his contact to start his integration process. Therefore, the presence of a contact, and especially of a friend, in the destination country constitutes an important facilitation for the Euromover in the process of adaptation.

As many Euromovers move repeatedly, they create a network of friends in the different countries they visit, and this network remain an important source of social capital.

While abroad, Euromovers tend to use their acquaintances as sources of social capital. In this sense, also the most superficial relationships, that is, the weakest ties acquire a certain importance in the construction of individual reality. At the same time Euromovers tend to valorise some of these ties, transforming them in friendships based on sharing an experience. If one of the friends moves, these friendships may last in the distance or slowly fade. If they last, they become close

friendships. As maintaining a relationship in the distance requires a certain degree of commitment, the hope that it will be possible to meet again the distant friend helps the success of the relationships: *the more a tie becomes intimate, the more it needs to have a perspective*. Euromovers tend to assign a high value to their close friendships, which they consider durable and trustworthy non-family relationships, thus fixed point up in a mobile life characterized by uncertainty.

Given the different types of relationships that Euromovers may establish, they can develop different social networks:

- a. a *professional opportunity-driven network*;
- b. a *personal opportunity-driven network*;
- c. a *solidarity network established abroad in the present experience*;
- d. a *solidarity network established at home*;
- e. a *solidarity network established in previous experiences abroad*.

Each social network responds to precise Euromover's needs. In particular, the solidarity networks established abroad are often based on a commonality of interests that the solidarity network established at home might not have. In this sense, the interpersonal relationships established abroad may be enriching even though they are not intercultural.

1.3: How does new media influence interpersonal communication?

Euromovers are prepared to the fact that, when they leave to go back home or to move to a new country, they normally lose the majority of the friendships they established abroad. Only the most genuine, intense and intimate relationships last, while the others simply fade.

New media, especially the ones based on the Internet (e-mails, chats and audio chats), are considered essential instruments to maintain the relationships with people living in different countries. They are preferred because of their low cost, their large availability and their immediacy in transmitting the message.

Nevertheless, communication frequency and intensity may vary, so that it is possible to recognise two different strategies to maintain relationships in the

distance, which I call *rarefied communication strategy* and *intense communication strategy*.

2: How and how much does the encounter with the Other during a permanence abroad determine an identity and value change in the Subject?

To have any identity change it is necessary that the individual does not close in his own identity, refusing diversity. Euromovers present this precondition, as they do not chose their relationships according to national preferences. Nevertheless, they may find easier to stay with certain national cultures rather than with others. The conflict between their stance of openness towards diversity and the natural difficulty to stay in the same way with every person from wherever in the world produce two different approaches to meet strangers:

- a. a *critical personal approach*, in which more personal selection criteria are adopted to choose one's own relationships;
- b. a *non-critical cosmopolite approach*, moved by the conviction that it is always nice to meet different people, as in any case they are a richness;

In both cases, the Euromover is able to trigger an intercultural exchange that produces a *dialectic process of mutual learning*. This process is useful to the Euromover not only to learn about the other culture, but rather to learn about himself. Therefore *reflexivity ceases to be an isolating, intimate mental activity, to become an action in process, a transformation that occurs in the daily life activities*. Exposing themselves to this process, at the beginning Euromovers lose their certainties, but only to realise that they do not need them: in the moment they renounce to them and accept diversity, Euromovers become more free, more independent, more self-confident and able to adapt.

2.1: What is the role of intercultural relationships in the identity and value change?

The fact that Euromovers very rarely look for strangers in their origin country allows to believe that also for Euromovers what is really important is not having international friends, but just having friends. As Euromovers do not see national

identity as a discriminating factor at the time of choosing their ties, when abroad they naturally establish relationships also with people from other countries: having English as a common communication language, they have no reason to avoid intercultural relationships. So even though Euromovers are aware that intercultural relationships may help them to learn about themselves and the place they come from, this cannot be considered the reason why they establish relationships with other foreigners. International friendships among Euromovers rather seem to be based on traditional factors, like the presence of an opportunity drive, the sharing of cultural interests, a similar education level, the sharing of an important experience, the creation of an emotive link based on mutual liking or on reciprocal support.

Despite this, intercultural exchanges produce identity changes. Euromovers may become critical about their national identities, in such a way that *gaining the ability to stay with people from other countries, they become more intolerant towards their own country idiosyncrasies*. Moreover, adapting to new lifestyles, Euromovers trigger a virtuous circle: they become flexible, improve their tolerance and broad-mindedness and develop a democratic spirit; these abilities improve their adaptation skills, this way increasing their ability to cope with uncertainty and making them more self-confident.

2.2: How is it possible to classify national identity?

In order to classify national identity, I counter two different logics: the logic of the *or*, which produces monolayer identities, and the logic of the *and*, which produces multilayer identities. On the basis of this main differentiation, I defined the typology schematised in table 11.7:

monolayer (or)		multilayer (and)						
		horizontal		vertical				
defensive	consolatory	dominant	shifting	local	regional	national	multi-national	global

Table 11.7: Identity types

Regarding specifically the European identity, I identified four levels of adherence to it, which I called:

1. EU *supporting*: support to the European political project; very weak European identity;
2. EU *opposition* identity: weak cultural identity used to mark the differences among the Europeans and other continental cultures;
3. EU *belonging*: strong cultural identity based on the recognition of similarities which are common to all European states;
4. EU *filling*: very strong cultural identity, used as a replacement for the lack of a narrower identity level.

2.3: What kind of identity do Euromovers show to have?

Euromovers present two contradictory tendencies:

- a. a monolayer identity, usually a national one (only one interviewee identifies with his region rather than with its state), prevails. In these cases, it seems that the Euromover has very clear who he is and where he is from, and that *this very defined identity becomes a source of certainty* to him.
- b. A multilayer identity is used to combine different and sometimes conflicting identities. In these cases, Euromovers solve the problem of loyalty to the origin or to the host country by adopting an “and” logic: some Euromovers shift from an identity to another one, others feel more than one belonging, and others use broad labels, like the European one, to define themselves in addition to their national identity. This European identity, however, does not correspond to a clear vision of Europe, but rather to a mix of many dimensions, not unified by a unique concept of the old continent.

2.4: Can globalisation produce cosmopolitanism?

To answer to this question firstly it is necessary to define what cosmopolitanism is: a mental stance of openness towards diversity sufficient to guarantee not only intercultural communication, but also a transformation in the subject or a concrete commitment to a cause. On the basis of this definition, it is possible to differentiate

among the travellers with a global horizon, who are able to look for and take opportunities on a global scale, but who tend to remain detached from diversity, and cosmopolitans. Globalisation is producing both kinds of people, but while the first kind are the evidence of a power differential between nations, the second kind shows that *cultural diversity can be valorised as an element over which intercultural dialogue can be founded*. The fact that cosmopolitanism can coexist with a defined national identity, in fact, shows that *the difference does not necessary represent a boundary, but can constitute the origin of a genuine interest towards the Other*.

3.2: Is globalisation producing the conditions to guarantee Subjects' action freedom?

One of the theoretical premises of the present research is that individuals meant as Subjects are active actors able to produce sense and changes. Euromovers are Subjects who experience a certain freedom of choice. As I noticed, this freedom of choice does not automatically convert itself in freedom of action, as new bonds come to limit Euromovers' action possibilities.

Nevertheless, Euromovers seem to be able to actively react to adverse conditions either by taking opportunities on a global scale, or by changing some of the conditions which tie them. Euromovers overpass through their action, which is at the same time individualistic (the single mover) and collective (the expatriates community), the post-modern anomie and the uncertainty. They do that simply ignoring them, re-interpreting them, living together with them as normal elements of their mobile life. In this sense, Euromovers face uncertainty with the intensity of their professional objectives and their interest in discovering new realities, as well as with their ability to adapt to new situations and change their own lifestyle.

To say it differently, Euromovers operate a constant reflexive process of choice and adaptation, in which the role of interpersonal relationships is fundamental. The fact that Euromovers' interpersonal relationships may present a high degree of instrumentality (for example: opportunity-driven relationships) or may be used as irreplaceable sources of social capital, as well as the fact that Euromovers seem to be generally aware about the benefits of their relationships abroad (for instance:

intercultural exchanges) show that *Euromovers use their interpersonal relationships in a reflexive way, in order to realise their life project.*

Final remarks

Given the qualitative statement of the present research, its purpose was not only to describe a type of European citizen, in particular the moving type, but also and most of all to provide concepts and theoretical frames to be used as instruments in the study of any professional high level migration. I have been going in this direction providing the following:

1. a typology of movers;
2. a classification of interpersonal relationships;
3. a typology of the social networks that a mover can be involved in;
4. a typology of the strategies to maintain distant relationships;
5. a typology of the approaches to meet strangers;
6. a typology of identity transformation;
7. a classification of the different kinds of national identity, including the European ones;
8. a list of the perceived differences among conceptualised geographical areas;
9. a typology of citizens of the world.

Concerning the Euromover figure, it raises lights and shadows. On the bad side, there is his high level of opportunism and the tendency to create instrumental relationships; on the good side, the fact that the Euromover is able to establish intercultural friendships which make him ripe as a person. On the bad side there is a generally weak European identity; on the good side, the fact that national identity may coexist with a cosmopolitan attitude. On the bad side there is the observation that Euromovers are a minority of people in the European landscape; on the good side, the fact that Euromovers show that a reflexive process of adaptation to post-modern uncertainty is possible.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: The questionnaire

INTERVIEW N. _____
DATE: _____ **DURATION:** _____
INTERVIEWEE: _____
NATIONALITY _____
AGE _____
CONTACTS: _____
NOTES: _____

Introduction

- Very general information about me and my research project
- Anonymity guarantee

Authorization to record the interview and cite it

Do you accept to be recorded and cited, given that your interview will be remain anonymous?

Yes No Interviewee signature _____

I. Interviewee's experiences abroad

1. Origin country (and possible double citizenship) and town (small, medium, big).
2. Did you have other experiences abroad before this one in Brussels?
3. Where, what for and how long for?

II. Effectiveness of European Union's policy to support the mid-term living abroad

4. Did you make your experiences abroad thanks to European programs?
5. (If yes) Which ones?

III. Personal motivations

6. Which are the reasons that pushed you to move from your country? Why just to Brussels?
7. What does it mean for you to live in Brussels?
8. Did you have expectations about your permanence here? Which ones?
9. You have been here for ... months/years. Are you satisfied about your expectations?
10. In terms of time frame, how do you consider this experience of yours here? How long would you like to remain here?
11. In your opinion, how many young Europeans have this kind of experience abroad?

IV. Interpersonal relationships network

12. Do you know many people here in Brussels? Do you consider them friends or acquaintances?
13. In which occasions and contexts do you meet people from abroad?
14. Generally speaking, in Brussels do you have the tendency to stay with people from your country, with foreigners or with Belgians?
15. Why?
16. Generally speaking, do you find it easy to establish new relationships in Brussels? More or less than in your country or than in others where you have been?
17. Which nationality are the people you mostly mix with here?
18. In your opinion, which are the difficulties and the positive aspects in having a relationship with a person from another country?
19. Do you find any difference in the relationships you have here respect to the relations you have in your countries?

V. Maintenance of distant relationships

20. Do you maintain the relationships with the friends left in your country?

21. Have you maintained the relationships with the people met in your previous experiences abroad?

22. Which instruments do you use to keep in touch?

23. Do you believe that you will maintain the relationships with the people you met here?

VI. Identity and values

24. How would you describe your identity?

25. Do you feel that you have something in common with the other Europeans?

26. What does it mean for you the expression “to be a citizen of the world”?

27. Do you feel you have values in common with the people who, like you, had or is having important experiences abroad? (If yes) Which are these values?

VII. Structural data

29. Studies.

30. Actual profession.

31. Parent’s work.

32. Marital status.

33. Language abilities.

34. May we remain in contact, as to follow your experience development?

Appendix 2: Interviews

interview number	opinion leader	position	date
A	João Delgado Helen Block	Leonardo program Head of unit Collaborator	28/05
B	Ans Persoons	Brussel-Europe Liaison Office collaborator	15/05
C	Claire-Lise Dautry	Alliance Française director	27/06

interview number	country	geographical area	date
1	Portugal	South of Europe	03/05
2	Spain		11/05
3	Italy (1)		08/05
4	Italy (2)		24/05
5	Malta		20/06
6	Greece		19/06
7	Cyprus		28/05
8	France	Central Europe	18/06
9	Belgium (1)		03/05
10	Belgium (2)		30/05
11	Belgium (3)		09/05
12	The Netherlands		28/06
13	Germany		07/05
14	Austria		04/07
15	Slovenia	05/06	
16	Ireland	North of Europe	15/05
17	United Kingdom		06/05
18	Sweden		04/06
19	Finland (1)		06/06
20	Finland (2)	07/06	
21	Estonia	East of Europe	15/06
22	Lithuania		05/06
23	Poland (1)		14/05
24	Poland (2)		14/05
25	Czech Republic		16/05
26	Hungary		10/05
27	Romania		05/07
28	Bulgaria		11/06
29	Switzerland	Non-EU member countries	12/06
30	Moldova		30/05

All the interviews were done in Brussels between May and July 2007.

2 *Interview A: João Delgado (and Helen Block)*
3 *European Commission*
4 *Directorate General for Education and Culture*
5 *Head of Unit Leonardo da Vinci Programme*

6
7 [he starts to talk about a research the Directorate is running:] The first part is about the program and the second
8 part is in the impact of the program. But we have some limitations on the conclusion: we are undergoing the
9 evaluation this year and the results will be available only next year, so I can't give you conclusions about the
10 impact of the program.

11 **When did the program start?**

12 1994.

13 **Which is the overall budget?**

14 Now we are on a seven years framework program and the budget is 1.5 billion euro.

15 **This is for 2007-2013.**

16 Yes, but this figure is provision, because there will be a revision of the program in the mid-term.

17 **Which were the initial proposals of the program?**

18 This program is the evolution of different programs that already existed in the EU, but the main objective of the
19 program is to contribute for EU vocational training policy, meaning that this is mainly a task of member states
20 but there are common goals at the European level and we support those goals.

21 **What does it mean vocational training?**

22 Vocational training is specific word, if you make a translation there's probably a big difference from one country
23 to the other. It's the training that is... is the part of education related to the profession and training within the
24 profession.

25 **How many countries are interested by the program?**

26 We are all the member states of the EU 27 member countries, plus the countries of the European economic
27 space, meaning Norway, Lichtenstein and Iceland, and, for the moment, as applicant country to EU, Turkey.
28 These are the countries that are now participating in the program. The program can be enlarged during the next
29 years.

30 **Do you know more or less how many young Europeans have already used the program?**

31 I don't have those figures in mind. Nowadays you can talk to my colleague, she knows better than me about the
32 mobility, because it's a complex program, we have the mobility part, like Erasmus, meaning that people can go
33 from one country to the other, in traineeship projects; but you also have innovative projects that involve people
34 but are not in mobility, we are doing innovation projects, there are meetings in all countries but this is not related
35 to mobility activities. So I suppose you are more interested in the mobility part of the program.

36 **I think so.**

37 Let's say on mobility we have around 80 thousands persons per year, this is the current figure.

38 **It's a big number. Do you have information about the impact on the enterprises?**

39 Most of people don't go to enterprises. The basis of the mobility is the training, which can be done in companies
40 but it cannot also be done in a vocational training institutions, schools. Now we have a new tool that is about
41 satisfaction of people in mobility activities, it's very high, around 20% of satisfaction from students, but apart
42 that we don't want to go deeper in detail, because it's very difficult to evaluate.

43 **This is my understanding of Leonardo too, as I was in Leonardo myself and I went to a company.**

44 There is a part of Leonardo regarding the placement in companies, for university studies, but now it's not any
45 more in Leonardo. Now these people coming from university do placements in companies: they go to Erasmus,
46 from 2007.

47 **Do you have an idea of the general profile of Leonardo intern?**

48 We have different profiles because we have people at a very initial vocational training, very young students from
49 16 years old, but we also have professionals in vocational training: teachers and people who work for
50 institutions; and we also have people on the labour market. So we have different profiles of our trainees.

51 **Which is the age of people applying?**

52 Can be from 16 up to 50 years old for those on the labour market, but mainly we have young people.

Normally which are the expectations for the Leonardo's applicants?

54 With 27 countries and different ages, so we can have a lot of different expectations. I think the main expectation
56 is to know a new reality related to the other countries. What is really special in our programs is the possibility of
58 people doing this in different environment and countries. Because our schemes can exist and exist on a bigger
scale at a pure national level, here the new thing is the European character of the program and the possibility to
do it abroad, in another country.

What rate of satisfaction do you register?

60 Very high, around 85%.

Do you have figures about the people recruited by companies after the intership?

62 Somewhere I have these figures. But as this is no more in Leonardo, it can be tricky.

**Do you have data regarding people who eventually remain in the country where they made their
64 experience, even though they were not recruited?**

I may have some data but it's not easy now, let me find them and I'll try to give them to you.

**I also was an Erasmus and had the feeling that usually people tend to go to similar countries respect to
66 their own one. Do you have any data about this?**

68 No. I have exactly the same impression, but there are different factors that play. It's not only to go to a similar
country, it can be very tricky; there are facts that are conditioning the training and the economical reasons are
70 important. The fact that people go to a similar country can also be because it's less expensive, so it cannot only
be interpreted with cultural reasons, but also with economic reasons. At the same time there is the language
72 factor, that can be an important limitation, for instance countries where you speak English are much more
demanded than other countries, and also, as you said, cultural aspects also play something, that's clear: you are
74 not very motivated to go to a completely different country where it's difficult to control the language and it's
very expensive.

Which are the most requested countries?

76 I have here the statistic, but it's difficult to answer you immediately, because this study is completely new. These
78 are also provisional figures. We have problems also because our survey didn't cover all the countries, some
countries didn't want to participate... ya, the first is UK, then Spain, then Germany. Let me call my colleague.
80 [He calls a colleague]. My colleague is Mrs Helen Block [in *italic*], she's in charge with the mobility.

Which are the most active in applying for the Leonardo programme?

82 Nationality. It's not the case of being active. The division of the budget is by country and each country has a
quota, I think that Germany has the biggest one, no?

84 *Yes.*

What is the difference due to?

86 *Is due to the size of the country, the number of people as potential candidates, that's why the budget is
distributed among a specific key which is calculated everyday, so we have a total budget for the mobility and
88 then we distribute to a country key, let's say, which includes a target population and other criteria, and then they
try to spend all the money and in general they succeed; the UK has problems sometime, because UK people are
90 not at ease livers than the others, UK has a very specific situation, a lot of people want to go there but not so
many want to leave UK for the rest of Europe.*

Do you see any difference between the Eastern and the Western countries?

In what sense?

94 **In any possible sense.**

96 Not so much. As I told you it's difficult to create groups of countries, because each country has his own
situation. It's true that we have new member states with different realities, but this is changing very quickly. We
can't create a distinction.

98 *They are very active in general.*

100 And they have already participated in the program, but not from 2004, from the accession, from the beginning,
so since 1994. It's not new for them.

Turkey is already participating, without being a member.

And are they active?

Yes. They are willing to come [in the EU].

What do you think is the impact of the program in creating a European identity?

104 It's very important, really important. Nowadays the brand is established, people know what is Leonardo, and for
106 these people sometimes is the first experience to live in a foreign country, and if the degree of satisfaction is very
high it means that they are positively impressed by their staying abroad, by the country and so they discover the
108 others and also discover themselves in a different situation. They discover the others, they train together with
colleagues from other countries, so this is important to the creation of a European identity.

110 **Having done both Leonardo and Erasmus myself I have two impressions. As to Erasmus, it didn't really**
112 **succeed in creating a European identity. My impression is that it created a European identity just when**
114 **compared our identity to American one or Asian one, but it didn't mix the people, at least in my both**
116 **direct and undirect experience. Another point is that many people go abroad, then they don't travel**
118 **anymore, only for tourism.**

116 Ya, that's clear. Now, we have still different labour markets in Europe. We have professional barriers and sociological barriers and language barriers, but you cannot say that we don't contribute to the promotion of free movement of workers.

118 *It's also because it's very difficult to see exactly what's a European identity, and it is certainly one piece of a lot*
120 *of puzzle pieces that fit together, and the question is really what is meant by European identity. I think we have*
122 *also the experience that something through European is not really existing in a way because everybody is linked*
124 *to his own origin or whatever. And what is good in those program is that it is not promoting as it was at the*
126 *beginning, that we should be all mobile and move everywhere and work everywhere. The reality is a bit different,*
128 *people are different in a way, and they still want to stay at their home base, and these programs offer something:*
130 *they have the possibility to go abroad and at least from the study we have many people expressing an interest to*
132 *continue and remain abroad. In our questionnaire there was a question about: would you be interested in having*
134 *another stay abroad or to work abroad in the future?, and it has very positive responses, so it created a shift at*
136 *least from maybe a completely indifferent position to something more open, without of course going through the*
138 *European identity. I don't know even if I have a European identity. It depends on how you define that, of course,*
140 *and we are still all very national and the problem is that you need a sort of program. I think with students it's*
142 *even better because students in general are quite over-minded.*

132 [He reads from the questionnaire results:] If you are giving the chance to stay abroad what's your view? 77% say "definetely, sure, I would participate", and 21% say "I would probably participate", meaning that we have 98% who are prepared to do another stay abroad, so it's really motivating. Only the 2% say "I would rather not participate".

134 *In the population of people we normally do not think of the 16-17 years old, who make a professional training,*
136 *who normally would never go out of their town of origin. With that program at least they open their mind, even if*
138 *they come back later, they know people think differently on the other side of the border. On the other hand, our*
140 *budget compared to the mass of people who could leave is very limited. It cannot be a huge impetuous. It's*
142 *rather a small influence everywhere which then in the end after years creates something more.*

140 **One of the hypothesis that I'm investigating is the fact that it doesn't really create a European identity but**
142 **it allows people to get to know a different reality. I went twice to Spain, and I can say that now I know**
144 **better Spain, so I could be one of those who answered positively to that question.**

144 It's an interesting question, but very tricky. When you say European identity, I have the feeling that a lot of people would interpret it as a replacement of their national identity. For me that I already live in Belgium for 20 years is a different layer. You have a different layer that is common to other Europeans and it coexists with your national identity. But also your national identity lives with your regional identity. Many people from EU countries have a very clear regional identity. Even in Portugal there are regional identities, there are people from the South, from the North. So these are different layers and you can't talk about this as something that is exclusive, because this common European layer is common to everybody: when you participate in a program like Leonardo, probably like Erasmus, you define clearly, you make it stronger, you create it in your life because it's an experience that makes people stronger. The results of our questionnaire are clear on that.

150 **Do you think that the program is reaching unforeseen goals, something that wasn't meant?**

152 Probably at the end of the program we will have data. No...

154 *Within a project there are sometimes side effects; for example in Leonardo mobility project we have sending*
156 *institutions (schools, universities, sending institutes or whatever), and the first goal is just sending them out or*
158 *giving an opportunity to work abroad, and sometimes, especially in the vocational training school, they start to*
160 *have partners in other countries, and start to work on more than just the mobility. This side effect is limited to a*
162 *small partnership, to a small, let's say... some schools say: "let me try to have an international contact in our*
164 *curriculum". This is the sort of side effect that comes out of the program. And it's difficult to quantify, we know*
it exists, we have an example, but it's difficult to tell how much there is. It builds up over years in general.

162 And we refer to mobility, but we have another part of Leonardo, the innovative project, where the impact are of different kinds and sometimes it's difficult to evaluate. We have for instance training for cardiologist in Europe that is totally different from lift maintenance personal. So we have the sectorial approach and the impact on each sector in Europe, where our programs are very important in promoting some professional standardisation.

166 *So the side effects are more than going to institutions from individual effect which are expected in this mobility*
167 *to a more institutionalized effect, which we do not have necessarily in the objectives, and as he said, in the other*
168 *branch of the action, which are rather developing a common product or approach to learning, which has a much*
169 *bigger effect to bring together training contents.*

We had two open questions.

170 **Yes: how many interns are recruited after their stage and how many interns remain in the country of**
171 **their stage.**

172 We cannot reply to the first one. [He tries to find a similar question in the results of his questionnaire, which last
173 for many pages, but does not find a relevant question]. I can tell you that for the people who were employed,
174 75% considered they had an improvement [in their careers]. The structure and organisation of the periods abroad
175 are mostly: traineeship abroad, 55%; chance of getting to know other work procedures, 65%; improving of
176 language skills, 75%; intercultural exchange, 65%; new views of the other ways of living, 68%; chance to go
177 abroad, 74%; gaining experience of personal importance, 72%. Why people didn't like their staying abroad: the
178 period was too short; too much bureaucracy, 24%; too much preparation, 26%; bad mentoring by supervisors,
179 21%. It seems that you have more positive points than negative points. But it's difficult to reply to your
180 questions. Sometimes people do not return immediately to the country where they did their traineeship, they
181 return after 1-2 years, they keep contacts.

182 **Another problem might be that many of the companies which recruit Leonardo just recruit Leonardo, one**
183 **after the other.**

184 *That's it, they want to have a stagier. This is a discussion that is carried on, at least in Germany, about the all*
185 *stage approach [read: about the pertinence of having interns instead of paid people].*

186 The Commission had the same approach.

Ya. We are aware of this.

188 **It's good that there is a debate on this, because in Italy we don't: it's already a sign...**

[Laugh] yes, it's already a sign of some exploitation.

190 **Do you think that in the Commission there is the same situation? Are the interns in the Commission well**
191 **used? Do they really take advantage of the period they spend here?**

192 In our Unit yes. In our Unit you have a lot of different situations, it depends on people's situation, they came to
193 Brussels for different reasons. In Europe since the Middle Age we have this apprentice, they go to work with a
194 older person who teach them the skills of the apprentice, and they were there for free, they were learning, they
195 were happy to work for a good teacher. They work for a small amount of money, but at the same time they are
196 not so productive as a normal worker, so it's been existing from centuries and it is continuing to exist and there
197 is always the balance between learning by doing and also contributing for the work, being really productive.

198 **My question was more related to the fact that these people come here, especially in Brussels, they make an**
199 **internship, with the hope they will create some basis to remain in the institutions, then they do not**
200 **actually, they run out of money and they are obliged to go back home.**

201 But European institutions are completely different. In my professional life I began in a bank, there was a big
202 selection but the internship was the first step to be an employee. In a normal company if you are needing
203 someone and he is good you are going to make a contract; in the Commission we have very selective process of
204 admission, it takes a lot of time but it's a completely different system of selection and the selection is very
205 competitive, and the fact that you went well in your traineeship is no related with the possibility to get a job in
206 the Commission.

207 *What you try to do is to get contacts and to learn about the contents to succeed in the concour, but in general it's*
208 *very difficult to succeed in the concour, and we know someone who continue to apply to find something, but now*
209 *the contractual based job are very limited in the Commission.*

210 Ya, it existed before, but nowadays it became a minority. Now in our Unit everybody is official, we have no
211 temporary agency [employee].

212 *They all try, lots of them certainly hope to stay here in a way or the other, but they can't all find something,*
213 *that's for sure.*

214 **Why do you think all those people want to work in the Commission?**

215 *That's a good question. I think it's a mixture of money, certainly, but also international surroundings. What we*
216 *know from inside is that it can be also very boring, with a lot of administrative things, and it could be more*
217 *interesting to be on the ground somewhere and work on concrete things, instead of making theories...*

218 We have other activities which are very interesting, and I think it's appealing to work in an institution where the
219 things are changing. I think to work in the Commission you have to be motivated by the European integration, by
220 the European Union, and if you are interested in the European Union, it's a very interesting place to be.

222 *And you have all these sectors where you can work in, this is very interesting... you are not limited to one*
subject for all your professional life, you have a lot of possibilities to open your mind, and I suppose this all
plays a role.

224 **Ok. Thank you very much.**

*Interview B: Ans Persoons
Advisor
Brussels-Europe Liaison Office*

2
4
6 We have three main publics we work for: one is the European people coming to Brussels; young people of
8 Belgian nationality coming to Brussels: we inform them about Brussels; the third public is composed by
10 Regional Offices; we are a regional office, we are completely financed by the government, and we help other
12 regional offices. With the Expats, we help them to find their way, we help them with all kind of advice and also
14 in concrete ways, and all this for free, because we are a public service. Then we have our newsletter and
sometimes we do campaigns, for example the last time we had local election we made a campaign to invite
people to subscribe to the voting lists. Most of the Expats are quite young, and the newsletter present activities
that most of the time are for people who are in their 20 something, 30, 35; but often people who come are have
family or are older, and we try to do stuff for a general public, as large as possible. I can't give you any number
about how old are our average customers.

16 **How do people get to know you?**

18 Mainly by the institutions, and that's our problem, because we have a lot of people from the institutions and...
20 because they have their own welcome service, and if they can't help them they send them here. But we try to
22 make ourselves better known, most like lobbies and NGOs, because we have a big job to do there. They have
much more problems when they come, because they don't have a welcome service to help them out, so we
should be better known among those people, whose work is not easy. With our web site, which is largely visited,
we kind try to reach a larger public, larger than the institutions'.

24 **Actually I didn't know you.**

26 That's happens all the time: you work for a consultancy and people don't really know us there. We have to do
something better. We do a lot when people have to sign a [renting] contract, because contracts are in French or in
Dutch, and people can't really read them, so before signing it we suggest to people to just send it to us. These
people can be useful, especially to people who don't speak English.

28 **How many people as an overall do you help every year?**

30 I'm gonna send you our rapport of activity we are making right now [She never did, despite my invitations to do
so in the weeks after the interview; nevertheless she gave me a lot of useful material to better discover Brussels'
reality from the Expat point of view].

32 **In your opinion, which is the difference between an immigrant and an Expat?**

34 The only difference that I make is between people who came here in the 60s or in the 70s, mostly to do dirty
work, in mines and stuff like that, or in Brussels like Portuguese because they were escaping from Salazar
regime, and people who came here because they had a job in the European institutions. They have a totally
different economic profile: those working for the European institutions have a higher education, earn a lot of
money, they didn't leave their countries because they needed to, for political or economic reasons, they just
came because they wanted to work for the European institutions and make a lot of money. And they don't really
get in touch. For example, there is a huge Portuguese community, but they don't get in touch with the Portuguese
in the institutions. They are two groups.

40 **Which is your perception about the division among the people who are resident here and the international
42 community of Expats?**

44 One of our tasks is also to change people's opinion about the Expats that come and live here. The figures I have
46 need to be updated a bit, but if you consider all the people working in the EU institutions, in the lobby and in
48 NGOs, you reach a rough estimation of about 100.000 people, and that's one out of 10 people here in Brussels,
so it's quite a lot. The general public thinks that they make a lot of money, that they push up the prices of the
houses, because Brussels used to be really cheap, because they make much more money than the average person
here and can pay the double or three times, so it creates an envy. Also institutions buildings ruin the
neighbourhoods. For example, where there are the Parliament and the Commission: before there were
neighbourhoods with houses, and all the people who lived there were like forced to move. If you see in
Strasbourg, all the institutions are outside the city, but here they are in the middle of the city and there were
houses there before. And now there is a lot of speculation in the neighbourhood, so the few houses that exist
there, they want them to be offices, so there are not many people living there anymore. I'm working with
somebody who is responsible for rethinking the European neighbourhood in a urbanistic way, to create a mixed
neighbourhood again, to make sure that there are not only offices and that is not empty after 7 at night, to create
houses and cultural infrastructures, and to displace the institutions in other parts of the city. We still have a lot to

58 do to change people minds, because they do not realise that people in the Commission make more money, but
they also use their money to go to restaurants here, to go to shops, and they spend their money in Brussels, and
60 that makes the economy work in Brussels. And they create a lot of jobs, too, because the institutions are here, but
also the people who work for the institutions: catering, cleaning, taxi. But people don't feel like that. People have
62 really a bad idea. Because a lot of people who work in the institutions don't send their children to Belgian
schools, but to European schools... it is an élite, because they make more money and they live in certain areas of
64 the city, not all of them, but a lot of. What we try to do is also to change the general opinion about those people
and to create occasions where they can meet up. Because in Brussels we have really a lot of different
66 nationalities, we have to make sure that they know each other, because a lot of people remain in their community
and don't know the others. In Saint Gilles, in Ixelles: you have Spanish areas, or Polish, but those people don't
68 mix. That's a problem that Brussels is facing: it's a really cosmopolitan city, but we have to create more meeting
occasions.

So you are saying that the Expat community is isolated and moreover that inside the Expat community people do not mix.

70 I really don't know: they can mix up, but they surely don't do that with Belgian people. We have also a big
72 Morocco community, a big Turkish community, a big Polish community (but not with those who work in the
institutions), and they live in their neighbourhoods and they go to different bars etc. So our work is mainly to
74 inform people, for example that Flemish theatres have English subtitles, and to promote activities like street
celebrations. It's not much but it starts there. People want to know what's happening and want to create a world
76 together, I think. Of course we can't force people. We also work with the university, but with the Flemish one,
not with the ULB, and we work on Brussels classes: history, institutions structures, cultural events. And inside
78 the Expat community, some people form them to know very well what's going on in the city, so that we can be a
centre of information for the Expat community.

Do you also organise @7 [an event designed for Expat who want to meet for an aperitivo between 7 and 11]?

82 It's one of our partner. Do you know what it is? It's in the Mirano. The organiser told me that a lot of Belgian
people go there too, but I don't know, sometimes I go there, but I don't like it.

Why?

84 I don't know... It's just that I go there because it's my job to see what is going on for the Expat community.
86 Because... people are a kind of élite... because the guy who organises it remains outside and sais "you can go in,
you can't come in", you have to show your card...

Really? And how do you get the card?

88 They have to subscribe on their list, and they check if your profile is good enough to be on the list, that's what
90 they say, most of the time you get in, but I don't like that atmosphere, and it is full of people who just show off.
But a lot of people really like that, because the night starts early, the food is not good at all and it's expensive,
92 but then people dance and you can mix up with other European people. The organisers gets a lot of sponsoring,
because if you do stuff for the Expat community... it's financed by a bank, because banks and other companies
94 like that find there really their ideal public, with high salaries, so they try to get in touch with them. There is also
a magazine, called The Bulletin, for the Expat community, and it is also financed by sponsors [she gives me a
96 copy].

Which are the motivation and expectations that push the Expats here?

98 It's only work. They don't come because they like Brussels, it has nothing to do with it. It could be any other
city. Their idea about Brussels is most of the times quite negative. People from the Southern countries say that
100 it's cold and rainy, the people from the Nordic countries think it's a chaotic and dirty city. They come here just
because they think that they have career options, and most of the time they come here for a short while, and they
102 all want to go back. There are people who stay here for 20 years and still want to go back. There are people who
buy apartments here.

To sell them later or what?

104 They want to go back to their countries after they retire, but then they realise that Belgium is their country. There
106 was a great play about that: I only came for six months, where the director interviewed people in the streets and
it talks about people leaving all the time, it's a very moving community, often people leave, and then they come
108 back... there are people who come here and they really want to know the city, and try to learn French, and some
Dutch too; people who send their children to Belgian schools, who buy their houses in Belgian neighbourhoods
110 or at least in places where they can get in touch not only with Expats. But you also have people who come here
and make a scene because in an official office they don't speak in English, and who really refuse to learn any
112 French, and who go to shops and restaurants and if people do not speak English it's a shame, everybody should

114 speak English. We see it more and more often, especially with the new European countries. We have problems
116 with them, or not problems, but they are not polite, because they have an attitude like: we have waited for so
118 long, and now we are here and we want what we have right to. Not all the countries have the same attitude:
120 people from Italy, or Spain or France, they speak some French, in the new countries it's not the case. The first
122 thing we do is to encourage people to attend to language classes, because we can live here in Brussels only
124 speaking in English, but it doesn't help to get in contact with other communities. These people ask for official
documents in English, but we have already two official language in Belgium, so they say English should be the
third one, but we say that in Brussels there are more people speaking in Arabic than in English, and they say:
"Oh no, it's not the same!". Our office help people who are highly educated and have means, but there are a lot
of people coming to Brussels who have nothing, other immigrants, and do not have an office like this to help
them. Because our office was created to get in touch with the institutions, because there were other cities that
wanted to be the capital of Europe: it's not written in any treaty that Brussels is the capital of Europe, not at all.

**The first thing I did when I came to Brussels was to enrol in a French class, and I was very surprised
126 discovering that I was at the same level [just a step over the beginners] as many people who have been
128 here for 2-3, even 4 years.**

128 They can do that and I can't force people to learn French. For example I have a Canadian flatmate, and I
encouraged him to learn French, but he refuses: he said he has to remain here only for a few years and he's not
130 going to make the effort. If you only stays in the Expat community... but it bothers me: when we go to a shop or
a restaurant and he doesn't even say "merci", I think it's not polite at all. But that's my opinion. And that's really
132 changing: before people really made an effort to learn a basic French, it doesn't happen anymore. It bothers me,
and French is not my mother tongue. You can't imagine in Paris people claiming to make English an official
134 language.

**No, at all. In fact I came here with the idea I would have learnt French, and I soon understood it's the
136 wrong place. How is the situation outside Brussels?**

136 They only speak their language. This is a very Brussels situation. In Brussels you have people from 170
138 countries and you can hear so many languages. French is the common language, my mother tongue is Dutch, but
if I go out I speak in French, because it's a common language for everybody. But now it's changing and the
140 common language is becoming English.

Which is in your perception the social level of the people who come here?

142 What do you mean with social level?

**[I explain. To sum up:] Are they richer than the average and consequently have access to better schools
144 and so on?**

144 It is maybe the case of the people working in the European institutions: if you want to make an internship over
146 there you have to have studied economics or European policies. I think that people working in the institutions or
in the consultancies most of the time have a better economic background. And in the new countries especially,
148 you really have to be part of a higher class to be able to do those studies, otherwise you can't access to certain...
they have to, because people who are here are asked to speak several languages, so often you don't do that if you
150 don't grow up in a multilanguage environment, if you don't learn them at school... I don't know if it's changing.
More often when we have stagiaires or assistances, they are less rich than they were before, they really look for
152 cheap houses, and stuff like that. They do not all have parents that manage to have big partners for them. It's
changing. Before it was worse. But the Parliament and the Commission have a lot stagiaires who come to
154 Brussels and do unpaid stages, because it's so difficult to get an internship. I don't see people who make another
job besides their internships, it's possible that in their country they worked before coming here; because it's not
156 that easy when you start to make money, and a lot of people really start with low salaries. That is changing,
because before they thought that it's easy to make a lot of money with things that have something to do with the
158 European Union, but it's not the case. Also inside the institutions they are lowering the salaries, and in all the
consultancies, and NGOs, and if you start there you don't make a lot of money at all. And those people hope
160 they will one day, but the salaries are not at all the same.

Which do you think are newcomers' expectations and projects?

162 There are a lot of people who come to make an experience abroad, I think, and living inside the big Expat
international community, after a while it's superficial, because it's always going to party and "where are you
164 from?", always the same kind of conversation, and it's hard to build a friendship, because the people are coming
and leaving all the time; there are people looking for more stability and this Brussels has difficulty in offering,
166 and then they wanna go back to their countries... So most of the time they want to come for a short while,
making an experience, and then go back to their countries with this experience, they know a language, they

168 worked in an international environment... I think everybody who comes here thinks it's only for two years,
except the functionaries in the Commission, who know it's going to be for their whole life.

170 **You said that frequently they settled down.**

172 That happens: they fall in love with somebody of another nationality, and if you really live in an international
community for some years, it's really difficult to go back to your little village in Portugal or... it's such an
environment, it's really interesting, but there is a lot of loneliness, I think the Commission has the highest
174 depression rate, a lot of people are really lonely. But it's difficult to go back to a non international environment
after it. That's our experience.

176 **Why do you have this sensation of loneliness?**

178 There was somebody saying "there are so many possibilities!". You don't settle down, because there is always so
much to do, after one girl another girl, and you always meet a lot of people, it's not that easy to settle down. You
don't have a family, a lot of people are lonely, they don't have like a family cocoon, and there are people coming
180 and leaving all the time, and they have all kind of hobbies because they don't have a family environment that
you see all the time. And it's really difficult: they have all superficial going out relationships. That's what I hear
182 about, it's my perception, it's not that for everybody is the same. But depression inside the Community is really
a problem, they have a cell inside which deals with it. And that's only the Commission.

184 **Would it be interesting for Belgian to settle down with those people?**

186 If you go to @7, the Belgian people who go there do that in search of a guy who has money, so... that's what
they told me. But you can see couples here, they break up all the time, because somebody is going back to his
country, and if you live that several times then you don't start again a new relationship, because people move. I
188 don't know, there are clichés in that too.

Many people told me that they have a lot of acquaintances here, but no friends.

190 I think for many people it is double here: they like it and they don't like it here. Because there are so many
young people here who are looking for people, that it can't be really hard to make new contacts. But it isn't that
192 simple.

Do you have any perception of the Expat community values?

194 I think you need some kind of openness, because you are in contact with people from everywhere all the time, so
you have to be open to people with whom you don't share the same background. I think it's the realisation of the
196 European Community in real, because you see people living together, mixing up, sharing experiences, that's
what happens in Brussels, there are so many nationalities here in Brussels living together, that's what all Europe
198 is about. Otherwise I don't know... ambitions, most of the time.

Which are the major difficulties that these people find here?

200 Finding a job if you don't already have one, and for the rest is like in any other city, find an apartment, friends...
it's the same as in other cities, except that here landlords, shops, etc. are used to be in touch with newcomers.

202 **Would you be able to depict a typical Expat profile?**

204 Educated, multilinguistic, speaks several languages, and curious. I think if you come to live in another country
you need to be curious. And ambitious. And open, but not really about the city. Many of them leave without
knowing absolutely anything about Brussels or Belgium. And they are quite young, 20-35.

206 **Thank you very much.**

*Interview C: Claire-Lise Dautry
Directrice Alliance Française Bruxelles*

Pour commencer je voudrais savoir :

1. Qu'est ce que c'est l'Alliance Française ;

2. Quel genre de personnes la fréquentent.

L'Alliance Française vend des cours de « français langue étrangère », spécifiquement des cours de français à direction du public européen, avec des contenus particuliers, des supports particuliers, des démarches particulières, puisque le public européen représente la moitié des 3850 étudiants qui fréquentent l'Alliance F. en 2006. L'Alliance Française de Bruxelles Europe existe depuis 1945, c'est une énorme institution très soutenue par l'Etat français et l'Etat belge. Elle est centrée sur les activités de langue et exclusivement de langue (ce qui est un phénomène relativement nouveau). Elle fait aussi et elle a fait des activités culturelles en tant qu'institution culturelle : elle fait partie d'un consortium qui s'appelle aujourd'hui ENIC (European Institut for Culture) autrefois SISEP. A l'intérieur de ce consortium l'Alliance lance des projets culturels, mais il s'agit d'une activité mineur, car l'essentiel des son énergie est tourné vers les cours de langues. Elle crée du matériel puisqu'elle a reçu une mission de TV5 monde pour « didactiser » des journaux télévisés qui sont utilisés sur la terre entière ; elle travaille aussi avec RTBF, donc elle a un rôle d'avant-garde en termes de conception du matériel en Europe et pour le public européen : elle a donc une mission pédagogique.

Qu'est ce que ça veut dire « public européen ? »

La spécificité de cette Alliance F. c'est qu'elle agrippe dans son sein une institution qui s'appelle le CELF, Centre d'Etudes pour la Langue Française, qui aujourd'hui n'a pas de budget spécifique par ce qu'il est intégré dans l'Alliance, mais qu'historiquement fait partie de l'Alliance. Et le CELF a été créé en 1996 pour développer une offre en direction des publics des fonctionnaires européens (Commission, Parlement , Conseil , etc...). Sachant que pour avancer et postuler à la Commission Européenne quand on habite en Belgique il faut connaître trois langues (ça date d'un certain temps et ça c'est radicalisé en 2006), aujourd'hui il y a une demande explicite, spécifique, mesurée, évaluée des compétences en troisième langue étrangère. Il y a une vraie demande officielle et nous avons des partenaires, l'OIF, Organisation Internationale pour la Francophonie, qui a mis en place le plan pluriannuel pour les français. Et c'est l'OIF qui subventionne les cours pour le public européen. L'Alliance a remporté l'appel d'offre pour former les fonctionnaires de la Commission Européenne, l'avant-dernier a été gagné par l'Alliance, le dernier n'a pas été gagné et le prochain qui arrive, j'ai bien l'intention de le gagner. Donc on est très impliqués dans la formation du public européen.

Cela signifie que les fonctionnaires qui travaillent dans la Commission européenne ne paient pas les cours.

Oui : il faut dire que nous avons deux type de cours : les cours spécifiques et les cours standard. Pour les cours spécifiques, nous avons trois type de public : les diplomates, les journalistes accrédités et jusqu'en 2006 nous avons les END, Experts Nationaux Détachés. En général il s'agit de jeunes, qui doivent apprendre le français car on ne peut pas être journaliste, diplomate et vivre à Bruxelles, travailler dans la Commission sans connaître le français. Pour cette raison leurs cours sont pris en charge par l'OIF. Dans les cours standard, nous avons des conjoints, des parlementaires, d'autres fonctionnaires, du personnel technique, un tas d'autres personnel qui est intéressé par l'apprentissage du français. De près ou de loin nous travaillons avec des gens impliqués dans les institutions européennes.

Vous avez dit qu'il n'y a pas d'expatriés ici, si j'ai bien compris.

Je me suis mal exprimée, ici il y a des expatriés, pour moi il y a des travailleurs, qui viennent chez nous par ce qu'ils sont impliqués dans les entreprises belges, ils sont dans les universités ; par exemple, dernièrement on a reçu quelqu'un qui a eu un problème personnel, ce monsieur est turc et il veut monter un Hôtel, on a des artistes, on a des filles au pair, des étudiants, des chinois, des japonais ... On a des expatriés bien sûr, mais pour moi ce sont des professionnels, de tous les milieux, suédois, letton, russe, italien, espagnols et tous ces gens-là travaillent en Belgique à 50 % dans les institutions européennes.

Quelle est votre définition d'expatrié ?

Moi je suis expatriée, mais je ne me sens pas expatriée, c'est difficile, car quand on est française, on ne se sent pas expatriée en Belgique : ici c'est l'Europe. Je viens de passer cinq ans en Chine et là-bas il y a une communauté d'expatriés car il y a des bars d'expatriés, des magasins d'expatriés, une vraie vie d'expatrié, mais pas ici, on travaille ici, mais on n'est pas expatriés, ici c'est l'Europe.

Quelle est alors la différence entre expatriés et immigrés ?

Je ne me sens ni expatriée ni immigrée, je me sens européenne, française du sud qui a été détachée par son institution centrale dans une ville qui est à une heure et quart de Paris. Je suis un travailleur détaché. Dans

expatriation il y a le mot « ex » et je ne me sens pas « ex » ; quand j'étais au Japon, au Liban, au Venezuela, oui je me sentais expatriée mais pas ici. C'est mon point de vue.

Je voudrais comprendre si vous considérez les gens qui viennent ici comme des immigrés ou des expatriés ou seulement des personnes qui viennent pour une expérience temporaire.

Je ne peux pas répondre à leur place. J'ai rencontré dernièrement un monsieur espagnol, de Majorque, qui travaille à la Commission, sa femme est belge et il ne se sent pas immigré, je ne sais pas comment il se sent, j'imagine qu'il se sent européen (c'est ce qu'il avait l'aire de dire). Je pense que si on est moldave la situation n'est pas la même que si on est hollandais. Mais je ne peux pas répondre pour eux. Je peux vous dire que moi, au jour d'aujourd'hui, je ne me sens pas expatriée. Par exemple je n'aurais jamais l'idée de participer au cercle français en tant que français à Bruxelles. En Chine c'est différent : en Chine on fête le beaujolais nouveau et on est content. Ça dépend de plein de choses. Je pense qu'il y a des gens parmi les fonctionnaires internationaux qui se sentent en mission, en délégation mais qui ne se sentent pas expatriés; par ex. les stagiaires passent six mois ici ou neuf mois mais ils ne se considèrent pas expatriés, ni immigrés. Mais vous le découvrirez, je ne peux pas répondre à votre place. Ce n'est pas un terme que j'utiliserais pour ma situation et pour les profs. qui travaillent ici. La plupart ce sont des femmes mariées, qui vivent ici ... mais encore une fois je ne peux pas répondre pour elles.

Quelle est la définition officielle des expatriés, par exemple il y a un guide « les expatriés à Bruxelles » : qu'est ce que ça veut dire ce mot ?

Je ne peux pas vous répondre vraiment. J'imagine que c'est pour les démarches administratives, comment inscrire vos enfants à l'école, pour avoir la carte belge ... j'en sais rien ... pour moi c'est pour les familles qui veulent trouver des réponses pratiques, comme par ex. quelle est la bonne piscine ...

Mon impression c'est qu'il y a une construction sociale au tour de la conception de l'expatrié.

Oui, bien sûr.

Une construction avec une orientation politique, qui veut faire croire que Bruxelles c'est l'endroit idéal pour vivre, pour n'importe quelle nationalité.

C'est possible, mais là aussi je ne peux pas vraiment répondre. Il n'y a pas de difficultés particulières à s'installer à Bruxelles. Après avoir vécu au Japon j'étais mutée à Bruxelles et quand on me dit que c'est une aventure je réponds que ce n'est pas une grande aventure. Encore une fois, je ne parle que pour moi, peut être il y a des gens qui a vingt cinq ans quittent Toulouse et viennent ici et que pour eux c'est une aventure extraordinaire... mais je ne crois pas car je crois que le monde est devenu beaucoup plus petit et les jeunes partent plus qu'avant, mieux qu'avant avec moins d'angoisse qu'avant, mais je ne peux pas vous répondre ...

Vous avez dit que le monde est beaucoup plus petit : quelle est votre conception de la mondialisation ?

Je ne suis pas économiste, je suis universitaire en science du langage. En termes particulièrement égoïstes et personnels, je trouve merveilleux de pouvoir communiquer avec l'homme de ma vie, qui est au bout du monde, trois fois par jour, de pouvoir l'appeler sans que cela me ruine et inversement, quand je vais n'importe où j'ai un portable et je le joins et lui aussi et cela était impensable il y a dix ans. Mais ça, c'est ma vie. Je suis désespérée quand j'entends que quelqu'un que je connais s'est suicidé par ce que son usine a été délocalisée au Maroc et il n'a pas supporté et il s'est suicidé. La mondialisation c'est aussi « Le Monde » d'aujourd'hui qui fait un papier sur les conditions épouvantables des enfants chinois, qui travaillent dans les entreprises pour le JO et qui fabriquent des mascottes que des milliers de touristes vont acheter. Je vous dis des choses un peu bêtes, pour moi la mondialisation c'est un danger terrible et c'est une chance formidable. Ces questions je les ai vécues en Chine : j'étais en Chine il y a vingt ans et je suis retournée vingt cinq ans après et j'ai trouvé une Chine bouffée, attaquée, mitée par les pires éléments de la culture américaine : la musique misérable, la bouffe misérable, les comportements épouvantables. Ce n'est pas ça la mondialisation, ce n'est pas mettre des MC Do à tous les coins des rues, mais c'est un peu ce qu'il se passe. Il faut dire que cela c'est ce qui fait devenir la Chine de moins en moins autocrate et de plus en plus démocrate. La mondialisation à Bruxelles il faudrait la penser en termes socio-économiques et je n'ai pas d'arguments. Je suis comme les gens de ma génération sensibles au cinéma italien, j'adore aller voir Almodovar en VO et je refuse de le voir doublé, j'aime consommer de la culture qui a du sens et je me battrais pour que ça continue et pour les exceptions culturelles française, italienne, portugaise etc. et je refuse que quand un film français sort il y en quinze qui sortent aux US. Je suis citoyenne française et du monde, je suis prise en ces contradictions.

Je voudrais maintenant que vous parliez des étudiants qui fréquentent l'Alliance et de leurs motivations.

Les motivations sont doubles : personnelles et professionnelles. Les motivations professionnelles ce sont d'avoir une langue de travail dans les instances professionnelles : pouvoir communiquer en français dans les groupes de travail, dans les réunions... en réalité pouvoir communiquer vraiment dans une langue de travail c'est très difficile. Par exemple, je parle bien anglais, mais quand je dois écrire un mail très pointu dans un certain

114 domaine c'est autre chose... il faut être très prudent ... Si on arrive à former des fonctionnaires européens
116 capables de comprendre à l'oral les communications de travail, c'est déjà beaucoup ; s'ils arrivent à comprendre
118 d'autre part tout ce qui s'est dit de façon informelle, alors là, on a gagné. Ce qu'il faut savoir c'est que beaucoup
120 de gens viennent chez nous en disant qu'ils ont besoin de cours de français pour le travail, mais en réalité ça
122 cache une autre demande « je suis slovène, polonais ou espagnol ou danois .. et j'ai besoin d'acheter mon pain,
124 de commander ma bière et d'inscrire les enfants à l'école », donc il y a une double demande : il y a « fonctionner
126 et vivre à Bruxelles, parler avec ses commerçants et ses amis » et il y a aussi la demande professionnelle. Cette
dernière doit être analysée avec prudence parce que, encore une fois, on ne prétend pas en quelque mois rendre
les gens capables d'écrire notre langue et décoder et lire les textes professionnels en français. Je ne peux pas
vous répondre sur combien de temps les fonctionnaires européens restent à Bruxelles car ça dépend des contrats,
Nous, les français, avons des contrats de trois ans, mais j'ignore tout des contrats des tchèques ou des slovaques
ou des biélorusses. Tout ce que je peux vous dire c'est que l'OIF prend en charge trois sessions chacune de trente
heures, donc, dans l'absolu, nous pouvons avoir des gens qui restent chez nous de septembre à juin, mais en
général ils restent cinq, six mois, deux sessions.

Ils restent six mois par ce qu' après ils retournent dans leur Pays ?

128 Je ne peux pas vous répondre là-dessus, car ils viennent s'inscrire et après ils ont une surcharge de travail, ou
130 leur femme arrive, ou bien ils changent de commission, ou leur ambassadeur les réclame ; en revanche ce qu'on
132 sait c'est qu'il y a des gens qui font une session chez nous, ils interrompent et ils reviennent ; ou bien ils sont
134 nommés pour quelques années, et ils n'arrivent jamais avec un niveau débutant, ils sont plutôt au niveau A2 et
B1. On a une majorité de gens entre intermédiaire et avancé (le niveau le plus fort pour les intermédiaires et le
niveau débutant pour les avancés), donc quand ils montent d'un niveau, qu'ils sont en B2 comme vous ou
éventuellement en C1, ils considèrent que ça suffit et donc ils ne viennent plus ou bien ils reviennent car nous
avons aussi des C2 mais c'est très rare, ça veut dire qu'on a très peu de demandes.

Ca veut dire que la majorité des étudiants ne parlent pas très bien le français.

136 Comme vous.

J'estime que je ne parle pas très bien.

138 Vous pouvez travailler, aller dans la rue, aller chercher le journal, lire un texte

Quel est le niveau social des gens qui fréquentent l'école ?

140 Quand vous parlez des gens, vous entendez tout confondu ?

142 **Oui.**

144 C'est plutôt un bon niveau, car c'est culturel, ça coûte cher l'Alliance pour quelqu'un qui est immigré africain.
Évidemment nous n'avons pas ce type de public, à Bruxelles il y a beaucoup de cours gratuits, la plupart des
communes offrent des cours de français gratuits, donc les gens qui viennent à l'Alliance c'est des gens qui ont
des moyens, qui ont fait des études qui ont des demandes, qui veulent entrer à l'université. Hier j'ai rencontré
des filles brésiliennes de bon niveau socio culturel qui veulent intégrer l'université belge et qui viennent à
l'Alliance et non dans les cours des autres communes par ce qu'elles ont d'autres attentes. Donc la plupart des
personnes ont un BAC +3 [licence], ce sont des cadres, des cols blancs.

Vous avez une idée des attentes des étudiants ?

150 ... [she repeats again something said above] .. on n'a pas de blocs identifiés. Dans les zones non francophones,
152 on a des objectifs plus précis, mais pas ici.

Quelles sont les difficultés que les expatriés rencontrent ici mis à part la langue ?

154 Je ne peux pas parler pour tous les expatriés, je pense qu'un diplomate asiatique n'a pas les mêmes difficultés
156 qu'un diplomate hollandais et qu'une femme qui travaille n'a pas les mêmes difficultés qu'une femme qui ne
travaille pas. Encore une fois je peux répondre que pour moi. Quand vous partez au bout du monde, vous savez
que vous avez tout à faire ; vous savez que vous devez vous adapter. Quand vous partez en Belgique, vous
158 pensez que ce n'est pas très difficile mais en fait c'est difficile, c'est différent, car il faut une adaptation
culturelle, il faut apprendre des comportements sociaux et culturels et alimentaires, bien sûr c'est un autre Pays.
160 Les difficultés d'adaptation que vous avez eu vous en arrivant d'Italie. Moi je suis une fille profondément
identifiée comme une européenne du sud et je préfère vivre comme en Italie, en Espagne ou à Montpellier. Je ne
162 supporte pas que tout ferme à six heures et demis, je n'aime pas les maisons unifamiliales, je préfère l'huile
d'olive à la crème ... Je ne peux pas répondre pour les expatriés, je pense qu'ils ont des difficultés mais au même
164 temps ils ont des vraies facilités, car c'est une ville internationale, où l'on parle anglais partout. Je ne suis pas
sûre qu'en France dans n'importe quel banque, on vous accueille en anglais, français, ou néerlandais. Ici
166 n'importe quel garçon de café parle deux langues voir trois.

**Pour moi les expatriés se divisent en deux groupes : le premier groupe c'est les expatriés qui viennent ici
168 par ce qu'ils rêvent de travailler dans une institution internationale et ils restent six mois, un an, deux ans**

170 **et après ils rentrent chez eux par ce qu'ils n'ont pas accès aux institutions ou bien ils viennent pour faire**
171 **une expérience pour leur CV et ils restent trois, quatre ans. Et il y a les expatriés qui viennent pour rester**
172 **ici par ce qu'ils ont déjà un contrat avec une grande institution ou une société importante.**

173 Mais c'est rare d'avoir un contrat qui dure toute la vie. Vous avez des contrats renouvelables. Vous avez
174 totalement éludé la question des immigrés africains, asiatiques : à la gare et dans d'autres services, vous avez
175 des maghrébins, des africains, il suffit d'ouvrir les yeux.

176 **J'ai fait une distinction qui coïncide avec votre distinction. On peut faire une distinction entre les expatriés**
177 **qui viennent ici avec une bonne situation socioculturelle et les immigrés qui viennent ici sans rien.**

178 ...Ou avec le rattachement familial, mais c'est un autre sujet. Je ne connais pas la situation ici, je la connais un
179 peu en France. Cela dit vous avez raison, c'est évident qu'un coréen ne sera pas expatrié de la même façon au
180 Japon que à Bruxelles. Dans expatriation il y a « ex », changer de patrie, mais ici vous avez la dimension
181 européenne.

182 **Ma dernière question concerne les relations entre les belges et les étrangers. On m'a dit que les relations**
183 **sont aussi bien faciles que difficiles : je voudrais comprendre mieux.**

184 C'est comme la question sur la mondialisation, on ne peut pas répondre, on dirait des banalités. Vous arrivez en
185 Pays étranger et vous découvrez des surprises là où pensez qu'il y en a pas et des choses faciles là où vous
186 pensez qu'elles sont difficiles. Je connais relativement peu la Belgique. J'ai voyagé à l'intérieur du Pays mais
187 pas beaucoup, c'est un Pays très particulier, petit mais très particulier. Vivre comme française à Gans ou à
188 Anvers ce n'est pas comme vivre à Bruxelles, vous savez ... Est ce qu'on parle de Bruxelles ?

189 **Oui on parle de Bruxelles.**

190 Bruxelles c'est une ville internationale, mais au même temps c'est une petite ville, elle n'a pas la vie d'une
191 capitale sur un tas de plans, par ex. sur le plan de la vie sociale. A Paris le dimanche tout est ouvert et tout
192 fonctionne, les gens sont dehors, c'est convivial. A Bruxelles quand on sort des marchés où il y a une dimension
193 conviviale, c'est difficile. Par ex., à Bruxelles quand on sort du travail c'est impossible de trouver un kiosque
194 pour acheter le journal. A Paris on peut acheter le journal jusqu'à huit heures le soir, et c'est quelque chose qui
195 me dérange. Quand je rentre chez moi, j'aime bien lire le journal. Le week-end ici est très mort par rapport à
196 Londres, Paris et Berlin. Ce que je vous dis c'est du blabla.. je ne vis pas depuis longtemps ici, je ne pense pas
197 que les belges soient difficiles d'accès, au même temps je vis dans un milieu très international, mes amis ne
198 sont pas tellement belges, j'habite dans un quartier marocain/africain donc mes voisins ne sont pas belges.
199 J'habite dans un immeuble avec beaucoup d'étrangers. J'espère avoir répondu à vos questions...

Vous m'avez donné des pistes ... Merci.

Interview n° 1: Portugal

2

4 **Where are you from?**

From Portugal.

6 **Is this your unique citizenship?**

Yes.

8 **Did you have other experiences in other countries before this one?**

Yes.

10 **Where?**

In Holland.

12 **How long for?**

About 5 months, then in Germany, twice, so it was in total one and a half year, and then this one.

14 **In Holland were you for study? And in Germany?**

I was for study, with the Erasmus; in Germany it was an intership for 1 year, then for 5 months, for work, for a post-graduation internship.

16 **Did you use European Programs to make your experiences?**

Yes all my experiences were financed at least partially through European programs.

Besides Erasmus which other ones?

20 The European Consortium Innovative University grant and the Leonardo da Vinci program.

What are the reasons that pushed you to move from your country?

22 Different ones. One that I had previous experiences, and I enjoyed them, they were good experiences, so I was already willing to go abroad again; secondly, it was the job opportunity, we can say it was an improvement, and also the salary was considerably better; thirdly, for personal reasons, due to the fact that my girlfriend also is abroad, closer to Brussels than to my hometown in Porto.

26 **Would you say that the main push factor was your job career or would you put the 3 motivations on the same level?**

28 The 3 things, because it was a conjugation of reasons that made me accept.

Which are or were your expectations here in Belgium?

30 Professionally speaking, it was the opportunity offered by this position [his present job], at least on paper, that is to start a new business, or at least opening a new office starting the business in different cities, so this development opportunity was very motivating; personally, it was coming to a new city, discovering the city, the people, the culture; and being close also to my girlfriend.

34 **Did you have any special expectations about the city?**

36 No, I didn't have any special expectation about the city itself. A place where you are going to live, to spend your time, I must confess it wasn't that important for me.

Now that you've been in Brussels for 4 months, do you think that your expectations are satisfied?

38 Yes and no. Yes, I think there was more or less what I predicted, but also it could be better, you know. It is inside the range of my expectations, but I must confess that I was open to a better social integration and also to better job activities.

So don't you feel integrated in the city?

42 No, no, definitely not, not at all.

Why?

44 For lack of time and opportunities, basically. Lack of time due to job constraint: it takes a lot of time; and opportunity because since I'm living alone, it is much more difficult to know new people, and also because since I work in a small office there aren't many opportunities to make connections.

46 **Do you consider your experience in Brussels a short-term one, and then you think to go back home, or you consider it as a long-term experience and even to remain abroad?**

48 Remaining in Brussels: I consider it a short term experience; but in terms of being abroad overall, it's possible that it is a long term experience; I mean, I don't see myself having to spend my life in Portugal, I consider at least European Union as my country.

52 **What does it mean for you short-term and long-term?**

54 It was based on what you said: I consider it short to spend a certain period here and then returning or going to another place, I consider long-term the idea to spend my life here, of settling down. A short term should be up to 3 years, let's say.

56 **Do you think that the experience you are having here is common to the majority of European young people or you consider it as a privilege that affects only a minority of them?**

58 I consider it as a privilege that affects a minority, although it is increasing the percentage of people able to have such experience, but overall I think it's still a minor part of them.

60 **Let's talk about your life in Brussels. Had you the possibility to get in touch with people from other countries? When?**

62 Yes. Our office is a multicultural ambient: we share the building with another multicultural company, so on our work on a daily basis we share different experiences; with the extra work activities people that I know are all from other countries, so I think I'm integrated pretty much in the foreign community, which in Brussels makes sense since here 50% of population are foreigners. It's a special environment.

66 **Does this community make you feel comfortable and integrated or not?**

68 No. Even in relation to this community my contacts are few, it's not a matter that I can say I communicate or spend my time with foreign people, it's a matter that I don't spend my time with a lot of people overall. Due to my past experience I think it's possible to feel comfortable in a city just spending most of your time with foreign people, but it depends: I think that right now my problem is a lack of communication overall, or not communication, but socialisation.

72 **Normally in Brussels do you tend to stay with people of your own country or from others?**

74 Of other countries. I never had the tendency to stay with people from my own country, you know, if you go abroad you want to open yourself to new experiences. In my opinion if you stay only with people from your own country you are not open to new experiences. So I always try to communicate as much as possible with other nationalities.

76 **Which are the difficulties and the positive aspects that you find in the relations with people from other countries?**

78 The difficulty is always the language barrier, which makes a problem I think; sometimes also some cultural aspects, although, you know, I tend to establish relationships with people compatible, so that normally the cultural barrier is not a problem. The advantages are the diversity of culture and relationships, and people overall.

82 **What do you mean by saying that you try to find compatible people?**

84 Yes. You meet people right and you identify some bonds with people who have something in common with you, that you start to feel well talking with. So that's a normal process, I think. On the cultural side it can be a barrier, but not very significant, because when you do know the people and establish a relationship, it's because you have already something in common; so I don't think that culture would be a barrier, I think it's more like a benefit, because it creates some diversity, so it's always interesting.

88 **Do you find any differences between the kind of relationship you have in your country and those you have here?**

90 Hmm... It's difficult to judge, because when I think to my home relationships I think in terms of my past, I go back to my childhood, of long lasting friendships, and I don't think it that much in this kind of environment, [where] I think in a shorter term. This should be the main difference, I think.

94 **Do you mean that these relationships won't last or that they didn't have a past?**

96 They didn't have a past and I don't have high expectations in the future, I don't think of them in a long term. For me it's normal to meet someone and talk with them, to discuss, to create some kind of communication bond, but it doesn't mean that I can meet them in the future. Maybe in Portugal I immediately assume that if we communicate well we can have a long lasting relationship.

98 **Other differences?**

100 In terms of communication? Hmm... No. I think the major difference is that when you meet people here you expect much more diversity in terms of discussion, topics to discuss, you expect to learn much more new things, to share different opinions and visions because, you know, you are talking with people who come from countries where you have not been or that you don't really know. I expect that communication has a much more rich content.

104 **Being abroad are you able to keep the relationships in your country?**

106 Not really, few of them, because I don't have the time or the energy to keep the contact with such a big group and because I don't like to get attached. If I live, I prefer to focus on the reality where I am.

108 **If you came back would they start again or not?**

Some of them yes, some of them no.

110 **Do you suffer for this? Do you miss them?**

Well, sometimes. But I think that at the end of my benefit is beneficial, I suffer a little bit, but I gain more.

- 112 **Did you maintain the relationships created in other countries?**
114 Some of them, but overall I must say that I maintain very few ones. Which is part of my tendency to focus on the present, not to look back. I don't have the time or the will to loose time with it.
- 116 **Which are the reasons for that?**
118 First of all it's a personal thing, not cultural: I don't like to look back [in my life]. You loose a lot of time to maintain relationships, because you have to write e-mails, make phone calls, or write letters and for me, well, I don't like it. Also because I don't like remembering the past. So if I try to maintain these relationships back home, for me is like trying to remain in touch with the past. Although I think that sometimes I should do it, but...
- 120 **So do you think that you will be able or that you will desire to maintain the relationships you might create in Brussels?**
122 Well, thinking of my past history: no; well, it's not one hundred percent, I do maintain some of them, just the strongest ones.
- 124 **Can you mention which instruments you used in the past to maintain your relationships? For instance with your girlfriend.**
126 With my girlfriend it's completely different, because I use mobile phone, I use everything, like in a normal relationship. I use mobile (audio and SMS); then I use internet e-mail, MSN, Skype; with Skype I use mainly audio and writing, and sometimes the video, but not frequently.
- 128 **Do you have a web cam?**
130 Yes, recently I bought it.
- 132 **Do you meet her and your friends?**
134 I meet her frequently and my friends occasionally.
- 136 **How frequently?**
138 Every 2 or 3 weeks.
- 140 **And with your friends?**
142 With my friends I tend to use just e-mails, webmessenger (MSN), that's it.
- 144 **Why do you prefer these instruments?**
146 Because they are easy to use and convenient. E-mail, for example: you can write whenever you want, you don't have to sincronize with the other person. This is a very important advantage. And MSN is widely diffused, everyone uses it, so it's easy and convenient too.
- 148 **Are your friends from the EU or outside?**
150 Also from outside Europe, for example Mexico, Canada, USA, Honk Kong.
- 152 **Are they from these countries, or are they people from the European Union who just live abroad?**
154 From these countries.
- 156 **How would you describe your identity?**
158 I don't feel a citizen of the world. I'm in between a European and a Portuguese. When I'm at home I feel European, when I'm in Europe I feel that I must defend my Portuguese roots. It's a good answer, eh? [Laugh].
- 160 **It's a frequent answer.**
162 I imagine it [laugh].
- 164 **What do you think you have in common with the Europeans?**
166 I share the vision of the single land, let's say so. I share the notion it's easy to access, that it's important to exchange experiences, they can be as nice as anyone else in my hometown, for example, so it's a world of opportunities, you know, more diversity, which is always better; there are lot of things that you can learn and also lot of things that you can pass on.
- 168 **This is more a notion of Europe. What do you feel you have in common with the other Europeans?**
170 Well everything. The land, the history, the culture. I think the culture defines everything. I identify myself, for example, in terms of humour, conceptions...
- 172 **What is for you a different culture?**
174 Difficult to explain, because first of all in Europe we share already quite a similar culture, but there are always differences. We share McDonald's, we share this globalisation points, and we share the past, alliances between countries which leaves marks, for example Portugal has a strong past relation with England, we have same background, and these are things that you can see very easily; but then there is this globalisation, especially in Europe and the United States, but I think in Europe is stronger because we are part of the same continent. Then there are differences which are part of each nation and which are based on their past traditions; for example in Portugal we have different cultural relations with Spanish people, although we are very close, and if we consider slight details like to eat, to dress, what kind of music you like more or less, so there are differences, and the thing I find interesting is that with European people from different countries you can find out every now and then that

168 “ah, it’s different this situation from my situation in my country”; also it’s related to the teaching system: you
170 learn different things at school. So despite the fact that it is very easy to identify yourself with every people,
172 because you share common places or ground, the industry, the business activity, etc., your hobbies, you still can
identify, every now and then, differences under cultural aspects; for instance in Italy men kiss on the two cheeks
while for me it’s completely strange.

In which sense you say that we share the culture but we have differences in our national cultures?

174 I mean, it’s simple: as inside your own country you share different culture and differences in between cities, due
to traditions.

What the expression ‘citizen of the world’ suggests to you?

176 It means that you consider yourself part of the world not part of a country; you think that countries are
178 buroucratic institutions and you have a vision to belong to the whole planet, to the Earth, and countries are just
lines traces by some people.

Why don’t you identify with this vision?

180 Because my experiences outside Europe are not so many to enable me to identify with this concept.

Do you think you have values in common with people that, like you, had experiences abroad?

182 Yes. One of them is the [fact of being] open mind: you see and accept other ways of conducting the rules; I think
184 one thing that everyone has, having been in other countries, is this respect for diversity, a broader vision of the
world; because people who don’t share this experience tend to be more closed in their own city or at least in their
186 own country, in their own culture, in their own language: they don’t see the big picture.

Do you see the big picture?

188 I wouldn’t say I see it totally but at least I see the European big picture. It’s different to see the European picture,
because we are an advanced continent with rich countries. I don’t see the big picture in terms of third world
190 countries. So I think it’s completely different. Although I had some experiences with people coming from third
world countries and the cultural shocks are very much bigger.

Your study level?

192 Master in Industrial engineering and management.

Your profession?

194 Consultant.

Your knowledge of languages?

196 English and German, Spanish and Portuguese.

Would you like to remain in contact for a couple of years?

198 Yes, of course.

Interview n° 2: Spain

- 2
- 4 **¿De donde vienes en España exactamente?**
De un pueblo de Alicante.
- 6 **¿O sea de un pueblecito, una realidad pequeña?**
Relativamente pequeña, es un pueblo turístico.
- 8 **¿Y tuviste otras experiencias al extranjero antes de esta?**
Sí, en Reino Unido.
- 10 **¿De qué tipo?**
Erasmus.
- 12 **¿Cuándo?**
En el 2004-2005.
- 14 **¿Cuánto tiempo?**
Un año.
- 16 **¿En donde exactamente?**
En Gales, Cardiff.
- 18 **¿Te gustó?**
Muchísimo.
- 20 **¿Y solamente eso?**
Y aquí en Bruselas.
- 22 **¿Y aquí en Bruselas estás cómo?**
¿ En qué sentido ?
- 24 **Quiero decir, ¿estás con una beca?**
Sí, estoy con el Programa Leonardo da Vinci.
- 26 **¿Por qué has decidido moverte de tu país?**
Cuando volví a España después de mi período Erasmus, me encontré con una situación laboral bastante desagradable, ehr...
- 28 **Perdona. ¿El período de Erasmus fue el último año de tu carrera?**
- 30 Sí. Y cuando volví a España empecé a buscar trabajo en lo mío y me encontré con un panorama bastante... que
- 32 no, que no me parecía bien, que no estaba de acuerdo. El caso es que cuando tú acabas una carrera en España,
- 34 como hay un exceso de titulados superiores, las empresas hacen que la gente cuando empieza a trabajar lo haga
- 36 en prácticas, y pagados por el bajo de lo que se le debería pagar a un titulado superior. Entonces como las
- 38 condiciones laborales son malas, no encontré trabajo en mi campo y empecé a trabajar de otra cosa; en Barcelona
- 40 trabajaba al día unas 14 horas, y cobraba 900 euros. Entonces visto lo visto, y que seguía gustando de lo mío,
- 42 tampoco le di mucho tiempo: sólo estuve 6 meses en España después del Reino Unido, visto lo visto como
- 44 estaba con ganas de salir al extranjero otra vez... me salió casualmente en Bruselas, en Bruselas tengo familia, y
- 46 me pareció una cosa interesante, que podía hacer, y...
- 48 **Y estás aquí.**
Y estoy aquí.
- 50 **Pero vamos a ver, las cosas no salen por casualidad. ¿Realmente fue una casualidad, o tú la buscaste?**
- 52 No, yo la busqué totalmente. Yo en mi trabajo que estaba busqué... bueno, me dieron una beca para Perú, la
- 54 rechacé. O sea que podría estar ahora mismo a Perú. Salieron varias cosa, porque me pasaba todo el día en el
- 56 Internet buscando cosas, así que fue una cosa que busqué. Pero la opción de Bruselas me pareció más fácil,
- ¿Qué familia tienes aquí? ¿Es cercana?
- No, no es muy cercana. Es la hermana de mi novio. Mi novio vino aquí también. Cuando a mí me dieron la beca
- decidió que él venía conmigo también.
- O sea, que estáis viviendo juntos.**
- Sí.
- ¿Qué significa para ti vivir en Bruselas?**
- Significa básicamente, si hago un resumen, explorar otro campo que no es el mío, es decir estoy en una carrera
- de ciencias y me he metido en temas europeos, he aprendido cosas de qué no tenía la más mínima idea.
- ¿Y más allá de lo profesional?**
- Pues, más allá de lo profesional, académicamente he hecho un master, y creo que va a beneficiarme.

- 58 **¿Estás haciendo un master aquí?**
Sí, estoy haciendo un master ahora mismo, estoy escribiendo mi tesis, la entrego el mes que viene.
- 60 **¿En la ULB [Université Libre de Bruxelles, with French courses]?**
No, en la VLB [the correspondent city university, but with Flemish courses].
- 62 **¿Hablas flamenco?**
No, es en inglés.
- 64 **Bueno, esto siempre es algo en un sentido profesional. ¿Y más en lo personal?**
En lo personal ha supuesto mucho, porque mi pareja y yo, al tener una situación laboral en Barcelona, en España, no buena, nos influyó bastante. Aquí nos hemos sentido más motivados, hemos empezado a hacer cosas que nos gustan, y la relación de pareja ha ido mejor. En Barcelona el trabajo le dejaba bastante deprimido, yo no tenía tiempo para estar en casa, porque como trabajaba tantas horas al día... él no trabajaba, no encontraba trabajo, trabajaba por la esporádicas, entonces eso se nos repercutió como pareja muchísimo; además de que no teníamos tiempo libre. Y el concepto belga, que nos gusta muchísimo, es el concepto de trabajar las horas que hay que trabajar, acabar a las cinco y tener un 60% de vida personal y un 40% de lo profesional. Ésta es la mentalidad que hemos visto aquí, que en España no hemos visto. Y eso nos ha beneficiado como pareja.
- 72 **¿Tenías expectativas con respecto a tu desplazamiento aquí?**
Sí, la verdad. Esperaba que me contratasen después [de la beca], pero luego no, no me lo hicieron. Y ahora estoy buscando trabajo. Cogen un becario y después cogen otro.
- 74 **¿Y a nivel personal?**
¿Expectativas a nivel personal? Pues, el hecho de estar en el extranjero, aprender una lengua nueva, y conocer gente nueva, y engrosar un poco el curriculum. Sí, te estoy diciendo siempre de lo profesional, pero es que ésta es mi mayor preocupación ahora, entonces influencia todo lo personal.
- 78 **¿Hace cuánto que estás aquí?**
Hace un año y medio.
- 80 **¿Y crees que tus expectativas se están realizando?**
Pues ahora mismo estoy en un período de transición que no puedo... las expectativas sí, es un período fructífero, he hecho un master, una experiencia laboral, con mi pareja va muy bien, vivo tranquila, sin estrés en una ciudad sin estrés, para mí: puedo ir andando desde el trabajo a casa, en el metro la gente no se empuja, es una ciudad tranquila, hasta el punto que llega a ser demasiado tranquila. Pero he tenido una paz que no tenía en Barcelona, y Barcelona es una ciudad mucho más divertida, mucho más bonita, pero la paz que tengo aquí en Bruselas no la tenía yo ahí. Y por eso me gusta. Yo pienso que sí, que la experiencia aquí ha sido muy fructífera, más que los 6 meses en Barcelona. Los 6 meses que pasé en Barcelona: como si no hubiera hecho nada.
- 84 **¿Estás aprendiendo una lengua nueva ?**
Sí.
- 86 **¿Estás conociendo a gente?**
Sí, sí.
- 88 **¿Este período, esta experiencia que estás haciendo aquí, la consideras más, eso, una experiencia, o como el principio de algo de más largo plazo?**
Es que ahora lo que voy a hacer no lo sé, porque eso depende de una decisión. A ver, yo puede que me quede aquí 4 años más, pero en este caso ya no depende de mí, depende de mi pareja. Mi pareja trabaja en el servicio geológico igual que yo, le dieron una beca igual que yo, su historia es muy paralela a la mía, pero ahora a él le ofrecieron un doctorado, entonces si a él le dan ese doctorado nos quedamos aquí. Entonces depende un poco de esta decisión. Entonces yo me planteo: me quedo 4 años, quizá me compro una casa aquí, quizá empiece algo aquí. No estoy hablando de una cosa de ida y venida, nada más, como casi todo el mundo que viene y se va aquí. A lo mejor estoy hablando de quedarme aquí un tiempo.
- 100 **¿Podría ser por toda tu vida?**
Bueno, eso ya no lo puedo saber. Pero si esta beca no sale, sabes dependemos de las decisiones... depende todo de como va a estar, quizás él y yo nos planteemos de hacer algo más descabellado y de ir a otro sitio que... que nos guste más.
- 102 **¿Por ejemplo ?**
Un sitio bonito: es una cosa tan simple como es, un sitio bonito. Es que un sitio puede ser bonito, pero... lo profesional no me puedo desarrollar aquí, ¿qué más me da estar en otro sitio? Por lo menos salgo a la calle por la mañana y me levanto y veo el sol y paseo por las calles y... no sé... en realidad aquí no voy a conseguir lo profesional que necesito, lo que quiero, pues prefiero vivir en un sitio más bonito.
- 106 **¿Pero estamos hablando de España?**
No, da igual.
- 108
- 110
- 112

¿Cualquier sitio en todo el mundo?

114 Sí, sí, cualquier sitio, si sale algo... y también que salga algo interesante. Es que nosotros, sabes, jugamos al azar,
estamos jugando al azar. Te estoy diciendo que hasta hemos echado para ir a Nueva Zelanda ahora mismo,
116 hemos aplicado para unas plazas ahí, para unas plazas de investigación, para becas doctorales... Nosotros no
paramos, nuestra mente es global, no es en absoluto “es que tengo que volver a España”, no no: vamos a ir allí
118 donde las condiciones sean mejores y donde lo que vayamos a hacer nos motive más, y si puede ser en un sitio
bonito. En Honduras también hemos echado de voluntarios. Es que hay un montón de ideas. Como tenemos las
120 manos vacías, no ganamos nada ni perdemos nada. Yo tengo ahora mismo sueldo mínimo y él también, somos
estudiantes. Se puede decir que somos como estudiantes, empezando todo. Puede ser quedarse en Bruselas, o ir a
122 cualquier parte del mundo, o volver a España, ¿por qué no? Si sale algo interesante.

¿Te irías a China, por ejemplo?

124 ¿Por qué no? Si me ofrecieron un proyecto interesante.

¿El tipo de experiencia que estás haciendo aquí la consideras una cosa muy popular, que ocurre frecuentemente a los jóvenes europeos, o algo todavía restringido a una minoría?

126 Yo creo muy popular. Desde que el Erasmus existe. Pero éste es el paso posterior al Erasmus.

Es que claro, tú te consideras un estudiante.

A lo mejor.

¿Y por lo que afecta a los profesionales?

130 ¿Por lo que afecta a los profesionales? Vale, yo te doy mi punto de vista de recién licenciada, entonces no tengo
132 una carrera profesional, se puede decir, estoy en el primer peldaño de mi carrera profesional. Sé que bueno,
cuando me viste en el contexto, cuando nos conocimos, en el “energy in transport infoday”, allí ves gente que
134 está para allá, para acá, que viene solamente a eso, gente que está aquí en la oficina central de muchas empresas,
pero te dicen que quieren irse de aquí, y... he conocido a gente que trabaja en la Comisión, o a gente que trabaja
136 en ONG, y he estado en fiestas, y he hablado con el mundo, “yo trabajo en esto”, “toma mi tarjeta”, un rollo un
poco... se podría decir que mi rollo es un poco más infantil. Sí, porque estoy con estudiantes todo el tiempo, y es
138 otra cosa, o sea la gente que conozco, los Brusselois que conozco son un poco en mi situación, o sea chavales
que acaban de acabar la carrera: son la gente con qué más me entretengo, yo no trato con gente que está en otra
140 esfera.

¿Dirías que conoces a mucha gente aquí en Bruselas?

142 Tampoco. Pero la misma que en Barcelona.

¿La gente que conoces dirías que son amigos?

144 ¿Amigos amigos? Amigos uno. En el año no hay nadie que... bueno luego hay mi pareja, pero bueno, eso no
cuenta.

¿En qué ocasiones aquí en Bruselas tienes la posibilidad de tener contactos con gente de otros países?

146 Pues, ¿en lo lúdico o en lo profesional? En lo profesional hay oportunidades todo el rato, sabes, todo el tiempo,
148 por ejemplo ahí en donde nos conocimos [FP7 energy and transport official infoday]; en este tipo de cosas
siempre estoy yo metida, con X [su jefa], para allá, para acá. En el water conference estoy trabajando con
150 expertos que buscan información de todo lo que sale en la legislación nueva comunitaria relacionada con
geología, ahí salto yo, para enterarme de las calls for proposals, de donde pueden aplicar, de donde salen los
152 proyectos, estoy en un montón de eventos, y en esos momentos es donde encuentro... es que es totalmente
internacional. Y después cuando sales, en fiestas. En las fiestas casi todos son brussellois, son más bien
154 brussellois, excepto alguna fiesta a que nos ha invitado una persona que hemos conocido en los cursos de
idioma. En los cursos de idiomas suelen ser gente que son parejas de gente que trabaja en la Comisión, que
156 vienen aquí, que no tienen más remedio y que no tienen nada que hacer.

Pero nada de amigos entre toda esta gente.

158 ¿Amigos amigos? No.

¿Aquí en Bruselas tienes la tendencia a buscar y a estar más con españoles o con gente de otros países?

160 Es que yo pienso que no tengo tendencia a buscar más o menos. Mi master es completamente internacional, mi
master está financiado por la Unesco, y tiene gente de Palestina, de Vietnam...

Pues entonces ahí también encuentras a gente.

162 Y esa son la gente que suelo buscar. Y además este es el nuevo conocimiento, gente del tercer mundo, este es el
164 nuevo descubrimiento que hice aquí en Bruselas, gente de Gaza, de Zambia, de Jordania, de Vietnam, de Nepal.
Es que son países de los que jamás he conocido nadie en mi vida. Y esa gente es la con la que me suelo
166 moverme, sobre todo con los árabes, son los que más he hecho más enlaces. Y después hay los brussellois que
son de aquí, pero es que no busco a unos o a otros... y españoles, vale, hay que decir que mi mejor amigo aquí es
168 español.

170 **¿Tú crees que es casualidad que es español?**

Es que él viene también conmigo. Es que vamos a ver: vine mi novio pero vine el también aquí.

Entonces no le conociste aquí.

172 No, él es un amigo, él estuvo en Cardiff conmigo, él estudió conmigo, él es un amigo de toda la vida. Se podría
174 decir que él ha tenido una situación como si fuera mi novio, pero que vino aquí para mí. ¡Mi segundo novio!
[risas]. Él vivía en Barcelona también, encontró a una chica, y se fue aquí. Estábamos nosotros aquí, porque él es
176 muy amigo nuestro, de Y [her boyfriend] y yo, entonces se les dijo “están ahí mis amigos del alma, está ahí mi
novia, me voy allí yo también”, y ahora casualidad que están aquí mis mejores amigos. No es que lo haya
conocido aquí.

178 **¿Encuentras fácil crear nuevas relaciones aquí en Bruselas ?**

Sí.

180 **¿Más o menos que en España?**

Menos. [risas]

182 **¿Por qué?**

184 Sí, pero... vamos a ver, es que yo... el punto de vista subjetivo mío. Tú sabes lo que es el ambiente universitario,
en el ambiente universitario conoces a gente a diestro y a siniestro, da igual que sea España o que no sea España,
conoces gente, con lazos no muy fuertes, pero conoces gente. Pero ahora que tuve la pequeña experiencia de
186 Barcelona me di cuenta de que ya no es lo mismo, ahí me encerré un poco al mundo de pareja, al mundo de
trabajo y de pareja, y llegar cansado y no... es que no te voy a decir que en Bruselas es más fácil o es más difícil.
188 Si yo estoy aquí de estudiante pues para mí es muy fácil, pero si estoy trabajando muchísimo, pues no tendría
tiempo, es lo que siempre me quejaba. [pausa] Pero tampoco te quiero liar. Lo que quiero decir es: es más fácil
190 en España, pero depende de la situación en la que tú estés en el País. En Reino Unido la gente no suele
pasárselo... en Reino Unido la gente era muy cerrada en general, pero a mí me salió facilísimo conocer a gente,
192 gente de allí.

¿Y eso cómo lo explicas?

194 ¿Eso cómo lo explico? [pausa] Yo he encontrado de todo, lo que a mí no me gusta. Vamos a ver, a mí lo que no
me gusta es, todos los españoles tenemos un carácter muy fuerte, somos muy sectarios, solemos ir juntos,
196 solemos agruparnos, igual que los italianos. Es un tópico pero a mí me lo parece, realmente, cuando estamos al
extranjero. Entonces como eso iba en contra de todo lo que yo quería hacer, yo me empeñé en que eso no pudiera
198 pasar, porque si hacía eso me estaba perdiendo algo. Ya he conocido a muchos españoles durante toda mi vida.
Desde que nací estoy conociendo españoles. Ya que estoy fuera yo pienso que sea el momento de conocer a
200 gente de otros países, de conocer a otras cosas, no tiene sentido que yo... en la universidad, hay un ejemplo muy
claro que a nosotros nos da miedo, porque cenamos ahí, y hay una mesa de gente que está haciendo doctorado o
202 postdoctorado de otros departamentos, y hay una mesa larguísima de españoles, son todos españoles, que
siempre se quedan a comer, y comen todos juntos, y es que no se mezclan, son incapaces de, de... y los ves y
204 siempre te dicen “venid a comer en la mesa con nosotros”, ¡no! Es que no nos gusta, no nos gusta. Se supone que
toda esta gente de la Universidad en un departamento, ¿por qué a la hora de comer te tienes que ir con los
206 españoles, y no vas con los de tu departamento, con la que estás todos los días? Ahora está bien que tampoco
vamos a huir de los españoles, pero es una cosa que nos llama la atención y que no nos gusta, que nos parece que
208 te pierdes algo, y no rechazas a tu propia gente, pero es un poco huir de ciertas actitudes que suele tener la gente
cuando está en el extranjero: los españoles somos muy cerrados. Hemos empezado a viajar hace muy poco,
210 hemos empezado a salir de España hace muy poco, y eso es lo que, es lo peor que yo tengo, también me lo aplico
a mí, sabes. Pero es que somos una gente con un carácter que nos no... nuestros amigos de la universidad, igual,
212 cuando... siempre quejándose de todo, quejándose del mal tiempo... por favor! Si tienes que estar así en el
extranjero, vuélvete a España y déjanos en paz! Son unos pesados de verdad. Me da una rabia!

214 **Entonces puedo decir que, sea donde sea, a ti te sale fácil conocer a gente porque te abres a la gente, porque quieres conocer a la gente.**

216 Sí.

O sea, haces un esfuerzo para conocer a gente que no sea...

218 Hago un esfuerzo en cuanto al idioma que estoy aprendiendo, porque me está costando el francés; para mí
mantener una conversación inteligente en francés ahora mismo... hace dos semanas estuve en una fiesta, y vale,
220 llegaba a tener algún tipo de conversación sobre algo, pero porque la persona con que estaba hablando conocía el
español, y entonces manteníamos la conversación en francés, y yo estaba metiendo patas pero ella entendía lo
222 que estaba diciendo porque sabía mi manera de pensar española. Por el idioma me cuesta, pero por lo demás no
me cuesta nada. Por eso digo: es menos fácil aquí que en España, pero en cuanto a lo que afecta al idioma,
224 porque no lo tengo todavía.

226 **¿Cuáles son las dificultades y cuáles los aspectos positivos que encuentras cuando te relacionas con gente de otros países?**

228 [Pausa] bueno, numero uno es ver distintos puntos de vista y conocer un poco de... eso es muy positivo. Ahora para tener una mentalidad crítica, hay que escuchar a la gente, y hay veces que en el mismo país las ideas están muy dirigidas, sobre todo las ideas políticas. Hay un bando u otro, o ideas sobre leyendas populares, que todo el mundo piensa lo mismo. Por ejemplo en mi país está el bando derecha o izquierda: el discurso de los de la derecha los sabes cuando los escuchas, y el discurso de los de la izquierda: sabes lo que van a decir, sabes cual es la siguiente frase que van a decir. Sin embargo cuando hablas con gente de otro país, en donde la evolución histórica ha sido distinta, cuando hablas de un tema te van a dar otro punto de vista y no vas a prever por ser español lo que te van a decir. Esta es una de las cosas más positivas. Y lo que a sido maravilloso ha sido conocer a la gente del master que estaba en la Unesco, porque ha sido gente con la que realmente se puede hablar. Yo me había relacionado solamente con europeos, y ha sido la primera vez que me he interrelacionado con gente de fuera de Europa. Ya no sólo porque sean del tercer mundo, porque yo tampoco conozco a gente estadounidense o de Canadá, sólo conozco a gente de esta Europa; ha sido la primera vez que he salido con gente de fuera, y esto es genial, y te da ganas de moverte más. Es que Europa ya se convierte en una cosa homogénea, de un país a otro ya no cambia tanto, tienes que ir a otro sitio.

242 **¿Y dificultades? Me has dicho la lengua. ¿Qué más?**

244 Me ha pasado dos veces de estar con gente... parejas de alguien que trabaja en la Comisión; por ejemplo conocí a esta pareja italiana, ella no tenía trabajo, pero él sí tenía trabajo, y fuimos con ellos al cine, salimos a noche y ya no supimos nada de ellos, desaparecieron; dicen: “nos vamos a llamar”, y luego... otra pareja que trabaja en la Comisión: un chico español que conocimos en el curso de idiomas, nos invitó a la fiesta de cumpleaños en su casa, pasamos una noche maravillosa, una borrachera... y han desaparecido de nuestra vida. Entonces yo pienso que esto pase mucho aquí. Un día vas, quedas con alguien, dices “bueno te voy a llamar, y tal”... es a lo mejor lo que me pasa aquí contigo, sabes, hoy hemos quedado para un café, hacemos lo de la entrevista, y después “sí, sí, ya nos llamaremos”, pasan dos meses e iguales ya no nos conocimos; nuestro primero encuentro fue en febrero, ya han pasado 4 meses, pues podía que no pasaba nunca de volver a vernos, y yo pienso que esto pase mucho aquí en Bruselas. Pasa mucho.

252 **¿Encuentras otras diferencias entre las relaciones que estableces aquí y las que estableces en tu país?**

254 La diferencia está en las raíces: las de mi país vienen de toda la vida, son como mi familia. Mi madre no la he elegido yo, y con los amigos igual: tengo a unos amigos que fui con ellos al colegio y aún están allí. Incluso los de la facultad desde el primer día, y mi grupo de amigos de mi pueblo pequeño, esos están ahí y no cambian. Los nuevos vienen y se van, pero ellos son como la familia: ellos no cambian.

256 **¿Te ha pasado que algunos de tus mejores amigos españoles se hayan ido al extranjero a su vez?**

258 Sí, me ha pasado.

260 **¿Y siguen quedándose amigos?**

260 Sí! ¿Por qué, por el hecho de haberse ido ya no debería ser mi amigo?

262 **Quiero decir que podría ser más difícil mantener la relación, dime tú.**

262 ¿Mantener la relación? Depende de lo que consideres mantener la relación. Si mantener la relación es escribir un e-mail pues es una chorrada. Yo no me escribo durante seis meses un e-mail con una amiga mía que no está aquí, pero cuando llega el verano ahí estamos los dos, todo el verano. Eso sí: no nos llamamos, no nos escribimos, pero sabemos que estamos allí.

266 **Entonces mantienes las relaciones con las personas que se han quedado en España.**

268 Sí. Y con amigas que están al extranjero. Y siempre hago todo lo posible porque vengan, porque yo no tengo dinero.

270 **¿Y mantienes también las relaciones que has creado en Gales?**

270 Sí, se han mantenido.

272 **¿Qué medios utilizas para que estas relaciones se queden? ¿Realmente hay un contacto, o simplemente no te sientes por seis meses, como me has dicho, y luego te ves con ellos?**

274 En España voy como muy tarde cada cuatro meses, y a Reino Unido el año pasado fui una vez después de volver, y lo que hago es llamar por teléfono, pero se puede decir que en un año llame como mucho tres veces, a la casa en donde vivía y en donde siguen mis compañeras que siguen allí, e e-mails pueden ser unos diez al año. Y así las mantengo. Y cuando llamo por teléfono les digo que voy para allá, les digo: “mañana voy”, y ya estoy en su casa.

278 **¿Utilizas el teléfono o un móvil?**

278 No, el móvil sale carísimo, voy a un locutorio.

280 **¿Utilizas también chat o skype?**

- No me gusta.
- 282 **Y visitas.**
- 284 El año pasado fui una vez y este año estoy planeando ir otra, pero es que la economía no...
- 284 **¿Crees que mantendrías las relaciones con la gente que has conocido aquí en Bruselas?**
- 286 Creo que aquí no... bueno sí... a ver... Los bruxellois no, los que he conocido en el master sí.
- 286 **¿Consideras bruxellois los belgas o la gente en general que vive aquí?**
- 288 Los de aquí, que casualmente son belgas.
- 288 **¿Por lo que afecta tu identidad nacional, como te describes?**
- 290 Soy española. No me siento ni valenciana ni alicantina.
- 290 **¿Más cosas?**
- 292 Bueno, cuando he dicho ni valenciana ni alicantina vamos a hacer las cosas un poco más locales. Soy española,
- 292 pero soy alicantina. Y tengo una comunidad que es bilingüe, y una cultura que es un poco distinta. Esa es una
- 294 noción que tengo, pero que no me impide decir soy española y decirlo con la boca bien... En España tú sabes lo
- 294 que tenemos: la fragmentación. Hay mucha gente que no te diría: "soy española". Te dirían: soy valenciana. Yo
- 296 soy española, soy valenciana, soy alicantina y más localmente soy de mi pueblo. Pero si lo quieres englobar todo
- 296 allí, soy española, pero sabiendo que soy de allí, de mi pueblo. Y no te voy a decir europea! [se ríe]
- 298 **¿Sientes tener algo en común con los otros europeos?**
- 298 Más en común que con la gente que he conocido este año en el master, eso sí. Porque ahora en Europa pasas de
- 300 un país al otro y las cosas no cambian tanto.
- 300 **Te lo pregunto porque antes me has dicho que Europa se está quedando muy homogénea.**
- 302 Sí. Yo comparo mis dos experiencias en Reino Unido y Bélgica y para mí no ha cambiado mucho de uno al otro.
- 302 Hay cosas que son distintas, pero mi situación es la misma. Entonces yo considero que a lo mejor una
- 304 conversación con alguien de Vietnam, que me cuenta como él se vino a Europa, como él encuentra Europa,
- 304 como le ha cambiado todo, entonces a uno le da por pensar que si me voy a Italia, o si me voy a Alemania mi
- 306 situación no va a cambiar tanto. Con ciertas costumbres gastronómicas distintas o que el tiempo es mejor o peor,
- 306 pero más o menos es lo mismo. Cuando cambia es cuando vaya a Zambia, o cuando llegue a Pekín: ahí es donde
- 308 realmente me vayan a llamar las cosas la atención. Por eso considero que somos más o menos iguales de un país
- 308 al otro.
- 310 **¿Has oído alguna vez la expresión: "ser un ciudadano del mundo"? ¿Qué significa para ti?**
- 310 Es un concepto un poco... Para mí significa "yo soy de donde estoy". Vivo en Bruselas, yo soy de Bruselas.
- 312 **¿Tú te sientes así?**
- 312 Yo me siento como en casa.
- 314 **¿Te definirías así?**
- 314 Como una bruxelloise no, yo soy española; como un ciudadano del mundo, no, me definiría como que yo hago
- 316 de mi sitio mi casa. Me parece peligrosa esa expresión, por que se utiliza demasiado y hay que tener una
- 316 conciencia de uno donde está, integrarse donde está, pero siempre teniendo noción de donde viene y de lo que se
- 318 ha dejado por detrás. Por eso viene lo de "soy española, pero soy de Valencia, soy de Alicante, soy de mi
- 318 pueblo". Y a mí esos escalones no se me olvidan. Hay muchos tipos de españoles, igual que hay muchos tipos de
- 320 europeos. Entonces el español de Valencia no es lo mismo del español de Andalucía: somos todos españoles,
- 320 pero no somos los mismos, y no vamos a meterlos todos en el mismo saco. Estamos juntos, pero tenemos que
- 322 tener consciencia cada uno de donde venimos, no se nos tiene que olvidar, no se nos tiene que olvidar nuestra
- 322 cultura. Por eso ser ciudadano del mundo puede ser como que la historia de uno y los costumbres se conviertan
- 324 en algo voluble y a la gente se le olvide.
- 324 **¿Sientes tener valores en común con las personas que, como tú, han tenido experiencias importantes al extranjero?**
- 326 ¿Qué quieres decir, que yo me junte a todos los Expats y que me sienta más unida a ellos por que están en la
- 326 misma situación que yo? No sé. Se puede tener una conversación con alguien, "tú, ¿por qué estás aquí?", la
- 328 misma conversación de todas las fiestas, "ah, sí, yo estoy aquí porque trabajo en una ONG, yo he venido a hacer
- 330 un stage, ah", y no se qué. Si ésta es la empatía que tengo que tener, es un poco aburrida, ¿qué quieres que te
- 330 diga?, porque todos cuentan la misma historia. Prefiero estar con la gente que no está en la misma situación que
- 332 yo, o conocer a gente de aquí, o de allá, pero que no haga lo mismo que yo.
- 332 **Tu último título de estudio me has dicho es el master.**
- 334 Sí, he hecho cinco años de carrera, más este año más.
- 334 **¿Tu profesión, a parte de ser becaria?**
- 336 Geóloga.
- 336 **¿La de tus padres?**

338 Agricultor y ama de casa.

¿Estás casada?

No: convivo juntos desde dos años.

340 **¿En cuantas lengua puedes mantener una conversación a un nivel razonable?**

Tres: español, inglés y catalán.

342 **¿Podemos quedarnos en contacto para los próximos dos años?**

Sí. Pero no sé lo que va a pasar!

Interview n° 3: Italy

2

4 **Di dove sei?**

Sono italiana, unica cittadinanza. Vengo da Piano di Mommio, in provincia di Lucca.

6 **Hai avuto altre esperienze all'estero?**

Sì. Prima di venire in questa società di consulenza ho fatto uno stage.

8 **Volevo sapere se sei stata in altri paesi prima di venire in Belgio.**

10 Sono stata in Francia, Inghilterra, Irlanda. In Francia per studio per 3 mesi ho frequentato una scuola di lingua; lo
12 stesso in Inghilterra, Scozia e Irlanda, per un periodo che variava da 2 settimane a 1 mese, perché a partire dal
14 liceo ho fatto queste cose e anche durante l'Università. Ancora, in Norvegia ho frequentato un festival
16 internazionale degli studenti, mi pare nel 2002, ho preso una borsa di studio all'università di G. per partecipare a
18 questo festival strutturato in diversi workshop, ognuno dei quali doveva realizzare un progetto, sulla base della
tematica generale che era 'Sfide'. Le sfide potevano variare, per esempio l'individuo e la società, io ero nel
political game che doveva analizzare il sistema di corruzione degli aiuti internazionali nei paesi in via di
sviluppo. Essendo studenti che venivano da tutto il mondo, ognuno dava il proprio contributo spiegando quello
che era il sistema di corruzione nei propri paesi. Per lavoro sono venuta qui in Belgio da settembre a dicembre.

18 **Quindi non hai studiato all'estero con programmi dell'UE?**

No.

20 **Quali sono le ragioni che ti hanno spinto a spostarti dall'Italia?**

22 Diverse. Innanzitutto la famiglia ha sempre spinto me e mio fratello a viaggiare, a scoprire, infatti già a 16 anni
24 mi hanno mandato a studiare all'estero e la prima esperienza è stata un po' forte, forse perché ero piccola, però è
stato l'input che mi ha permesso di creare il mio interesse a viaggiare, fare esperienze diverse da quelle che puoi
fare nella realtà locale, poi la mia è abbastanza piccola. Poi di conseguenza lo studio e le esperienze di lavoro
durante il liceo e l'università.

26 **In che senso?**

28 Diciamo prima lo studio delle lingue, quello è stato il primo input; in un secondo momento quando ho deciso di
specializzarmi negli studi europei e internazionali la consapevolezza che la mia realtà non poteva offrirmi niente
di interessante e di conseguenza la volontà di farmi un'esperienza all'estero nel settore. A Bruxelles perché è
30 legata agli studi europei e la considero una tappa obbligata per chi intraprende questi studi.

32 **Cosa significa per te vivere a Bruxelles?**

32 Per me Bruxelles è ora una scelta di vita, prima ero partita per fare un'esperienza e poi c'è stato un periodo di
transizione, poi la decisione di farne un posto dove vivere in maniera abbastanza stabile.

34 **Come è avvenuto il cambiamento?**

36 Inizialmente per questioni lavorative, perché avevo fatto uno stage; diciamo che qui l'ambiente è molto
competitivo, rispetto all'Italia c'è più possibilità di fare colloqui, di essere presa in considerazione, poi alla fine
non so.

38 **Vuoi dire che non sai se è più facile il mercato lavorativo in Italia o a Bruxelles?**

40 Esatto. Bruxelles è più aperta, è più flessibile, cioè più o meno tutti possono avere un colloquio; in Italia invece
ho visto che è abbastanza chiuso e comunque offre molto poco per un laureato e una persona che ha fatto anche
un master, contratti a progetto, pochissime garanzie.

42 **Torniamo un attimo indietro: dall'esperienza breve alla decisione di restare.**

44 Il lavoro qui è stato determinante. Da quando mi sono laureata ho cercato un lavoro più o meno stabile, in questi
anni ho fatto un sacrificio di studio e di ricerca continua e finalmente sembra che insomma, speriamo di aver
trovato una situazione stabile, che psicologicamente per me era importante; adesso ho 28 anni e volevo una
46 realizzazione personale e qui ho la possibilità di mettere a frutto tutti questi anni di studio.

48 **Quali sono le aspettative rispetto al tuo trasferimento a Bruxelles?**

48 Non ho ambizioni o aspettative. La mia aspettativa era comunque quella di svolgere una professione che
corrispondesse ai miei studi alle mie passioni. Ho fatto per esempio anche l'esperienza di un lavoro che pur
essendo ben pagato non corrispondeva a quello che mi piace fare e infatti è durato un mese e ho capito che non
avrei mai lavorato solo per soldi, dato che bisogna dedicare 8-10 ore della giornata è necessario farlo volentieri e
50 io mi ritengo ora fortunata. Sotto questo punto di vista posso dire che ora sono contenta.

52 **Dunque cercavi un lavoro presso le Istituzioni e sei rimasta qui per ragioni professionali?**

54 Sì, continuo a fare concorsi, non con molte aspettative perché non mi impegno abbastanza, non ho mai studiato
in modo mirato, ora ho cominciato a farlo per questo concorso che è uscito adesso, i posti sono sempre
56 pochissimi ed è sempre una sfida passarli, comunque una volta l'ho anche passato ma poi il punteggio che

- 58 richiedono è alto; in secondo luogo c'è sempre questo sogno di entrare alla Commissione, però lì sarebbe una
scelta di vita totale nel senso che mentre adesso ho l'idea di restare a Bruxelles 2 o massimo 3 anni e poi tornare
60 in Italia, se dovessi diventare funzionario sarebbe difficile tornare indietro e sinceramente questa non è la città
dove vorrei passare tutta la mia vita. L'Italia rimane il mio paese e il posto dove voglio vivere. Come qualità di
62 vita non c'è confronto. L'idea è di fare un'esperienza abbastanza consolidata e poi tornare in Italia sperando di
avere più possibilità.
- Hai pensato di trasferirti anche in altri paesi?**
64 Sì mi sarebbe molto piaciuto andare a lavorare a Parigi e ancora non lo escludo.
- Fuori dall'Europa?**
66 No, magari viaggi legati ad un lavoro, ma non andare per esempio in America, questo no.
- Comunque anche a Parigi non su base permanente.**
68 Idealmente sì. Mio fratello per esempio è già da sei anni a Vienna. Dunque dipende da come si sviluppano le
cose. Qui sono da 9 mesi.
- Il tipo di esperienze che stai facendo secondo te è comune alla maggioranza dei giovani europei?**
70 Forse mi astengo dalla risposta perché sinceramente non lo so. Se penso a Bruxelles mi verrebbe da dire di sì
72 perché qui c'è molta mobilità ed è un crocevia di molte nazionalità. Però in relazione ai singoli paesi non saprei.
In Italia per esempio la mobilità è molto bassa.
- Conosci molte persone a Bruxelles. Amici o conoscenti?**
74 Ho cari amici e anche molti conoscenti.
- Persone che conoscevi già o che hai conosciuto qui?**
76 Entrambi.
- Frequenti ambienti internazionali dove puoi incontrare persone che vengono da altri paesi?**
78 Sì, le istituzioni. La Commissione e il Parlamento, che frequento per lavoro; ho anche degli amici che vi
80 lavorano e che di conseguenza ti presentano persone che vengono da diversi paesi.
- Al di là di questo, altri contesti in generale?**
82 Spesso mi succede che uscendo coi miei amici a feste puoi conoscere altre persone.
- Non hai menzionato il lavoro.**
84 Hai ragione. Anche il lavoro. Colleghi o ex colleghi.
- Sei più portata a cercare o a stare con italiani o con stranieri?**
86 Ho molti amici italiani, perché sono amici di università o di master, però ho la predisposizione a stare più con gli
stranieri.
- Perché?**
88 Forse la scelta di evadere dall'Italia dipende anche dalla volontà di conoscere persone che hanno cultura,
90 tradizioni differenti da quelle italiane.
- Ti è facile creare nuovi rapporti a Bruxelles?**
92 Sì. Sono una persona abbastanza aperta, socievole.
- Più o meno che in Italia o in altri paesi in cui sei stata?**
94 Sì, mi è più facile perché trovo persone con cui ho molte cose in comune. Forse questo deriva dal fatto che vivo
96 in una piccola realtà, più cresco e più mi rendo conto che nell'ambiente italiano non ho molto da condividere
mentre qui mi sento inserita. Poi chiaramente ho delle amicizie di vecchia data che ci sono, restano e rimarranno
sempre.
- Rispetto ad altri paesi in cui sei stata?**
98 Ho questa attitudine. Quando sono stata in Francia e in Norvegia, soprattutto in Norvegia ho creato dei legami
100 con 3-4 persone, degli ottimi legami con persone anche di altri continenti con le quali continuo a vedermi quando
c'è possibilità.
- Da cosa pensi derivi questa facilità?**
102 Un po' perché di carattere sono socievole e un po' perché soprattutto per me è istintivo rapportarmi con persone
104 diverse da me.
- Di che nazionalità sono gli amici che ti sei fatta qui?**
106 Devo fare l'elenco? Ho amici di tutte le nazionalità europee.
- Quali difficoltà e quali aspetti positivi incontri nel relazionarti con persone di altri paesi?**
108 Gli aspetti positivi li ho già citati, che vieni in contatto con realtà, comportamenti e modi di pensare diversi che ti
110 permettono di essere più aperta e flessibile con gli altri, secondo me questo è importantissimo e noto la
differenza tra me e amici che non hanno mai viaggiato. Questo ha i suoi pro e i suoi contro: può aiutare te a
112 capire e quindi a comportarti in modo più aperto e più democratico in senso lato e a volte però anche le
difficoltà, perché sono tradizioni o culture diverse dalle tue; questo per esempio mi è successo al master, di

114 trovare persone che hanno un modo completamente diverso, se non all'opposto di pensare e spesso non riesci ad
115 avere un dialogo lineare, a trovare punti d'incontro; però preferisco lo scontro al silenzio, è comunque sintomo di
116 arricchimento, ti fa pensare sempre indipendentemente dal risultato.

116 **Riscontri differenze nei rapporti che hai qui e quelli in Italia?**

117 Quello che ho appena detto.

118 **Mantieni rapporti con gli amici che sono rimasti in Italia?**

119 Certo. Ho un gruppo di amici, del liceo, amici dell'università che per me sono i veri amici. Non sono tantissimi,
120 sono pochi ma buoni.

120 **Perché dici che sono i veri amici?**

121 Ho tre amiche e due amici maschi con i quali sono aperta, ho condiviso tante esperienze, ci sono sempre state e
122 spero che ci saranno sempre. Una di queste vive a Roma, non vive neanche nella mia città. Sono persone con cui
123 sono sempre in contatto e ho un ottimo rapporto.

124 **Attraverso quali strumenti mantieni i rapporti con le persone lontane?**

125 Internet, e-mail, chat, Skype, ma solo audio.

126 **Ti vedi con queste persone?**

127 Sì. Per esempio un amico è venuto a trovarmi spesso dal Canada, poi ci siamo visti in Francia. E' chiaro che non
128 può essere regolarmente perché sono persone che vivono in altri paesi, però se è data l'occasione e posso mi
129 sposto volentieri.

130 **Quindi non ci vai apposta?**

131 Io ci vorrei andare in Canada, il problema è che mi mancano i soldi. Con altre persone mi è successo che sono
132 andata a trovarle, però questo dipende dalla distanza e da quello che sto facendo in quel momento.

134 **Pensi che manterrai i rapporti con gli amici che hai qui?**

135 Credo di sì. Chiaramente non con tutti, perché appunto c'è questa distinzione tra amici e conoscenti, ci sono
136 comunque persone con cui ho legato e spero di mantenere i contatti.

136 **Per quanto concerne la tua identità, come ti descriveresti?**

137 Non sono nazionalista. Sono legata al mio paese perché il mio paese mi piace come qualità della vita, però in
138 questo senso mi sento molto europea, anzi come identità mi sento più cittadina europea che non italiana. Non ho
139 questo legame così forte e necessario con l'Italia; ce l'ho dal punto di vista personale, come possono essere gli
140 affetti o il fatto di considerare l'Italia un bel paese, ma non mi sono mai preclusa la possibilità di cambiare
141 ambiente, di spostarmi.

142 **Cosa senti in comune con gli altri europei?**

143 Chiaramente la maggior parte degli europei con i quali mi relaziono sono giovani e quindi interessi comuni, o
144 forse perché tendo a frequentare persone che hanno interessi comuni ai miei. Lavorativi, in termini di
145 passatempo, di viaggi, tutto quello che può riguardare la vita di un giovane, interessi politici.

146 **Questo solo con le persone a Bruxelles o con gli europei in generale?**

147 Ora stavo parlando del legame che ho con le persone che conosco. Con gli europei in generale sono state scritte
148 delle teorie.

150 **Te lo chiedo perché hai detto di sentirti più cittadina europea che italiana.**

151 Sì. Perché secondo me i valori di fondo sono uguali per tutti, non credo nella identità nazionale forte secondo la
152 teoria del nazionalismo, vedo più dei valori che accomunano tutti gli europei.

152 **Perché accomunano gli europei e non magari gli australiani?**

153 Su questo ho fatto un esame molto interessante e magari ti consiglio anche un libro. E' diverso perché dipende
154 dalla storia dei paesi, da come si sviluppa la storia, la costituzione, la società. In questo libro si mette a confronto
155 la realtà europea e la realtà americana che sono frutto di storie e tradizioni completamente diverse. Certo poi ci
156 sono i cosiddetti valori universali che accomunano tutte le persone nel mondo, come la dignità.

158 **Nel dettaglio cosa pensi che accomuni gli europei?**

159 A livello storico abbiamo una visione comune, sulla religione non mi espongo. Secondo me, non per fare
160 l'europeista di turno, sono sincera, da quando è stata fondata la Comunità è iniziato un percorso per unificare i
161 paesi in tutti gli ambiti, mercato, asilo, diritto, tutto quello che riguarda la legislazione europea, volente o nolente
162 ha unificato gli europei; magari gli europei non se ne accorgono perché c'è poca informazione tra quello che
163 esiste veramente e quello che gli europei verificano in termini di risultati.

164 **Quali sono i valori che uniscono tutto il mondo?**

165 Sono quelli classici, quelli cristiani: la pace, l'amore, la dignità, la fede, il rispetto, la comprensione quelli che
166 sono i valori cristiani che poi sono interpretati dalle società in modo diverso, a volte anche in modo contrastante,
167 però sono valori di base.

168 **Quindi anche la società islamica?**

Sì sì, non vedo discrepanze.

170 **Sulla base di questi valori secondo te sarebbe possibile una cultura mondiale?**

172 Questa è un'utopia. Purtroppo bisogna guardare la realtà dei fatti e quindi per interessi contingenti non può
174 esistere. In termini teorici posso dire di sì, in termini concreti non credo sia possibile realizzarla davvero. Ci può
176 essere come pensiero, però purtroppo quel che conta sono i risultati. I fatti a cui assistiamo dimostrano sempre il
contrario. La religione per esempio non dovrebbe essere motivo di scontro, dovrebbe essere motivo di unione,
eppure le guerre di religione ci sono tutti i giorni e muoiono più persone per guerre di religione che per altri
motivi. Sono un po' scettica su queste cose.

Hai mai usato l'espressione "cittadino del mondo"?

178 Quando ero all'università sì, quando ero immersa nelle mie idee e filosofeggiavo. È un'espressione positiva, mi
180 piace, mi ci riconosco. Significa essere una persona fondamentalmente aperta, che quando si trova a ragionare
182 anche su una cosa semplice riesce a vedere diverse soluzioni. Secondo me questo è possibile solo se una persona
viaggia e si relaziona con persone che provengono da realtà diverse. Conoscono storia, luoghi e paesi diversi. E'
un input positivo.

Ne hai conosciuto qualcuno?

184 Sì, questo mio amico canadese. E' una persona che studia ma ottimizza il suo tempo viaggiando; è venuto a
trovarmi l'anno scorso poi è andato in sud Africa, in Cina, adesso è in Asia, è una persona che concentra la sua
186 vita sullo studio e sui viaggi, chiaramente è una scelta di vita, non so se riuscirei a farlo; dedica tutto il suo tempo
libero a viaggiare, chiaramente in modo molto semplice. Sacco a pelo e si parte. È una persona che veramente mi
188 ha colpito.

Pensi di avere valori in comune con le persone come te "espatriate"?

190 Sì. È questa volontà di confrontarsi, di mettersi alla prova al di fuori della realtà locale. Che magari è rispettabile,
al contrario dei miei amici io non critico mai le scelte di nessuno.

192 **Che studi hai compiuto?**

Laurea in scienze politiche e master in studi europei.

194 **Che lavoro svolgi ora?**

Delivery manager.

196 **Cosa fanno i tuoi genitori?**

Mio padre l'elettrotecnico e mia madre la casalinga.

198 **Possiamo rimanere in contatto per un paio d'anni?**

Sì, certo!

Interview n° 4: Italy

- 2
- 4 **Quanti anni hai?**
24, quasi 25.
- 6 **Mi hai detto che sei qui con la Leonardo.**
Sì.
- 8 **Perché sei venuta proprio a Bruxelles?**
Perché il mio ragazzo abita a Bruxelles, altrimenti come città non l'avrei mai scelta. Non mi piace per niente.
- 10 **Quindi sei venuta per lui e basta.**
In fin dei conti sì, perché c'erano altre associazioni dove mi interessava lavorare, però anche per imparare il francese. La città non mi piaceva in modo particolare, quindi solo per ragioni private.
- 12 **Cosa fai qui?**
Lavoro presso un'associazione che si chiama Encatc: è una rete europea che riunisce i master in gestione culturale.
- 14 **Che studi hai fatto?**
Scienze della comunicazione quinquennale. Più master in gestione culturale.
- 16 **Pensi di fermarti?**
Sì. Adesso diciamo che è una questione di opportunità di lavoro. E' una città che ti offre tante cose e quindi cercherei di fermarmi e da settembre di cercare altre...
- 18 **In che campi vorresti lavorare?**
Nel campo della gestione culturale, se possibile; nel campo delle organizzazioni anche europee. Più o meno cercherei questo, poi se non trovo, continuerei all'Encatc, che è comunque interessante per alcuni mesi in più; però non mi possono assicurare un posto, quindi sto cercando.
- 22 **Da quanto tempo sei qui?**
Da febbraio. Cinque mesi.
- 24 **Avevi delle aspettative particolari quando sei venuta qui?**
Forse pensavo che mi piacesse un po' di più la città e anche la vita. Forse ero un po' più ottimista, però non avevo alcuna aspettativa in particolare. Riguardo a lavoro e amicizie, invece, mi sono trovata bene.
- 26 **Perché non ti piace Bruxelles?**
Tra tutte le città dove sono stata, non so, mi sembra un po' anonima, un po'... non so, forse non c'è un posto speciale, un posto che posso legare a qualche emozione. E poi è un mondo istituzionale. E' interessante per chi vuole lavorare in quello, però non lo so. E poi piove sempre.
- 30 **Quanto pensi di fermarti? Qual è una prospettiva ragionevole?**
Forse un anno.
- 32 **E se il tuo ragazzo ti dicesse che si vuole fermare di più?**
Sì, in effetti... comunque un anno rimane... Poi troveremo altre sistemazioni. Non penso, non vivrei qui, mai.
- 34 **Metti che il tuo ragazzo ha una promozione.**
Il mio ragazzo si deve fermare 3 anni. Pazienza, già siamo stati divisi e non importa in fondo. Cioè mi importa però... un anno mi sembra tanto.
- 36 **Quali sono le tue priorità? Vorresti costruirti un percorso di carriera?**
Sì sì sì. Fare esperienza e poi sfruttare questa esperienza lavorando, non lo so, in Italia mi piacerebbe, a Roma in particolare mi piacerebbe, però...
- 38 **Sei di Roma?**
Lì vicino. Abito a Viterbo, però ho studiato a Roma. Poi non lo so, è pure una contraddizione perché mi rendo conto che non ci sono tante aspettative di lavoro. Se la mia priorità fosse la carriera, dovrei restare qui. Però è una cosa in generale, uno deve trovarsi bene, deve avere gli affetti vicino, secondo me. Quindi non penso di fermarmi per tutta la vita.
- 42 **Come affetti consideri le persone che hai in Italia?**
Sì, famiglia, amici. Poi comunque non si può mai dire.
- 44 **Hai avuto altre esperienze all'estero, prima di questa?**
Sono stata in Erasmus in Portogallo per 6 mesi. Per il master sono stata 1 anno a Madrid.
- 46 **Pensi che questo tipo di esperienza all'estero sia diffusa tra i giovani europei?**
Sì, penso che sia molto diffusa. Tra le persone che conosco è proprio in aumento, tantissimo, sì. Prima per lo studio, poi per il lavoro, penso che l'80%, no forse l'80 è troppo, non lo so. Però delle persone che conosco più della metà hanno fatto... è anche divertente in fondo cambiare, riiniziare tutto da capo. Oltre che utile.
- 50
- 52
- 54
- 56

- 58 **A Bruxelles conosci molte persone?**
Molte quante? Ho degli amici, sì, ma non tantissimi.
- 60 **Hai più amici o conoscenti?**
In questo momento c'è la mia migliore amica che sta qui a Bruxelles. Vive qui da due anni e ci rimane altri mesi. Lavora qui. Anche il suo ragazzo è un amico; il resto, sono più conoscenti.
- 62 **In questi mesi non ti sei fatta degli amici?**
Sì, però ti dico, gli amici che ti fai in cinque mesi non posso chiamarli ancora amici.
- 64 **Perché?**
Per me un'amicizia è di lunga durata. Ci sono persone su cui conto, se c'è un problema li chiamo; non c'è solo il livello della conoscenza. Però non li considero neanche amici.
- 66 **A Bruxelles in che tipo di ambienti hai l'occasione di incontrare persone di altri paesi?**
68 Il discorso mio è che io abito ad Anversa e quindi la mia situazione è diversa, però quando sono venuta a Bruxelles per esempio mi è capitato di andare a qualche festa, sempre tramite amici di amici che ti portavano.
70 Quindi lì oppure sul lavoro, sicuramente sul lavoro c'è gente di tutti i tipi, invece ad Anversa la situazione è diversa. Ti dico perché. Ci sono tanti studenti Erasmus, però persone che lavorano e stanno fuori non tante e, dal
72 momento che non studio più e non frequento l'ambiente universitario, li conosco più gli amici del mio ragazzo. Ma neanche esco tantissimo.
- 74 **Sono belgi?**
Sì.
- 76 **In generale, frequenti più belgi o persone di altri paesi, o italiani?**
Più belgi. Italiani no, so che sono tanti, però non li trovo tanto.
- 78 **Non hai avuto occasione di incontrarli?**
80 Qualcuno, ma non tantissimi. Quando vengo qui al corso vedo che la maggior parte delle persone sono italiane, però, nella vita di ogni giorno o quando esco, non mi ritrovo con tantissimi italiani.
- 82 **Ti riesce facile creare nuovi rapporti qui?**
No, forse per quello che intendi tu come rapporto, cioè come amicizia, no.
- 84 **Per quello che intendi tu.**
Io sono molto socievole, sicuramente faccio presto a fare amicizia. Però per farmi conoscere veramente ci metto tanto e quindi i rapporti veri, seri, sì, ho difficoltà, perché, primo, dovrebbero essere persone o una persona davvero speciale, non so, che ti senti di aprirti, di parlarci. Poi il tempo e la confidenza, sono cose che per me si costruiscono...
- 88 **Pensi che in generale creare un rapporto qui sia più o meno facile?**
90 No, questo non lo so. Se mi fermo qui un anno, penso che avrò dei contatti veri, degli amici veri, non soltanto il discorso di conoscenti. Quindi, secondo me, dipende da quanto tempo rimani in un posto. Lo so che sembra una cosa quantitativa, non è il tempo, boh, in parte sì. Perché penso all'Erasmus; magari incontri le persone più belle
92 della tua vita, poi dopo un mese non le rivedi più, non so spiegare. Direi che all'estero è più facile fare conoscenze, ma instaurare rapporti veri è più difficile.
- 94 **Quali aspetti positivi e quali difficoltà incontri quando ti relazioni con persone di altri paesi?**
96 Il senso dell'umorismo, consideralo negativo se non c'è, però quando c'è può essere un aspetto positivo. A volte la lingua, perché a parte francese e inglese, io non parlo fiammingo quindi a volte è noioso: in una conversazione o ti devono tradurre o non seguì. Anche questo è negativo. E positivo...
98

Interview n° 5: Malta

2

4 **How old are you?**

I am 31.

6 **Did you have other experiences abroad before this one?**

8 Yes. I studied for a year in Sweden in 2004-5, academic year; then I was in Brussels for 6 months for a
10 traineeship in 2003; and I also experienced 3 months working in Germany in the year 2000. When I was a
12 student, at my university in Malta we didn't have projects like Erasmus, mobility for students. I was aware of
14 some other student organizations that you could have good travel but not exactly what I had wished to do like
16 some kind of Erasmus program of 6 months in a foreign university.

12 **That's because it didn't exist at the time.**

14 Exactly, we were still not members. I was at the university in Malta between 1994 and 1998, so we were
16 applying for a membership and our membership was frozen, so...

16 **Even in Italy it didn't exist at that time. And in Sweden you were studying again?**

18 Yes, I did a master. I graduated in... a bachelor of education in Malta in German language; then I also did a
16 master in diplomatic studies in Malta as well, that was in 2001-2; then I studied in Uppsala in 2004-2005, to do a
18 master in development studies, a specific subject of politics science.

20 **So, in total how many years have you studied?**

6 years at the university.

22 **Now what are you doing here?**

24 I'm a diplomat. I represent the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I cover EU relations for Malta but the relation about
26 development issue and relations with African and Caribbean countries and Asia, so new relations in general.

24 **How many inhabitants has Malta?**

400.000, so it's barely half a million.

26 **And you were here in 2003 for an intership.**

28 Exactly. That was at the technical assistance office of the Commission for Erasmus, Socrates and Leonardo. It
30 was a sub-contractor of the Commission, now it's the Executive Agency for Education.

30 **Then you worked 3 months in Germany.**

That was at the Exhibition. There was the Expo at the time.

32 **So you never used European programs to go abroad?**

No.

34 **Which are the reasons that pushed you to move from your country?**

36 Well. I can't blame my job, because I chose this job, you know. To be a diplomat requires a certain disposition to
38 move around the globe. I think it's a need, I see very much as a need for me. I don't consider my own country to
40 be the whole world, I consider... I mean, life is too short and you need to travel, that's how you grow up, how
42 you become an interesting person, even for your employer. So in terms of even job affair I think is very much the
44 trend to see the flexibility of the person, how the person can change from one thing to the other, from one
46 country to the other, and that's a skill, not everyone can do it, ya. Besides being a need, it is also interesting, I
48 mean, you get to meet so many people, you are always open to the experiences even in terms of culture, and that
50 is something, from my own island, I cannot always get. Of course we have our own culture and tradition, we do
52 have an influence, Malta has been the crossroads of very [many] civilizations in the past, we are a mix of
54 people, but still even the insularity, I don't know, at least I'm very conscious of the border of living on an island.
56 Some of my friends don't think like me, I mean, they are more comfortable with just being with their life; they
imagine themselves teaching 30 years in a school and it's fine to them. So maybe it's also a disposition of
character for me, and after 5 years or maybe 8 I need to change. Living abroad gives me the sense of knowledge
and always discovering something new. On the other hand I realised that there is a disadvantage in everything,
so after a while you can get tired even of living abroad as well. It's not easy to just start from scratch in a totally
foreign country. Image, I have to go to China, for example, which has totally a different culture and I think that
adaptation would be much more difficult than within the European Continent, for example, where I'm familiar
with the language and familiar with the culture.

52 **How many languages do you speak?**

54 [Laughs] I speak English and Maltese as my mother tongue, then I'm fluent in German, French and Italian and
56 then Swedish.

56 **How come that you came just to Brussels?**

I was offered to come here, but I also applied for the job, I showed motivation for the job.

Which was your motivation?

58 It's a very multicultural, cosmopolitan city. It's also a small city, so you don't feel an individual as you would
60 feel for example in London, or in Berlin which are enormous. So Brussels in terms of size is very good, and you
62 can easily bump, if you are out for a drink and you go out to some club, you can easily bump into the same faces
64 again. So there is a kind of social circle, but then obviously you always hang out with Expats, so it's not that I
have a lot of contacts with the real Belgian people. I mean, I think Brussels is a unique case, in the sense that it's
not a real city like all other cities in Europe, it's very much focused on EU work; people are very much
professional and work-oriented and I feel a bit of a difference from other cities. That's basically it.

Can you explain deeper these differences with other cities?

66 Here you know that people are there for a temporary time, at least, the people that my job makes me meet: I
68 know they are here for a short period of time, say 3-4 years, and they are going to leave most of the times; or
70 maybe they are here only for a year and then they leave; or for a stage of 6 months, and then they leave. So the
72 feeling here is that everything is temporary, everything is in transition, so you come here because of your
74 profession, because you need your experience, and you can get a very good professional experience being so
76 close and being into actually the work of the EU institutions, but you know that it's a transition, so then it can
78 come up to a point where you miss home, because at home you have your people, and here things are a bit more
in a state of flux all the time. And also the fact that people travel during the week-end [is] because they see
Brussels, in my view, as a temporary destination, [so] they often fly home, or because of the ideal location of
Brussels and they often spend week-ends away from Brussels, so sometimes it's hard or not easy to socialize
within the city. I mean, there are clubs, there are possibilities that you build your own network, but no one is here
forever, although if you compare with other cities I guess the same can be said, there are diplomats everywhere.
But somehow Brussels is more extreme, so I can see the difference, even from Stockholm, for example, [where]
you meet much more local people than you do here in the centre of Brussels.

What about you? Are you here with the same temporary attitude?

80 That's a really good question! [Laugh] Well, I do see as a temporary job, maybe 3-4 years, then eventually I
82 know that my job will call me back or would require me to move somewhere else, but this because of the
84 specific nature of my job. But again, so far, in my first, say, a year of my staying in Brussels, I had positive
experiences. It doesn't mean that it was easy to settle down here, but I see the positive side of it, and I've learnt a
lot in terms of job or in terms of human interactions.

You have been here for?

86 One year almost.

So overall what does it mean for you to live in Brussels?

88 [Pause] It's difficult to say. It's a good professional experience and it's a good interculture mix. I can meet
90 people of just any nationality, basically, and I can go to activities which might not occur if I've stayed were I
was, so for me the environment is more stimulating than what I had before in Malta.

What about other realities that you discovered?

92 I don't feel as anonymous as in other cities, that's one thing. It was easier for me to settle down although I can say
94 that the process of settling in Brussels, due to the inefficiency to install TV, to install the telephone, to make
yourself understood in French language (and you speak well French), they are absolutely inefficient. In my
96 country in these things if you compel twice to three times, then it's a really bad service, while here they have
absolutely no idea of what a client service is. So that I miss. In London it's different, in Germany it's different, if
98 you complain about something in a shop, they would... while here they wouldn't bother you. I mean, I haven't
had experiences of settling down in Berlin, for example, and trying to get in touch with the TV company, but
100 here in Belgium they almost ridicule you on your face, you really have a hard time at the beginning, you feel
depressed: you are starting a new job, still getting to know the environment, and then these people sort of trying
102 to make it out of you, telling that they come at a certain hour, they know that you have to work, they don't, and
this kind of ridiculous stuff: postponing appointments when they have to come, ya... I was really ready to pack
104 back home, because I didn't have these problems at home. I mean, you have to accept them to an extent, but as a
client you are taken care of. Here, unless you are Belgian probably, as a foreigner, and a foreigner gets
106 [provides] a lot of money here to Brussels, they think that you are just here for the EU, that you have a lot of
money and that's it. They give a bad service. That's my feeling.

Which were your expectations when you came here?

108 Actually, I didn't have any expectations, to be honest. I was shocked, because I had no idea at the time I would
110 be selected for this job, and actually even the way I packed: I left so many things at home that I was still thinking
that I come as I did for the stage: 6 months and that's it. I arrived here and I said "I didn't bring this and that",
112 but I'm going to be here for 4 years maximum, it didn't occur to me, I didn't yet realize that I was going for so

114 long time, so I was still in a state of shock and denying when I arrived. The first 4 months were very tough even
to integrate, to make new friendships and to settle down, buy new furniture or find an apartment...

Did you come here alone?

116 Ya, alone.

No friends?

118 I had a couple of contact people, that was a big relief for me. I was still in contact and I did find quite a lot of
support from them.

Which nationalities are the people you go out with?

120 My best friend is from Slovakia. Sometimes I do things with Maltese people, colleagues from work, but not all
122 the time: I like to switch between groups. I met in Brussels a friend from Fiji, who else?, sometimes I do meet
Belgians as well, but I can't say they are close friends, but I do meet them. Hmm... I meet some people from
124 Slovenia, from Latvia...

So you don't meet people from North Africa, for example?

126 No, I do. Sometimes they are Belgian, sometimes they are North African origin, but they are not close friends so
far. And I would like, at least it is my wish to – because I'm so used to explore other countries, other cultures –
128 that I would like to get to know also people from Africa or from Asia, because I don't know a lot of people, I
mean, even my job it doesn't get me to contact with these people, so it would be interesting even to have
130 friendships from... Actually I met a guy from Indonesia and he lives outside Brussels, and ya, we are friends, we
can do activities together, so...

In general can you say that you know many people in Brussels?

132 At this point of time ya, I have a lot of acquaintances.

That's it: would you say you have more friends or more acquaintances?

134 Some are more friends. Friends wherever you go are only few. Ya, the real friends are few but the acquaintances
136 are always many. I have friends of my own nationality and I find them very supporting, and I have friends from
Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden...

So what's a friend for you?

138 A friend? Hmm... Someone who can check on you every now and then, you know, maybe if one or two weeks
140 passes by and you don't contact each other either you or him or her just give a ring and ask "how are you?", or
send a text message. Or someone for doing things together or trying to involve you in another group of friends,
142 and I involve her in my group of friends, so trying to get to know more people together. Or spending a week-end
together at least, sharing the costs, that's very important! [Laugh] I'm joking! If she knows I'm having a hard
144 time at work, I know she's there to listen to me, or maybe I don't need to call her: she would call me. And I also
rely on my best friends in Malta, so the friends back home are friends for ever, so I call them or they call me or
146 we find some time to go on MSN, I feel quite supported by my friends.

In which contexts or environment in Brussels do you meet people from other countries?

148 Basically, through my job, obviously, because I do meet with other EU people or delegates, and then if you are
invited to the conferences or to the receptions, which is not so often but can happen, or at my dance class, or I
150 simply go out to Place Luxembourg: I know one person, one friend invite me there or I invite her, we go for a
drink, then we go to Place Lux: it's so open that if you have someone next you automatically say Hi, so that's the
152 way it is here. Then yes, you have an Expat club, the @ club, they organise events, you subscribe and they send
e-mail so they have activities for the week-ends or for a French conversation night. And maybe in the future I
154 may consider to go to a language class, which is a good opportunity for meeting people, maybe Spanish or
Portuguese.

Do you have the tendency to stay more with Maltese or with foreigners?

156 It's a balance.

Is it easier respect to your country to meet new people here?

158 I don't think it's difficult. I mean, human nature is human nature everywhere. Every human being needs to have
160 friends, maybe the aptitude is that some people are warmer, they are very extrovert and they open to you, some
people are more reserved, they take a bit more time, but you can still be their friends, maybe it's a little bit
162 harder. One step after the other. I don't see it in the culture, I see it's more in the human nature. That's my
interpretation. I mean there are cultures, but it's more your aptitude towards friendship and the way you see a
164 friend. Human nature and friendship are something beyond the culture. I don't let a different nationality or a
different language to be a barrier to become a friend or a close friend.

**Which are the difficulties and the positive aspects that you find while having a relationship with people
from other countries?**

168 Let me think. Hmm... It's difficult for me to answer. One thing which annoys me: I have every right to criticize
170 my own country, every right, but if someone else from a bigger state or from a more influential state starts to
172 criticize my own country, then my pride comes in and it can't be in a relationship something like "ah, you don't
174 know the way of doing things": so what? It's true that we are not the best drivers, to give you a stupid example,
but there are many ways to express your displeasure about something. Maybe you don't like the food: my best
friend here, for example, she doesn't eat pizza, what for me is unthinkable; if we go to a restaurant I see her "oh
my god you are eating pizza, it's so unhealthy". Well it's pizza!, you know what I mean?

Yes! [Laugh]

176 [Laugh]. But it can happen! Culture in terms of religion is not a barrier for me, I'm more open-minded. What
178 else... I'm going through all kind... A language can be difficult, because unless you both are very fluent in a
common language... like English, I mean, when I was with a former friend of mine...

Former...

180 Yes, former! He was actually a former boyfriend: he was German, I was fluent in English, I was fluent in
182 German, so for me communication was not difficult, but again: sometimes it was really difficult to really
184 communicate, so it's even beyond languages, I mean, human relationships... this all issue of culture... if you
186 want an excuse then you can use culture as an excuse and as a barrier, but the only barrier is in your mind, I
188 think. So, when it comes to human relationships, I don't think that culture can be taken as an excuse. I had a
Maltese boyfriend, for example, and sometimes we couldn't communicate, we couldn't understand each other on
a personal level, and it certainly wasn't a problem of language. So it can be a problem of language, that's true,
because you might express your anger, or your frustration better in your mother tongue than in a foreign
language, but I don't see it necessary as a barrier. There is more than culture.

That's a quite new for me: language and culture are actually the standard answer to my question; you are saying just the opposite.

190 I'm not denying that language and culture can be an obstacle to a relationship, but I believe it's more
192 psychological, there is more to extend than culture, it is the essence of being a human being, the essence of how
194 you communicate with a person, it is how you behave with a person. It can be [a problem of culture]: for
196 example, if I go out with a Spanish guy and he eats at 11 in the evening, I have to find the way how to be
flexible, or not only me, how we can both be flexible. So I can understand that culture can increase the friction
between two people, but I don't see it necessarily as an obstacle: it can be overcome. I think I had more
experiences in terms of friends with people from different countries than with Maltese people. Maybe it's also a
personal aptitude or how you are bred up; but I don't think my parents have formed me in a particular open way,
it was normal, traditional way, like all families in Malta, but maybe my exposure to education, I was very active
in a student organization, so I was in contact with 60 nationalities... but I see more as an intrinsic value.

I'm wondering how many people have the ability to go beyond differences and how many people just say they go beyond.

202 It's true. Just as a point of clarification from my part: in Malta I never used to feel that I had friends who had the
204 same mentality as me; they still are best friends but they were not of the same mentality as myself, whereas in
206 Brussels I coincidentally got this job and I met Maltese people with whom I found the click, so it's true, they
208 have my same mentality, they lived abroad, they like to be in Brussels, so you automatically click, but I still
insist that best friends can be not only from my own country but also from another nationality. Ya, I can see the
trend, but I always criticize myself: "I need to be more open", so I am very sceptical towards people who say
they are very open-minded, because maybe you discovered they are not as open-minded as they think they are.
210 So it's how they perceive themselves but it's not necessarily the truth. What I think it's necessary to be done it's
212 a sort, an issue of personal and social education, and it starts with the school, it's something you grow up with;
it's not that my school had something in particular, but now there are so many opportunities, it's so easy to link
up with people with MSN, with web sites, communication is so much easier, or at least facilitated. I still think it
214 is something that is in you; it's an intrinsic value you learn to appreciate, and I don't know if it die down at some
point, but it definitely there is in my case, and if I really like a person, if I really see the good values of this
216 person, then it's genuine. It's like scanning a human being: you see how you click, if you have the same tastes,
and that's it. Then culture is secondary and does not mean that I won't be able to get along with my friend. My
218 best friend is Slovak, but for me is almost a sister. We speak in English together, not in our mother tongues.
So...

Which are the differences between the relationships you had in Malta and those you have here?

220 One thing is that here people are more work-oriented, so on a professional level every one is in the same boat:
222 you have a lot of work and then you decide "ok let's go for a drink"; in Malta it was different, because I had
friends who do not understand me: they think I am workaholic, but if my job is demanding it's demanding. There

224 are also differences in the sense that I have friends who are single and who are happy to be in Malta, they have
226 funded their activities; I did never give myself the time to settle down in Malta, since I was in Brussels and then
228 to Malta and then to Sweden and then back to Brussels... but some of my friends they are married, they have
their own life, with their own kids, and here the pressure, you know, my goodness, here if you are of a certain
age and you are a [single] woman [people think that] you are only career oriented, which is not true. It's not the
end of the world if you are 30 and you are not married.

230 **Are you saying that the people in Malta judge you or rather that the people here do that?**

232 I said both actually. Here I find myself with people who are in my same situation, who have a demanding job,
and therefore we understand each other better, whereas in Malta it's not that they never understood me, but
sometimes there was the tendency to say that I am working too much, that I became workaholic; it might have
234 been true, but they have an easier job, from 9 to 5 and that's it, it's not demanding *per se*. I did other jobs before,
I used to teach before, and that was also a demanding job, but it had different working hours, so I had more free
236 time. Moreover there is the fact that I can't spend so much time with my closest friends because they have their
own family. In Malta you have your own group of people and unless you're part of the group in terms of
238 socializing you are a bit emarginated: either you belong to a group or you don't. To be in, you have to belong to
a group and they are people who know each other basically. Here everyone is a foreigner, everyone goes for a
240 drink after job, before he goes home. In Malta everyone lives with his parents. In my case I live out of home and
it's not common to do that, it's becoming more common, but still it isn't.

242 **You mean that you are living with your parents until you get married?**

244 That's the trend, but now it's changing a bit. My friends of my age are still with their parents. So I also used to
feel different in that sense. If you live with your parents your need to socialize with people is reduced, because
you have your contacts at home, you are not [alone] in your apartment, with your food in front of the TV, you
246 know what I mean? Here, for example, there is a book club. Why? Because all these foreign people maybe have
some free time, they like to read, then they get together, they organize a social event, and that's it, because
248 everyone is in the same boat: you are a foreigner in a foreign country and you need to get to know people.
Whereas in Malta the need to meet people is not so strong because you live your own family, you know your
250 way around, you know where to go for shopping. You know what I mean? So you need people of your own
status to mix with and even though there are, I don't like to be with a group of people because everyone just
252 wants to go out [read: I don't want to stay with people united only by the fact that everyone is alone]. I want to
feel that I belong to the group and they like my company, so they ask me again, so I prefer my own company
254 rather than being with a group for the sake of being with a group. And in fact I use to do a lot of activities on my
own. I never gave myself time to settle down in my own country, maybe I need to become a tourist in my own
256 country. So I still miss Malta and my friends, but there are things that I don't miss or that I find better here. I
think socializing, even though it has temporary disadvantage, is more stimulating here.

258 **Do you think that the experience of working abroad for a significant time is common to many young
Europeans or only to a minority of them?**

260 In Malta I think the trend is changing. Especially the young generation, 5-8 years younger than me, some
students I used to teach: some are very forward looking, very active, and they travel. If I meet them I encourage
262 them to travel and to discover the world and to be independent, because kids in Malta are not used to be
independent. In Germany they have to travel alone to go to school, in Malta you have bus service that picks you
264 up at a point and takes you to school that is only 10 minutes away. So this kind of things: when I accompanied a
group of kids or teen-agers in Germany, we had an exchange at the time, I could see the difference. The Maltese
266 were so spoiled whereas the German were so much more independent. So the way of socializing does influence a
lot. I have some former students and I really enjoy when I encourage them: "come on, go for a month to study in
268 Germany, go ahead, go". And there is always the fear that the parents pull them back, because they panic: "oh
my god, you will be a month on your own, and what will you eat?". If they have a boyfriend at an early age, it
270 can be the end of the world, or if they go for a month abroad [without their boyfriend or girlfriend]. I always
said: "come on, a month will be good, it's great if you miss each other, or grap your suitcases and go together".
272 So there is this tendency, but it's changing and I hope it will change even more. Maybe in our country the way of
viewing things is a little bit conservative, but the influence is strong at the moment, not necessarily because we
274 joined the EU. I think it's more in terms of media and of education: the more people go to higher education the
more they realize how many opportunities there are, outside the borders of your country, which is not the same if
276 it is an island. So I strong believe in education, not because I'm a graduate in education, but it is the key for
everything in society, for how to interact with people, for how you want to create changes in society. If you want
278 to create change go to school, that's my belief.

You were saying that best friends are always old friends...

280 You know when a person is genuine, with respect to another person you just go for a movie with and that's it.
282 That is why I think friendship is an intrinsic value beyond culture: I meet genuine people even from other
284 cultures, and I see they are genuine when they offer their help, when they realize you are upset and keep asking
you until you feel ok, so for me that's a best friend, you don't need to say you are best friends, but you can feel
it.

Did you maintain the relationships you have in Malta?

286 Yes, yes, absolutely. Maybe it's not so often, so regular, it's more up and down: I wish to be more regular, but
everyone is busy with his life. But then there is a time when you think of a person.

Did you maintain also your friendships in other countries?

288 Yes, I do have friends from my experience of studying abroad, even from my 2 master courses, it's not regular,
290 like every month or 2, but we do keep contact and we catch up each other every now and then. Ya, from Brussel
I kept contacts, two or three contacts.

Are they still here?

292 They are still here and they are fantastic people. They are all foreigners, actually: one is a British girl, the other is
294 a Swedish girl and the other is a lady from France. And from Germany I still have contacts, but I met Maltese
people there, not German.

Which are the instruments to keep in touch with people?

E-mail, telephone, sms. And MSN.

Do you also use video chat?

I'm still discovering it, I would like to use it, but I don't have the time to experiment it.

Do you visit them or do they visit you?

300 Hmm... I had a friend visiting from Malta, but then... Yes, of course: I visited a friend in Austria, and he should
302 come as well. I'm having a reunion at the end of October, one is coming from Australia for a European trip. It's
not frequent but it happens.

Will you maintain the relationships you have here?

In case of my best friends yes, both Maltese and not Maltese.

In terms of your identity how would you describe yourself?

306 Deep down in my heart I have a core of Maltese values, but I'm very European: so deep in my heart I'm a real
308 Maltese, but I have that European touch or fancyfulness.

Ukraine or Moldavia are European for you?

310 What do define a European? What's the border to define a European? It's a difficult question, because I think
312 they are sort of European but in my mind, like the way I look myself, this kind of skin [she has a Mediterranean
skin, bronzed-looking], but I know it's not true because I see from delegations people who look totally non
European but with European citizenship, and they defend their countries. The skin doesn't make a nationality.
314 With globalisation is different now. For us in Malta it's a shock to see people of different colour on our island,
but where do the borders of Europe stop? I really don't know: I might start contradicting myself about what I
316 said previously. For example I said that religion is not a barrier for me, but it might be a barrier. What makes us
European? That's difficult. I don't think I have the answer for this question.

What do you feel you have in common with other Europeans?

318 Everything. Hmm... Or maybe not everything. [Pause] I don't know, I've never thought about this. First of all
320 I'm a human being. My love for music, my love for culture activities, my studies, education, with the Italian and
the Slovenian watching Bim Bum Bam [an Italian popular children program of the 80s]. Hmm... I can't see
322 myself different from Europeans, that's why it's hard to find what I have in common, I guess. But there are of
course many common things.

Would you say that you have the same things in common with the Americans, for example?

324 No, no, no, it's different. If the European kids are spoiled, in America they are spoiled three times. I believe in
326 strong European values and I believe they are much stronger.

Which are these values?

328 More intense social relation, the way how the states care about the citizens. US is such a hedonistic, consumerist
society.

Let's think not of the US but of Australia, for example.

330 It's funny, because I think I would find elements in common with them. The only thing not in common may be
332 the culture and living on a continent, while for me I do [cross] my island in 45 minutes from North to South. Of
course there would be common elements, there is a Maltese community in Australia which is even bigger than
334 the population in Malta. It's also a British colony... Australia is a multicultural context, there are probably
people from Fiji, from asia and so on working there...

336 **What is your understanding of the expression ‘citizen of the world’?**

338 The world is a global village. The more I travel, the more I see, the more I believe it’s true. So “being a global
340 citizen” for me means a sort of thinking that what is happening at the very Southern tip of Africa, which is miles
342 away, also concerns me; but I’m not sure I’m sensitized to this issue whether it has to do with the nature of my
344 job or whether for me. Maybe it’s something that I have acquired from school, and grew up and it could
eventually have influenced my professional choice. For me if a disaster happens in Pakistan, I feel as much my
duty to know what’s happening there, how many lives have been saved. So being a globe citizen means that you
have responsibility; and I am aware, in my profession, that the national interest is built within the framework of
the global context, so defending a national position sometimes requires you to feel responsible and to remind that
besides the national interest there is the framework of the global.

346 **Do you feel you have values in common with those making experiences abroad as you?**

348 Yes. The sense of adventure, they are more open for change, even in their personal life. They are more flexible,
350 more easy-going and not afraid to try something new. I mean, I’m comparing with the character of two some
352 friends of mine. So if I propose to someone to go to an Asian festival, I know that one would say “it’s not my
style” and the other would say “yes, come on, at what time?”. So there is a certain change, people get more
independent, at least speaking for my fellow country men, who are used, you know, to the fact that if you don’t
find the man of your life you have to stick with your parents for the rest of your life.

354 **What do your parents do?**

354 My mother never worked, she is a housewife and dedicated her life to me and to my sister. She is very traditional
356 and very conservative, and the more conservative she is, the more her kids want to fly away. My dad was an
army official, and also a pianist.

358 **Can we keep in touch for a couple of years?**

Yes, that’s would make the study interesting!

Interview n° 6: Greece

2

4 **Where are you coming from exactly?**

Athens.

6 **Did you have other experiences abroad before this one?**

8 I went to Strasburg in 1999 for 3 years and then 1 year in Paris 2003-2004 for studying. I studied in Greece, then
I continued in Strasburg where I did my first degree and my first master, then I went to Paris to do my second
bachelor and then I went to Warsaw in 2004-2005 to make a second master in the College of Europe, in
10 European Studies.

12 **Did you use European program?**

No, it was my own initiative.

14 **Your studies are?**

Degrees in European Studies and Linguistic. One master in professional translation and one master in European
Studies, EU governance, to be more precise.

16 **What are you doing here?**

I work as a consultant in EU affair.

18 **Which are the reasons that pushed you to move out of your country?**

20 First of all I didn't like to study in my country, I wanted to see something different, I decided to study in France
because I always wanted to go to France: I went to a French school, I had my French civilization, French
language, and for me it was a gate out of Greece to see something else, a different culture, and to get out of my
22 place, you know. That was the main reason at the beginning, then I started liking it and now, to be very frank,
it's just because I like EU community politics so much that I am in Brussels. I don't exclude the fact to go back
24 to Greece, but Brussels gave me the opportunity to deal with the things I like.

26 **How did you come just to Brussels?**

I came for a stage at the European Commission, I applied the stage, I was accepted and then I decided to apply
for a job.

28 **How long have you been here?**

One and a half year.

30 **What does it mean for you to live in Brussels?**

32 Ha. Sometimes I qualify this the Washington of Europe [laughs]. It's very multicultural and I like that a lot. So I
enjoy this multicultural environment that is so affected by politics.

34 **Why this aspect is so important for you?**

I like policy: that's what I studied, that's what I wanted to do. For the multicultural: after having left my country,
after 1 or 2 years, I realized I cannot communicate with Greek living in Greece, I can communicate very well
36 with Greeks who live abroad, because I really got a mentality which is Greek, but of an Expat. So I can more
easily make friends, but, my best friends here, let's say, are Greeks, but they have lived abroad all their life. All
38 foreigners [laugh]. And there is something in the Greek mentality that I cannot deal with any more.

40 **For example?**

For example, the complete disorganization of the Greek state, I cannot live with it anymore, although I grew up
with this complete disorganization. I need something a bit more organized. Or I cannot deal with nationalism any
42 more. Greeks are very nationalist. I am as well, I love my country, by I cannot stick to the idea that Greeks grow
up with that, ya, Greece is the most beautiful country in the world, and I agree that it is the most beautiful
44 country in the world, but I know that there are others very big countries now, so you know, I cannot deal, let's
say, with the short-sight of some people in Greece.

46 **Did you have any expectations when you came here?**

Yes. Hmm... I think I was more professional-wise one, professional because I came with the aspiration to find a
48 job here even though I came for the stage, with the ambition I would find let's say my first proper job here in
Brussels. Like, you know, the European dream a bit.

50 **Did you realize your expectations?**

Yes.

52 **And on a personal plan?**

No [laugh], no, but that's something I never... my social life is great, ya, I have a huge circle of people, but
54 personal life no, it's difficult when you move from one country to the other to have a stable personal life.

56 **But would you like to have a stable personal life?**

Ya, but I don't, because of my way of living.

The problem was in finding here a stable relationship?

58 It doesn't happen, it's a question of luck.

But do you think that it's something in your lifestyle or the fact that you are in another country?

60 Until now that I was moving from a city to another, from one country to another, yes. Now that I've been stabilized, so I think that from now on it's going to be different; but until last year it was difficult because of my lifestyle.

Which are your aspirations, for the future?

64 I don't plan these things in general, you know.

Which are your dreams?

66 Dreams? Easy come, easy go.

How do you see your life here? On a permanent basis?

68 No, for some years. For the moment I'm thinking I'll go back to Greece, and then it depends on my personal life, I think.

In what sense?

70 In the sense that if I get married in Brussels I would stay here [laugh]; if I don't establish my life here, I would go back to my country.

What about having children in Brussels?

74 If I meet the love of my life and marry here, ya, I wouldn't mind to have children in Brussels.

Do you think the kind of experience you are doing is common to many young Europeans or just restricted to a minority of them?

76 I wouldn't say restricted to a minority, but that a lot of Europeans aren't used to that yet. For example, if I can talk about Greeks, I have a lot of Greek friends who admire me, or think I'm weird, or they don't understand why and how I move from one country to the other; for other people that I know living in Brussels I'm nothing special and I know that I'm something really common, but it's true that for the majority of Greek friends that I have in Greece, I'm a minority. If you live in the microcosm of Brussels, it's such a common thing, but if you go to the countries you see that it's difficult; even people who go out for Erasmus or for the masters, they go to countries, they stay for 6 months, one year with intentions to go back. It's difficult for them to move somewhere else, in general. So I wouldn't say restricted for some objective reasons, but speaking about Greeks it's not very wide-spread.

Do you know many people in Brussels?

86 Yes.

Would you define them friends or acquaintances?

88 I have a lot of friends, real real friends, and I have a lot of acquaintances as well. I have around three extremely good friends that are like family to me, I have around 20 friends or even more, and I have hundreds of acquaintances. I'm a sociable person!

What's your definition for friend?

92 A friend is a person I can tell whatever I want without being judged, that I have fun with, and I won't get bored when I'm with them, that whenever I need something they will be there for me, and even if there is a misunderstanding, we are going to solve it, just because we are friends. My closer friends are kind of a family, a real family to me, these friends I'm talking I'd behave with them as I behave with my mum and they behave to me the same way.

Do you think that because of your being here?

98 Ya, it's true that you bond a lot with people when you are abroad, because you don't have your family, you don't have your friends that you met when 5 years old. But the weird thing here in Brussels is that 2 of these 3 very good friends of mine have their families here and still we bond very much, so it is partly because you are abroad, but it's only partly, it's not 100%, because these are people you would bond anyway with.

Of what nationality are your friends here?

104 The 3 very close ones are Greek who live abroad, the rest from all over the world.

Have you met the Greeks here?

106 Yes.

Can you tell me in which kind of context or environment you meet foreign people.

108 Place Lux [laugh], through work, and in professional events like conferences; through friends, of course, at parties, at the gym, ya, that's about it, you know, usual stuff.

Why do you think your best friends are from Greece?

110 Why? Hmm... It's also a mentality thing, it's also some common ideas and past experiences that we share, it's also the language.

Do you find easier or less easy than in your country to meet people?

114 I think it's easier here. Maybe just because everyone is a foreigner here and they all look to find people to meet,
116 maybe it's not, maybe just because people go out so much and there are many activities, let's say that you meet
118 people. Maybe it's also the profession, where you are supposed to meet people, that's how Brussels works, but I
think that the main thing is that everybody is a foreigner here, so you have to meet people otherwise you'll have
to be alone.

What about the other countries where you have been?

120 No, it's not exactly the same. Paris, for example, is a very lonely city. It's huge, you don't meet people very
122 easily, it's a difficult city to me. Parisians are not particularly friendly people; you meet eventually people but
not as here in Brussels and there are not as many foreigners as in Brussels. Strasburg was a student city, ya, you
124 had the opportunity to meet a lot of people, you know, going out a lot, but nothing compared to here. I personally
meet people more easily, of course also because I'm older, as well as I'm a bit more sociable, in a way I know
126 how to approach people better than when I was 20, because when I was 20 I was afraid, afraid also of the
language barrier; I'm not anymore, no. I can make mistakes in English, in French, I don't care anymore, when I
128 was 20 I did care. But I think that Brussels give the opportunity to meet people all the time. It's the setting of the
city. That's how it works, I think.

Which are in your opinion the positive aspects and the negative ones while having a relationship with a foreigner?

130 I think it's about the same with friends. Let's say that when you are with a foreigner probably there are going
132 some misunderstandings of culture, or of language, or you know some customs, things like that. Positive
aspects... that you can find excuses for everything, because you are a foreigner [laugh], so you might not, you
134 know, if the other guy gets misunderstood you are like: "oh come on it's like we do in my country, I'm sorry".
On the other hand, I don't see much difference being with the Greeks and of course very positive aspects or
136 negative it depends on how you want to see, when you are with someone of your nationality it's very possible
that you continue to have a future together, like you want together to go back to your country, and with a
138 foreigner you might not have this opportunity, you might but you might not; on the other hand that can be the
positive aspect of having a relationship with a foreigner, because if you want to stay abroad or even if you don't
140 want a superlong term relationship, you know that it is something temporary because you are abroad and you
want to go back to your country, or it's a gate for you to stay abroad. So it really depends on what you want.

Do you find any differences between the kind of relationship you are having here or the one you had in Greece or in the other countries where you studied?

144 No, the only thing... but this is not related to Brussels: I'm working, my friends are working, so we have
146 different timetable and [more] problems than [when] we were students, which is normal. Otherwise no, for me
it's the same.

Did you maintain the relationships with the people remained in Greece?

148 Ya.

And with people you met during your travels around?

150 Yes. I've lost a lot of contact, but I've kept also a lot of them.

Which instruments do you use to keep in touch?

152 Phone, depending on the person, phone or e-mail. I never write cards. No chat, no Skype because I'm a big lazy
going home and open Skype. I prefer to write an e-mail and get a reply. And I'm so lazy I never installed Skype
154 on my computer.

Do you meet these people?

156 Ya. Whenever I go to Greece, and I go rather often, I meet them. About the rest, a good amount are here in
Brussels, so I meet them as well.

So many people you met abroad live in Brussels.

Yes, they live in Brussels.

That's why..

I have so many friends, ya ya.

So it was easy to create...

I didn't create, I came here with the network. When I came here I already knew 50 people.

Do you go back to France and to Polland?

164 I go very often to France, which is close, and I want to go back to Polland as well. It hasn't come up, but I want
166 to.

Do they come to visit you?

168 Not so much.

- 170 **Do you live alone here?**
Ya.
- 172 **Do you frequently have friends from abroad in your house?**
Mostly family, not friends, not so much.
- 174 **When you leave from Brussels, do you think you will maintain your relationships here?**
Not everyone of course, but yes with some people ya. Definetly.
- 176 **Concerning your identity, how would you describe yourself?**
I'm European! [We both laugh]. A French author, I don't remember his name, had said, and this is my motto as well: "when I'm in Tesseloniki I'm an Athenian, when I'm in Paris I'm a Greek, when I'm in New York I'm a European". I think it's more or less what describes... but I tend to be European very easily, I don't have to go to the States to declare myself European, I declare myself European in Brussels as well. I'm a Greek and a European. I have two identities that are shared, like that I'm an Athenian and a Greek.
- 180 **What do you feel you have in common with the other Europeans?**
- 182 Let me put it this way. When I go out, even for professional reasons, with Europeans, I know that even if we have different mentalities and different jokes, we are going to share a lot of jokes, we are going to share a lot of habits, we are going to share a bottle of wine, we are going to share a lot of things. When I go out with Americans, I know that I will tend to be more careful with what I say, not to be misunderstood. And we also do share a lot of history, that's makes thing very easy with people.
- 184 **Why did you use Americans as reference term?**
- 188 Because it's, ya, it's the other side. Of the world. If you compare the Europeans you always compare Americans and Europeans. I don't think a lot about Americans but it's the easiest example. Also, Japanise for example, Asia Pacifica, I feel very different from Asia as well. But yes, it's true that you put America, you always put, you know, two counter parts: Americans and Europeans. Ya, I think the comparison is easier for most people.
- 190 **What's your understanding of the expression 'to be a citizen of the world'?**
- 192 It's to be able to settle in every city, in every part of the world without having problems. I consider myself a citizen of the world. I would easily move now to wherever it comes up. I wouldn't mind. Wherever. Language barrier would always be a problem, but I would do it. I'm not pro an English esperado, let's say, but it should facilitate a lot, so I could go to a German speaking country though I don't speak German or I could go to Asia, but I know I could survive with English, so I wouldn't mind.
- 194 **What's your understanding of globalisation?**
- 196 Ah. Well... firstly it's economic, trade, world trade. For me it has a positive and a negative meaning. I don't like when I go to each country to see Starbuck in front of a MacDonald's, something I don't like; I'd prefer going to Rome, to a *trattoria* than to Macdonald's, go to Japan and eat a good sushi. It has also a positive effect: you can go wherever you want very easily, because everything has become so easy. And from the economic point of view, there's also positive and negative effect. I mean, I'm not a fan of protectionism, but I'm not a fan of a super open trade to everyone and open competition without any, any protectionism. So I see globalisation as both economic and cultural, I'd say, and I divide both of them in positive and negative effects and I think in both you have to have some barriers, you cannot let it happen without any control.
- 200 **Do you think you have values in common with people who had important experience abroad like you?**
- 202 Ya. First of all to respect other habits and other civilizations. I think that's a very important value that many people who have lived abroad have learnt. As I want someone to respect that in Greece from 2:30 to 6 you cannot make noise, because you have to respect people who take their siesta at this time, and you have to respect that the bells ring on Sunday and you can't do anything about that, in that way I have to respect in Belgium that I cannot Hoover on Sundays because it can bother my neighbour, or in China I would respect to eat with chocks and not asking the fork and knife, or if I go to another country I would eat my hands and when they do Ramadan I would not eat in the middle of the day in front of them, I would cook at home of course because I'm not in Ramadan but I wouldn't go out to a restaurant. I think that people who have lived abroad in general respect these things.
- 204 **Some data. What do your parents do?**
- 206 My dad is a civil engineer and my mom is a lawyer.
- 208 **Would you define yourself a single?**
- 210 Yes, definetely.
- 212 **Which languages can you speak?**
- 214 English, French, Greek, a little Spanish.
- 216 **Can we remain in touch to see the develop of your experience?**
- 218 Definetely yes.
- 220
- 222
- 224

Interview n° 7: U.S.A. / Cyprus

2

4 **Where are you from exactly?**

I was born in Mountain View, California. It's a suburb of San Francisco.

6 **How long have you been in the United States?**

Until I was 21.

8 **How old are you?**

I will be 26 in July.

10 **After you left the States?**

12 Then I went to France for about 10 months, with the "University of California education abroad" program, which is similar to the Erasmus program.

Do you speak French?

14 Yes, I went to a French University.

Then?

16 Then I was back home for 7 months, then I spent 4 months in Cyprus, doing nothing. Then I went to Belgium for the master in international relation and conflict analysis.

18 **So your studies?**

20 I have a bachelor in communication, I have a bachelor in international relations, taken at same time. With honors! Then I made a one year master.

22 **Before we started you said you are Greek, American, Cypriot. I'd like to put some order. Where are your parents from?**

Cyprus.

24 **How would you define yourself?**

26 I don't know. It's a problem for me, actually. Because in America they don't think you're American, even when you are born there they ask you where are you from, and because they don't know where Cyprus is I always say I'm Greek, so you always say "I'm Greek, I'm Greek, I'm Greek, Greek Cypriot", and when you come to Brussel and they say "where are you from", I don't think they mean where you were born, they mean what is your nationality, so I say I'm Greek Cypriot, but I was born in America, and then it's very confusing because sometimes people in Brussels say I'm American some people say "no, you're Cypriot".

32 **You grew up in the US, so for example to me you are totally American because that's the environment where you grew up.**

34 Ya, but you don't get defined by that, you get defined by your nationality. What are you is not American, you were not born in America, I was born a nationality. If I had kids in America, for example they would be born in America, and would be American.

36 **Do you have a double citizenship?**

Yes.

38 **I can say that you are from Cyprus, even though you were born in the US?**

Yes. I'm both.

40 **But the fact that your origin is from Cyprus doesn't mean that you took its entire culture.**

No, but I took a lot, because my parents maintained a lot.

42 **So after these considerations how do you define yourself?**

44 I don't know, because I'm not fully American and I'm not fully Cypriot. I'm neither. I'm not a hundred per cent of anything. So I say I could be both. I don't think like an American and I don't think like a Cypriot. You can choose [laugh]. Everyone chooses it.

46 **So you just do not define yourself.**

I don't know how.

48 **Do you feel more European or more American?**

50 I don't feel very American, but I do like a lot of stuff from there. They have a better quality of life, they have more stuff, you don't have to work so hard, you get more money, there is more money. But I like European style more, I like I can travel more, I don't know, but things in Europe are a lot more difficult. People are ruder, are less happy, it takes a whole day to work something out of a bank, while in America it would take 10 minutes. It's just that life is more difficult in Europe, it's not so easy. Like in Brussels: if you go to the bank people aren't there to help you. So in those terms if you want to define me like that, yes, you can say I'm American; like the man on the phone, I don't care if it's holiday, in America it could be a holiday but someone would answer the phone, whoever you are calling, maybe the airlines, the bank, whoever.

58 **When you think of your identity you think in national terms, like either American or Cypriot, or in a broader scale, like either European or American?**

More national.

60 **Do you know the expression ‘citizen of the world’? What’s your understanding of it?**

62 People who travelled around. I would interpret that they don’t relate back to their own nationality. It’s like that you say “I’m not anymore Italian, I believe in a mix of everybody’s culture”, so I would interpret that as somebody who is a bit disconnected with his own culture and more have a mix with other cultures. A bit lost!

64 **Do you think it as a positive or negative concept?**

66 On a grand scale it’s a positive comment; in it’s positive meaning it’s almost ironic: this expression could mean that you don’t belong to one place. It could be negative personally, unless your view is that great, I can belong to Italy and I can go to Spain and I can live in London, it depends on how you view the world.

68 **Do you think that these people exist?**

70 Yes. Children of diplomats for example: they live 2 years in Morocco, 3 years in Norway, 3 years here, but they have the negative aspect, because they don’t belong to one place.

Do you think it’s important to belong to one place?

72 I firstly think so, because I’ve never had that. I’ve never been fully integrated. Never been fully into the American and fully into the Cypriots. I think it’s very important, because I don’t know what is like to say... you know, I hear people who say “I’m going home” and they mean that the entire family is in Greece or Italy or Spain. My family has never been like that. My parents were in America, my grandma and my grandpa, all my uncles, cousins, everybody was in another country, so during Christmas all your family is over there and you never have all this family around us, so you never have your own roots, everything in one place, and people who travel tend to be quite lonely.

78 **Why do you think that people who travel a lot are lonely?**

80 It is fine and exciting, I think if you live 3 years in London and 2 years in Zurich you can’t build roots, you can’t have ties with your family, because you are always thinking ‘when I’m back home to my family, do I have to fly for Christmas’, because you are not stable. I’m not thinking it’s negative, I think it’s exciting but it might not.

Do you feel like a citizen of the world?

84 I don’t think I’ve lived enough places to say that. You know, I can’t relate to all cultures, I can’t relate to a Croatian or to a Chinese.

86 **Do you think you have values in common with people who had important experiences abroad?**

88 Yes. They are able to leave their home and actually go somewhere on their own, because if you do go back to your home you realise that most people never leaved, and if you are in Brussels you think everybody does it, but if you go back home you realise no one does it, that it’s very rare. In Brussels you know how many people are here, away from their family and their home, but if you go back, for example if I go back to America or Cyprus, most people have never left their area, they might switch cities in the same country but they never go off on their own. In Brussels it’s different, because everybody here more or less is on their own in another country, there are not real Belgian around here. [So in common you have that] You did have the courage to travel and leave what was familiar and probably more comfortable, and you come for whatever reason, to study, for a better job, for love, any reason.

96 **Why did you decide to take this program and come here?**

98 Because I was... I don’t know, probably bored. And tired. It was all the same. Because I was always coming to Europe since I was probably a baby, and then I just thought it would be nice to live here and just try, so...

So you were always spending holidays in Europe and willing to see how was living here?

100 Yes

Why just France?

102 Originally I actually wanted to go to England, but then I thought it was better to know another language than go to something so similar to America.

104 **Why did you want to go to England?**

I always wanted to go there.

106 **Why did you leave the US?**

108 Because I was in France, and when I went back I was really bored and I didn’t like it. Also I had a boyfriend in Europe, then I thought I want to do my master in England again, one of the schools in England had the campus in Brussel so I thought to be where there are the institutions and I should be where the action is. Also I could maintain my French, it probably would be easier and cheaper, I could get a better apartment, so I came here.

Why didn’t u like anymore US?

112 I was bored.

And you had already planned to do a master?

114 No. I was working at Google and I didn't like the job, and I just thought "God, life in America is so boring", you
116 always do the same work all day, and there is always a room manager who would watch you and would take
118 notes on your performance and you just felt guilty even getting to go to the bathroom. I didn't like that mentality,
I just didn't feel I belong there, so I just thought "I just want to go back to school, I'm not ready to work", so...

Though you say that in America there's a better quality of life...

120 No, not quality of life: it's just easier. I'm thinking of my sister and she is really bored there. She is 23 years old,
122 she makes her money, she makes 40.000 dollars a year, which is not so bad, but she's bored because she works
and then, I mean, there is some stress; and then I thought I might not have many friends because my friends after
the university they've left to go somewhere else. I mean, it's personal reasons, but it's just a bit boring.

So you decided to go to England but then you came to Brussels. Why just Brussels?

I came to Brussels because the campus was here.

And it also had something to do with the institutions presence, in which sense?

126 Because in school they were always talking "we will have speakers from the commission, we will have this, we
128 will have that", I thought it was more interactive towards what I was studying. Perhaps London would be an
amazing place to live, but...

You also mentioned your boyfriend.

Yes, not in Brussels: I had him in Cyprus.

How did you manage the fact that you are living in a place other than your boyfriend's?

132 I don't know. It was normal for me. Then I broke up. The current one can't be next to me anyway because he is
134 in the army and is destined to the basis, once in Ireland, once in Turkey, and even in the same country he would
be based on an island, so he wouldn't be next to me.

But he used to live here, in Brussels, and you meet him here?

Yes. It's a coincidence.

What does it mean for you to live in Brussels?

138 Right now it means nothing to me: I'm waiting to leave. When I first came here it was fine, I liked it, I had a
140 great time and I had maybe one of the best years of my life here, then, because Brussels is so unstable, after the
142 master all my friends left and I was by myself; then I got a job, I mean, I didn't need a job as I was doing an
144 intership, but I got a job after that, but then I got stagiaire at the Commission, so I left after the Commission and
I came back again, I mean, it was fun but after a while I wasn't going any further, it was just an intership,
everybody just coming and going... This time I just came back for working a little bit, he [her boyfriend] is in
the army, that's not the best reason to return, I mean, it was my motive to come back ...instead of living in
California I thought it would be better to live in Brussels, which is closer to Greece.

Professionally are you satisfied?

I am.

If you are satisfied why are you waiting to leave?

150 Because I don't like the weather, I don't like this place, it's boring for me, I just don't like it; it's lonely, people
152 here don't have families, you just see bunches of single people, just one person, you know, everybody by
themselves, you can't go to somebody's else and meet mother and father there who cook dinner, you don't have
154 your family here, no one has her family here among the people I met, you just see bunches of single people by
themselves, and everyone just talks about: "oh, in my country, I can't wait to go back, oh in Italy it's so much
156 nicer, oh in France it's so much nicer, I just can't wait to go back", it's a very depressed atmosphere and very
unstable, because you know everybody can leave at any minute. So it's not something you want to be, you can't
be happy here, you can be happy temporarily but in a longer term this isn't the place to be to establish yourself.
158 It's a good stopping for experience but it's not a good place to be.

Did you have expectations when you firstly came here?

160 I was just expecting to do my master and probably getting a good intership, I was expecting to add this to my
162 C.V., probably find a better job later on, but because I didn't know where I wanted to be and I knew I wasn't
ready to go back to California, that's why I stayed so long, because I didn't have anywhere else to go, so I just
stayed here. Personally I had no expectations, I stayed here because I had anywhere else to go.

Overall how long have you been here?

164 2 periods: the first one of 2 years, then I left for 6 months to Greece and America, the second period I was back
166 last March for 3 months.

Now would you say you have met your expectations in Brussels?

168 I didn't have any expectations when I came back, I knew what it was like, I knew I didn't like it, I just came back for the job.

170 **Did you already have this job?**

No, but I had three interviews.

172 **So you came here on a safe basis.**

174 What happened is that when I left Belgium I bought a round trip ticket and I had a return ticket, and I didn't know whether to take it or not, and then coincidentally 2 weeks before I just got people asking me for an interview, so I thought to take my return ticket, fly to Belgium on a stop to Greece for example: if I get a job I can stay otherwise I stay for a month and see and then if I don't get the job I can go home to California. But I got this job on the first day so I stayed.

178 **How do you consider your permanence here in a time frame?**

180 I don't consider it at all. I don't want to be here past February. Twelve months is the maximum that I will stay. I would like to leave before but because of some projects that are happening in February... now they want me to postpone to March, but I don't think I'll stay: this is too much.

182 **And are you leaving for which country?**

I don't know... probably Greece.

184 **Why?**

Because my boyfriend lives there.

186 **Are you planning to live together?**

If we don't break up before he gets out of the army...

188 **How many languages do you speak?**

French, Greek and English.

190 **Do you think that your experience abroad is common to a minority or to a great part of the young Europeans?**

192 I would say a minority. I don't know. It seems like a lot of Europeans travel around, but sometimes when I go to Greece and I talk to people about where I've been, they say "Wow, you travel so much, I've never left the city!", they are so surprised. Travelling is different than living. Europeans travel a lot, they are visiting other countries often, but living? They do a lot of Erasmus but actually living after the Erasmus: I don't think so. Maybe they stay abroad for six months, one year and then they go back home and that's it, they stay in the same place for the rest of their life. I've been in airport waiting and just talking to random people asking what are you doing in Greece and said visiting my boyfriend, I live in Brussels but I come from California, and then I lived in France, and I just came back from Russia last week, and they were 'wow, I've never even like...', and then I meet people who are so impressed by the fact that you live in a different country, while here is so normal. For example my cousins in Cyprus always lived there, they moved to travel, but never lived abroad.

202 **Do you know many people in Brussels?**

Yes.

204 **Would you define them acquaintances or friends?**

206 Acquaintances, because people here are so on a short term that you can't really get to know them, people, in a way to be cynical, they are using each other, you know, "I'm alone here, you're alone here, my best friends are in my home country, but let's have fun together while we are here". You can't get to know people very well. I have kept in contact with people that I made here but the majority of the people are just acquaintances that you meet and you go out for a drink, you have some fun, that's it.

210 **What's a friend for you?**

212 It's somebody who even if you don't talk for months you can just start talking again; someone who knows you so well, and deeply, that you don't need to explain things and they know your crazyness, when you are overreacting, they just know you. Here you are living a double life in a way, in Brussels, because they always say "all my real friends are back home, and my best friends are back home", you don't hear people here who have good friends, they just have friends, or room mates, or a friend of a friend.

216 **Where do you meet people from other countries in Brussels?**

218 You meet them when you do an internship, at the Commission during my stage; at work; friends of friends; in place Lux. Most, I would say in the work environment and friends of friends.

220 **Do you tend to stay more with people from your country or from other countries?**

222 I usually hang out with Greek people, but I also like to go out with Americans, which I know as well; but I don't really hang out with Italians or Spanish, not other nationalities, I have American friends, Greek friends, Cypriot friends, and a Canadian.

222 **Why?**

- 224 Because I find that sometimes it's very hard to communicate: sometimes people from Italy or from Spain, or
226 Germany, they take so long to say what they're thinking that you don't know what they are talking about: it just
228 takes so long to understand them. So when you speak with somebody from the UK, or American or Canada in
English, it's easier, or with someone in Greek, it's easier, and you don't need to explain like "in Greece we do
like this", etc.
- Do you think it's a language problem or it's the mentality?**
- 230 I don't know what it is. One of my best friends here is Swedish, but she went to school in Canada and she speaks
232 perfect English, so I can speak with her easily, I can use slang. I mean, I don't have any German friends but the
234 people I work with, I don't have Italian friends, Spanish friends, French friends. I know 2 Americans and the rest
are Greek, then I have Swedish and one British.
- Generally speaking do you find it easy to establish new relationships? More or less than in your country?**
- 236 Yes. Definitely more than in Cyprus and I would say more than in America as well. Because here a lot of people
238 are alone and looking for friends as well, while when you are home you have your family, your friends from
high school, from college, so you are not so often looking for new friendships, but here you are like "I'm bored
tonight, let me call a friend and let's go out", then you build a friendship more.
- Which difficulties and which positive aspects can you find during a relationship with people from other countries?**
- 240 Probably language, and the positive that you get to know other cultures and you learn how they do things.
- 242 **Which are the main differences between the relationships you have in your country and those you have here?**
- 244 They are more permanent.
- Do you maintain friendships in your country, both in US and in Cyprus?**
- 246 Yes.
- Did you also maintain the relationships established in France?**
- 248 With one person. He's a real friend, I think, as well, because we don't talk very often, but still...
- Did you meet him in France?**
- 250 Yes.
- Where were you in France?**
- 252 I was in Bordeaux.
- Which instruments do you use to maintain these relationships?**
- 254 Mobile phone, only audio, my phone doesn't have video; then e-mail, chat, Skype, but only audiocalls.
- Do you meet them?**
- 256 If I have a chance. Not often.
- Will you maintain the relationships you have here?**
- 258 Yes, most of them.
- Which is your profession?**
- 260 Media relation analyst.
- What do your parents do?**
- 262 My mother doesn't work and my father works in a car shop.
- Can we remain in contact for two years?**
- 264 Yes, sure.

Interview n° 8: France

2

4 **Where do you come from?**

I come from the suburb of Paris.

6 **Did you have other experiences abroad?**

I spent one year in Sweden as an Erasmus student and I frequently go to Germany because my mother is German, so half of my family lives in Germany.

8 **So you speak French, German and then?**

10 In French better than in Germany, and then English and Swedish.

12 **When did you go to Erasmus?**

It was in 2004-5.

14 **Did you use other European programs to go abroad, like the Leonardo?**

No.

16 **Which are the reasons that pushed you to move outside your country?**

18 Well, I don't know. I was used to go to Germany very often, so I was used to be in another country with a different language and another culture; that made me curious, I like to discover styles, cultures, languages, I love to speak foreign languages, I've always been fascinated by Sweden and I wanted to live there to see if all the clichés were true and to see how the Sweden social system works... Everytime I'm in France for a long time, I feel I would like to go abroad to see different people, different things. In Europe, because it's closer and it's much easier to travel in Europe than to other countries.

22 **Why do you think so?**

24 Well, there's the European Union that helps a lot to travel. I've been in the US once and I'd like to go far away as well, but it's more expensive to travel to another continent; it's also much more difficult to go back home. For the moment I never wanted to go like to China or Asia, but maybe I would go sometimes, I have never been yet.

26 **Why did you come just to Brussels?**

28 Well, I was thinking about working for the EU a long time before, I've been studying European Public Affairs, so I really focused in the EU, so I was really focused on the EU institutions. After doing my internship in Sweden, I realized I wanted to work in a multicultural environment. I was doing my internship in Stockholm for 3 months after the Erasmus. I was in Erasmus in Gotenborg and then I went to Stockholm to do my internship there. Because I had been thinking to work for the French diplomacy, but what I found is that it was quite boring to be in a French island in a foreign country. I wanted to be in a multicultural environment, not working with French people abroad. So the easiest way to be in a multicultural environment, coming from France, having studied in Lille that is a suburb of Brussels, I found to be this one.

34 **Why do you give so much importance to the multicultural environment? Which are your expectations with regard to this environment?**

36 As I said, I love speaking foreign languages, I get a big bored when I speak only French with only French people. Then I think you meet so many nice people. When you are working with people from different cultures it enriches you, you discover so much from the others.

40 **Do you think that European institutions can give you such an environment?**

42 Well, being in the European Parliament I see how it works and I think it's really a nice environment. When I talk with [name of one of her colleagues, from Cyprus] about Cyprus or with [name of one of her colleagues, from Poland] about Poland and with [name of one of her colleagues, from Italy] about Italy, it's funny to speak about our different countries, cultures, habits, traditions, everything.

44 **How long is your stage at the Parliament?**

46 6 months.

48 **And after that what are you planning to do?**

I'd like to stay in Brussels, and I'll see. My boyfriend has just been hired by a company in Brussels, so he will stay here, so I'd like to stay here as well. So from the personal side everything matches.

50 **What did you study?**

Political science and European affairs. A 5 years diploma, totally.

52 **What does it mean for you to live in Brussels?**

54 A big flat with funny flat mates from different countries, especially compared to Paris, it would be impossible to have such a big flat in Paris for such a prize, so it was a big advantage. The first thing for me is to find a work that matches my expectations, at least I hope so. Brussel is so close to France and it's so easy to get home that it's not really a foreign country for a French. [Pause] People are more open-minded here. I mean that when I

58 meet people in Paris, when I meet my friends, even if I love them and they are very nice people and they have
60 been studying a lot abroad, you always get the feeling their life is in Paris and they don't want to leave Paris, as
62 they think that Paris is the greatest city in the world, and I don't like this French centred atmosphere everywhere
64 in Paris; in Brussels I don't have this feeling; even with the French people I meet in Brussels: they are different,
66 they feel more European and that we are 27 in the Union and we cooperate with the other countries.

62 Why don't you like that French people are proud to be French?

64 It's not like to be proud to be French; it's that they are thinking they are better than any other and still think that
66 they can make their policy in their way and don't even think that actually Europe is everywhere. This week I was
68 in Paris and went to a party on Saturday night and the first thing people would say: "Oh you live in Brussels,
what the hell are you doing in Brussels?". Well, it's nice, it's interesting. French people also use to make jokes
on Belgian people, they want to know if now we speak with the Belgian accent, they make jokes, but they don't
realize what we do and they actually don't want to know, because they are not interested.

70 What do you mean when you say "what we do"?

70 I was talking about my boyfriend and myself; "why the hell are you in Brussels and all your friends are in
72 Paris?", sometimes it's a bit tiring to explain why it's so nice be in Brussels as well, to work in English, with all
74 these different people around, and my flat-mate coming back from England she brings us all English things and
my other flat-mate from Spain... it's a bit like an Erasmus here, but for graduated people [laugh].

74 Are you planning to live with your boyfriend or to live in your flat?

76 We are planning to move to another flat, but not now. We'll stay I guess for 2 or 3 years.

76 So you can still enjoy this kind of environment.

78 Ya, we were thinking about being in a shared flat because we don't know so many people in Brussels and we
80 think it's the best way to have an exciting social life to mix with flat-mates friends. I guess that in 2-3 years we'll
82 have as many friends as we have in France. If we have a social life we can move to a flat... I have some friends
here from my university, but we thought that it would have been funnier with other people, and our flat is so
huge that we won't have any problems.

82 Which were your expectations when you moved here?

84 As I told you, the multicultural environment, people from everywhere in Europe and from other countries as
well, interesting job.

86 Do you think you've found what you were searching?

86 Ya, I think so. It a bit hard, because people who have been studying European Affairs they all are looking for a
88 job in Brussels, so there is a high competition. I know it takes quite a long time until you stop finding internships
and start finding real jobs, but it's the same also in France, it's not only about Brussels, it's about our generation.

90 What do you mean?

90 That for young people, well educated, with a master in political science, law, economics is much harder than 10
92 years ago to find a job. They do two or three internships before finding a real job. It's the same in France, it's the
same in Europe [pause]. But I still hope to find something someday.

94 How long have you been here?

94 5 months. But I have been often in Brussels before, because I was studying in Lille that is half an hour, so I was
here pretty often in the week-ends.

96 Will you remain here for many years?

98 I think so.

98 Even the rest of your life?

100 I don't know. Maybe. You can never say.

**100 Do you think that the experience you are having here is common to many European young people or is
restricted to a minority of them?**

102 I think that more and more people have the possibility to go abroad and they also realize how important is, when
104 you are looking for a job, to have been abroad; also the feeling that being abroad with Erasmus doesn't mean
anything anymore, now people know that Erasmus is partying, so now you have to go to Japan or China to have
106 something special. But even if more and more people have the possibility to go abroad, I still have the feeling
that so many people don't dare to go abroad, because they've never gone before and think it's much more
108 difficult than actually is. I have friends in France who on one hand have been once and keep going abroad and
there are more and more people in this group, but there is still a remaining group of people who don't speak
110 English that well, they've been studying for so long that now they can't waste the time to go abroad and they use
the word "waste" because they don't realize how important it would be for them. So I would say yes to both your
112 possibilities: there are more and more people who go abroad, but it is still a minority, or maybe not a minority,
but the people who remain at home are still a big group.

Do you think that the people who go abroad and are happy about that have some features in common?

114 I would speak of the French case because it's my own experience. In France we have the system that on one
116 hand we go all'Ecole, where you have admitted with a competitive exam, and is the school of the élite, and on
118 the other hand you have Universities. In the French case the people who go abroad very often, who love to go
120 abroad and who speak a very good English, most of them have gone to the Ecole, because it has special
122 programs, like a double diploma. Also when the exams are so competitive, then the number of students who have
124 been admitted... like in my case, we were 130, and each one could go abroad, because my university has
126 partnership programs that each one could go abroad, whereas in normal universities there are so many students
and so few partnership programs that actually only the best students can go abroad. So I think it's a vicious circle
somehow, because the ones who have been abroad once speak better English, so it's easier to go a second time
abroad. And when I see my friends from the engineer schools, really top level schools, they all have been abroad
and all speak a very good English and they are all planning to work abroad; while my friends who have been
studying at the universities they wouldn't be good enough to be among the few in their university who go
abroad. So I think in France there's a difference between Ecole and University, there's a huge gap between the
two kind of students getting worse and those with the possibility to go abroad.

Are you saying that the French school system is creating a sort of élite?

128 It's the way French administration talk about it, it's the way Napoleon saw it. It was Napoleon who created this
130 and this preparatory class where you went after the high school to prepare yourself to competitive exams in 2 or
132 3 years, yes, the purpose is to create an élite.

Do you know many people here in Brussels?

132 Hmm... I have 3 or 4 really good friends, from my university, from France, I've known them for 2-3 years now.
134 I have my flat-mates, who become good friends as well; I have lot of contacts with 10-15 people, we like each
136 other but we don't know each other that much.

What's your definition of a friend?

136 Somebody I could talk about everything with, someone I call when I don't feel well and don't want to socialize,
138 somebody who knows also my dark side and likes me even though I'm not the funniest person in the world,
140 somebody I can really trust, not just somebody I can hang out at parties.

Can you tell me all the contexts in which you meet people from other countries in Brussels?

140 Firstly in my flat. I met quite many people I had been with in Sweden, we got in touch again, it was very funny
142 to meet them again in Brussels, most are from Germany but also from other countries. Then in the European
144 Parliament, where I work. I'm sharing my desk with a guy from England and in the corridor there are people
146 from Germany, from The Netherlands, so I meet a lot of people from different of countries. During my work at
[name of her private consultancy company, where she is making a second stage] I am meeting people from a lot
of countries.

In Brussels do you stay more with people from France or from other countries?

148 The fact is that my boyfriend is French, so personally I hang out mostly with French, but I would say, usually I
150 don't like hanging out with French people, but the fact is that my real friends here in Brussels are French because
152 I know them from the university. The people I meet to go out or in my flat they are from different countries. I
don't make only French parties, I don't like it. I'm in Brussels just because I don't like this French atmosphere.

Do you find it easy to establish new relationships here in Brussels?

154 It's easy to be in contact with a lot of people, because everybody is really nice and the feeling is that here anyone
156 is a very socializing person, everybody is smiling and is nice, open-minded, but the fact is that a lot of people
158 came and go and are planning to stay like 4 or 5 months and they go back home, so since I'm here I've met so
many nice people that I started to become friend when they go home actually, so it was always really sad
because we were starting a really nice relationship. So it's easy but you don't have time to have a deeper
relationship to become really friend, to have long experience in friendship, because people leave.

Do you think that here is much or less easier than in your country?

160 It's a difficult question. In my country, I have my old circle of friends I've known for 10 years, so I don't make
162 new friends that quickly in France because I don't need to. Here I don't know as many people as in France, so
I'm more in demand, I want to meet new people, and so many Expats are in the same situation, they all want
to make friends. I think it's easier, the problem is that we don't have enough time to build the relationships.

Couldn't you find a similar multicultural environment in Paris?

164 No, because I have my friends from school, from University...

I mean, why din't you make an effort to meet people from other countries even in Paris?

166 First, I didn't study in Paris, but in Lille. Actually I'm still in contact with some nice Erasmus students. When I
168 go to Paris I see my family; I used to go there only in week-ends and on holidays so it was just to see my family

170 and my friends, not to make new friends. In Lille of course I was studying and making new friends with Erasmus
171 students. I think it's common to everywhere. When you have your family and your home, your old friends who
172 you don't see so often, when you go back home they are your priority. In Sweden I made so many friends from
173 Germany, from Belgium, from The Netherlands, from Italy, from Poland, from the world but especially from
174 these countries, but it was much harder to meet Swedish people because they knew that you were staying only a
few months, they had their family, their friends, of course they were curious and nice to me, but they wouldn't
build a friendship.

176 **Which are the difficulties and which are the positive aspects that you find in a relationship with someone
from another country?**

178 Sometimes, but that's what makes it funny and more interesting, you don't have the same reaction to the same
179 situation, when talking to somebody you expect their reaction because you are used, because everyone grew up
180 in the same situation, and suddenly people have a different way of behaving which makes more difficult to
181 expect what they do. When I was in Sweden it was really obvious, when a friend had a relation with a Swedish
182 boy, for example, we knew we were used to relationships with French boys and we knew how the behavioural
183 conventions were, the way you act when you like somebody, the things we say, and with Swedish people it was
184 impossible to understand the reaction and to know what they would do. For example Swedish people don't talk
185 that much and I remember my neighbour, who was French: she really couldn't understand the reaction of her
186 boyfriend and she felt he liked her, but she expected he would call her, in France we say that in 3 days you
187 should call otherwise it means that you... but after three days it's ok, but the Swedish guy didn't fit in this
188 model, in the way of reacting in a relationship of my mother, sister, friends... But friendship is not really
189 difficult. Or maybe... for example, with my spanish flat-mate: for her is normal to have friends in the flat every
190 evening, from ten, for dinner, and we had to tell her that we actually would appreciate if she could tell us when
191 she is going to have people and that we would prefer not to have people everyday, and this was not a problem
192 with her, but it might have been, because that was normal for her. When I was in Sweden I was sharing the
193 kitchen with 7 people and the Sweds couldn't talk to each other, if something was wrong they had to leave notes,
194 and they were not just able to talk, to have a normal conversation about the problems we had. But the sweds are
a bit strange [laugh].

196 **Did you maintain relationships you have in France?**

197 Ya, I do. I have my old group of friends from school I've known since we were 12, it's so easy to go back to
198 Paris, so every time I go home I see them. For example last week-end I was in Luxembourg visiting one of these
199 friends. I guess I do. And with Skype and MSN and e-mails.

200 **Do you use also video-Skype?**

201 Sometimes, but not that much, I normally talk with them.

202 **And what about your Erasmus friends?**

203 I met some of them again here in Brussels, which was really nice. So many people who have been studying
204 European Affairs go to Brussels and you can meet again; I have some contacts with 2 or 3 that I visited, and
205 other 3 or 4, not so much.

206 **Concerning your identity, how would you describe yourself?**

207 Hmm... I'm a European. Within Europe I'm a French with an important pattern of German identity.

208 **So firstly you feel a European, then a French.**

209 When I meet people from America or Asia, I feel more European than just French, I know the differences
210 between me and them and the culture depends more on the fact that I'm from Europe than for my being French.
211 If I go abroad with other Europeans we would feel like Europeans abroad, discovering we have so much in
212 common in Europe.

213 **Actually, what do you think you have in common with other Europeans?**

214 The side of the countries, compared to America for example, the kind of urban environment, and history,
215 because we are old societies and history is part of our lifestyle. Public services, social system: most of them have
216 a lot in common [in the different countries]. Our languages have either Latin, or Greek or German origins and
217 are quite similar compared to Asian or Arabic languages. I think when you meet somebody from Europe the
218 contact will be much quick; of course you have a lot of differences, but you still find a lot of points that you can
219 at least compare and discuss. I think it takes more time with people from a totally different culture, even though
220 it's not totally impossible.

221 **What does it mean for you "to be a citizen of the world"?**

222 Hmm... I don't know... I'm not sure it really means something. Maybe just to be aware of what's going on
223 outside in the world, in different countries. I'm not sure I really like this concept, I'm not sure it means
224 something.

- 226 **Do you feel you have something in common with people who travel around?**
I think that people who travel around are more open-minded. They speak better English and they are used to
228 communicate with people, they communicate very well with languages. People who don't travel so much have
language problems and people who are used to meet other people from other countries with other languages are
230 more able to make an effort and so it's easier to talk.
- 232 **Do you think you have values in common with these people?**
It depends. I don't think I can say "generally all the people who travel around are like this". I guess it's just the
234 way you feel about your place and your country, you realise that it's just a coincidence that you are born in that
place with your culture, so I think you realise we are all the same. People who don't travel tend to think that
people from different countries are really different, but they are all human beings.
- 236 **Some data. What do your parents do?**
My father is a doctor in the hospital and my mother used to be a translator.
- 238 **Can we remain in contact for a couple of years?**
Yea,sure.

Interview n° 9: Belgium

2

4 **Where are you from?**

I'm from Belgium.

6 **Tell me about your story.**

I was born in Belgium, I left Belgium when I was 15 to go to Luxembourg and in Luxembourg I went to the European school.

8 **How long have you been in Luxembourg?**

10 Since 1999 until 2002 when I was leaving my parents. My parents still live there and I'm living in Brussels. I have been living in Brussels for four years, now.

12 **Are you working or studying?**

I'm finishing my master now and having a stage for 3 months.

14 **Do you have a double citizenship, like a Luxembourgish one?**

No, I don't.

16 **Did you have experiences abroad?**

18 Yes. I went to an international school in England to learn English and I met a lot of people from Asia, South America. So I learned a bit about the cultures, we were all together in the class.

In England where?

20 In the Devon, the village is near Exeter. I went there four times in different families, the first time for 1 month and the other times for one week. I went to Germany to learn German, again in a host family, 2 times for 1 month each. Then I travelled but had no really experiences.

22 **I guess that you didn't have these experiences abroad thanks to the European Union.**

24 No.

Do you agree that Brussels, where you live, is a very cosmopolitan ambient?

26 Yes. Exactly.

How can this environment influence you?

28 [Pause] Because if I don't know cultures, if I don't know something about people I like to interest myself in their cultures, in their background.

30 **With "their" do you mean people from other cultures?**

32 Yes, because I like to know things that I don't know, and as they come from abroad they have different backgrounds and everything and they can bring me things that I don't have, like ideas, or even cultures that I don't know, books, everything. Even cinema: I was in touch with a Spanish girl and she was at a Spanish cinema thing in Brussels and I had no idea of this event and she said "Come with me" and I went and it was really good, so I saw two movies in Spanish that I wouldn't ever seen at the cinema.

36 **As much as I can understand you are speaking about cultural exchanges.**

38 Yea. People are different, so they listen kinds of music that I don't know, they do things that I don't know, they teach me that there are different things than mine that I [can] listen to, that I [can] go forth, so...

Would you like to have a professional experience abroad?

40 Yes, sure.

Why and where?

42 Why? Where? Oh! Mostly, I would say European Union, North America or Australia, or South Africa.

Why?

44 I can't explain that, but I really want to go there, to work, to visit, to meet people, to know about the cultures, the languages, to improve English. I don't want to go to China.

46 **Why?**

48 I don't know, it's a country that, it's not a country that attracts me. Just historically it can be interesting in cultural books, and I don't know why, because maybe it could be very interesting, but...

From the countries you mentioned I can say that maybe you have in mind an idea of West, of West culture.

50 Yea.

52 **So do you think I'm right in saying that you are willing to explore the Western culture?**

Yes.

54 **Do you think that you are scared from what is outside the Western culture?**

- 56 Not at all. No, I've been to Tunisia, Turkey, different countries. I'm just not ready now. I had some problems in Tunisia... but Turkey was really great, best vacation of ever, but I think now I'm not ready to explore the entire world, first the part I know better, then other countries.
- 58 **But are you speaking about having just a holiday in those countries or a professional experience?**
- 60 Both.
- 60 **So if they told you "come to South Africa and work here" you would go.**
- 62 Yea, if I can go with my boyfriend, sure.
- 62 **Do you say this because you don't want to stay without your boyfriend or because you would feel safer with him?**
- 64 I can't stay without him more than two days. When I'm abroad I feel bad, I'm not good at working, I can't concentrate, so... I feel better when I know he is near me, in the town. I can't quit, if he remains in Brussels for a year while I'm abroad it would be difficult. If he can follow me, no problems.
- 66 **In your priority schedule firstly come this relationship and then the possibility to go abroad.**
- 68 Yes, yes, for me it's really important to have a private and a professional life, but private is very important too.
- 70 **Would you see any difference between the experience you might have in the EU and in the one you might have in Western countries?**
- 72 Can you repeat the question?
- 72 **You mentioned North America, Australia... so you see differences that you might find in a professional experience in those countries with respect to the EU?**
- 74 North America and Australia would be maybe the same as in Belgium or France, while Eastern countries and South Africa there can be difference. One of my best friends is from South Africa, from Cape Town.
- 76 **One of the most dangerous cities in the world.**
- 78 Yes, she had to leave because of the Apartheid. She was 12 when she left.
- 78 **Is she black?**
- 80 No, she's white. And she went to Belgium.
- 80 **In Brussels do you have the possibility to go around the international environment and meet people from other countries?**
- 82 Of course. Firstly you have a lot of events.
- 84 **What does it mean?**
- 84 Like, as I said, the Hispanic culture was organising an event like Spanish cinema, you have a lot of things either for Italian, Russian, everything; you have the town, I mean Irish pubs, different things you can go in town and find people from abroad; you have the events of the European Commission to meet people. And for me the first was at school because I was in the German section and there were all strangers in this section: so I had a friend half from Brasil and half from Argentina, one coming from Ecuador, then from South Africa, Spain, Italy, Austria. So, first I knew them there and after they had their friends from their cultures and we met and everything. For me it was the first time, because in Brussels when you arrive if you don't go to international sites you don't have the information of what is going on, so if you don't know what to do, you don't connect with people. You have to go out, to go to events, to participate and you will know people from abroad.
- 92 **During your stage did you meet people from abroad?**
- 94 Ya. All my colleagues are from abroad, I am the only Belgian. They are from England and Italy, my boss is French and in the office there are German people, Dutch, Polish.
- 96 **Usually in Brussels do you have the tendency to spend your time more with Belgian people or from other countries?**
- 98 I'd say half half, because all my friends from school and after school are from abroad and I have some Belgian friends too.
- 100 **Which difficulties and which positive aspects do you find in a relation with someone from abroad?**
- 102 It's easier with people from abroad, because you have different cultures, you can ask a thousand question the first time you see the people; with a Belgian you have almost the same background, you speak the same language, you have to go more inside to know the people, so it's easier to speak to people from abroad, they are more open. With Belgian people you have really to go inside, because you have a lot in common.
- 104 **You mean that you give a lot of information for granted and it's more difficult to get in touch...**
- 106 Ya!
- 108 **At the same time if you can go deeper it should be easier with Belgian people.**
- 108 Yea, but Belgian people are not really open-minded. They live the same things, they do the same things. I mean, I like to know people who are different from me, so that I can learn about the country, about the culture and I have so many questions to ask.
- 110

Which are the differences between your relationships with Belgians and those with foreign people?

112 It's very different. With people from abroad everything is good, all is positive, I enjoy doing things; with Belgian
114 people it's like that we do always the same things, it is boring, they don't have the passion to do other stuff
like... Take the Play Station, I know it's cosy, but I don't know any people from abroad who play with the Play
Station: you go out, you visit something, you do an excursion, you go to museums, you have a drink.

116 **Why do you think it's like that?**

Different culture. Belgians like more to stay at home, watch the TV.

118 **So you think it's a cultural issue. You don't have an explanation.**

No, I don't. For me everything is easier with the people from abroad.

120 **This might bring you to the conclusion that when you go abroad all the people are enthusiastic and positive...**

122 No, I know it's not like that [Laugh]. When you arrive to Luxembourg, Luxembourgish people are cold at first,
but when you get to know them, they are great people. In Italy I never had any problem, in Spain too, in Turkey
124 too; everywhere I went, everybody was so friendly, so cool with me. And it was not only [about] me but [about]
my parents too because I went there with my parents.

126 **Did you maintain contacts with people from abroad who returned to their countries?**

128 With some of them I lost contact, but some are real friends. One of my best friends is in Paris, another one is in
London, and we try to go twice a year there, one time in Paris one time in London to see them, and also with the
ones in Luxembourg, we are always in contact, when they come to Brussels to see us (because we are two in
130 Brussels) we are always in contact too.

Do you think that you will maintain...

132 With real friends ya. Because we know them since we are 15.

What do you mean with 'real friends'?

134 My older friends who were in Luxembourg and then went abroad, and they come here once, twice a year, but it's
important to keep in touch, and via Internet we can keep in contact.

136 **Do you use e-mails, chat, Skype?**

Ya, chat, no Skype, no audio, no video, mobile phone, but only audio.

138 **And you are visiting them, do you really do that?**

Oh yeah, it's important. Just in Paris and in London.

140 **How would you describe your identity?**

I'm European.

142 **What does it mean for you to be European?**

144 Because I don't feel myself as a Belgian, simply. I live there, I have a Belgian culture, but I was living in
Luxembourg, where it was completely different. I would like to know people from every country in Europe, all
my studies were for Europe, I'm really into it.

146 **I don't understand if you are confusing Europe as a political notion with Europe as a reality of most people who live there.**

148 Ya, I think so, it's more political. I don't feel myself... I don't belong to a country, because at the European
school in Luxembourg my friends were from everywhere in Europe: Danish, Greek, Portuguese, and we had so
150 much in common that I feel more as a European than a Belgian.

What do you think you have in common with other Europeans?

152 Hmm... So much stuff. It depends on who you are too. I can have, I did have things in common with Italians
because we were listening the same music, we went to see the same films.

154 **Do you think that that music is European?**

No! It's from the world. Ah. I don't know, I can't explain it.

156 **Do you think you have some values in common?**

Ya, sure: respect. For me if you don't have respect...

158 **What do you mean with respect?**

Respect of people, respect towards each other, trust.

160 **What do you mean?**

162 [Pause] It's kinda hard. It means you don't have prejudices on people, you listen to them before having a
judgement, you respect what the other thinks, you respect who he is, where he's from, his culture, his religion.

Why do you think that this is typically European?

164 Because I've never been so much out of Europe, so I don't know if other...

166 **You must have a feeling of how the other countries are, probably you are unconsciously making a comparison between other countries and Western countries. Do you feel that maybe we are more democratic?**

168 Ya.

Do you think we are more free people?

170 More open-minded.

So we mentioned China, what is the fact for which you wouldn't like to go there now, for example?

172 I don't want to go first for the Communist regime, there's a situation, they don't respect the fundamental rights and I'm allergic to Asian food [Laugh].

174 **Do you think we are different from Algerian, for example?**

Ya, they have a different culture. For them women are stuff, first, and they don't have the same respect.

176 **So let's focus again on Europeans: people from England or Spain, do you think they share the same values?**

178 Yes.

And for example from Rumania?

180 Ya. I had a Rumanian friend here.

And for example from Peru: do you think we have same values?

182 [Pause] Ya, I would say yes.

And what about India?

184 Not really. They are more spiritual.

So, maybe one of these values can be the religion, or the moral base.

186 Yea, I would say the religion.

Do you consider yourself a citizen of the world?

188 No.

What does it mean for you the expression "citizen of the world"?

190 To have a large experience of the world, it means to travel, to work... I don't feel myself like this because I don't have the experience to go really outside of Europe. I don't know the word in English.. ya, some of the cultures I don't know, I have no idea how the people are, so I can't consider myself like this now, but maybe later. Surely maybe later!

194 **Do you think that you have values in common with people who had experiences abroad?**

Yea.

196 **Which are these values?**

Ah [laugh]. Which are these values? Hmm...

198 **Do you give value to the same things?**

200 [Pause] I can't find values like that, but... [Pause] I can't, I don't know. When you arrive to a country, you don't know, it's always the same thing: you don't know the people, the language, so you just arrive there and you have to... débrouiller [to work it out], and people who had experience abroad have the same things, so it's the same start, you have to learn, to ask...

202 **So do you think they are more patient with you, and that you can rely on them because they passed through the same experience?**

204 Yes.

206 **This makes you feel more comfortable.**

Yes.

208 **But for example if you change town in Belgium, it might be even more difficult? I'm just gessing.**

I just did it once. Yes! [Laugh]. I have been living there for 2 months and I don't know anybody around me [laugh], I don't talk to people in the street like that...

210 **If you were the traveller, do you think that you might have the same problems?**

212 No because it's a different place, or even if it is a place that you already know you meet the people, so...

Ok. What is your last study title?

214 University degree. I'm making the master in European Affairs and Communication.

Profession?

216 I am a stagiaire at the ETUC, the European Trade Union Confederation, in Brussels.

In which languages can you have a conversation?

218 French, English, German, Dutch.

Interview n° 10: Belgium

2

4 **So before we started you were telling me that you are from Brussels, and that you stayed 9 months in**
6 **England, just to study English, and that there you met a lot of people, also French speaking.**

6 Yes.

Did your experience there affect you?

8 No [she refers only to the fact that she met French people], because it was interesting to me to meet people
10 coming from other cultures than French culture, because I know French people coming from France, I go often
12 there on holidays so it's not interesting, but meeting Japanese, Coreans, people coming from America it's more
14 interesting: you can see differences in cultures and also I had to learn English, so if I speak French...

12 **This is not an answer you give for granted, there are people who would remain with the same culture just**
14 **because they feel more confident, at easy.**

14 Yes, yes. I had French friends there [in England] who stayed all the time together because it was easier for them
16 to speak French, also with different cultures you have problems of understanding, you can make mistakes
18 thinking it's normal to do something while for the other culture it's not normal, so it's also difficult, but
20 interesting to see the other point of view.

18 **Then you stayed 1 month in India...**

20 I worked there as a volunteer. It was in the South of India; it was also very interesting because you have a lot of
22 ideas about India and Indian people, that they are poor and not happy, that's true that they are poor but they are
24 very happy compared to us, sometimes they have less problems that we have, they are more free, when
26 something happens there's not a problem for them, they just go on, they don't have Internet but they are really
28 happy, that was a way to see how things are working.

24 **There are studies about happiness; they say that we are not happy at all, while African States in which**
26 **people have nothing are happier than us.**

26 Yes. I saw that with the children, as we lived next to the school: they play with nothing, and if I look at my
28 brothers, for example, they just need something new every time to play with. In India they just need nothing and
30 they enjoy it. It's nice to see that you can be happy with less material things. In Europe we think we need that,
32 that and that to be happy, but that's not true, you can be it with nothing.

30 **There is a theory called relative deprivation. You can understand from the name what it is about. When**
32 **did you go to India?**

32 I was there in 2004.

So you never used European programs to go abroad.

34 No.

What is your degree?

36 Economics, 4 years.

What's your profession now?

38 Now I'm a quality employee.

Did you take into consideration to go abroad for a significant amount of time?

40 Yes, but I don't really want to. Here in Brussels you can meet a lot of people coming from everywhere, and also
42 I like my country, even though there are a lot of problems and things that should be changed, but I'd rather stay
44 here.

You can't know it if you do not try another reality.

44 When I went in England I enjoyed it, but I had the feeling I was missing something back home, and when I left
46 England, I had the feeling to leave something back also, that I was leaving something to go back to something
48 else, but I had the feeling to be cut in two, and each time I go back to my host family it's always the same: I
50 enjoy to be there, because it's another kind of life for me, but... I'd rather be in Belgium, and go to visit, and not
52 live in another country.

How would you describe this feeling of being split in two?

50 I don't know. For me my family is really important, so when they have some problems I couldn't be there for
52 them, but on the other way around they learnt how to solve problems without me. I had my life there, I had some
54 friends, and it's really strange, because when I came back (I came back from England 2 or 3 times), I met some
56 friends and it was really difficult, because they knew that I was away and for me the everyday life was in
58 England, and it was a kind of holiday coming back to Belgium, and for my friends it was still their daily life and
60 they didn't understand that it was a sort of holiday for me, and it was difficult to continue the relationships, and I

- 56 felt that they had changed but they didn't know it, because their life just went on, and I had changed but they didn't see it too, so that was really a strange feeling.
- 58 **Do you have the impression that many young Europeans or a minority of them make an important experience abroad?**
- 60 A minority, because it's difficult to say "I leave my family, my childhood, my friends", to live somewhere else, sometimes you don't know the city, the country, sometimes the language, you don't have any friends: not everyone is capable of doing that.
- 62 **Are you?**
- 64 I'm not. I don't mind travelling. I'm going abroad for about 3 weeks now but not for one year. I did it once and it was a good experience, but that was enough. I know that I'm better and happier at home.
- 66 **Living in Brussels don't you feel some sort of pressure that you must be international, you must be one of this kind of people travelling around?**
- 68 Yes. Here you meet a lot of people coming from everywhere. Sometimes you try to say "I'm Belgian, I enjoy to be here and I want to be here", because the other people you meet are international people, they just left their families, their home, and came to Belgium to live. You feel a sort of pressure, that Belgium has the NATO, the European Community, you feel the international way, everywhere you can find someone who is not Belgian. The best example: I'm practising judo and in my club a quarter of members are not Belgian, are coming from all over Europe because of the European Community, they travel a lot, you feel like a sort of pressure, it's not really a pressure, but you have the impression that a lot of people are travelling and working abroad, but when you go in the North part of Belgium and you don't have that kind of impression, it's only in Brussels.
- 74 **You are mentioning this example to say it's a club with mixed people, but they are a minority.**
- 76 And you have people coming to the classes just for one or two years, because they are here for one or two years because of the European Community, and then you don't see them anymore because they just come back to their country.
- 80 **Do you get affectionate to these people or you keep the distance?**
- 82 We see two times a week, we go out, we make things after judo, so I keep relationships with different people, but only through e-mail, it's difficult to see them; it would be very nice to see all of them but we have to work and to do different things, so I keep in touch with them by e-mail.
- 84 **Do you consider them friends or just acquaintances?**
- 86 Some friends, some other acquaintances.
- 86 **So, the fact that they have to leave is not an obstacle for you to establish a relationship?**
- 88 No. Otherwise you would lose something because everyone can give you something and you can learn, I don't see why it should be an obstacle.
- 88 **How do they look at you when you say: "I'm Belgian, I want to remain in Belgium"?**
- 90 Some of them understand, some of them don't. Because they find it's interesting to move, they don't find it difficult to move every 2 years to another country, but they understand my point of view and I understand theirs.
- 92 **But still, don't you feel a pressure to be like them?**
- 94 No, they don't put a pressure.
- 94 **Do you really think that these people are happy travelling around, maybe changing a country every two years?**
- 96 Some of them are happy, some of them don't want to have habits, changing is a way to break the cycle, but for some of them it's just a way of living, they just need to see other things, to move, to find works they don't know, to see new people, so just fifty fifty.
- 98 **To sum up, how would you say that the cosmopolitan environment of the city influence you?**
- 100 Sometimes I don't have the feeling to be at home. For example, I'm living in front of the European Community school, and when they have meetings, because they are working for the EC, they can do everything, when you call the police because they can't park correctly and you can't go out of your house or come in, they just don't move, because they work for the European Community and we have to understand that they are not at home, so they don't know all the rules in Belgium, and when you speak to them they say "but you have just to move, if you are not happy just go and live somewhere else" [read: they are arrogant]. But we have been living here for 20 years and they only for ten years, we were here before. They just don't understand, [they say:] "Ah, we don't know the country" and like that, but they just have to get it. It was like that a lot before, now it's getting easier, because people understand they are living in Belgium and you have Belgian people living in Belgium, and we have also a culture and you don't have to adapt to it but just to respect it as we respect the others.
- 108 **Which are the consequences on your life?**
- 110

112 Sometimes problems to move around in Brussels; also when there are important meetings with all the Prime
Ministers or whatever coming, the town is blocked, sometimes even 3-4 days, the streets are closed and you
114 can't go to the protected area; sometimes it's annoying because we just want to go from that point to that point,
we can't go straight, we can't make through up we have to go, so we are losing time.

Does it happen frequently?

116 Yes, 4-5 times per year.

Something more personal?

118 I have a lot of friends from Europe, that's really interesting, a real positive point. I seem that without them I
wouldn't be so open to things. Sometimes I don't agree with that sometimes I do [read: I can agree or not with
120 the new things I see with them]. That's a better way to think and that's to do things, so I just try to... it opens
[your] mind, [your] point of view.

When and where do you have the possibility to get in contact with people from other countries?

122 At work and... I would say everywhere.

That's an answer...

124 At work; and in my judo club I have a lot of friends from abroad; everywhere: even when you go shopping you
126 can meet someone. Last week I ran the 20 km in Brussels...

Did you?

128 Yes and it was really interesting, because while I was running I met a lot of people, Belgian and not Belgian, it
was interesting to speak with them..

Of which nationality are the people you meet?

130 Mainly French, Dutch, German, people coming from Luxembourg; Italian, Spanish, and then from North Africa;
132 some Asian people.

**Would you say that these nationalities show more or less the distribution of the majority groups of
134 foreigners?**

136 Not really, because you have the European Community open to other countries and for me in 4-5 years I will
meet them [the people from other countries] everywhere... like people coming from Poland, which is a new
138 member of the EC: we don't meet them often because not a lot of them are living in Brussels, but in 4-5 years
they will be many more and they will be more open to other strangers. Now they try to stay together, like the
North-African people, like the Turkish people, you can go there, to some part of Brussels, and you will find
140 concentrations of them, so some cultures just stay together and don't want to open, while others want to adapt
and live with others.

Do you have the tendency to stay more with Belgian people or with foreigners?

142 My closest friends are Belgian but I have a lot of friends who are not Belgian. The closest are Belgian because I
144 know them from my childhood, at school there were only Belgians, and before, like 10 years ago, it was not
usual to see people from everywhere.

How would you define friendship? [Laugh of the interviewer:] I'm sorry I can't record your expression!

146 Friendship is when you know someone and you enjoy spending time with them, you can build a relationship with
148 them, when you can give and take with you something: for me friendship it's a win-win situation.

Nice definition! But from your definition I don't see why the friends you met time ago are the closest ones.

150 Because they know me more, they know where I come from. They are closer because of that. They know me
152 from a long time, yes, that's why I say closest, that doesn't mean that I rather spend time visiting my closest
friends, I should say my oldest friends rather than closest. I like to stay with both of them, but they are closer
154 because I know their life and they know mine too, because it's not easy and you don't have to say all the time 'I
have that problem' or 'I enjoy doing that', you don't say a lot of things about your past and not often you have
the opportunity to speak of the present, what you like to do, what you would like to do.

Do you speak about new people?

156 Yes, you need time to speak about your past.

Let's get deeper in this. What do you mean?

158 You need to know what they think about different things, when you meet someone new you have to say: "I'm X,
160 I did those studies, and while I was studying my grandparents died and that was difficult, etc.": [with the oldest
friends] you don't say that.

You mean that you need a long time relation?

162 Yes, for me at first you don't reveal yourself to people.

Let's say you really need to talk to someone, who are you looking for?

164 My oldest friends, and when I can't speak with them I don't know, sometimes I speak easily with... well, it
166 depends on what kind of problems I have, sometimes it's easier with some other friends; and sometimes you

168 meet a friend and you tell him about a problem. That depends on the situation. When I have a problem I wish to
170 speak with my oldest friends, as we've known each other since 20 years.

**So we can say that you have a different level of intimacy. Would your boyfriend likely be Belgian or where
170 from?**

172 Whoever. Why should he be only a Belgian? Of course if he is not Belgian he might want to go back to his
174 country, and I said before that I don't want to leave Belgium. But I would see the situation, what I could do, to
176 move away or...

Love could be more powerful than your love for Belgium.

176 Yes! It depends, maybe, I don't know.

And did it happen?

178 Yes, even though I had more Belgian boyfriends than foreigners. It was interesting, but it wasn't so easy because
180 cultures are different, the distance, he had to go back to his country, I went to see him sometimes, but we had
182 both to study and that was the difficulty. But you can have the same problems with a Belgian: maybe he has a
184 work opportunity in Canada and wants to go there and it's up to you making a decision; with the globalisation
186 you can move a lot, it's up to you. In the past you just got married with someone living in your city, now
188 sometimes I have the feeling that the world is a big city and you don't have a specific city.

What's your understanding of globalisation?

184 It's more economics. For me globalisation... you will work with a lot of different countries and people, being in
186 touch with them, and you need them to have a lot of information and the new technologies goes very fast, and
188 you have to understand other cultures, sometimes things that are normal to you are impolite to somebody else,
190 sometimes you have to do what you consider impolite. Different people that come and go and information going
192 very fast.

**Which are the difficulties and which the positive aspects while relationing yourself with people from other
190 countries?**

192 The difficulties: you have different cultures and your culture is the base for your personality, it influences your
194 thinking, it rules your relationships, what you do, how you live; what you think has a role, but the ground for it is
196 the culture. It's difficult to explain to someone else the differences; sometimes someone can ask you "why do
198 you do that?" and you say "it's normal" and it's very difficult to make the other understand the reason of your
200 behaviour or of your thinking. But that's a way to know new personalities, to know where you come from. When
202 I went to England I had a lot of exercises to learn English, [and they were about] how it works in Belgium, how
204 it works in Japan, how it works in Korea, etc: it was difficult to me to say: "in Belgium we do that, that and that,
206 but we don't do that", it's difficult to get into the situation and to explain why; but it's very interesting to think
208 about it, to see that maybe you can do it in another way, because you have to know the other one and to respect
210 [him and his way of doing things], and you have to learn things. So for me difficulties and positive aspects are
212 linked.

Why for you discovering differences is so important?

202 Because it's nice to learn all the time. I don't like the people who say: "what I know is enough", and who don't
204 have an evolution. I want to learn but when you know other things, you may change or you can see things from
206 another point of view. When I went to India sometimes I was worried about my work, if I would be able to find
208 one, and a flat to live in as well, but then there you see everyone happy, and if they have to live together they just
210 live together [read: if they don't have their own house], it's not a problem for them. Or if you couldn't do it
212 because of the others, well that's not a problem, you can do it later. Before I never did it. I've always tried to do
214 everything even though I wasn't able to do it: I wanted to do it and I tried to do it all the time. Now I try to
216 achieve [my goals], but if I have a problem I think I have to find a solution and then I can go on.

**You are giving for granted the fact that the more you see the more you know, while actually there are
212 cultures, like for instance the Buddhist one, which maintains that you should focus on one thing and get
214 into that thing. I have interviewed other 15 people before you, and they all told me the same: I want to
216 meet new people to discover the differences. Why to discover the differences is so important?**

216 When you see differences, you have to see the other one and you have to see yourself, and to know you better if
218 you want to see the differences; if you don't see the differences it means that you can't because you don't know
220 who you are and what your culture and your country are. In England we had to make some research [about our
222 countries] and I got some information about Belgium, but also about other countries, and once back I knew more
things about my country. Strange thing.

But why knowing more things enriches you?

220 Because I know my country more, because I had to learn more about me, about my culture and where I come
222 from, and I can understand the others also in a way that... the word is globalisation, so even if you stay in

224 Belgium when you look at the news about other countries, you have to know [a broader picture] if you want to
understand the interaction in Belgium, I don't want to know about other cultures just to know, I want to
226 understand about Belgian politics. Another example is that I watched about the French Presidential election
because it will have a lot of influence on Belgium and Belgian political programs that I would have not be able
to understand if I had not a little knowledge about French politics.

228 **At the same time don't you feel that all this knowledge can be a superficial one?**

230 You can have a superficial knowledge, that's true, you can't be a specialist in all knowledge. To have a more
specific knowledge you have to be older.

232 **Are you able to maintain relationships with those who came back to their countries?**

Not with all of them, because sometimes I didn't answer them or they didn't take the time to answer me. The
relationships are different because when you see someone is different from when you write or call. So you can
234 still have a relationship, but it's not deep relationship, because you don't often see the other person and the
communication is even more difficult than when you see the other person.

236 **How would you define the people you speak on the phone for years, friends?**

238 Yes, because for me it's still a win-win situation.

So they are not just acquaintances.

240 No. For me you can have acquaintances at work, or persons that you just met once or twice or there times.

Actually at work you should spend a lot of time together, so you'd know them very well.

242 Not really, because you know them at work, you don't know them in their families [read: in their private life].

So what matters is the personal aspect of the relationship.

244 Yes, for me the personal aspect is more important than the work, because I see that people are different at work
and at home. Sometimes they are the same, but some times they are completely different.

**An author called Goffman said that we all have masks, and that we change our mask according to the
246 situation, so if you want to understand a behaviour you firstly have to locate that behaviour in the proper
situation. Do you agree?**

248 Yes.

Which instruments do you use to keep in touch with your friends?

250 Sometimes mobile phone, never video calls, I don't have video in my mobile phone; e-mail, chat, sometimes
Skype audiocalls, but not frequently, because my PC doesn't work very well with the audio.

252 **Do you meet them abroad?**

254 When I can, yes. Sometimes they just come back to Belgium. It happens occasionally, once in two or three years.
I don't have the chance to travel all the time, otherwise I would do it.

How would you describe your identity?

256 Hmm.. What...

What about your national identity?

258 As a Belgian. Part of the European Community, that is part of the world.

You have the feeling to be part of the world?

260 Yes. I have the feeling to be Belgian because I live in Belgium, and when I go to other cities I meet Belgian
262 people; when I am in Brussels I really have the feeling to be part of the EC and for me it's a very important
project, from the point of view of economics we have to do it, if we don't succeed, we will have problems with
globalisation later; and [in Brussels] I also meet a lot of people from all over Europe. And I'm part of the world
264 also, because when I watch the news my life is influenced by what's happening in the world. I can't say: "The
rest of the world doesn't matter", you have the war in Iraq and the petrol, you have Chinese and Coreans
266 fighting, you have economic problems and economic consequences even for my life, for example that means for
me that I have to buy at higher prices, so what happens in the world has an influence on my life, so I'm part of
268 the world. And what I do can influence also the rest of the world.

How can you influence the rest of the world?

270 Because I'm part of something, I'm part of the EC, and for example I'm working at the university and the
272 university is part of the European Association of all different universities, and it has not a direct influence, but
when you look afterwards, you can have consequences. Indirectly.

What do you feel you have in common with the other Europeans?

274 The history, the Roman empire, if we look back we see that we have common things.

How the Roman empire, in your opinion, have an influence on a Norwegian or a Finnish?

276 They had some contacts with the Roman empire, they had an influence, they had to fight with them.

And what else in common?

278 The same economic level; we are an old population, we will have problems in the mentality, all over Europe.

- 280 **Going back to the same economic level, do you think to have the same level as a Rumenian?**
Not yet, not with the new European members, but with the others yes.
- 282 **What's your understanding of the expression 'citizen of the world'?**
I am citizen of the world because the frontiers are not really existing. Before if you wanted to travel you could only travel in Belgium or in Europe, because you couldn't fly, or going to America took a 3 months journey;
284 now you can go everywhere and anyone can come to your country, and that means being citizen of the world.
286 And for example we know now that regarding the pollution if you don't pay attention to that, the problem is not only yours but of the world. So you have to understand that you are part of the world.
- 288 **Some data about you. Are you married?**
No, I live at home with my 2 brothers.
- 290 **What do your parents do?**
My mother was a pilot for commercial flights, my father is working as an employee.
- 292 **Do they live together?**
No.
- 294 **What languages do you speak?**
French, English, Flemish and a little bit of Spanish, more passive than active.
- 296 **Can we remain in contact for 2 years?**
Yes, no problem.

Interview n° 11: Belgium

2

4 **Where do you come from exactly?**

I come from Bornem, at one hour from Brussels. It is about 20.000 people, medium, I would say.

6 **Do you have experiences abroad?**

No, only travelling.

8 **Do you envisage to go abroad for a long period?**

10 No, I chose not to go abroad for a long period, because I have a relationship from the age of 18. I couldn't leave
12 for a year, because then I would probably lose my boyfriend. I tried to do this project abroad, like a thesis
14 project (which is more practical than the classical thesis, and which you can do abroad), so we have interviews or
we collaborate with companies or an association to work for them, but we also do research and we also write our
own opinions, so it's more practical, and I applied for this but they refused me, I don't know why. So I didn't
have the possibility to go abroad.

How long would it be?

16 It's only a six weeks, which was ideal for me, but didn't work up. And I could do Erasmus, but then I was
18 thinking of my relationship... of course it's a pity.

Is that the only reason why you didn't move?

20 Ya, and I'm quite a family person. I think I would be feeling homesick. A couple of months I always consider,
22 maybe later I could do it, but not like a year or longer. Or I would like to travel for work for a couple of weeks,
whatever.

**Do you think that professional experiences abroad are common to many young Europeans or involve only
a minority of them?**

24 In international organizations is common, but still an amount stay in their own countries. It's just that in Brussels
26 it seems that everybody is travelling, but that's only the big cities. Outside people stay in their home cities,
maybe take a train to go to some cities, but not far. So I think it's still a minority of high educated people in
European or international affairs.

With "high educated" you mean with a degree?

30 Yes. Or of course people looking for a better job abroad, that's also a possibility. So two extremes: the well
32 educated and the others.

Expatriates and emigrants.

Yes.

So you don't live in Brussels, you are only working here.

I lived in Brussels during my studies for 2 years.

Does this cosmopolitan environment has some sort of influence on you?

36 For me as a person not really, but it's always nice to get to know people from different countries, it's like you're
travelling and then you meet different cultures. That's the big advantage. You mean personally?

Yes.

40 Maybe I can see a broader picture. For instance at home they're always talking about Belgian politics and I react
"Oh shut up, there are so many things happening in the world and not only here!".

So you have a broader vision of the events.

Ya, it gives you a broader vision.

Does this vision affect your life?

44 Not really in a direct way. Sometimes I feel that people think too small. Maybe it changes my points of view, my
46 mentality of seeing things in the world, but in practical there is not a real influence. I mean, every night I go
home and I feel that I have left this environment and I am back in this cocoon and I just live my life with my
family and friends; we have a typical Flemish way of living, and there is nothing multicultural.

During the time you spend in Brussels have you any chances to go to international ambients?

50 Well I was a stagier at the Commission, so it was quite international at work and outside the work. I have still
52 some friends from abroad, which I contact sometimes and it's really nice to know that I can visit them and hang
around there, and they moved to another country but we still keep in touch, and that's nice. Professionally I
attend many European meetings, all member states involved.

How do you consider your job: is there an international atmosphere or you are just used to that?

54 No, this is international because I worked in a typical Belgian atmosphere as well, in [town], in my previous
56 company, and it's different: [there] people talk about different things, about their home life, their children, also
because they are older, here we are all young people. Here people talk more about what's going on in

58 international facts and politics. You don't find this in the home town, although it was a big company, it's not that
60 it was a small company, this is smaller, but here the atmosphere is completely different. Sometimes I felt more at
62 home when I worked there, but here you learn more. We discuss more things that are actually going on in the
64 world, you know, actual topics, also professionally. It's a complete different job I do here. There you had to do
your work and go home, and it was finished, and it was all about numbers, getting the figures, getting the target,
because it was a private company; here I work more in public sector related environments, so it's completely
different.

64 **What nationalities do you meet here?**

66 I have colleagues from Poland, Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, and in the Commission French,
German, Russian.

68 **Both from the East and the West of Europe?**

Ya.

70 **Do you know many people also from outside Europe?**

Not really. We have a friend in America whom we know from travelling, but... no.

72 **Do you usually have the tendency to look for people from other countries or for Belgians?**

74 It's not about a tendency, it's just... for instance, if you go somewhere it depends who's there. I can talk to
anybody, it doesn't matter who they are. In my town you meet only Belgians, if you go out here you almost
never meet Belgians.

76 **What do you prefer?**

78 It doesn't matter to me. If you meet foreigners it's easier to get a conversation running, because if I go out in my
town or in my environment, there you have the tendency to go with some friends you already know and you
don't really speak with other people; here you have more options to speak with foreigners or other people. And
of course if you travel you meet foreigners.

80 **Which are the difficulties and the positive aspects you may find in your relationships with foreigners?**

82 I wouldn't call them difficulties, but often you have to explain why you think differently or typical culture
habits. So it's not very difficult, it's interesting to talk about differences. Of course you may not feel at ease in a
minute, because you talk about, how to say?, not superficial things, but it takes a while before you get to know.
84 Although it depends, if there's a click with a person, whether foreigner or not, it makes it easy.

86 **Do you prefer to create a relationship with a Belgian?**

As I said, when you hang around and there are only Belgian you don't have the tendency to go to them so you
don't really get to know new people.

88 **But let's say you are introduced a Belgian and a person from another country. What's your impression?**

90 I have always the first impression, never mind their nationalities, so it depends on the character of the person, if I
can get along I immediately notice it. At the Commission, for instance, I have 2 great friends: one from Belgium,
one is German. I have contact with them very privately, with both the same. It's not more typical, it's just the
92 inner person. And of course the language barrier, but that's just a practical obstacle.

94 **For you is the language barrier an important obstacle?**

96 I think when you meet someone it's important you can both speak one language well enough, never mind the
language. It's much easier, because you want to express things, and you don't really have the chance to get to
know each other if you don't speak the same language.

98 **Do you think that there is a division between the international part of the city and the Belgian one?**

100 Ya! [Laugh] That what I experienced when I was studying here. There was some in the center, in Grand Place or
in my neighbourhood, ok, it's very touristic, but there's no European living there, or Expat living there, and in
102 fact I didn't know this neighborhood of the European quarter when I was studying, because we all stayed in
circle, then professionally I met this neighborhood and it's completely different. Here you go to place Lux and
find all expatriats, you don't find any Belgians there, if you go to the centre there are only Belgians, except a few
104 expatriats. I went to a Flamish University, I was around with Flamish persons, but you don't really do this like
on purpose, it's just the way it is. It's not that you don't want to meet foreigners. And here is the other way
round.

106 **What is your perception of Belgians' perception of foreigners?**

108 You mean like positive or negative? Well there's a difference between immigrants and expatriats. In general not
only from my part, I have this general feeling that people working at European Institutions are all ok people, but
we often have problems with violence and with immigrants, so that is negative.

110 **In your perception are immigrants only from outside Europe? Or violence can be from Italian
community, for example?**

112 In Belgium there's the perception [of the violence] coming from North Africa and East Europe. I had personal
114 experiences with those things, and my boyfriend was robbed by a gang composed by all foreigners. I never want
to judge the whole community, but I know people think like this in Belgium.

116 **What's your understanding of the difference between expatriat and immigrant? Because actually I
consider myself an immigrant too.**

118 Mostly the Expatriats only stay for a couple of years, that's how I see the difference, and they are still attached to
their own country, and if they come here it means that they have a good job and stay here temporarily, while an
120 immigrant is looking for a job, often a criminal experience, and it's harder for them to get adjusted or to be
accepted in the community, and they hang around in the street... it's a completely different world.

122 **What consequences on your life provokes having the European institutions here in Brussels?**

122 I think it's good for Brussels, and for Belgium, although only Brussels is known [laugh]. It's good for the
environment: around here everything is secure and it's getting a nicer environment; and of course for politic
124 reasons, we get all the good companies here, and there is quite some lobbies going on. It's good for economical
and political reasons, etc. I do not see many disadvantages, only the prices go up, maybe.

126 **Are you still in contact with people who live in other countries?**

126 Yes, we try to stay in contact through e-mail, some friends visited me, but well, it's not so frequent to see them
128 as with the friends I have in Belgium, of course.

130 **Do you feel that these people give you something?**

130 Yea, of course. It's not for a difference of nationality that you stay in contact, it's just hard when you are not in
the surroundings, for instance I worked for a company in [town] and I had really a lot of friends there, sometimes
132 we e-mail, sometimes we see each other, 2, 3 times a year only, and they only live only 15 km away, but it
depends on your spare time, on your work to have the chance to contact them.

134 **What kind of instruments do you use to remain in contact with people living far?**

134 Telephone not that often, e-mail; no chat and no Skype.

136 **Have you gone to visit them?**

136 No, not yet. Because they came back to Brussels again, so it was just the situation. I'm planning to go.

138 **How would you describe your identity?**

138 Huh...!

140 **I mean, your national identity.**

140 National identity?! Do you mean: do I feel like a real Belgian or like a real European or whatever? Like this?
142 [Laugh] Ok, in Belgium we have this regional problem, you know [laugh], so firstly I feel Flemish, but then it
depends, because when there is this world cup [football] then I feel really Belgian!, like we were one only
144 nation. But I feel European as well, as I'm working here. When you go abroad and you meet people you do not
say "I am a European", I would say I'm Belgian, and ya, I feel quite comfortable.

146 **Have you ever gone outside Europe?**

146 Ya. Gambia, Turkey.

148 **There you say that you are Belgian or European?**

148 Yes, of course, that I'm Belgian.

150 **So in which sense do you feel European?**

150 Like I believe in the values of the European Union [laugh].

152 **Which are these values?**

152 They started with not having wars anymore, I think it's still a very important issue, because since they exist there
154 were no big wars anymore. And then of course economic reasons: with the Euro everything is much better,
although I must confess it's not so good all this enlargement, it would create so many practical problems,
156 because I noticed when I was attending this Union meeting, there is not enough space [time] to discuss subjects
with 27 members, you can only say three words and then "ok stop, next", it's difficult the decision making if you
158 get too big, but it contributes to the economy pursue, for instance like Ireland, and for the Eastern European
countries as well; and maybe with time it will be good for the economy of rich countries, but that's solidarity, I
160 think.

162 **Do you see other European values?**

162 Economics especially and politics. The market and free borders, although we have to be careful with free borders
for instance to criminals etc. Still we have to watch this. But it's good for labour force, because now it's easier to
164 get all the best people, scientist and the best companies. There's a mobility factor, now we have all the same
degrees.

166 **So the European values are the benefits we can get from being together?**

166 Ya.

- 168 **Do you feel you have something in common with the other Europeans?**
That's typical, they ask to Europeans what they feel being Europeans. Hmm... In fact there is not such a thing
170 like... I don't think anyone says "I'm a European". You always feel attached to a country or whatever. You can
say "I believe in European Union", that's something else than saying "I'm European". Every country has its own
172 culture, it's own values. Difficult. [Pause] Probably I have something in common but I don't know what. If you
mean what is a European who believe in the EU value then ya... I'm also in favour to keep the national cultural
174 values as well, because that makes Europe an interesting place.
- Why do you say that?**
176 Because I still love differences. It's like you travel somewhere and you have always this typical food, this typical
dress code, this typical architecture, I like this.
- How do you think these things can get to an integration?**
178 I don't think they really integrate, you see all kinds of restaurants, Italian restaurants, a French restaurant, but
180 real integration? In terms of cultural values I don't think there is.
- Have you ever used the expression "citizen of the world"?**
182 No! [Laugh].
- What is your understanding of it?**
184 I'd say... That you feel at home everywhere. No? That you are like... multicultural. That you don't feel
homesick anywhere?
- Do you feel like that?**
186 No [laugh].
- And other people?**
188 Probably, I think if you travel long enough, and if you work in a place a couple of years and in another for a
190 couple of years maybe, but I have no experience with this. Probably it's possible.
- Some data about you. Your studies?**
192 Economics and international relations. A one year master at the political science department, also in international
relations and conflict management.
- Your profession?**
194 Research consulting.
- What does it mean?**
196 [Laugh] I have to find out!
- What's your parent's profession?**
198 They are retired. My father had his own company, my mom had a boutique and work in movies' production.
- How would you define your social level?**
200 Could you tell me the level? [Laugh] Say middle... but I know people from every level, so I get along with
202 everybody.
- So are you married?**
204 No, I live with my mom and my boyfriend.
- Which languages do you speak at a conversation level?**
206 Dutch, French, English.
- Can we remain in contact?**
208 Ya.

Interview n° 12: The Netherlands

2

4 **Where do you come from?**

6 I was born in Germany, I lived there for 6 years with my parents and then we moved to The Netherlands. And
8 we basically moved around because my dad was in the Air Force, so we went from a military base to another in
The Netherlands, and also Germany, so I don't think I can tell you one place which I can say, you know: "I'm
from that place", I don't really feel like that. There's no one place where I belong, I just lived in several places in
The Netherlands.

10 **Did you have other experiences abroad before you came to Brussels?**

12 We lived in Germany for the first 6 years of my life, which of course is some kind of experience, but slightly
different, because you are a child. I travelled a lot when I was studying, so I spent like each time a few months
somewhere, a few months in Finland, a few months in India, also in Peru, that was all the time 3 to 5 months,
and after my studies I went and lived in Barcelona, in Spain, for 2 years.

14 **Have you ever used European programs to go to these places?**

16 No, not European programs, they were international programs. In Finland I was at an international summer
course.

18 **The same for Peru and India?**

20 Yes, Peru it was via a Dutch organization, looking for young people willing to do volunteer work. In Peru and
India we managed through the university, basically. In Peru I went to do voluntary work with street children, in
Finland I went to study and in India I went to do a study tour, doing a research, basically. To Barcelona I just
went after finishing my studies to look for a job and it took me a while, but after a few months actually I got a
job.

24 **Did you already know anyone in Barcelona?**

No.

26 **So you just went there.**

Yes [laugh].

28 **Why just Barcelona?**

30 I wanted to learn Spanish, obviously Barcelona wasn't an awful place to be, and you know, I made it as to have
fun on the way as well, and that's when I could do a language course while looking for a job.

32 **In which years?**

2001 and 2002.

34 **Which are the reasons that pushed you to move out of your country?**

36 Basically for most I think curiosity. Being curious what's out there, what's the difference; and also some kind of
ambition, some kind of "I need to prove that I can make it", that I can make it somewhere else, that I can achieve
it. And on top of all I just love the feeling of getting out of a plain and smelling different odors and hearing
different sounds, and everything being different: I really really love that. Just a way of challenge basically.

38 **Why did you choose Brussels?**

40 I didn't actually choose Brussels, I just chose the job really, because I got to know my boss and she was elected
and I just called her and said "I would like to work for you". What I really liked about Brussels, and is obviously
the reason I shaked to that, is the international environment, everybody being around, all these languages, all
people being from different cultures, and the most difficult part is to get to know the different cultures and to
know what the background is. So everytime that you call [during work], you have to think: "ok, I'm calling an
Italian person", which means attitude different to them than if I call a German person.

46 **How long have you been here?**

Almost 3 years.

48 **And you met the person you worked for in The Netherlands?**

Yes, I was working for the Liberal Party in The Netherlands, she is a liberal politician. I got to know her during
the election campaign in 2004, and I called her and she said "yes, come here".

50 **What does it mean for you to live in Brussels?**

52 It means living in an international city, very culturally diverse, it's not the most beautiful city in the world, there
are a lot of nice spots, but you have to know the city. It also means living in a city where everybody just comes
and goes, it's not a city in general where people live their entire life: they just spend a few years here depending
on their jobs and then move home again.

54 **Do you think it will be the same for you?**

56 I think so, ya. But it could well be otherwise, because there's a lot of challenge and a lot of different jobs here
58 and will be more in the future, I guess because the European Union is becoming more attractive as an institution,
but I can tell I see myself going somewhere else again.

Anywhere else?

60 Not everywhere. No no no. There are a lot of countries where I can be myself, I think, but in the Middle East it
62 would be kind of hard to live there, although it would be interesting, but it would be hard; and I really like the
cities, I don't think I would like to live in a very rural area.

In any case you would be ready to move even outside Europe?

64 Ya.

Which were your expectations when you moved here?

66 Quite frankly, I don't have the same background as a lot of people here, because a lot of people study politics or
European policy.

68 **What did you study?**

68 Civil engineering. So I didn't really have expectations on institutions because I didn't really know a lot about
70 them before reading the papers, and more expectations of living and working environment which is very kind of
universal or at least European, and ya, I was very much waiting forward to that.

72 **Did your expectations realize?**

74 Ya, absolutely. I still love being in the elevator in the morning going up to the office and then hearing five
different languages. Still I can't distinguish between Latvian or Esthonian, or whatever: it's so funny, I really
like that.

76 **So this is your next challenge.**

Exactly [laugh]. That would be interesting.

78 **Do you think that the experience of working abroad is spreading around among the European people or it
is something restricted to a minority of people?**

80 Strictly speaking, I think it's still a minority, looking at figures. But I do think that the minority is growing, also
82 looking at figures, because more and more people actually are making use of European programs, which gave
them an opportunity to work and study abroad, like the Socrates program and the Erasmus program, so yes, I do
think it's growing, but I also think it's a minority.

84 **Now I will ask you about your personal relationships here in Brussels. It's important the following: I'm
using the expression interpersonal relationship or relationship, just think of it in a broad sense, don't
86 think only of love affairs or intimate relationships. Do you know many people here?**

[laugh] It really depends on the definition. Oh, yes, kind of.

88 **Are they more friends or more acquaintances?**

In Brussels: more acquaintances.

90 **What is a friend for you?**

Friend is something that if I'm doing something I would just stop it if they're in trouble.

92 **Apart from your job, in which context or environment do you meet people from other countries?**

Doing sports, going to bars, those things. So going out and doing sports.

94 **Do you have any tendency to stay more with people from your country or rather with people from any
other country?**

96 [laugh] The thing is the problem, but the nice thing as well, once you are living in Brussels and you are Dutch, is
98 that The Netherlands are really close, so you have the tendency to go to The Netherlands quite often, because
one of your friends is running a party, or is somebody's birthday or being my age (I turned 30 one month ago)
everybody's having a baby or getting married and stuff, and because The Netherlands are so close, I mean it's
100 only two hours to drive, or not even, but where we go to in general, you just go there a lot. That actually means
that a lot of week-ends you are away, or your friends from The Netherlands are coming to Brussels, so yes,
102 actually it's not on purpose, but yes, there is a tendency to stay more with Dutch people in The Netherlands than
with foreigners of all countries. In Brussels it doesn't really matter. Obviously I have Dutch colleagues but also I
104 have good acquaintances in German colleagues, and a lot of Scandinavian colleagues and also people from
Belgium.

106 **Do you find it easy to meet new people in Brussels?**

108 The problem in Brussels is that it's easy to meet people, but you transfer a lot of them from your job; it's not that
easy to meet people living in Brussels, being in Belgium, because you're spending so many hours in this
building and when you go out for example on Thursday a lot of people go and have a drink after work: you
110 almost always go to place de Luxembourg, which is really close by and everybody who is there is working in the

112 European institutions. So in order to get out of that world you would really need to find your way out to meet
others kind of...

114 **With respect to your country or other ones of which you had experience, do you think it's easier here to
meet people or not?**

116 In Barcelona it was very easy to meet new people, but that also because I was in a different phase of my life,
because now I live together with my boyfriend, which is so really different, I mean, I spend more time at home.
118 In Barcelona I was by myself, so you go out a lot more. Basically, spending 12 hours at work everyday it's not a
lot of hours left, right?

118 **And you know what it means.**

120 [Laugh] Ya, that's quite awful. But as long as you like your job, then it's ok.

120 **You said you have been living here for 3 years. Have you always lived with your boyfriend here?**

122 No. First half year I lived on myself and then he moved in, so for two and a half years, basically, but last year, in
2006, I lived in The Hague for a year, because I had a different job on top of my job here, but my boss basically
124 lent me because we had election in The Netherlands, national elections and regional elections, and the liberal
party asked me to be the campaign management, so I went back to The Hague and I lived there for a year, one
126 and a half, I mean, I went back to Brussels just everytime I could, just to be home, but I travelled a lot between
The Hague and Brussels.

128 **You already knew your boyfriend before you came to Brussels?**

128 No.

130 **So, you met him here. When you moved here, had you already some contacts here?**

130 No, I don't think so. No, only vaguely, by the party, but no, not really.

132 **Did you find hard to meet people and so on?**

134 No, not at all, not really. I mean, there're so many young people working in the European parliament in the same
position, all wanting to get to know young people as well, so no: that's one of the most easy things to do, I think.

136 **Which are the difficulties and the positive aspects of having a relationship (any kind of) with a person
from another country?**

138 Obviously the difficulty is the language, I mean, you have to understand each other in order to build up a
friendship or a relationship, so the language; I think that's one of the reasons that the Dutch in general get along
very well with the German or the Scandinavian people: we all use English quite well so it's very easy to get
140 along with them; we get along very well with English as well, and French it's a lot harder for us. With Belgian
people I need to speak French, so it's already quite hard, and Italians or Spanish don't speak English very well,
142 so there's already some kind of barrier. So that's the first, the language, and then difficulties of not knowing the
cultural background: thinking, you know, "why is he or she doing such a stupid thing?", or saying something
144 very silly, and then if you know the cultural background it all makes sense. Or sometimes it doesn't even make
sense, but still, you know, things would be natural. And the positive aspects... well, it depends whether if you are
146 curious or not; if you are curious about it, I think you can learn a lot from other people, and out of that you can
learn of yourself as well. I think I really learned a lot about myself in Barcelona through getting to know the
148 other cultures, as much as Spanish themselves really.

150 **Do you find any difference in the kind of relationship you have here and the one you have in your
country?**

152 Yea, there is a difference, you start from a different level. For example, a few friends I know from when I was
studying: you went through so many things together and you truly know where those people are coming from, so
it's a very different level you start from. For example, they quite often don't understand the job I'm doing here,
154 because it's a quite different job to explain, although it's straight forward and concrete, so I can have an Italian
person in Brussels who understands a lot better what I'm doing than one of my best friends in The Netherlands,
156 who is Dutch as well, what I'm doing like 12 hours a day, so for a big portion of my life. So it's quite a balance.
Which actually in the end means you just talk with different people of different subjects, 'cause you are thinking,
158 you know, "he'll understand better this subject"... In the end there are a few friends obviously with whom you
talk about everything: you can talk about everything, but for example with my best friends I don't talk of work as
160 much as I do with my colleagues here, you just talk about the superficial things about work, or the things that
really bother you, the real problems, but not as detailed as with other people I talk with who work here; and then
162 with some people here I only talk about work, not about their private life, just very superficially about their
private life.

164 **And do you consider them friends in any case?**

166 Hmm... colleague-friends. Obviously the two colleagues with whom I've been working for a long time are
167 friends, and my boss is a friend as well, but the others no, they would be colleague-friends, not real friends as the
168 other ones.

168 **Did you maintain the relationships that you created travelling abroad?**

169 No, not really, I mean: very few, via e-mail, though, and sometimes seeing each other. I'm very comfortable
170 with some people belonging to some periods of my life and others belonging to another period. Quite frankly, it
171 would be almost impossible to be in contact with everybody, and it doesn't feel right. For example in Barcelona:
172 I lived there for three years, and I'm still in contact with three people from Barcelona, when I know that when I
173 go back to Barcelona and I would call the friends I have there, then it would be great and we would have big fun,
174 but it's just a different life, now, a different period. So it just feels good that they belong to that period and I had
175 such a good time with them, and then now with different people. Some people will stay, but that's only a few
176 people. And the rest are just part of a different period. You know, I remember when you go on holiday with your
177 parents, maybe for three weeks, and everybody at the end of the holiday giving each other e-mail or whatever
178 addresses, and now I think: no. Sometimes you meet a very special person, of course, and then you exchange
179 addresses, and then it's good, but in general...

180 **It's like a small death...**

181 It is like a small death, but then it's like a small death of that period of your life as well, so you just say goodbye.
182 I think it's a very normal part of life.

183 **Let's say that tomorrow you live Brussels: do you think that you would maintain the relationships that
184 you created here?**

185 With a few, only a few. I can think of two or three people.

186 **Concerning your identity, how would you describe yourself?**

187 Everybody's always some sort of European, I don't know what that is, really. It's the right thing to say, but it
188 sounds silly. Identity depends on where you are, really. When I'm in Holland with my friends I feel like a Dutch
189 person living in Brussels, and when I'm in Brussels I feel like a Dutch person living in Brussels, but then being
190 more Dutch than when I'm in The Netherlands. No, it really depends: when I'm in the United States I'm very
191 European, but being in Europe doesn't make me feel very European. It depends on where you are, because I
192 think in this sense it is a strange feeling of identity, so when I lived in Barcelona I was far more Dutch than I am
193 now, because all the differences became clear, then, all of a sudden. Like all those people immigrated to the
194 United States two hundred years ago: if you see those villages in the United States, those people are Dutch, the
195 way we were Dutch two hundred years ago; and everybody is always celebrating the national party when they
196 are abroad more than you do when you live in your own country. There are always discussions in The
197 Netherlands about people unable to have a double identity, a double passport, like an Italian passport and a
198 Dutch passport: they actually want people to choose, which to me is really weird, but some people seem to think
199 they can actually choose an identity.

200 **Do you think you have something in common with the other Europeans?**

201 A lot, but even in the Parliament you can see the groups of people having more in common than other groups of
202 people. For example, we are on a level of this building together with German, Swedish, Danish, English and
203 Finnish, but on the floor underneath there are Spanish, French, Italians, but it's kind that they did it on purpose, I
204 mean, we work well with certain groups. And all depends on the subject as well, because when it comes to
205 ethical values, we don't really work well with the Polish at the moment. So it really depends on what you are
206 talking about. And there is a sort of split: I mean, you have Northern and Western Europe, and then Southern
207 Europe, and then Eastern Europe, and you can see that in the Parliament as well, and it's a very surprising split
208 on certain topics. For example, when it comes to drugs policies, Netherlands is actually quite alone, almost only
209 together with Benelux Countries. So it really depends on the topic. But yea, in general there are absolute
210 grouping people.

211 **What about your personal life?**

212 I think in general Northern, Western European: they form the majority of my address book of acquaintances and
213 friends. Because we understand each other on a very basic level: norms, values, lifestyle. So yea, I do think that I
214 have something more in common with certain people than with others.

215 **What does it mean for you the expression "to be a citizen of the world"?**

216 I remember doing this text we had in The Netherlands, called "21 minutes text", which is done by McKinsey to
217 try to get an idea of the Dutch people and of what they think about certain things, and in the end the text said I
218 was a cosmopolite person, which basically means a world citizen. For me basically it means "without a lot of
219 prejudices": you look at people and you are curious about who they are and where they come from, not only
220 geographically, but also socially and psychologically. Everybody has prejudices, you can't do without, when

222 reading a name or thinking to a certain culture, but you need to be able to either change them, to think differently
223 after having met somebody or having had an experience with somebody, or you need to lower them down before
224 you meet someone. Then you have to travel a lot to be a world citizen. Travelling can help. But it also depends
225 on the way you travel, right?, because there are so many people travelling, and they just go to the same place all
226 the time, or they go to these compounds that you never leave and you only see the swimming pool and the hotel.
So travelling doesn't necessarily help to become a world citizen.

Do you think you have values in common with people that, like you, had important experiences abroad?

228 Basically the answer depends on what kind of experience, but yes, young people in Europe who had experiences
229 abroad do have a basic curiosity about other people or have a basic interest in other cultures, and they have also,
230 and that's a good thing, actually, that's the main thing: I mean, you can travel, but it depends on what you do and
231 what you learnt when you come back, and if you come back and you don't think "ok, I learnt this and that and
232 I'm now going to incorporate it in my own life", then it wouldn't mean to change because of having travelled,
233 and that is different: you can travel and not learn anything, not change anything, or you can travel and change a
234 little bit. Because that's the beauty of our culture, basically: you can make it your own. I really don't like the
235 Dutch people always being very strict about appointments: you can never bring anybody else if a Dutch person
236 has agreed to have a meeting just with you, for example, and it just annoys me, in an informal way. Dutch people
237 really goes: "oh, you brought somebody else, oh my God, it's unexpected, surprising!", and they always draw
238 their calendars, when actually with my Spanish friends when I call them on Tuesday and say "what are we gonna
239 do this weekend?", they say "excuse me, it's not weekend yet, so we don't know what we are gonna do this
240 weekend, we'll just see". The Dutch people, if you ask them "what are you gonna do this weekend after two
241 months from now?", they know it: totally different. So you can bring a Spanish characteristic into your Dutch
242 culture: you can swap, and change and just mix. If people do that after travelling, yes, I do have a lot in common
243 with them. And a lot of people, you find in them not one culture but many cultures all together, united in one
244 person. If I would bring Dutch culture to Brussels, I would go sit in a restaurant all by myself at 5.40 to have
245 dinner, and nobody would be there; actually I wouldn't even be given dinner, because they don't do dinner at
246 5.40. So it's different: you just adjust and if you think "yea, this suits very well", then we have things in common.
Easy.

What do your parents do?

Airforce pilot and nanny, although they are retired now.

Are you married?

No.

How many languages do you speak?

English, German, Dutch, French and Spanish.

Can we remain in contact for a couple of years?

Yes, of course.

Interview n° 13: Germany

- 2
- 4 **You are from Germany, don't you?**
Yes.
- 6 **Do you have other citizenships?**
No.
- 8 **Which town do you come from?**
Hamburg.
- 10 **Do you consider it a big or a medium city?**
A big town. It has 1,8 million inhabitants.
- 12 **Did you have other experiences abroad?**
One year, in Edinburgh in Scotland, 1999-2000. I was there for studying, post-graduate studies.
- 14 **Did you enjoy it?**
Very much.
- 16 **How old are you?**
33.
- 18 **Did you participate to any European programs?**
No. I went to Scotland with a private program of the Edimburgh University.
- 20 **Can you tell me the reasons why you left your country and came here to Brussels?**
Because in Edinburgh I met my girlfriend, whom I'm going to marry.
- 22 **So you just moved to stay with her.**
Yes.
- 24 **What happened later?**
She went back from Scotland and started to work. I went back to Germany, to Berlin, because when you study law there is a 2 years training, and you have to terminate with a second state exam in order to become a lawyer or a fully qualified jurist, so you can work in all legal professions.
- 26 **Where is she from?**
She is from Brussels.
- 30 **When did you come here?**
For the first time in 2003, then after almost a year I went back to Germany, then I came back here at the beginning of 2006.
- 32 **Now you are living with her and planning to get married next summer? So I can say that you came here for her.**
Yes. Of course we had considerations like if it would be easier if she goes to Germany. I've seen my chances and my prospects to find something here, which I like, are higher than vice versa, because Brussels is a place where if you come from another country you have relatively good chances to find a good job.
- 34 **Does she speak German?**
No, not really.
- 36 **Could this be another reason for you both to prefer to come here?**
That was also a reason, but also we both knew that if you don't speak French or Dutch very well, you have still the chance to find a job here, whereas in Germany you would have very hard time if you don't speak German rather well. Whether as a place for education and legal profession, it would also be a reason why it's easier in Brussels than in Germany.
- 38 **What does it mean to you to live in Brussels?**
It means an international environment, not only a German environment anymore; that I get used to many things that are different; I got to know many new people from all part of Europe at least, and even more; and you eat very well.
- 40 **Eating well? It's the first time I here that! [Laugh].**
If you live with a Belgian in a Belgian environment it has to be reconsidered.
- 42 **What more?**
Also it means that one has left the used environment and friends that one had are more far away, and the family as well.
- 44 **Do you miss them?**
Sometimes. I'm not really sad in my everyday life, but it's not always easy to keep in touch, and sometimes you see that you lose the contacts.
- 46

Which were your expectations when you came here?

58 The first time I came here I wanted to find a job as a layer, that was the most important thing, because at the time
60 in Germany it was extremely difficult, so it was my main issue; of course also leaving for the first time and
sharing a flat with a girlfriend; on the other hand I knew I would meet my girlfriend's friends and family, so that
was not great new thing that I expected.

Because you already knew them?

62 Yes, most of them. Of course the first time trying to get a professional life, step into independency, I would say.

Why did you go back to Germany?

64 Because I didn't find a job and I had an opportunity to qualify further in Germany, so I did that; it wasn't far
66 away, so it wasn't difficult to come to Brussels every week-end.

And in 2006?

68 Then I had started my PhD in a University in Germany. I wanted to focus on it completely and I could do it from
Brussels or from Bonn or other places in Germany. So I just came here to write my PhD basically, and also
70 trying to look for other opportunities and make contacts that in Brussels are easier for the European institutions,
that could also help me for the subject of my PhD.

Which is the subject?

72 It is the influence of general agreement on trade and services on R&D in Germany and Europe.

How long have you been here?

74 It's almost 1 year from 2006, and the first time it was 10 months.

Were your expectations satisfied?

76 After the first time no, as I hadn't found a proper job, but apart from that it was fine here, I mean, I improved my
78 language a lot and made new acquaintances, and so on. But the issue of the job was unsolved. Now I would say
that expectations are met, as far as the place and the country where I stay are concerned.

Which language do you mean?

80 French.

And what about acquaintances?

82 I met people through my language class, and my girlfriend of course. And through sports, through the job.

Which is their role in your life?

84 Some of them are still friends, some of them I've lost contact with.

You consider your experience here a long or a mid-term experience? Do you think to stay here for a certain time and then go back to Germany?

86 I don't know yet. I will stay for a few more years, that's pretty certain, but it is still an option to move to other
88 places.

In Europe or wherever?

90 It depends, but I could also image to leave Europe. But going back to Germany is also an option.

It depends on what?

92 It depends on the job.

So you'd move according to where the job moves you.

94 Probably. I mean, of course there will be criteria when you have a family: and it not only depends on my job, but
96 also on my girlfriend's job, those are things we both consider.

So you are both considering to move?

98 Ya.

She wouldn't mind to leave Brussels?

100 No, sometimes she would even be happy to leave Brussels. It depends on the weather and on the mood.

Do you think that your working experience abroad is something common to the most of young Europeans or only to a minority of them?

102 It depends on education. Certainly it affect lots of Europeans with the University degree. The loyal world I
104 would say not so much, because you are rather bound to your country legal system, but there are many
professions you can travel and work abroad, so it affects not just a minority of well educated people.

Let's talk of the people you met here. Do you know many people?

106 Yes.

Are they good friends or acquaintances?

108 Everything. Good acquaintances, which are, I'd say, the majority; and some friends.

Which is the major difference among friends and acquaintances for you?

110 For me it's sharing personal emotional feelings and thoughts, I would say as one point. And that I can trust a
112 person.

It doesn't depend on the time you spend with them?

114 Yes, that's true [read: No, it doesn't].

Where here in Brussels have you the possibility to meet people from other countries?

116 For example conferences with international participation organized by the Commission, by Associations from whatever country; of course pubs, place de Luxembourg. Also through my girlfriend many Belgians.

You didn't mention your work.

118 Of course! There are seven different nationalities in there.

And through your girlfriend?

120 I mean Belgian people, which is rather rare in this environment, because I know many people who don't know a single Belgian person.

You said: "in this environment"; what do you mean?

124 I mean the environment around the European Institutions, all the jobs attached to them, like consultancies, political associations, and so forth: they don't have to know Belgian people and so far are rather isolated.

Do you think there is a separation between the two worlds?

126 Yes, there is.

Since you live with a Belgian girl I can ask you: does she think the same as you about this separation between the international context and Belgian people?

130 Yes. For example place de Luxembourg is the hall of Eurocrats, so to speak, and normally Belgian people don't go there; of course there are always exceptions, but it's not the place to go. That's one thing. Also the perspective of all the privileges of the Eurocrats, people working in the institutions and having in their outside view of Belgium or Brussels.

Why do you think it happens like that? Why Belgian people don't mix with the international environment?

136 It's not something against them. I experienced also another country: in Edimbourg the people who have their own environment, their own friends, they do not have to make an effort to know people, they have their infrastructures; that is certainly one reason. There is also not much interest from the international community to meet Belgians, which is not seen as very exotic, exceptional nation, I would say. So they don't do big efforts.

What about you? In Brussels do you tend to stay more with Belgian or from other countries?

140 Anyone. I have few German friends, but they are certainly not the people I'm out the most, since I'm working, I would say, in the international Eurocrat environment quite a lot. But also Belgians.

You don't have a specific preference?

144 No.

How easy or difficult is to you creating new relationships in Brussels?

146 Quite easy.

More or less than in your country or in Scotland, for instance?

148 In Scotland I was with this program, and there was no problem at all, but it was not easy to meet Scottish people; but with international students was very easy. In my own country it was more difficult; I lived in big cities, that took a bit more time.

Why do you think is like that?

152 Berlin...

Did you live in Berlin?

154 I lived in Berlin for 2 years and it is like Paris or London, those are not very personal cities, it's quite an anonymous city, it's not easy to make the first step, but it's also personal. In a place like here, where everything is concentrated in one spot and everybody is more or less used to meet new people also on a rather superficial basis, it's very easy.

I was told that Berlin is a quite international place, so why do you feel that there is such a difference between Brussels and Berlin?

160 Ok. I don't know whether you have met German people or people who lived there.

Yes, it might be different.

162 So many people from other countries are also studying in whatever, but I was in the German environment and was also meeting people who had a long established context, in their establishes circles of friends, and it was not too easy to enter. Another thing I discussed about when I was in Berlin is very much this: to commit to new relations is not supposed to be cool in Berlin, and in general in the German environment.

Your friends in Belgium: where do they come from?

166 Belgian persons, some English, also German persons.

- 168 **Which are the difficulties that you find in establishing a relationship here with people from other countries and which are the positive aspects?**
- 170 So far with the first contacts I haven't encountered real difficulties; what might be difficult is sometimes to overcome the superficial meetings to establish a deeper contact. The positive aspects are that [you meet] people from other countries, with other backgrounds, and it's interesting to exchange experiences, so you see your situation from a different perspective.
- 172
- 174 **Do you find differences between the relationships settled here and those in your country?**
- 176 The oldest relationships you have from school time and so on: it's hard to have such a familiarity [as] with people that takes a long time, I would say, and also it changes with the age. I mean, when you share adolescence, all this stuff, then it's different than in working life, meeting people. But it's a question of time.
- 178 **Are you saying that you have less time now?**
- Less time yes.
- 180 **Do you maintain the friendships in your country?**
- Yes, not with all of them. Each time there are just a few left, but...
- 182 **And the relationships you created in Scotland?**
- A few. Not many.
- 184 **Why?**
- Of course through my girlfriend: we met there and we have some common friends. There was another specific point in Scotland: there were lots of Germans, well, on one hand it was easy to keep in contact with them, on the other hand only a few of them were nice enough for me or were my cup of tea. So with the ones I became friends with I stayed in contact.
- 186
- 188 **Still you mean you are making a difference between acquaintances and friendships.**
- 190 Yes, that's for me the difference.
- 192 **And the same in Germany?**
- Yes. Not deliberately. You realize quite soon how the person is, whether you think to make an effort to keep in touch.
- 194 **Which instrument do you use to keep in contact with people?**
- Telephone and e-mail. I try to use the normal telephone instead of the mobile, because international calls are expensive. And e-mails, but not so much. No Skype, no chat.
- 196 **Do you visit your friends?**
- 198 Yes. Not so frequently. Once a year, but not each of them. It depends on where they live as well, if in Hamburg, where my family lives, I try to see the people who live there. It is more difficult with people who live in Berlin for example.
- 200 **Did you go back to Scotland?**
- 202 Not yet. But I don't think there is anybody left there. They all left from Scotland at the end of that year.
- 204 **Yes, because it was an international context. Wouldn't be this a push factor to move and visit friends in their places?**
- It is partially, and we have visited people in France and in The Netherlands. I invited them to the marriage.
- 206 **Do you think that you will keep the relationships you settled here?**
- Some of them yes. It depends on things also... but someone I would certainly maintain.
- 208 **How would you define your identity?**
- My character, my personality?
- 210 **No, I'm talking about your national identity.**
- You mean as a German? How I feel as a German?
- 212 **You might have a local, a national or more than a national identity.**
- Ah, ok. I guess I identify mainly with Germany, I would say. The cities where I lived I was very attached to and have been important. European identity... I have a lot of sympathy for Europe, but it's too abstract to really call it "identity".
- 214
- 216 **What about your Belgian identity?**
- It happens that more and more I defend Belgium against all those stereotypes and prejudices, and so far it is a kind of... that I start identifying with the country and the people; of course it's due on my girlfriend as I see things through her perspective, and hearing all those issues even more inside, in a differentiate manner. So this is certainly changing something.
- 218
- 220 **Do you feel you have something in common with the other Europeans?**

222 I mean, the ones here yes, but the people who are working here are one of the kind: many of them have studied
224 and have the same interests in European politics, so from this perspective one has things in common. From the
national, political point of view, I find that is quite striking here a common view of the United States.

Here in Brussels?

226 Among the Europeans, strong emotions about the United States.

Would you define them positive or negative?

228 When people talk about Bush it's negative at least 90%; here it's also rather differentiated, but at the moment
politically more negative.

230 **Do you feel there are common features with Europeans?**

232 Difficult to say. Maybe each one [has] a pride in the culture of his country. But in Europe the history of countries
is very much interrelated and goes further than [the history of] each country. So Germany is usually very
234 interested in Italian history and culture, for example. Another thing is the view of religion, again compared with
United States: in Europe it is more secular, and this is a big difference between Europe and the US.

236 **You said you have sympathy for the idea of the construction of the European Union, but you haven't
mentioned it now. Do you consider it only as a political or process?**

238 No. In the long term it has hopefully a stronger effect, but at the moment... I mean, of course it's getting
countries closer, Erasmus is an example, and you [can] work in other countries. The effect of EU certainly [there
is], but the political union is another question.

240 **Actually, I was talking more about a European identity. Do you think there is something like that?**

242 I think it might develop slowly. There might be something like that yes, but I would have hard time in defining
that. Maybe in the history, in the culture, people feel they have something in common. But that having a
European Commission makes people closer, I don't think so, and to vote for the European Parliament every five
244 years, I don't think either. I don't think that makes a big difference.

Have you ever used the expression "to be a citizen of the world"?

246 No, I'm a human being. Mainly citizenship implies many perspectives, something like civilization, living
together under common rules and values, sharing common responsibilities of the Earth, having something in
248 common with the human beings living on the earth, that concerns a citizen of the world... it's a little brainstorm.

Do you think it is possible?

250 From the European perspective yes, whether you call it humanistic ideals. Because of the media, because you
252 learn about things happening in the opposite part of the world, you feel emotionally involved with what is
happening to people in the other part of the world. So far it's something like that. Whether every person in the
254 world feels that or whether it has something to do with the European background, I believe is another question. I
think in other cultures it is not developed, I think people don't even care about what is happening to people
living in the next city.

256 **Do you feel you have values in common with people who made or is making experiences abroad?**

258 Yes, I think a certain openness; maybe most of them have a certain curiosity or ambition or at least consider
important to study or make experiences abroad.

Curiosity towards what?

260 To other cultures and other people. And they are not afraid of meeting other nationalities.

Why do you think that these people consider important to have experiences abroad?

262 Widening the horizon, to use a phrase. The main thing is certainly that it's seen as very important if you want to
find a job; like in law: most of the people who have some ambitions study abroad, have a degree abroad, to learn
264 the language. That I would say is the most important reason, but it's also having the positive side of meeting
people from other countries, other cultures; widening the horizon is at least in German an old phrase, but it's
266 kind of true, because you have other perspectives, you learn to cope in other environments.

Some data. What did you study?

268 Studies in law, then a master, and I'm still involved in my PhD.

Your profession here?

270 R&D policy analyst.

Do you use your knowledge or you have to develop new skills?

272 Both. It's not directly linked with law, but certainly my university studies are useful, as well as the things I
learned when I was working in other places; but now I'm learning new things.

274 **Your parents' profession?**

My father is a veterinarian, my mother helped him and was a housewife.

276 **Which languages do you speak?**

German, French and English.

Interview n° 14: Austria

2

4 **Where do you come from?**

I was born in a very rural area in the middle of Austrian mountains, the province is called Stiria.

6 **Did you have any other experience abroad, before this one?**

In 2002 I was also in Brussels as a stagiaire, not as a professional, for 6 months then I went back to Austria. I have come finally to Brussels in 2004.

8 **And as a student?**

10 I wasn't abroad. This mainly for private reasons. My father was very ill and I couldn't leave the country. There was no need to go. I had some holidays, I made some projects abroad but never lived. There is a big difference.

12 **Which are the reasons that pushed you to move out of your country?**

14 The job. Especially in my case is definitely not the city of Brussels, but the job itself. Very interesting, changing everyday, you meet so many people from different origin and you have to keep the balance, it's a very fast job, everyday is different, I have a very nice boss. I really enjoy it and I see a lot of things. Also I have a salary I wouldn't have in my Agency in Austria.

16 **What does it mean that you have to keep the balance?**

18 Ya, you have to keep the balance between the different nationalities, to deal differently with people coming from different origins. Talking to, let's say, let's go to prejudices, talking to a Greek man needs to have much more self esteem than I don't know talking to a colleague, so you have always to be aware whom you are talking to and what you can expect.

22 **How did you get this job?**

24 I was a trainee in this office and one of the officer just called me and asked me if I would be ready to come and live in Brussels, so I didn't have to apply.

What does it mean for you to live here?

26 It's a bit contradictory. On one hand I have a very good job, on the other hand there is something in Brussels which is different from Austria and Vienna. The problem in my daily life for example it's the fact that people do not separate the waste and the rubbish, for my perspective it's much more dirty here in general, because there's a lot of rubbish in the streets; I would also have some problems with the food: meat is full of hormones, or at least I think it is full of hormones, and I don't like to eat it, because, as I said before, I was born in the Austrian mountains. But on the other hand it's very important to see that life is very different and it works here; it took me quite a while to get used to Brussels, but my personal relation to Brussels is getting better and better. I call it a sweet chaos here.

34 **Why do you use this expression?**

I've just found it. I find it nice. It is a bit chaotic. Nice on the other side.

36 **Which were your expectations when you came here?**

38 Regarding the job, actually I knew more or less what will come as I was in Brussels before and this is the same living in the city, so I was before and I knew what will come; I knew that I had to work a lot and that the big lights being thrown in the cold water [?], but I never regretted it.

40 **So which were your expectations the first time you came here?**

Nothing serious, because you know you are just going there for 6 months, so... honestly, I can't remember.

42 **How come did you come to Brussels?**

A friend of mine did it, so I thought it might be a good idea.

44 **What did you study?**

I have a degree in Law and a degree in History and a degree in Political Science.

46 **3 degrees! How long did it take to?**

5 and a half years.

48 **So you could use the same examinations?**

Not a lot, maybe 2 or 3 exams.

50 **So how did you make it?**

52 I don't know. I'm really interested in. I was fast and I got a financial support from the state of Austria and this financial support was in 5 years so I was just able to take money for 5 years. You have to finish in 5 years or you are gone. But you can do a lot of things parallel.

54 **You have been here for 3 years. Do you consider your permanence here just an experience before going back home? Or before going to another country?**

56 It's completely open. But I don't have a problem to move to another country. But I still have, and this is very
58 important for me, on a personal level, my apartment in Vienna, so there is always a small place where I can go
back.

Did you study in Vienna?

60 Ya. So that's always my back for close, this is important.

Would you travel everywhere in the world, or just in Europe?

62 I think I would travel more or less everywhere, where I have access to the languages. So a country where my
64 language skills would need another 1 or 2 years in order to improve is nothing, which is interesting for me. So at
least, I don't know, I go to a country where you can survive with English, French, German, but it doesn't have to
be the native language there.

So you wouldn't go to China?

66 For example. I cannot imagine at the moment. But you never know. Or Japan or stuff like that. But I can imagine
68 very well to go to the Middle East, Israel and Palestine.

Can you imagine to remain here for the rest of your life?

70 In Brussels no.

And 10 years from now?

72 I think I'm going to live in 2009. Simply I just said to myself "ok you are going to make a period in the
74 European Parliament and then live". It's also for your C.V., I mean, up to a certain point you learn it, you know
how it's working, and I don't want to be stuck in a job, I don't have to feel like I can't learn from.

How many hours a day do you work?

76 Very different. Minimum on a normal day maybe 8, but it's not very realistic, maximum about 14, but I think the
average is from 10 to 11.

**Do you think that your experience abroad, especially for working, is common to the majority of young
Europeans or is something that affects a minority of them?**

80 Maybe in average it's still a minority. But if you just focus on certain types of education or university degrees,
82 or... let's put it this way: people with the university degree I think most of them are aware, that's an important
thing. If you take every youngster in any town in Europe of the age let's say 22, of course they have another
perspective. So it's very different to the education, what position they have, and the chances involved.

Do you know many people in Brussels?

84 What is many?

You tell me.

86 Again. I don't know many Belgians. I know a lot of people living in Brussels because of the work.

Are these acquaintances or friends?

88 Most of them are acquaintances. Some of them are friends, but I think in Brussels I would have something like
90 10, maybe 7 good friends.

What is a friend for you?

92 When you share really private stuff with, when you spend your spare time with, when you can speak nonsense
and not necessarily about your work, when you sport together... somebody who doesn't judge you.

Apart from your job, in which context or environment can you meet people from other countries?

94 Apart from the job, you meet people while going out. Sometimes when you are travelling, if you are in Strasburg
96 with all the visiting groups coming, but that's also somehow job related. But mainly going out, sometimes
travelling, going to Strasburg you start to talk to somebody who is not from the Parliament, but you meet a lot of
98 foreigners through the job, not only from the Union but also from many many other countries.

Talking about your friends, of which nationality are they? Firstly, did you meet them in Brussels?

100 I met most of them here in Brussels, ya. You are talking about the current situation? I have a lot of friends also in
102 the Middle East but this was another project. What nationality are they from? I would say a lot of Dutch, huge
amount of Dutch; Hungarian; I try to put them in extraction order, the biggest groups: German, Italian. I think
that's it. Oh no, I have a Belgian one.

You said it's not easy to meet Belgian people, why?

104 Because you are working a lot, all day long, and your environment is very international. So the Belgian people I
106 meet are mainly my landlords, a couple with 2 children, I'm renting the apartment over there, so these are the
people I really need. They are something like my Belgian family; and it's very nice to me even to be involved in
108 Belgian life. But apart from them you do not get too much involved in Belgian normal life because so many
people are international here and you hardly know if they are Belgians or Dutch or French, you don't know;
110 sometimes you don't even ask the nationality, it is not important to put that question. So maybe I've met a lot of
Belgian without knowing it because you talk in English. That's it.

- 112 **Do you think it is easy to create relationships in Brussels?**
Oh ya. If the two of them are in Brussels is very easy, the complicated way is when people go back to their home
114 countries to keep their life. This is very difficult. But as long as the two are in Brussels is not a problem.
- 116 **Do you think it's easier or less easy than in your country?**
To meet foreigners?
- 118 **To meet people.**
I can't say.
- 120 **Which are the difficulties and the positive aspects that you find in a relationship with a person from another country?**
In general it's more interesting, more exciting. The disadvantage is of course that sometimes they do not
122 understand jokes, you have to explain, sometimes the cultural background, if you are joking about politics or
124 musicians or stuff like that. But this is also a very positive thing. Like two sides of the coin: if somebody has
126 not your background, you have to explain. And I like very much is the fact that you have to define many things,
so when you go out... sometimes things in your life are very easy because you don't know the difference, but if
128 you are with a foreigner you have to reason, you have to argue, you have to think a second time why you are
saying this and that.
- 130 **Do you find any difference between the relationships you are having here and those you have in Austria?**
It's mainly the language use, you know.
- 132 **So you said it's difficult to maintain relationships when people leave. Why is it like that?**
Because it's so busy here, and as long as two sides live more or less the same life, you have the same structure in
134 the Parliament, in the Commission, in whatever huge institution; but when people go home they start to... the
society changes, the environment changes, so it's really just the best one who stays: friendships. There are a lot
of friendships that have gone because people leave and it's very normal. So, I don't think it's a bad thing. It's
very normal.
- 136 **The people you consider friends here do the same job as you?**
Most of them are working in the Parliament.
- 138 **Did you maintain relationships you had in your country?**
Oh yes.
- 140 **And that do you find easy or not?**
Getting weaker and weaker, and is getting less and less. But there are some friends I left in Austria even when
142 I'm meeting him or her let's say 1 or 2 years without having seen each other I still have the feeling I just left
yesterday. So when you leave the country and you go abroad, it's just really the best friend, let's say the purest
144 friendships [the ones which] stay. Everything else vanish.
- 146 **Which instruments do you use to keep contact with these people?**
I like to send SMS from time to time, because I think it's more private than e-mail, but of course also e-mails.
Sometimes you meet at common events, like wedding.
- 148 **Do you frequently go back home?**
No.
- 150 **Do you also use chat or skype?**
No.
- 152 **How would you describe your identity?**
[Laugh] That's difficult. I am very pure.
- 154 **I am talking about your national identity.**
Oh, well, I'm more Alpine than Austrian. I'm call Heidi, so... I'm very proud of my roots but I'm also very
156 proud of the fact that I have been able to leave my roots. So, that means going to university, getting some
degrees, going abroad. All my cousins stayed and get married, divorced, having no work... I'm proud of my roots
158 because they give me a lot of stability, but I'm also happy that I could come across it. As an Austrian identity... I
think you are really lucky when you are born as an Austrian, but as I told I feel more Alpine.
- 160 **So it's about having a local identity or a national one.**
In my case it's a local identity.
- 162 **Do you think you have something in common with other Europeans?**
Ya, we have a lot in common. Common history, maybe seen from different perspectives; you share basic values,
164 human rights with the majority, I mean you never share values with everybody, it doesn't work. Youngsters
move, they travel, I think many Europeans love to travel and to see other parts of Europe, and they like diversity.
166 So we are actually unified in diversity, and that's the nice thing. That I would say.
- Do you also think of the East of Europe?**

- 168 Ya, specially when you are coming from Vienna or you live in Austria, and your country borders are Slovenia,
170 Slovak Republic, Hungary, the Eastern countries, you are very much involved in Eastern traditions, you like to
172 go there. It's exciting, let's say it's more different than maybe the Western world. We did, I did a lot of interrails
174 in Eastern Europe, including Russia, when I was young and I was going to University, but for somebody coming
176 from Austria, Eastern Europe is very very close. We went on holiday, even when I was a child, to Croatia, which
178 was [under] the iron curtain but you could go to Croatia, so we have always been in contact with Eastern Europe,
180 it's not a big deal for us. Which is very amazing because my boyfriend is Dutch and for him Eastern Europe is
182 completely new, and for me is somehow normal, I'm not that far away from their thinking.
184 **Your boyfriend is Dutch. Is the reason why you have...?**
186 No. I had him as friend before.
188 **Do you live with him?**
190 No... But that's important: he lives in South Africa. So he doesn't live in Holland.
192 **What's your understanding of the expression 'citizen of the world'?**
194 It's a sentence which means everything and nothing to me, so it's nothing I feel personally emotion committed
196 to. It's a nice sentence but I cannot grab it.
198 **Do you think you have values in common with people who are abroad, who travel a lot?**
200 Oh ya. You try to get very patient when travelling, because it's a basic need; you are open to what others do,
202 because you have to; you don't have to get nervous when you have to travel, just get used to that, huge amount
204 to travel all the time. Emotionally if you face similar problems you have something in common, you know, little
206 things, [like] missing planes, bad weather, not being able to land, which is very inconvenient... that you have in
208 common, and the fact that you have to be open minded, it doesn't work otherwise, and you have to take many
things with a portion of humour.
Overall how many languages do you speak?
English, German, French, Arabic. I'm just interested in Middle East. I decided I want to learn Arabic and then
decided that much more [more and more] people speak Arabic, so I wanted to learn. Of course it's a very slow
process.
Can you communicate?
Ya. It would take let's say 2 days to go into again, but then at a basic level I could communicate. My mother
tongue is not German, but it's Styrian.
Is it different?
It's a very heavy accent. Have you ever heard Arnold Schwarzenegger talking?
No.
That's it. Let's say I can understand everybody speaking in German but not everybody speaking in German can
understand me. That doesn't work, especially when we are talking fast, ten they don't understand, don't grab it.
And this was of course my problem when I studied foreign languages, because there is a big difference between
learning English from German or learning English from Styrian which has no written grammar. It's a strong
strong dialect. It's difficult when you have to learn foreign languages.
May I ask you what your parents do?
My mother was mainly a housewife, but my father had a small enterprise and my mother just helped him.
Can we remain in contact for a couple of years?
Sure.

Interview n° 15: Slovenia

2

4 **Where do you come from?**

I'm coming from Slovenia, from the Eastern part. I was born in Maribor, then I lived with my parents in a town very close to the Hungarian border, then I started studying, then I moved to Maribor again for the university which is very close but it is bigger.

8 **So you grew up in a small town?**

Yes, I grew up in a town of about 20.000 people.

10 **Then you went to study to Maribor, for university.**

Yes. It's pretty close to my hometown, but it's a little bit bigger, it's about 150.000 people. So I lived there with my grandmother in my grandmother house, with my boyfriend. I was not in a student dorm or with other students, just with my grandparents. After 5 years, when I finished the university, I moved to Lubiana where I worked for 4 years, then I moved to Brussels 2 years ago.

14 **Was it your first experience abroad?**

16 Yes, for living. I had travelled before, but nothing like living abroad or working abroad. I came here 2 years ago. I work for a Slovenian association which is basically a lobby organization, like every organisation here in
18 Brussels, and we represent the interests of different Slovenian organisation to the EU, like European policy,
European funding, legislation, networking (establishing contacts with clients who are mostly private companies,
20 chambers, SMEs associations and we also have four cities). I am an economist, "economic advisor" is my title at
work, but we are a small association with five people employed. My work is still really connected with Slovenia,
22 my working language is mostly Slovenian, we have a lot of contacts in Slovenia with our clients, but then in
Brussels I work in English. So it's like a mixture: I still have a strong connection with Slovenia, because of the
24 work, I travel a lot to Slovenia for business, but on the other hand I have many contacts and I do a lot of work
with other organizations in Brussels similar to ours representing their country in EU, Italy, Spain, Germany and
26 many others. So my work is not like a strictly office work, but I have a lot of meetings, evening receptions,
cocktail parties and so on, so it's not the work from nine to five, but is more like my preoccupation for most of
28 the day. For instance my social events are still connected to my work, but then of course I have my private life,
my friends who have nothing to do with my work. They come from the private sector or from other
30 organizations that are not connected to my work. Funny thing here is that I don't have any Belgian friends, I
know some Belgian people, but all my friends are Expats basically here: they work here, but they are from
32 Hungary, Estonia, US, Australia, Spain, Portugal, Poland and then of course Slovenian, half of my friends are
from Slovenia. Although I have very good relations with people connected with my work but we don't socialize,
34 don't go out together but we have a really good relation at work: people are my age, so it's pretty informal, and
that's what I like in Brussels because in Slovenia all the work connections I have are pretty much formal, like we
36 were talking strictly about work, we were formally addressing each other like in French you have 'vous', a polite
way, here everything is informal. But maybe this is also because of the English language. And maybe the reason
38 why I came to Brussels... I worked in Lubiana in the Chamber of Commerce and Industry at the EU
department, and it was a pretty big institution with more than 200 people, and the Chamber of Commerce and
40 Industry is also the biggest member of the association where I work now, so I had a lot of connections with this
office in Brussels, so eventually they invited me; also I had some personal reasons, personal disappointments so I
42 wanted to go somewhere.

You basically broke with your boyfriend [laugh].

44 Yes! After eight years of relationship! But it was two years before I came here, so it was not immediately after.
But actually when you live in a town (Ljubljana is not a city compared with other European capitals, it has
46 300.000 people)... and I wanted to have this international experience.

So you moved here for working reasons, because they offered you...

48 Yes, they offered me a work, the salary was much bigger and I was also working for 4 years in the same office
so I needed some kind of change, I would have left that office anyway even staying in Slovenia. I had come to
50 Brussels many times before because of my job, so...

Would it be the same if the job were in Germany or other parts?

52 Yes, I would go as well. I wanted to have some change. Of course I wouldn't go to Albania.

And to, say, Estonia?

54 Yes, to Estonia yes, but not to Finland.

Why not?

56 I don't know, maybe it's too cold [laugh], geographically speaking. And in Brussels there's a very strong
58 international community, I knew that before, so before I came here I knew Brussels. When I started to work at
the Chamber of Commerce, this was six years ago, I was still an intern and I did a stage here for one month.

You mentioned the fact that you knew that here there was an important international community. Why was it important to you?

60 Both for work and for personal reasons. For work because I imagined I would establish contacts that would
62 favour my career or give me the opportunity to go somewhere else after I finish in Brussels, maybe to some other
European country, not back to Slovenia. I wanted to see how the people work, the different culture, different way
64 of working, and I also studied economy but a big part of my studies were also connected with the European
Union, like European integration, internal market; my master also was about EU, so it was a kind of opportunity
66 to experience that in practice, what is the Commission, what is the Parliament, how they work, how can you
influence them, different techniques of lobbying, different approach to people, argue and convince someone to
68 listen to you. Personal reasons: in Slovenia I had strict Slovenian friends, some of them were Croatian, but I was
not in an international community, also I had friends for example at the chamber of commerce, mostly French
70 and Spanish, they were doing internships in our office and I knew them, and from my travelling, here I have
friends from all over Europe and really it's interesting to me to see how they are, work and think, how they talk,
72 and I can improve my English as well.

What were your expectations coming here?

74 Actually I was really afraid of coming here, because it was a big change for me. I like changes but... Even
before, when I moved from Maribor to Ljubljana, I was scary and terrified for the new environment. But I was
76 prepared mentally because I got the job eight months before I came here. I knew that I was coming here, so I had
like eight months of mental preparation, it was not like saying "I'm going and I'm gonna leave everything in
78 Slovenia, I will move to Brussels and start everything again", ok, it was more like "where do you live? What do
you do? How do you work?". I had some friends from before, Slovenian, for example my ex room mate. She
80 moved to Brussels before me, and I knew other people as well. It's not that I came here and I didn't know
anybody, I didn't know the city at all: I had some preparation. It took me a while to get the decision: I was
82 offered this job two years before I came here, but I rejected it because of my boyfriend – he was like really
conservative. When I made my internship here he came with me, but we didn't go out a lot, so I knew only the
84 formal part, I didn't make any friend. Then we broke up, I got a second opportunity and I said "why not?".

Then do you regret you didn't come before?

86 Yes. Because we split up one year after I rejected that offer. I thought I was stupid, I could work abroad. But
then I was lucky to get another opportunity, so here I am, and before I didn't even think to go abroad, I was not
88 looking for a job abroad, I was just offered one and I said "why not?". I like my work, I work much longer than
in Slovenia, I normally work until seven, before I worked until five maximum, but it's a different way of
90 working: more meetings, connections, dinners, cocktails, because for the type of work you need to be always in
contact with the people and this is what I really like.

Going back to your expectations, did you have a clear idea about what you would have found here?

92 No, not a clear idea.

But after two years that you are here, would you say that you are happy with what you found, that you found all you wanted to find?

96 I wasn't really thinking what I should expect. When I moved here it was like really a big city for me, with a lot
of different cultures. I live close to Matongé, a black area, and we don't have blacks in Slovenia almost at all, I
98 was kind of scared of them, when you go to the metro and there are these Moroccans talking, making comments,
and I was really afraid of, I didn't go anywhere without my car (I have a car here). But eventually you get to
100 know the area, the people, you see that they are not so dangerous like you thought at the beginning, you adapt,
and now I almost feel that this is my home. For me my apartment is the best one in Brussels, and I really like to
102 spend time in it although I don't spend much time in, because I am always out with someone... But
expectations.. maybe regarding work I was expecting a little bit more. In Slovenia I was... I was feeling more
104 important, because I was in a small community, I had a pretty important job although I was still a beginner, but I
had presentations in front of big audiences, I had meetings with the General Secretary in the Ministry or with the
106 Ministry, but this because Slovenia is more community. Difficult to say if it's better first in a village or last in a
city, to translate a Slovenian proverb. So I was like: I speak languages, while most of my friends only speak
108 English...

Which languages do you speak?

110 I speak English, German and Croatian very fluently because my grandmother is from Croatia, Serbian and now I
can say I can communicate in French too but I don't speak it very well. When we go to the high school reunion,

112 for example, some of my ex school friends are still in college, or still studying, or some of them have dropped,
114 and they say “Oh you live abroad, you work abroad, you are a star”, but when you are here and you see that
116 people speak five languages and they study in three different universities and they have PHDs and they are of
118 your age, well, then you are not so wow anymore, so sometimes it can influence your self-esteem. And here I
120 don’t have meetings with very important people as of delegations, but I have meetings with people of my own
122 level so this was bothering me a lot at the beginning. In Slovenia I was writing for newspapers, TV and radio,
124 because I was working in the EU department when Slovenia was entering the European Union, and I knew a lot
126 about this entrance, I even wrote two books when I was in Slovenia on integration and they were published, well,
128 not only me, there were three authors, but they were published. But here there’s more international stimulation,
you have daily contacts with people not much more educated but much more experienced, internationally
experienced, and you are kind of stimulated to learn languages, to educate yourself, to open up and so on. Now
we work in project consortia and we always have different nationalities, and you can see the cultural differences,
and you learn a lot from people you work with and you become more tolerant. Since I came here I’m much more
tolerant, open and flexible. For example in Slovenia if you get a permanent job you stick with it although you
don’t really like it, there are permanent contracts and you stick with it, you can stay until you retire, while here I
have a temporary contract and when it finishes I have to find another job so you learn to be flexible and you
don’t worry what will be in two years because you are smart, educated, experienced and you’ll find something.
Also the labour market is more flexible, people here change job more frequently than in Slovenia.

130 **How long would you like to remain here?**

132 Have no idea. I still have three years of contract, but I don’t know. It depends on if I’m offered something else.
134 So far my work is still not a routine, I’m still learning a lot but I don’t plan to stay in Brussels, I don’t want to
136 have a family here, to retire here.

138 **Where would you like to have a family?**

140 I don’t know, probably in Slovenia. A thing that I like here is that there are so many international families,
142 people of different nationalities meet here, fall in love, get married. This also happens to me: I had relationships
144 with boyfriends from different nationalities, it’s pretty ok. I don’t have a serious relationship right now, but
146 maybe... Maybe I will find a partner from another country, so everything right now is like really open, not like
when I was in Slovenia, so I became more flexible and more open to new opportunities. You see more.

150 **Do you think that many Europeans have a similar experience abroad, or rather that it is something still
152 restricted to a minority of people?**

154 Still restricted to a minority of people. When you live here you think that everyone is living abroad and everyone
156 is travelling around, but it’s not like that. In Slovenia for example you see that many young people are still not
158 interested to work abroad, they travel a lot even for 2 months but not to live abroad. For Slovenian offices here is
160 very difficult to get people, because once someone has a life, a family in Slovenia, it is very difficult for them to
162 go abroad.

164 **Why do you think it is like that, because you have a better quality life there or because of your culture?**

166 A little bit because of the culture, but also the quality of life is really good in Slovenia.

Why do you think is higher there?

168 Because Slovenia is a beautiful country, very small but with a little bit of everything, sea, mountains, forest;
170 salaries are not that bad compared to other European member states, they are not that high as they are in
172 Belgium, but we don’t have big cities, we don’t have crime almost at all, you can walk in the middle of the night
174 by yourself and you are not afraid that someone can rob or kill you or something. Salaries are pretty good,
176 people don’t work like crazy, they finish at four or five and have the whole afternoon to spend with their
178 families, so people are satisfied. For example, compared with Poland (I have a Polish friend), there young people
180 are so eager to go abroad, to experience... but this is most connected with the work standard. But also at the
182 university I think that almost all the students have the opportunity to go studying at least on semester abroad:
184 Erasmus and so on. They like to go abroad, but before they have a family, once they have a family it’s really
186 difficult, except they are really really open minded.

190 **Do you know many people in Brussels?**

192 No. Well, I know a lot of people but I don’t have a lot of friends.

194 **That was my second question: if you consider them acquaintances. So you have a lot of acquaintances, but
196 not friends...**

198 Ya, but I think that everyone is like that. When you are young you have like 30 friends, when you are older you
200 have like 10. I have a lot of acquaintances. For example, the list of people you go out for a drink is really broad,
202 but the list of people you can really trust is small. The life here is so busy that we go to bars and you meet maybe
204 two people only... I work until 6, 7, 8 sometimes, then I do some sport, then I go home at 10 o’clock, I do

168 something in my apartment and go to sleep. Life is much more intensive here than in Slovenia, and much faster,
170 there are so many events happening. So many things happen to you here that you can't miss that when you come
home you just say "leave me alone, I want peace and quite for a few hours". Twice a week we have some work
connected events.

172 **In this kind of events you meet people and they might become friends?**

174 No, you don't meet people in those events. The most of the friends I have here are coming from the French
classes. Then you meet friends through these friends, everyone has another friend, and you meet them and you
become friend with them, but on work no, they are very nice people, I can talk to them, but I don't like go out
176 with them, maybe you meet them, for example in a bar, and you like to talk with them five minutes, but not that I
would call somebody to go out, so they are not real friends, although we can have really informal conversations.
178 The friends that I have are not connected with my work, and my Slovenian friend, I have 5 or 6, they were
friends already in Slovenia, because it's a small community and you end up meeting everybody in Brussels.

180 **Do you have the tendency to stay with Slovenians or whoever from any country?**

I don't have any preferences but I have more contacts with Slovenians.

182 **Why?**

184 First they were my friends from before, second we speak the same language, third we have more common
interests... ya, I have more contacts with Slovenians but it's not that I would choose that. But if I compare
myself with friends of other nationalities such as Hungarians, Portuguese, Spanish, Estonian, they all have best
186 friends from their own countries, although sometimes we socialise all together. I notice here that you meet so
many people but then you loose contacts. Everyday you meet someone new, but it is very difficult to keep in
188 touch. You still have your 4, 5, 6 friends, but then you meet a lot of people.

Why do you think it is like that?

190 Because of lobbying, the work that we do. For example sometimes if you meet someone actually you are not
interested in the character of this person but you are always like asking yourself: "ok, how can I benefit from this
192 person, where does she work, will this help me at work?". I think everyone is like that. For example you go to
place Luxembourg on Friday evening, you are only interested in meeting someone from who you would benefit,
194 you have a beer and a small chat, but you are always hoping that this person next time call you or that you can
call her at the Commission, that she will remember you and help you somehow. When I came here I had the
196 feeling I was in prison, because everyone is asking you why are you here, where are you coming from, how long
will you stay here, you know, exactly like in prison, always the same question, and where do you work of course.
198 So I think there are lots of contacts here, but they are at a very superficial level. For example I have some friends
who are very good lobbyists, they go every Friday to place Luxembourg and every Thursday to place Chatelain,
200 to these informal points, and they just go around and say hi, but this is very superficial, is not that they remain
friends or something.

202 **Is it easier or less easy here to meet people respect to your country?**

It's easier to meet people but it's difficult to make friends. As I said, there are lots of acquaintances, but it's more
204 difficult to have friends.

What's a friend for you?

206 A friend for me is someone I can trust, I can rely on, I can call in the middle of the night if my car break down
and I need help, someone you can tell everything to, your secrets, your worries, someone you don't have to
208 pretend. My best friends are still in Slovenia, they are from university or from the elementary school. So my best
friends are still in Slovenia, and although I do not have daily contacts with them, every time I go to Slovenia I
210 still meet them, I still continue the conversation that I dropped... Here I notice that a lot of people are really
depressed. They come here, they change environment, they do not meet their expectations and they are
212 depressed. There are two reasons why people come to Brussels: for work or make experience or make more
money, and second for personal reasons. But it's the globalisation here, yes, and it changes you, I think you
214 become a better person.

[she interrupts to answer to a telephone call]. So this is an example of one of my friends I haven't seen for six
216 months, maybe, he just called and said "I'm walking by your building, are you coming with us, do you want to
have a beer with us?", but... And what else? Everything here is less spontaneous, you have to plan everything
218 here, because you have such a lack of time that you really have to plan. For example in Slovenia I can wake up
on Saturday morning and call someone and decide to do something, while here you can't call someone on
220 Saturday morning because you must plan in advance, because no one has time, everyone has plans. And as they
do not really like Brussels, or it's not that they don't like Brussels but they want to go out of the city, Brussels is
222 almost empty in the weekends, there are only Belgians here. It is funny, I don't have any Belgian friends and I
don't have any foreign friend who would have Belgian friends: Belgian stick with each other, they don't really

224 want to make friends within the foreigners, because foreigners are here only temporary, they come and go, so
225 they don't really want to invest in a relationship or in a friendship, because they know that eventually people
226 would live. And this is also why you can't have really a deep relationship with people: because on average
227 people are here for one year, and in one year you only start to know somebody. For me, maybe because of the
228 culture, because Slovenians are like that, I need to develop a friendship, you can go out a lot with a person, but
229 you are not a friend until you develop the relation in years. So my friends have been my friends for 10 years or
230 more.

231 **Which are the difficulties and which are the positive aspects that you find when having a relationship with
232 someone from another country?**

233 Well, you can have work relationships, relationships with your friends, and love relationships. They are really
234 different. Work relationships are really easy to make, there are so many opportunities to work with different
235 people that it's really easy. And it's really easy to maintain them, but they are work relationships. Friends
236 relationships are a little bit more difficult but they can of course be established. But as I said, in order to meet
237 someone... you don't meet a friend every day, you have your circle of friends and you are connected with these
238 friends, but you can meet new friends too, but it depends on how long they remain in Brussels. And then you
239 have love relationships, which are a disaster in Brussels: for a single girl it's a disaster, because half of the men
240 here are gay, it's unbelievable, what of course is very positive, but not for a single girl who would like to have a
241 lot of relationships, and I don't know many people here who met the life partner in Brussels, it's more superficial
242 as well, so I think it's the most difficult part.

243 **Why do you think it's like that?**

244 Because people come and go, don't stay here for long, and everyone know that eventually they will live, so they
245 have superficial relationships, they meet from time to time and just do things together, but it's not really like they
246 would fall in love or be prepared to sacrifice their lifestyle for someone else. For example one Italian meets a
247 Finnish but eventually one of them will go back to his own country because the contract has finished so what?
248 It's really difficult then to move to another country for your partner, so it's really difficult. For example, if you
249 live in Slovenia and you meet someone from the next village you know that you will both stay there and it's
250 much easier to think this relationship in a long term, but here... it's not difficult to find someone for short time,
251 but for a serious relationship it's pretty difficult.

252 **How do you keep contacts with your friends who are in Slovenia?**

253 We are in Skype, we are on e-mail. We are not as much in contact as we were before, but we are still in contact.

254 **And telephone?**

255 Yes, but not as much as before, because it's really expensive from abroad. Mostly we have contact via internet.
256 And they visit me here, thanks to the cheap flight, and I go to Slovenia quite often.

257 **Do you use Skype's video function?**

258 No, Skype only for talking, not for seeing each other.

259 **Do you think that you will maintain a relationship with the people that you met here?**

260 I don't know. I think I will. Two, three, maybe, not everybody. And I think I will maintain a relationship with
261 people I work with, you know, for work sake, because what I do now here it's so international I can do it in
262 Slovenia, I can do it everywhere in Europe, and you have to have contacts all over Europe, because you are in
263 European projects with European consortia and so on. I think that if I stay in this business I will maintain
264 contacts.

265 **Did you ever have a love affair with someone met at work?**

266 No, never: not in Slovenia and not here.

267 **Did you notice that this happens?**

268 I didn't have any relationships, maybe because my boss is 65 and my other colleague is gay. I'm not strictly
269 against it for principle, I don't know, maybe I didn't have an opportunity, but I don't know, maybe if it
270 happens... for example here we are in a small institution, but maybe in a bigger institution. I don't know of
271 anyone really falling in love with a colleague and maintaining the relationship here .

272 **Personally, are you looking for a stable relationship or only for a superficial one?**

273 Maybe the last one, I don't know, starting slowly. It's not that I'm in a hurry or that I'm really eager to find a
274 partner. I had a relationship for 8 years, so right now I just want to have... but most of my friends are single
275 here, or have their partner but nothing really serious. Some of my friends have their partners in Slovenia and it's
276 really difficult, they spend all their money just for flight tickets! If people have a serious relation then they
277 usually bring their partner with them to Brussels, one of them follows the other, which sometimes can be really
278 difficult. I know cases in which long term relationships here ended, because one partner works but one partner
didn't work and couldn't find a work, and then their lifestyle just split and...

280 **Only men bring their couple here?**

282 No, also women. For example this friend of mine, he came here because of his girlfriend, but he remained like two years unemployed, so it was very difficult, and he just thought to go back to his country.

284 **How would you describe your identity?**

286 I still feel I'm Slovenian, I still feel this identity, but I'm more Europeanised. Slovenia is still my country and my nationality and so on, but I can probably live and adapt much easier to other cultures. You become more open, more flexible and more tolerant to other cultures and to other nationalities. Here in Brussels Expats mostly socialise among themselves, they don't have friends from Belgium or, not from other nationalities, but from different religions, or different races. I don't have any friend who is black, or Muslim. You have friends who have the same lifestyle, which work all day long, who do a pretty similar work in associations or with the European policies...

290 **What do you think that you have in common with the other Europeans?**

292 Here in Brussels?

294 **I would say in a more broader sense.**

296 I think that Europe is becoming like a continent, well it is a continent, but like with all this integration, like the borders are disappearing, free flow of work, of routes, of services, and the currency is the same in the most of the European countries... it is becoming more like in the United States, European identity is maybe stronger than it was a couple of decades ago. I think globalisation has two aspects: you are becoming more international and present everywhere but on the other hand you feel your national identity more. If you would ask me if I feel more Slovenian or more European I would say Slovenian, although I like Europe. For example, if I travel somewhere abroad, if I say I'm from Slovenia no one know where it is, so I just say I'm from Europe, so it's more like that I feel European when I'm in company of people from other continents. As you noticed, here in Brussels you have these national communities, Polish stick with Polish, Portuguese with Portuguese... Italian are the biggest minority in Brussels. So people mostly stick to each other, like Polish they have their own doctor, their hairdresser, their own shops, it's like that they are in Poland, sometimes they don't even speak anything else but Polish, although they are in a different country. It's the same with Slovenians: they have Slovenian restaurants, which are like cultural places, and every time you go there you meet your friends and people you know from Slovenia, and you can speak the same language, or you can speak about the political situation in Slovenia, the things that make you feel that you belong to Slovenia. But of course everyone has international friends as well. I would have never had international friends without coming to Brussels. To summarize, the benefit in coming to Brussels is that your personality changes a little bit, you become more open, more flexible, more tolerant, more understandable, less afraid, you get experience, life experience and work experience, you can save some money; the downside is that I have less free time, less private life, I don't have deep relationships, all kind of relationships, not only love relationships: they are not so deep. I can say that I know more people but I have less friends. This is the downside... and of course the weather is a downside. But the good side is, geographically speaking, that Brussels is very well connected with all Europe. I travel much more: as I warn much more, I can afford it. My lifestyle, materially speaking, is better, but compared with Slovenia I do much less exercise, because I don't have so much time. There are of course bad sides and good sides. I would repeat this experience, and if someone would offer me a very good job in Spain or in Italy, I would go. I would have much less fear than when I came here two years ago.

302 **Would you say that you are a citizen of the world?**

304 No.

306 **What's your understanding of this expression?**

308 For me is just to live on the planet Earth, nothing else. When you feel some kind of identity to something you have to be in a different environment. I mean: if there were people on Mars or on another planet, then maybe you would feel the identity of being a citizen of the world, but when everyone is the same... like in Europe: you feel that you are European when you are in another continent, you don't feel European when you are in Europe. I think Europe will never be like the United States.

310 **Like a Federation?**

312 Yeah, it can be politically like a federation, but not culturally and not identity speaking. There will still be French who speak French and Italian who speak Italian. So I think Europe will never be so integrated, will never feel so European as American feel their government.

314 **Maybe is not that bad.**

316 Yeah. How's the Commission slogan? "Connecting cultures, celebrating diversity"? That is, trying to integrate, but in this integration trying to maintain your culture, your language...

318 **Do you think you have values in common with the people that like you travel abroad?**

336 Yes, of course. They are more open and they know how it is to live abroad, to work abroad, they know how
338 difficult is when you come to a new environment and you have to adapt, they have the similar feeling and the
340 same experience that you have: they experience the same fear, the same joy, new environment, new friends...
342 everyone who come to Brussels is alone, you know, or not alone, but in the same position, in the same situation:
344 you have to find apartment, friends, supermarket, these practical things, and everyone is a little bit lost when
he or she comes here, so this is really a big experience. And it doesn't matter if you come to Brussels or not, is
like that everywhere you go: it's a new environment, and going abroad you have this experience of having to
meet other people, having to meet new friends; then is much easier at the second time to make connections and
to find friends, to start talking to somebody in the street or in the bar: you are more open, more self-confident,
you can do it.

346 **What did you study?**

I studied international economy, then I postgraduated. Totally 6 years with the master.

348 **Profession of your parents?**

My mother is a kindergarten teacher, my father is an engineer, but he works more as a designer.

350 **May we keep in touch for the next two years?**

Yes!

Interview n° 16: Ireland

2

4 **Where do you come from?**

I'm coming from the West of Ireland, in a place called Newcastle West, which is about 10 thousand people.

6 **Do you consider it a small town, or medium?**

Small.

8 **Have you had previous experiences abroad?**

10 I worked in Barcelona for the summer when I was in college in 1998, for 3 months; and in 2001 I spent almost a year from September to May in Granada in college, studying political science; I worked for a month in New York that summer, as a barman.

12 **Did you use Erasmus to go to Granada?**

Erasmus, yes.

14 **The other experiences were through European programs?**

No, only Granada through European programs.

16 **Did you enjoy your Erasmus?**

Ya. I enjoyed it.

18 **Which are the reasons that pushed you to move from your country?**

20 They are very specific: my education academically was to work for the European Union, studying European studies on the graduate, Spanish, and then I did a master in European integration, which is basically law, economics, political theory, how the EU works, so it's very specific.

22 **So you came here for professional reasons?**

Well, I wanted to live abroad.

24 **Why?**

Why? I just like travelling.

26 **What does it mean for you to live in Brussels?**

28 What I think of it? Hmm... Before I came here...it's a very complicated question. When I went to college, actually for what I did in college I had to come to Brussels, and when I decided what I wanted to do in college I was very young, 17, but I knew that would be ended up in Brussels. So I always wanted to work abroad, but because of what I did in college Brussels was the natural consequence. I like Brussels but it's not just the dream of my life, it's only a consequence of my studies.

32 **So you were trained to come here. Which were your expectations when you came here?**

34 I came 'cause I wanted to see what was like to live in Brussels or live on the continent on a full time basis. My expectations were those my job would be interesting and that socially would be interesting because there are so many different nationalities living here, which is the big attraction actually for a lot of people in Ireland or even in Europe I can imagine, because you have so many different nationalities condensed in such a small space.

36 **I lived in Dublin 4 months and had the same feeling: many nationalities and they are all young people.**

38 Yes, but you have to realize that's a recent phenomenon. When I was growing up, from 1998 to 2002, that wasn't quite so common. You had a lot of that because of the enlargement of the European Union. Even in my home town, a small town, 10,000 people, in the last 4 years it started a program for Spanish students, 15-16teen come to study and learn English for a summer. When I was that age that would never happened. So for people of my generation it's a big thing to have a lot of nationalities. Maybe in the continent it's different, maybe in Italy there was always...

44 **No, it's like that. In my town there is no tourism, I perfectly understand. What I was asking is if you see differences about the 2 environments.**

46 Between the two environments: huge. It depends on where you are... In the town I'm from there are not many people like the people I would associate if around in Brussels, because it's different. I worked in the EU or related to EU, so it's mainly college graduates, people who are specifically interested in politics. You know what I mean? Even now if I lived in my home town it is full of Polish people, different from Eastern Europe, but most of them are very bad educated, they are not well educated, I'm not discriminating, I'm just saying it's different.

50 **You don't have to justify with me.**

52 No no. I'm not trying to be racist. I'm just saying that there's a difference between having a lot of people from different countries and having a specific type of person concentrated. That's another reason I came to Brussels, because there's a big difference between countries, it's not the same thing.

54 **Did you expect this?**

56 Yes I did. I think that the reason I did my post-graduate was because when I was in Granada I had that. Granada
58 is a big university city with 60000 students and 50.000 were of Erasmus, from Sweden, Denmark, all over
60 in European integration which was completely steering me towards that kind of environment, you know what I
mean?

You've been here for 2 years. Do you think you're meeting your expectations?

62 Yes. Well, it depends on what you are coming for, I came to have a good time, there is no big plan. I didn't want
64 to be a Commissioner, I came here just to see what was like and enjoy it. There are a lot of people here who are
not happy, because they can't get a job in the Commission and they want it. That's why a lot of people are
66 coming here, because they pay a lot, they pay very well and if you get a permanent job you don't really have to
work hard for that. It depends on your expectations, on your ambitions when you come here.

Have you met these people?

68 Yes. I've been here for 2 years, I lived in Schumann, which is like, you know, where the traineeship in the
Commission, in the Parliament, come and go every 6 months, and you see a lot of people coming and spending 6
70 months doing exams, interviews, then they finish their traineeship and they are out of money and have to go
home. Or you see people with very little money working for lobby groups, but they stay in Brussels because they
72 know they can get a job at the commission where the wages is 2000 a month up to 6000, to do the same work.
You have a lot of frustrated people here.

Do you consider your staying here temporary?

74 Yes, temporary, maybe another 2 years, maybe another 6 months, I don't know.

Don't you have push factors to remain here?

76 Not really. I've a lot of friends. Friends of Ireland, friends of Spain.

What about your girlfriend?

78 She wants to travel. I'd imagine when she finishes college next year she will probably go to America for a year
80 and then Australia, I think. So I have nothing holding, unless my job. If I go back I will get another job.

**Do you think that the kind of opportunity you had to come here is something common to many European
young people or affects only a minority of them?**

82 Well... It's not common. Would deal with how many people want to come to Brussels. If I took my class in the
84 secondary school, different people wanted to do different things, one wants to be teacher, one engineer.

**I was thinking in a broader sense, not only the experience of coming to Brussels but also going abroad to
have a professional experience.**

86 Yea, I don't know. I can only say that Irish people tend to work abroad but not to stay abroad. My own family
88 prospected my uncle's support, one of my uncles worked in Australia for 20 years, they always wanted him to
come home. A lot of Irish people work abroad for 2 or 3 years, maybe 10 years, but they always want to come
90 back. It's a big thing. Even for example the master course I did, which was specifically to work in the European
Union: 20 people did the course and I'm the unique here, not because they weren't any good but because they
92 just decided they wanted not to do it, they wanted to stay in Ireland. Irish people like travelling but they always
want to go home. Maybe it's different with other nationalities. Italians stay here a lot, when they arrive they stay,
94 but there's a lot of Irish people who want to go home, for whatever reason.

Do you know many people here?

96 Do you mean friends or...?

That's my next question: friends or acquaintances, or both?

98 Both. Well I play football here, and I'm in a very big football club, is an Irish club, but there are Italian and
Spanish playing, so I know both. Through that I know at least 80 people. Of that easy I would be very good
100 friend with 25 to 30 people, I would see them regularly.

20 to 30? It's a huge number.

102 I don't think so. [Pause] It's a huge number?

Well, you socialize with them, that means that you go out with them occasionally or regularly?

104 Regularly. Well, I talk to people, don't go out together on Saturday night to one place moving a group of 30.
Over the course of the week, going to watch a football match, going out on Friday night, there would be 30
106 people that I can meet and easily converse really about anything. You might not see 5 or 10 out of those 30
people for two weeks, but then you meet them and you can spend the all night with them, you know what I
108 mean? So you might have an extended group.

Do you consider this group as a group of friends or a group of acquaintances?

110 Friends.

Where are your friends from?

112 I suppose mainly Irish, 15 would be Irish and 6 would be Spanish, a couple of French, one Sweden...

Why do you stay with Irish and Spanish? Is it a chance?

114 It's just circumstances. I work 9 to 6. Two days a week have football training, at the moment we do a French
116 class the other 2 days of the working week, then on Saturday I play a game of football and we go drinking
afterward, normally, so in that environment is naturally that much of the people would be Irish.

In which ambient in Brussels can you meet people from other countries?

118 At work. If I go to the European Parliament, you have to talk to EMP [European Members of Parliament]
120 assistants from different countries, so you meet them there. If you finish work on Friday and you go for a drink
or you wanna relax you probably go to Place Lux, which is full of people from different countries; if you go for a
122 drink in Schumann, it's full of different nationalities, or if you have football training twice a week, you probably
have representations between these 5 teams, with other member states representatives. There's a big
124 concentration within a small area of a lot of different nationalities in Brussels, I don't think you get anything like
that anywhere in the world, I imagine.

Generally, do you find it easy to establish new relationships in Brussels?

126 [Pause] I don't see the correlation between being in Brussels and being in Ireland for establishing new
relationships. Being your age, when you are 18 you are shy, but at 25, 26, you talk to the world, you don't care.
128 Now if you are 18 and come from Ireland and you don't speak French that's different, but if you are 25 you are
more confident, you can speak, I don't think it matters.

Which are the difficulties and the positive aspects you may find in a relationship with someone from another country?

132 [Pause] That's difficult to explain. You can have different types of persons from a same country with different
personalities, different nationalities with different traits, it's hard to generalize. I live with a German guy at the
134 moment and he is very particular, he keeps asking me the same question, because he can't understand the first
answer, it just doesn't work in his head because Germans think in a straight line; my boss at work is Italian and
136 obsesses by the way chairs appoint in a room, or while settling for a meeting about where the bottles are, for an
Ireland nobody cares. I don't find it difficult just because I'm used to. I laugh at my boss when he does that,
138 when he tells me that the bottle shouldn't be here [left], it should be here [right], because the majority of the
people are right-handed. Some people get very frustrated with different nationalities, they get upset because they
140 can't understand why this is so important to someone, but if you just accept and deal with it, it's ok.

Do you think there is any difference between the kind of relation you have here and those you had in Ireland? Or in Spain?

142 When you are older, you see... The things you talk about when you are 19 years old when you are just on holiday
144 in Spain are different from the things you talk when you are 26 in Brussels, because you think differently,
slightly differently, not hugely differently, you shouldn't be pretentious [laugh]. You can't say in Ireland, in
146 Spain...

You are saying: you cannot say like that. Why?

148 Because in Ireland people are very direct, if they don't like something they just say it. If I have something I don't
like I'll tell you I don't like. You are working and you do something wrong I'll tell you that something is wrong,
150 I'll tell what to do. Here people like to talk in circle instead of just saying something. Again my Italian boss,
initially for the first six months I couldn't figure it out, because instead of telling you once "you do something
152 wrong" and telling you how you should have done it, he hints five things that you have done wrong, and then
when you don't understand he gets kind of a big mash, whereas in Ireland it would never happen because the
154 moment you make a mistake the first time, the boss would just say: this is the mistake, this is why you made it
and this is what you should have done, and then you fix it. Here it seems to be, as such as Italians also the French
156 seem to be afraid just to be direct in the way they speak, and that causes problems socially as well as
professionally. Maybe that's just the cultural difference.

You have friends in Ireland, in Spain: do you maintain them?

160 The best friends yes. I just had an e-mail today from I guy I was in Granada with, we maybe e-mail each other
once every six months. I'd have e-mails or phone conversations twice a week with those in Ireland who know
162 me since I was born. It depends on how close you are with people. It's like if I left Brussels I would probably
have contacts on a weekly basis only with two or three people, that's because I am better friends with them than
164 what I am with others, but you know, you have friends and you have people you are friendly with, there's a
difference.

Which instruments do you use to keep these contacts?

166 Skype, only audio, and e-mails.

Do you meet them?

- 168 One I haven't seen him for two years, others I see every time I go home, naturally.
- 170 **Do you think that you will maintain the relationship you created here?**
- 172 It depends. It's like when you are in college and there's 20 people in your class. Then you leave and you e-mail your friends once every couple of months, but then when you go back and you are all in the same area, then you hang each other again. So at the moment there are people in Ireland that I see once every six months and that when I was in Ireland I saw three times a week, so when you say you maintain a relationship you just kinda leave and you are not as in contact as you were previously, but then if you come back you are, so if I left Brussels I probably stay in contact people I am very friendly with, in Ireland when I go back it is the same as it was, unless they get married, or... [laugh]. When anyone lives anywhere, it doesn't matter if in Brussels, they are not going to have as much contact with people as they have when they live there.
- 178 **Concerning your identity how would you describe yours?**
- Irish.
- 180 **Is that for you a local identity or national?**
- National.
- 182 **Do you feel that you have something in common with the other Europeans?**
- The one you are friendly with [laugh]. You were asking about European identity, weren't you?
- 184 **I'm not really asking about European identity, I'm interested in identity.**
- 186 If you ask me if I have something in common with American people, I would probably say yes as well, because there might be American people I like and who share my same interests. Coming from another European country is not the same as being Irish. I think the issue of the European identity, the all argument is just a mist.
- 188 **Have you ever heard the expression 'to be a citizen of the world'?**
- 190 Yea. I think is bullshit. It's just people who travel a lot and they like it so much that they like to call it being citizen of the world, because they like the fact that they are travelling all over the world and living all over the world. I don't think that there is such a thing. It's like in a very good film, she meets a guy and she asks "where do you come from?", and he says "I'm a citizen of world, I have no country", and she says "ok, so you are Palestinian" [laugh].
- 194 **So from this joke I understand that for you everyone has his own identity?**
- 196 Everyone. I don't think you will ever get an Italian or an Irish person feeling that they are European before than Italian or Irish. It'd never happen.
- 198 **Do you think that you have values in common with people having professional experience abroad?**
- 200 Obviously they had the desire to work abroad at some stage of their lives. Everyone who is here basically wants to work abroad, for a while or permanently, so you have definitely in common with them, yea. Then you might completely dislike some of the people who are working abroad and think that you have nothing in common with them but the thing that you are working abroad [laugh].
- 202 **Ok. Some data. Your studies?**
- Degree in European Studies and Spanish, then a Master in European integration, overall 5 years.
- 204 **Profession? How would you define yourself?**
- It's a good question. Policy analyst.
- 206 **Profession of your parents?**
- Nurse and entrepreneur. Middle class.
- 208 **Do you live with your girlfriend?**
- No, she is studying in Sweden, she is Swedish.
- 210 **Here do you live alone?**
- No, with a German person.
- 212 **In which language can you maintain a conversation?**
- English sometimes, Spanish when I'm drunk [laugh], and Irish.
- 214 **Can we remain in contact for two years?**
- Yes.

Interview n° 17: United Kingdom

- 2
- 4 **Where are you from?**
England.
- 6 **Which town?**
Crowborough. It's a small town.
- 8 **Did you have other experiences abroad before this one?**
Yes, I lived in Brussels when I was younger.
- 10 **What were you doing in Brussels?**
I was living here, from 0 to 8. Then I had the gap year in Brussels, the year between the end of the school and the beginning of the university, I was 18. Then I did an Erasmus year abroad, in Italy and Spain.
- 12 **In the same year?**
Yes.
- 14 **Where?**
In Perugia and Granada.
- 16 **Are your parents from Belgium?**
No, they are British.
- 18 **In addition to Erasmus did you experience other European programs?**
My first years in Brussels were just because of my parents were living here, and then the gap year was through an organisation which sends young people abroad before they go to university.
- 22 **Is it a British organisation?**
Yea, I think so.
- 24 **Now let's focus on your current experience. How long have you been here?**
Six months.
- 26 **What are the reasons that made you moved from your country to go abroad?**
Well... I came to Brussels because I had a contact, my brother lived here, so it was easy to move here and have somewhere to stay, and then I was interested in doing something related to the European Union and... I think that when you are young it's quite a good time to travel and to go abroad, things like that.
- 30 **Why?**
Because when you are old you might have a family, you might want to settle down, and... those things really.
- 32 **I see, but in this answer you give for granted that all the people want to travel, and it is not like that, you know.**
No, no, I don't think so, I'm not saying that everyone wants to travel...
- 34 **I'm provocative [laugh].**
I think that possibly, to deal with my background – I went to a European school, so there were sections of English, German, Italian, Spanish, so I'm used to meet people from other places and having contacts with other countries, so that maybe contributed to my wanting to go abroad, and I just think that it's more interesting, I'd rather work here than in England, at the moment [laugh].
- 38 **What does it mean for you to live in Brussels?**
In what sense?
- 40 **I don't know, you tell me.**
You have to narrow a bit.
- 42 **In which sense does it enrich you, in which sense it's the place where you like to be?**
Because it's the place... it's like the heart of the EU, where things are constantly decided, you feel you are at the centre of the action when it comes to European policy making, and I like the international side, and I like the fact that it's easy to get to other parts of Europe, good connections, it's not too far away from England, and it's not a very big city, you know, quite a nice size for the moment, I don't wanna be in a big city right now.
- 46 **Why?**
Because... I just prefer to be in a medium, in a smaller city.
- 48 **Why?**
[laugh] Because... London for example, is really frantic, and really busy. I think that here it's easier to adjust to the size and everything.
- 50 **But why?**
- 54

56 Maybe because the town I was living before wasn't a massive city. If I had come from New York then maybe I'd
find Brussels really really boring, but I didn't, I came from a place that, you know, it was a city, but it wasn't
very big.

58 **Which were your expectations when you came here?**

60 Well, I didn't expect it to be as good as it's being, I didn't realise that my job was, I mean, into the institutions, I
didn't realise I would be able to go to the Parliament, the Committee of Regions, and everything. I didn't realise
62 how much stuff I found out actually about: I found it very easy to learn about the EU and everything, and this is
my first job, maybe it's like that in every job, you go somewhere and you start and then you learn a lot. I felt as
I've learned a lot, more than I realised that I would have.

64 **But did you only have professional expectations?**

66 No, no... I did have an idea of what it might have been because I knew people who had moved back to England,
and I had lived here when I was younger, so I was familiar with Belgium and the city, because I used to live
68 here. But I've never... I knew that there was a large international community and I'd heard about the fact that
there's a lot of Expats, and when I came there were, and most of them were kind of... approachable.

70 **Do you consider your experience here as a short or midterm experience, or more as a long term one, in the
sense that you could take into consideration to remain here for a very long period of your life, if not for
the entire life?**

72 I don't think that I'm going to stay here long time now, but I might come back later and then stay for longer, I'm
not sure.

74 **Why?**

76 Because [laugh], firstly I would like to live in London for a few years, and... I might, I'm likely to go to some
other countries as well, possibly, and secondly if I was here living a long time I'd probably want to have a really
78 good job, if you see what I mean, I'd probably only do that if I got actually a good job in one of the institutions,
and I don't even know if that would happen, so...

80 **So you are prepared to move again.**

80 Yea.

82 **You would like to.**

82 Yes.

84 **Only for England or any country?**

84 To other countries too.

86 **In the world or in Europe?**

86 It would depend on the job, if it was a job like...if it was in the Middle East, or working in China, and you have
a sure job, and you might work for three years and then you go back to England, or you could then go to France,
88 for example, I might do that, but if it's meant going without any job security to Thailand to find a job, I wouldn't
do that.

90 **In principle you are open to travel outside Europe...**

90 In principle yes, but for the moment I am more interested in Europe.

92 **Why?**

94 Because I studied European languages, because that's what I know more about, because I think that if you move
to a foreigner country which is very different from your own, it is very easy to feel isolated, and I wouldn't really
want that, so...

96 **Would you feel safer in Europe?**

96 Probably, I mean, I still feel safer here than I would feel living in Gaza [laugh].

98 **Do you believe that the experience you are having the possibility to develop here is something that you are
sharing with the most of the young Europeans, or that it's still something that only a minority has access
100 to?**

102 Well... working in Brussels is something that anyone can do, anyone can do a stage but it's whether they know
that it exists. I had no idea that there were so many stages going on in Brussels, until I started looking for, and so
if someone is interested he'll probably find out, but you have to be interested. Most people know about the
104 Commission stage, but they don't know about stages in the Committee of Regions, or things like that.

106 **The sense of my question is slightly different: do you think that many Europeans are having this kind of
experience abroad, or do you feel they are still a minority?**

108 If I think that many Europeans go to a foreigner country to work?

108 Yes.

110 I think that an increasing number do, I think that lots of people do, but probably not the majority. But with the
new countries there are a lot of Latvian, Lithuanian coming to England and to other countries, so you have more
and more people going abroad.

112 **Do you know many people here in Brussels?**

114 I have a few friends here, not many people, not loads of people, but because many people are in the same
situation and they come from abroad, it's not that difficult to meet people you have things in common with them.

116 **Would you define the people you spend your time with as acquaintances or close friends?**

118 Well... I'd say... I don't use the word close friend very much, so my close friends... you have to be a very close
friend. I'd say they are good friends, mostly, but they are not just acquaintances, they are more than
acquaintances.

120 **Here in Brussels do you have the possibility to go to international contests, international environments,
where you have the possibility to meet people from other countries?**

122 Brussels is an international environment. Do you mean more specifically? [laugh] In what sense?

124 **What does it mean for you?**

126 It means there are a lot of people from different countries.

128 **Apart from that, are there specific places where you get in touch with foreigner people?**

130 Cities like London and New York: there are a lot of people living there from different countries as well, but the
thing is that in Brussels is very concentrated and, you know, this is especially for work, and everyone is in the
same kind of area, as far as I know most people are in the same area and so it's all very concentrated and you are
more aware of being in international... while if you go to London, you know, there are lots of tourists
everywhere, but it's more spread up, so you might meet Spanish people, you might meet Italians, you might
meet them on the underground, but I just don't think it's the... [pause].

132 **Do you mostly meet foreigner people for example at work...?**

134 No. Sometimes...

136 **...in other places?**

138 There are other places. If you want there are clubs, you know, the Expats club, if you want to get involved in that
sort of things.

140 **What about you?**

142 When I arrived I didn't know so many people, so I thought that maybe one way would be to join a website called
"xpat.com", and then there they had a lot of information about parties and groups and conversations and things
you can do. I haven't used it that much but I also found out about sports clubs...

144 **And do you attend any sport club?**

146 Yea [laugh].

148 **Here in Brussels do you have the tendency to stay more with foreign people or with Belgian people?**

150 I would say more with foreign people. If I was living here a long time then I would probably try to integrate
more with Belgian people, to spend more time with them. But now it's a transitory thing for me, yea, I'm not
going to stay here for a long time. It's hard to get to know Belgian if you are not working with Belgians, and I
think Brussels is quite divided and many people have no interest in meeting Belgians, I think, many people who
work for the EU, institutions, I mean EU related jobs. You can kind of keep yourself separate from it, but I think
that if you are gonna living in a country for a long time then it's nice to know about the country where you are
living, about the people that live there, and stuff like that.

152 **Generally speaking do you find it easy to establish new relationships here in Brussels?**

154 I think people are generally quite... keen to meet people, I think people are quite friendly, so they might not
necessarily be... this might be superficial things, but people are quite approachable.

156 **Do you have the feeling that it's easier or less easy than in your country?**

158 I find it easier.

160 **And respect to other countries...**

162 Well, I mean, I find it easier because of the situation, I mean, I'm working here and when I was in Italy, in Spain
or whatever I was on an Erasmus exchange. I mean, when you are a student you can kind to go to the university
and study and live the university without having to speak with people, meet people, if you want. But if you are
working you are more likely to meet people. In Italy people are quite, well, from my experience, people are quite
open, they are very friendly... since you ask this question I'm giving my little theory about that.

164 **Ok.**

166 In Italy they are very friendly, at the beginning they will be really interested in you, but then you are not really
getting to pass that level, or you have to stay there a long time to get to know well, to get passing that level. In
England it's more difficult like the initial contact, people are more distant, but when you do get to know them

- 166 it's maybe... I'm saying that, that... well, Italian are socially extrovert people, British people are less socially
extrovert, so whereas it's easier to meet people in Italy, you might meet lots of people but not really go to a
168 different level, in England you might not meet that many people, but if you get to know them, if you make the
effort with the people you meet, you might well get to a different level in a quicker amount of time.
- What about Spain?**
- 170 In Spain... I don't have so much experience of Spain... I think Spanish are quite friendly... I have to think about
that, you have to leave me time to think! [laugh]
- 172 **You have all the time in the world.**
- 174 When I was in Spain I was on holiday, so I met Spanish people but I didn't meet many Spanish people, so I can't
really say that much. The people I met were nice to me.
- The friends you have here are from where?**
- 176 They are from a lot of places.
- From Europe?**
- 178 Yes.
- Also from the Eastern Europe?**
- 180 I know a few people from the Eastern Europe but they aren't close friends, sorry, good friends [laugh].
- Which difficulties and which positive aspects do you find while you have a relationship with people from
182 countries different from yours?**
- 184 Communication problems, misunderstandings, because either the person doesn't understand what you are saying,
because they don't know the language well enough, or you don't understand what they say, just linguistic,
186 comprehension stuff. And then it's hard to make jokes and understand humour when it's in a foreign language.
This isn't a problem I've encountered, but you have cultural differences and different ideas about certain issues
188 that could create conflicts, you know, clashing of opinions. And then there is just the fact that people weren't
necessarily to stay for very long, so they might leave. That's the problem to have foreign friends, here in
Brussels. It's that the friendship might not last for very long, because you might not stay in the same area.
- What about the positive aspects?**
- 190 You learn about other people culture, traditions, other people countries, and stuff...
- 192 **Do you really believe in that or it's just...**
- 194 No, I do believe in that, but, you know, it's kind of... pretty obvious [laugh].
- Do you find any difference in the kind of relationship you have here respect to the one you have in your
country?**
- 196 Yea, but that might just be because I'm doing something different: when I was in England I was studying at the
university, here I'm working, so that changes the relationships.
- 198 **Which are the differences?**
- 200 At university you tend to stay with people of the same age as you or younger, and here I'm with people who are
younger and older and that makes things different. At university you work in a library where you are separate,
202 you work individually, while here if you work in an office you are in close proximity and you see the people
everyday in the same place.
- How does this influence you?**
- 204 I quite like the fact it's more structured, whereas at university... I think it's different, because... you might not
see the person everyday, you know most people do not go to their lectures, all them regularly, sometimes you
206 have people in a lecture sometimes other people.
- Do you maintain the relationships with your English friends?**
- 208 Yes, some of them.
- Do you maintain also the relationships with the people you met in other experiences abroad?**
- 210 Some of them. Now I'm out of touch, but for a few years I was in touch with people.
- What happened?**
- 212 Just kind of shooting down, really.
- Without a specific reason?**
- 214 Yea.
- Let's see the instrument you use to maintain the relationships: the phone, I guess...**
- 216 Yea.
- The normal phone or the mobile phone?**
- 218 Both?
- Only audio or video?**
- 220 What do you mean?

- 222 **Do you also videocall?**
No.
- 224 **And I guess you use Internet. E-mails?**
Yea.
- 226 **Chat? Skype?**
No.
- 228 **So you only write e-mails, you don't speak with people.**
No. I might start using Skype, but I don't use it at the moment.
- 230 **Which is the instrument that you think is more important for you to get in touch with people?**
Do you mean people who are a long way away, in Spain, or do you mean people who are living near... I'd say mobile phone.
- 232 **But before we started the interview you told me that in your opinion Internet is the...**
The globalisation is the... what I mean is that with the Internet is easy to find out what is going on in the other side of the world, it's easy to communicate with the other side of the world, but it's not necessarily what I would use.
- 236 **Do you still meet with the people from abroad?**
I'm kind of out of touch with most people from the past.
- 238 **And in the past did you use to meet them frequently?**
No, infrequently, sometimes.
- 240 **Do you think you will maintain the relationships you are creating here in Brussels?**
Possibly.
- 242 **How would you describe yourself with respect to your identity?**
European.
- 244 **What does this mean for you?**
I guess that I feel that I am a citizen of Europe, but I don't mean it like a cliché: I just mean that I don't feel particularly British, because I wasn't born in England and I've lived in a few European countries and I've met a lot of European people.
- 248 **So you are saying that you might move to any other country and still feel European?**
Yes.
- 250 **So you can feel at easy wherever in Europe?**
I haven't been everywhere, so I don't know. I haven't been to Eastern Europe, so it's probably quite different from here, I don't know if they are very welcoming. But I feel European rather than English. Actually that's not true, because when I went to South America I actually felt English, because taken out of the contest of Europe you are kind of aware of yourself in a different way, so when I was there I actually felt quite British, although I felt European, if you know what I mean.
- 256 **Well, I'd say I don't know. Why did you feel more British there than European?**
Because when you travel in Europe, everyone is used to meet an English person, or an Italian person, is not rare, it's quite normal, and so people would say "oh, you're English", and the recognition is different from when you go abroad, because you are all European. If you go somewhere outside Europe, like I found when I went to South America, the way they saw me... because they didn't see me as another European, they saw me as an English person, I was "la inglesa". And it's just different, because they are perceiving you in a way that you don't actually perceive yourself, I don't identify myself as "la inglesa", but that's how they see you, and it's different.
- 264 **What do you feel you have in common with the other Europeans?**
History... we have similar languages, like Italian, Spanish, Romanian... and then Christianity. Of course I'm not to say that there aren't other religions, but there is the fact that a lot of Europeans are Christian. And also the geographical area. There are big differences, but we are close to each other.
- 268 **What does it mean for you the expression "being a citizen of the world"? Would you use that expression?**
No. I certainly wouldn't use it for myself. I guess that would mean... I think it's quite optimistic: to say that someone is a citizen of the world, they really would have to be quite exceptional persons, because the world is such... I mean, different parts of the world are quite different, Africa, central Asia, Siberia: to say citizen of the world I think it's a bit reductive, I mean, I guess the idea has a positive connotation, someone who can adapt to any place.
- 274 **Do you think you have values in common with people that like you had or are having experiences abroad?**
Maybe, a few. I'd say that people who travel a lot probably value respect for other cultures. If they are travelling voluntarily, then they have probably an interest in other cultures, and they probably have a respect for other
- 276

- 278 cultures, and then maybe also a sort of tolerance, open-mindedness or whatever [pause]. Maybe a little bit of curiosity.
- 280 **Curiosity towards what?**
Curiosity for stepping outside the environment you are familiar and going somewhere different.
- 282 **Which is your degree?**
Spanish and Italian.
- 284 **Your profession?**
I'm an information and communication assistant in a Regional office in Brussels.
- 286 **Which is the profession of your parents?**
My dad is retired, he worked for the Commission, also in Africa. My mother has been a housewife for quite a few years, but she used to be a bilingual secretary in Brussels.
- 288 **In which languages are you able to maintain a conversation at easy, even not fluently? Italian I know...**
Spanish, French, and I'm working on my German.
- 290 **Can we remain in touch for a couple of years...**
No! [laugh] I'm not prepared to commit myself to meeting someone in years time.

Interview n° 18: Sweden

2

4 **Where do you come from?**

Tidaholm, it's a very small place in Western Sweden, it's about 10.000 inhabitants.

6 **Did you have other experiences abroad before this one?**

I've been working in Dublin for three and a half months in the summer 2000, for a summer job in a news agency, and studying in Australia in 2003 for 5 months, and in England in 2005, about 5 months, for studying.

8 **Did you use European programs?**

10 Yes, in England I went to the Leed University with the Erasmus scholarship.

12 **Is it a coincidence that you chose English speaking countries?**

In Sweden we speak a quite good English, so it was easier in order to communicate; I don't speak any Latin languages, otherwise it would have chose maybe to go to Spain or to some American countries, but it was more convenient for me to go where I could communicate very easily.

14

16 **So you went there knowing English already.**

Yes.

18 **What reasons pushed you outside your country?**

I've always liked to explore things: new experiences, seeing new things. When I got the opportunity to go and see something, I said "yes, I will take this opportunity": it's more saying "yes" when the opportunity did arrive than actively trying to get outside Sweden. Going to Australia was the only thing I really applied for, while the other things happened more for coincidence, and I am very happy for it today, because I think I learned a lot travelling.

22

24 **So you were not looking for these opportunities.**

No, coming here to Brussels was a pure coincidence. I was looking for an intership for my master, I was looking in Gotenberg, and in this office they were looking for an intern and sent an mail to my university, which just forwarded it to me, and I replied and then I got the intership here that I'll be keeping for 2 years.

26

28 **What does it mean for you to live in Brussels?**

It means I get to see interesting things. As I got a degree in political science, it's much the atmosphere that for me is more interesting, as there are a lot of European issues and big issues that are discussed here. I work for a regional office, so it's more at the local level, but still it's a wider policy area that you see.

30

32 **Couldn't you follow the same issues from home?**

I could. But it's the same thing as I could read the local newspaper from Brussels and I could read Brussels news on the web from home: here you get to meet people and see with your own eyes. I feel that I learn a lot more doing that.

34

36 **More on a personal plan?**

Yea, and also my knowledge. I don't have a very positivistic view of knowledge, I think you can learn much more by taking part of a process, especially in social sciences: I can actually practice what I've been studying being here, I think it's nice. And the more I work here, the more I get: there are a lot of subjects I'm getting more and more interested in, which is nice.

38

40 **Did you have any expectations when you came here?**

Very little. I've never been in Brussels before, I knew what the European Union did, but not really what the regional role in the European Union is or what a regional office did, so I more or less walked into this blind and said "ok, I try for a couple of months", but I liked it, I found it very interesting.

42

44 **So you've been here for two years.**

I'll do 2 years in September, yes.

46

48 **What's your final impression about your experience here?**

You have to be very flexible to work in this environment, and it's something challenging but mostly very rewarding, and you have to work with everything, from very high to very low, and you get to meet people from up level politicians to low level practitioners, and you have to be able to work against all levels in the Region and also in the Commission and in the Parliament, and that's very interesting. And also in the non professional part I get to meet a lot of interesting people to my other social network, not just to my professional network, which is also rewarding, so "interesting" I think summarise this experience quite well.

50

52 **You speak of two different social networks, the professional one and the other one, what are the differences?**

54

Well, you can't use the professional network to the same extent.

56 **Do you include your colleagues in the professional network?**

56

58 Yes, some of them are overlapping, as some of my colleagues I socialise with and with some other I only meet as
colleagues, and the same with other people from regional offices, from the commission, and so on, some of them
you only meet them professionally and some in an informal way.

60 **Back to my previous question: which are the differences between the two networks?**

62 Well, the professional network: I want something, that's why I meet them, I need to get an information, I go to a
meeting, it's a need driven, and you have to do a task, so the social interaction is secondary to the task, while in
64 my private meetings the social interaction would be my main goal, not the activity I do. And of course some
practice overlaps. I just got a new job and I got it partially because I knew someone who knew someone who
66 came here and offered me a new job, so of course it overlaps sometimes, but the professional network is
someone I need to know 'cause I need to perform a duty or a task or to get an information, while my private
network would be the people I like socially because they are interesting, or funny, or something like that.

68 **Did you ever meet someone of your private network to achieve something professionally?**

70 No, not deliberately. It had happened a couple of times. Of course you should never underestimate, if you know
something and you have a good relationship, that it would be easier to call them in their professional role and get
72 something, and they will know that they can call you and that you are a good contact, but I don't socialize with
people because of their position in, say, the Commission or something.

74 **Is it frequent to meet people professionally who have something in common with you, and then starting to
go out?**

76 Yes, definitely. Quite often you meet people a couples of times, at conferences or something like that, and then
you meet them at pubs. Place Luxembourg would be an astonishing example for a sociologist, to have all those
78 young people there, who meet there, it's like that there is some kind of scheme behind that makes all those
people from all over Europe meet there. You meet people there, and you see them a couple of times and you talk
a bit, then you meet them there and you talk more, and with some people you go forth, and with some people you
80 don't have so much to do. And the other way around, of course: maybe you meet someone, a friend of a friend,
when you are out somewhere, then you meet them in their professional role and then of course it's easy and you
82 can talk to them, so it's a two-way system.

84 **Do you feel yours as a temporary or a permanent experience?**

Hard question. As I said I tend to take opportunities when they arrive. I have not planned to go back to Sweden
in the next couple of years at least, I also have a Belgian girlfriend, who might like if a stay in Belgium, I would
86 suppose, so I'm probably going to be in Brussels for a couple of years more and then I'll see what happens: I
might go back home, I might go somewhere else.

88 **Are you prepared to remain out of your country for the rest of your life?**

Yea, I could do that.

90 **Do you think that this kind of experience you are having abroad is something common among young
Europeans or still restricted to a minority of people?**

92 Hard to say. One thing I noticed is that the people you meet here, it's not their first time abroad: they would be
doing maybe a college year in the United States, they'd be doing an Erasmus exchange. They tend to be a kind of
94 travelling people. I've almost never met someone down here that has always been in his own country for his all
life and then suddenly come in Brussels, the most of the people have been travelling before. It seems to be quite
96 a good need that you would like to experience new things and to see new places...

98 **Do you meet many people here in Brussels?**

98 Yes. There's a lot of people coming here from abroad and they don't have an established social network here, so
they tend to be very open in contacts seeking, so it's very easy to meet new people here. Then of course you
100 have the downside that people are moving a lot as well, so it's hard to keep friends here, you meet a lot of new
people, and then they stay only 6 months or 2 years and then they go back home again, that's the problem that
102 I've been discussing with other people staying for a couple of years, and most people agreed that it's hard to
keep a working social network here, because people move out. Also the European community here, the Expats
104 so to speak, they tend not to socialize with native Belgians, so many people here do not know Belgians at all,
they only know other people from other European countries.

106 **Why do you think it's like that?**

108 Well, I'm not sure really. It's a language barrier, a social barrier, the people who come here they are very high
educated and they are here for something especially, and the people you might meet in the street is just an
average European, maybe it's a cultural balance, it's not only about incomes, but with goals and education.

110 **How would you describe the typical profile of the Expat?**

112 Highly educated, in between 25 and 35, here for a limited time, quite outward, he likes to socialise, he likes to
see new things, maybe not career driven, I don't think that all the people here are career driven, I know people

114 goal driven and other people who are here to make an experience, and most people don't plan to stay here, most
116 people want to stay here for a period and then to go back home. Often people say that what they are doing here is
118 a step for a position in their own national or regional government. And I am coming from a rural village in
120 Sweden, where almost all the people neither have a bachelor, so here they are highly educated. I am not talking
122 about culture as fine art, but culture in the sense of what kind of music you listen to, what kind of bar you go to,
it's more culture in the subculture sense: you know, people may dress in a special way, they have a special way
to talk, and if you look at the funk scene, or every kind of scene, they usually pull that kind of line, they want
their special brands, their special music, their special way to talk. And if you meet people down here, they were
their suits, they speak this Eurolanguage, which if you don't know it currently it's very hard to understand what
people talk about, so that form a kind of subculture.

124 **Do you think this is something typical of Brussels or that you may find it elsewhere? I'm not saying
exactly the same, but at least such a subculture.**

126 I could guess you can find it somewhere else, but I can't speak about any experience. I know some people who
128 were working in the IT in Dublin, and they had a sort of the same thing, maybe not a uniform dress, but anyone
was working in IT, and also had their special way to talk, you know, everyone knew that everyone you met had a
work in something in the computers, while the normal Irishman probably was working at the store, at the factory
or something like that.

130 **Would you define the people you know here more as acquaintances or as friends?**

132 Acquaintances. People are coming and going a lot, so it's hard to have the time to develop a good friendship.
134 And I know people who say that they don't really dare to make friendships, because they know that people will
leave, and it's not a worth effort to work on a relation when you know that they will leave very shortly anyway,
so I think that people can become cynical here after a while.

136 **Is this your experience too?**

138 On a bad day! [Laugh]. Well, after a while you tend to choose with whom you socialise, you tend not to spend
140 that much time with people who are spending their intern here, you tend to focus on people that you know will
stay here for a bit longer; but also when you get here you are very excited, but after a while you get tired of the
people who want to go to all the clubs and all the pubs, and to do everything. I think that's why you tend to stay
with people who are in the same phase of life as yourself.

142 **Do you think that having a girlfriend here you have a more stable life?**

144 Yes, definitely, and I know more Belgian people through my girlfriend as well.

146 **Do you live with your girlfriend?**

148 No.

150 **In which contests do you meet people from other countries here?**

152 Conferences, meetings, seminars, through the difference networks. There is a lot of thematic networks, like the
154 IT network. Outside work, it's the Brussels Expats pub culture. You have place Lux, you have this kind of places
156 where everyone... yea, that would be the place where you probably meet new people. Ad through my training as
158 well: I go to an Aikido club which has people from all over the world in it, maybe 50% from Belgium and 50%
160 from the rest of the world; but probably the number one would be the pub culture, because it's where people tend
to be very open and it's easy to socialise and to meet new people. It's a big strange for me being a Swedish, as
we don't have the habit to meet in that way, at least not in small towns, maybe only in three big cities.

162 **Do you have the tendency to look for people from your country, from different countries or from
Belgium?**

164 If you meet another Swedish, or another Scandinavian (because we are quite similar, and with Danish and
166 Norwegian we understand each other), you have a common language, and you grew up seeing the same tv
168 shows, and you have the same cultural background, it's easy to communicate. On the other hand I try not to
focus myself on people of my own language or with the same cultural background, because I like to meet people
and try to see new things. It's interesting to speak with someone, say, from the former Soviet block, they grew
up under the Communist dictatorship, and had a completely different life than the one I had before the Berlin
wall falls down, so it's interesting to meet people with different backgrounds and talk to them. Generally I don't
have any difficulties in communicating with people from, say, South of Europe, or Eastern Europe, or outside
Europe. Maybe it's because the people who come here tend to have a similar background, everyone has a degree
in political science basically, so you have some kind of common references even if you have completely
different cultural backgrounds.

168 **The people you meet here are from where?**

Sweden, Germany, England, Belgium.

No one from the South of Europe.

170 That's true. Well I have some friends from Argentina as well. But there are the people that you meet
occasionally and the people that you give a phone call and you say "shall we meet?", the latest are Northern
Europeans.

172 **Do you think that it's easier or more difficult to create interpersonal relationships here in Brussels with
respect to your country or to other countries that you have experience about?**

174 It's much easier here than in England.

Why?

176 English tend to keep a distance with people, you know, they don't let you in, they tend to be more reserved,
compared to Australia, where people are very open, and it's very easy to get to know new people. In Sweden it
178 depends on where you are, people of my same age go to the same concerts, and it would be quite easy to get to
know new people, but Swedish are more reserved, they are not as bad as English. So in Brussels it's a little
180 harder than in Australia but a lot easier anyway.

182 **Which difficulties and which positive aspects do you find while you have a relationship with people from
other countries?**

184 The first and most obvious is the language barrier: I don't speak French or Spanish. Most people here speak
English or a sort of. Secondly a cultural barrier: if I make something that would be very funny in Sweden, maybe
186 with a reference to some old movie, if you have never heard of this movie of course it's not funny, you don't
know what kind of reference it is. It seems that there is some kind of common European standard of how to
behave down here, it's not that you get offended if something is different with respect to your country.

188 **Positive aspects?**

190 You get to learn about things. If I had always lived in my 10.000 people town I would probably be very narrow
minded, I think that now I see a lot of things, and I realised that a lot of people don't think in the same way I do
and have a different view, and that's very interesting. Then I don't agree all the time, but...

192 **Why was that important for you?**

194 To see new things? I'm not sure. My mother, for example, always lived close to where she was born, and never
went away. The first time I went abroad I said: "I want to go abroad at least once in my life, I might be married
in two years", then I went abroad once, then I got some other opportunities, and I went again and again and
196 again, and... I'm not sure, really. The first time I wanted to see something different, just once, and then you get
to a habit. But I can't say why it's important for me.

198 **Do you think that you were influenced by television?**

200 Well, it showed that there are other parts of the world, definitely. That's why I wanted to go to Australia, I
wanted to see the great barrier reeve, which was showed as the most fantastic place, and it was.

202 **Do you find any difference in the kind of relationship you have here and the one you had in your country?**

204 Hmm... [Pause]. Not in my adult life. Maybe the people in Sweden would be more in the same culture as I am,
so they would be part of the same subculture. That would be one difference: that it would be easier to know
people that are interested in the same things when I am in Sweden, while here I meet people because they tend to
be in the same place geographically where I am. In Sweden I would not go to any pub because I would think that
206 I could meet people: bad music and expensive drinks. I would rather go to Goteborg to a rock club or something,
and I'd feel a little more at easy, while here I go to the same place everyone goes, I'm becoming a little more
208 mainstream.

Do you maintain the relationships you have with your friends in your country?

210 Yes: Skype is a wonderful thing. I probably wouldn't have such a good relationship if I didn't have modern
technologies. It's just e-mails, Skype, messenger and other programs.

212 **Do you use both audio and video?**

Yea.

214 **Do you also use the telephone?**

216 Very little, mostly for text messages, not to call. But now basically you have computer access all the time, so the
only time I use my phone is when I go downtown and I call my friend with which I am supposed to meet, but I
am late, that's situation, otherwise I would use computer completely, which is more convenient and it's free. I
218 use e-mails, I write e-mails to my mother everyday probably: she works in front of a computer, I work in front of
a computer, it's very easy.

220 **Do you also visit people at home?**

222 Not as much as I would like: I would probably go to Sweden maybe two weeks a year, three weeks, so not a lot.
And then you are supposed to meet the grandparents and all the relatives, so it's very tight scheduled, but I have
people coming down to meet.

224 **So would you say that you can keep these relationships?**

226 Yes, I can, but if I didn't have modern technologies I would have probably lost a lot of contacts, because you can write letters, but you don't get the same direct communication that you share with people when you are there.

Do you think it's enough to tell what happens, instead of living together and sharing it?

228 No, you grow a part with some people, it's quite obvious. And I noticed this just with some friends I went to university with from the United States, which I was quite tight with when we were about together, then I went back to Europe and they went back to United States, and our references sort of started to shift, because they had their own reality and I had my own reality and after a while it gets hard to communicate, you don't have any common experience anymore, so it's hard to continue to build on friendship. Other people that maybe I knew for a shortest time, maybe I knew for 6 months back in Sweden, they are someone I can still communicate with, we have the same references, it makes it easy to communicate, and common values.

Can you also maintain the relationships that you had with people that you met in Australia or in England?

236 Some yes and some no. As I said, with the best friends you don't need to speak for six months, we can continue the conversation from where we left it when we see each other after six months, I have some of those friends, with whom it's all very natural. And some if you don't speak every week it becomes very hard to find each other again. But this also goes for people that I went to high school with: that we didn't have anything in common after we graduated, and you meet them everyday at school and after you graduate... and it's the same with some people I went to school with abroad: with some people it's very easy, we write e-mails occasionally and then maybe we don't talk for three months and then someone writes again a letter. It's easier with the ones based in Europe, for some reason.

What's a friend for you?

244 Someone you deliberately make an effort to socialise with and who also do the other way around. I have very nice colleagues and I like all of them, but not all of them are my friends; say I would have a barbecue tomorrow night, the people I would call and who would come over: they would be my friends. And then you have the very close friends, of course they are very few, maybe the people I've known for 10-15 years. So maybe there are three levels in my scale: acquaintances, friends and very closed friends. Acquaintance would be someone that when you meet you would actually talk with them, they are all nice people and you like to talk with them, they are something interesting to say. But if you didn't see them for two weeks you wouldn't call them, while a friend: if I didn't see a friend for two weeks I would call him, like "ehi, how are you, you wanna meet up?", that would be the difference.

Do you think that you will maintain the relationships that you created here?

254 Yeah, with some people I definitely will.

Talking about your identity, how would you describe yourself?

256 Hmm... I tend to be more and more Swedish the more I stay outside Sweden. I think it's quite common with people here. I was watching the game against Denmark on Saturday, it was just a qualification game for the Europeans, and I would have never watched a qualification back home, but here it's a bit more... going to my friends and cheer for Sweden. So I think you try to see your identity more when you are outside your country and it becomes a bit more important for you, but on the other hand I have a Belgian girlfriend, and maybe that makes me assimilated a bit more in Belgium, because I understand Belgium a lot better through her. She says that I need to understand Belgium, which is very nice: I feel like that I'm closer to her.

So what we are discussing are Belgian contaminations on your Swedish identity?

264 Well, contaminations or enrichment, it depends on your point of view, maybe.

Do you feel you have something in common with the other Europeans?

266 Yes, I do. On the other hand I meet people from Asia with whom I have something in common as well, so it's kind apart: European identity is not very strong, the identity of the people working with the European Union is quite strong; but maybe the farmers in Slovenia or the factory workers in Denmark not as much as the Eurocrats from Slovenia and Denmark. I feel I have a lot in common with the people I meet here, it's quite easy to understand them, 'cause we are a lot in the same situation, we have the same education, we all moved here from abroad and we often left people behind, so I definitely find easier to identify with them than with Europe as a whole, I think we have a lot to do before we get to a "we" feeling about Europe, and the Commission is working quite hard to get there: national things for Europe, a flag for Europe, a president for Europe, but talking about identity I think it's a long way to go there. It took a lot, 300 years to build a national culture in Sweden, so it will take a lot.

Do you think that the European Union is following the right path to a common identity?

278 A tricky question. It's following a lot of paths: the social, the economic, the military integration. If I follow your view that there is only one path, I think yes, but I don't think we can have so much cooperation, it's always better to try to solve something reasoning about it, that in the old European way, starting to fight about it. It's a

282 lot more constructive to try to talk. The European Union is very ineffective, but maybe it has to be ineffective,
283 'cause we are 27 countries, and a lot of these countries are federal states, they have their language and their
284 ethnic groups, so... but I think it's a good thing that we have this common form to talk to each other instead of
285 fighting each other. And looking at the global as well, with superpowers raising, if we are together we can make
286 ourselves more important. I think we share some common values in the European Union, a humanistic tradition,
287 Enlightenment, that's what we have in common. Religions are very different, but we have some common
288 ground.

288 **Scholars say that the top-down approach in creating a European identity cannot work.**

289 But it has been done a lot of times before. You just need to clean out all minorities. You know, in Sweden when
290 my parents grew up they were not even allowed to speak with the accent of my region. The way I speak in
291 Swedish would have not been tolerated in the school, you had to speak very a formal approved Swedish. But it's
292 something that ended in the Seventies, luckily.

292 **Do you feel you have also a regional identity?**

293 To a certain point, there are some parts in Sweden that have a strong regional identity: the Southern part used to
294 belong to Denmark, and the part at north of my region also has a very strong regional identity.

294 **But what about you?**

295 Me? Hmm... up to a certain point, but it is sort of ridiculous. In my region the people are proud of been in that
296 part of Sweden, because it's very rural part, peasants, you know, and there are no really big towns, so if you are a
297 local patriot in that part of Sweden we just laugh at you, but of course I'm a bit of my region, yes, I like my
298 town, I think it's a beautiful part of the country. But it's definitely lower than my Swedish identity.

298 **What does it mean for you "to be a citizen of the world"?**

299 Hmm... it means to be part of the same globalised community now. I think this idea is going to back clash,
300 because after a while people will see themselves back in their roots. And I am not that fond of cultural
301 imperialism, to be honest, I think it would lead to a clash, and I think we can see it in this Islamic movements.
302 Globalisation on one way is very good, I think it enriches the world a lot, but on the other hand I think it's
303 depriving the world a lot of the culture that used to be in the world, diversified and isolated worlds; you get lost
304 when you have to think to the global, probably the 90% of the countries now, except maybe Cuba and Korea;
305 and Coca Cola is sold all over the world.

305 **What's your understanding of globalisation?**

306 Many things. You have the economic globalisation, the cultural globalisation, the globalisation of ideas,
307 democracy, which is contested by the other part, with other ideas. Lands are getting more and more globalised,
308 as Christianity got globalised 400 years ago. So globalisation also has many parts, and I think all of them have
309 some good parts and some bad parts, I'm not a critical, but I think that some of them are necessary; in many
310 countries the outcome could be good if we manage to keep them as part of the economic globalisation: China,
311 Indonesia, you have workers been used as slaves, that's the downside of the economic globalisation, the upside
312 is that a lot of countries are rising from poverty. And with the globalisation of ideas you have the democracy
313 spreading a lot around the world, on the other hand you have ruptures you need to be careful to, because you
314 have traditional society and you have to be careful in saying: "ok, this is democracy and this is how it should
315 function now, because that is how it functions in Europe and this is the best way for everyone".

315 **Do you feel you have values in common with the people who had experiences abroad like you?**

316 Yes. I share the value that we don't... hmm... I believe if you travel, if you see new things, you get to
317 understand yourself better and you get to understand your culture better, and that your way of doing things is not
318 perfect and the only way of doing things. We share the value of being doubtful of our own heritage, maybe. Or
319 not doubtful, but open to other things and to new ideas.

319 **Do you feel part of an élite?**

320 Uh, that's a very negative word in Sweden, we've been socialistic for 60 years, we can't call ourselves élite, but
321 yes, in some way we get some sort of intelligentsia, even though the 50% of all Swedish have a university degree
322 these days. But that's maybe because I see the people from my home town, who are with no high education: if I
323 compare myself to those, yes, I feel myself as some sort of élite. I have a good friend, he is from a diplomatic
324 family, he went to the best private schools, he's part of an élite, that's a completely different level of élite, you
325 know, this friend used to rule the Austrian empire, he's from that kind of family background, so that's a
326 completely kind of élite, but from my point of view I'm in some sort of élite: I work in the European Union, well
327 not in the Commission, but I'm part of this, I'm closer to the European Union, to the power centre, than someone
328 working in a factory in my home town.

328 **Ok. I need some data. Your studies?**

329 Well, since I got a job I couldn't finish my master, so I only have a bachelor.

- 338 **Too bad, you are not part of the élite anymore! [Laugh]**
[Laugh] yeah, I have to finish my thesis. My bachelor is in political science, with minority people communication.
- 340 **Your job here?**
Information officer. I'm responsible for external and internal communication to West Sweden members, including the web site, newsletters... [laugh] that's what's written on my CV! No, it's mainly trying to find legislation, projects to apply for, conferences, seminars, what could be interesting for the people working in policies and in the region back home, so I try to filter all this flux of information.
- 344 **Parents profession?**
346 Factory workers. My mother works at the testing department.
- 348 **How would you describe your social level in Sweden?**
Working class.
- 350 **Are you single?**
I'm not married, but I have a fiancée.
- 352 **Which languages can you speak more or less properly?**
Swedish, English, and I'm learning Dutch.
- 354 **Can we remain in contact for the next two years?**
Yes.

Interview n° 19: Finland

2

4 **How old are you?**

35.

6 **Where do you come from exactly?**

8 I'm coming from Helsinki. Around 1 million of inhabitants including 3, 4 towns around. Helsinki properly has half a million.

Did you have other experiences abroad?

10 Yes. I studied in France in the 90s for half a year and I started also my career in France, so I stayed abroad for a while, for 4 years. Then, in 1999, I went back to Finland because Finland became for the first time President of the EU, they needed people and I wanted to go to experience this Presidency. Now for 4 years I've been living in Brussels, working for the Commission. In Finland I was working for the Government also, I've been in two Ministries, first in the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the other for the Ministry for Social Help. In the Commission I'm administrator and expert in social economic.

16 **Did you use European programs for your studies abroad?**

18 No. I started my studies in Finland, then I just wanted to have international experience and I started to look around for where I could study political sciences in France. Also French language is not spoken in Finland and I wanted to practise it.

20 **Why did you want to go abroad?**

22 I've always been interested in international affairs and relations and I wanted to enlarge my scope and my understanding of the world and also of Finland, because when you go abroad you learn a lot about your country also, you think that things are normal, suddenly they are not normal any more, so you know better where you are coming from. Also the way of studying in Finland, well, somehow I wanted to see something else, what's happening elsewhere; for sure if you come from Helsinki and you go to Paris, you really have the opportunity to understand what this world is about; in Paris, a very international place, you meet not only French but people from all over the world, and I had this kind of international idealism about international cooperation.

28 **Do you still have it?**

30 Not that much. It's sad but I've also learned that we stay very strongly prisoner of our origins: you see it in the Commission too: we have Italians, we have Greeks, we have Finns, in practical the people coming from the biggest nations have a strong identity, some of them in particular, like French. It's linked to the language, to the culture. Often when people are abroad, they have the tendency to search for the compatriots, so you have there Greek associations, French associations and so on. The Commission has different nationalities, in reality. It shouldn't be like this, but you just don't become European in the sense that you forget your origin, you have nostalgia about it more easily than when you are in your country, because you don't have the routine which sometimes makes you tired in your own country. There's a nostalgic approach: "it was so nice in my country". I can give you an example: Finland joined the EU in 1995 and ten years later 40% of the Finnish working in the Commission left the European Commission to go back to their country. So this is about nostalgia the way you're abroad, you don't use your language, the way of living is different and you just go back. It's very often and it happens not only to Finnish but to a lot of Nordic people. It's funny.

Is it the same for people from the South?

42 No. There is not this kind of social phenomenon, maybe it explains, if you want, why Brussels has still some of a Latin town, even though certainly you have not in the South of Europe this kind of place where all different traditions meet. But it's still a Latin town. I don't know. You don't have this kind of phenomenon. I don't know. It may be, it is my speculation, of course. It's interesting to try to understand by itself that in the Northern countries we are living in a kind of social society, because people working at the Commission certainly earn more than in their own countries, but it's not that important to these people, they can go back and have just half or less of their salary in the Commission. It may be more important for Mediterranean people, they don't have this family model where two people are working, both parents are working, so when they come here they still have this model, whereas Nordic people are changing their family life very abruptly, because one of them, the wife or the husband, just stops working while coming here, and for the person who stays at home is a total psychological disaster, ten-fifteen [years] of his career [thrown away].

Are you married?

54 Ya.

Did you have the same problem with your wife?

56 No. First of all my wife is not Finn but French. She's studying and working also here. It was easier for her to
58 find a job here than in Finland. She can follow me to Finland but it would be hard for her to find a job, here it's
somehow easier being a continent of French culture. She's more at home in Brussels than in Helsinki.

What does it mean to you to live in Brussels?

60 I don't have difficulties in being here. I could live most in all the EU member states without difficulties.
62 Somehow I am de-rooted from my Finnish roots, I don't have to be all the time in Finland. I'm going very rarely
to Finland also. Brussels is well located. It's very easy to go to France, Germany, the UK, to Italy, wherever, it's
64 the middle of Western Union, so it's practical to live here. It's a calm town, calmer than Helsinki, for example,
very deserted during week-ends. A normal Western city.

Did you have any expectations when you came here?

66 I knew the down because during years I came here for meetings, of course I didn't know how it's concretely to
68 live here, but more or less I really knew what to expect and what happened then was corresponding to my
expectations; somehow Belgian bureaucracy is sometimes surprising and not that well functioning, but it's OK.
It was not a particular positive or negative surprise.

How do you consider you permanence here in a time frame?

70 How long will I stay you mean? That's a good question. Something of which I think about regularly. For the
72 time being I'm here, for sure I won't stay here for the rest of my life, it's something provisory, it's related to
professional and private life at the same time. Sometimes I think time is going forward... whereas I still have
74 this international idealism, for which I may have more interest in working in a more global organization than the
European Union in the future, globalisation and things like that, I'm interested in other countries, other
76 continents to cooperate with them more directly, not just in border lines between Europeans and the others.

Do you know many people here?

78 Ya, of course first of all I know my colleagues, people who are working for the European institutions. They have
their networks, also, in private life. Most of their friends, and so of my friends, are colleagues. I have also
80 Belgian friends I have met through my hobbies, music and sport, secondly I have my kid, so I meet people in the
parks where kids play, so I met Belgian parents and they have become friends.

Do you have the tendency to look for people from your country or from Belgium or from any other countries?

84 Certainly I'm not searching for Finnish company, that something self-evident for me. I don't need Finland in
Belgium, so to say. Sometimes Finnish associations are contacting me and they make different activities but I'm
86 not at all involved in them; somehow I want to be integrated in this Belgian society, and also I have these
colleagues who are good friends of mine, but nationality is not an important thing for me when choosing with
88 whom I will pass my time. I want to meet interesting people, wherever they come from, Africa, Europe,
America, Asia, wherever. I'm interested in different people, different thinking that are linked somehow
90 structurally to where they come from.

And your friends are from?

92 Belgium, France, Spain, Germany, Italy, Greece, from everywhere, mostly from European countries of course,
Poland also, from Africa.

Is it easy to make relationships here?

94 Very easy. Belgian people are easygoing. It's very easy to get acquaintances, to meet people, to discuss with
96 them, not at all a problem, it's very easy.

Easier than in your country?

98 Certainly yes, because Finns are very introvertic people, in our culture you cannot just start to speak to people,
they easily have the feeling that you are try to fool them or whatever, they are not that talkative.

Would you define your relationships acquaintances or friends?

100 Both. I have some very good friends, but the most of the people stay as acquaintances rather, the same as in
102 Finland.

Do you have old friends from Finland or you have met them here?

104 I met here most of those people, I had already met some of them in France, some from my meetings and my
colleagues who are my friends.

Which are the difficulties and the positive aspects that you find in a relationship with a person from another country?

108 Basically for me it's a very enriching the experience with people having a different background from myself,
who have different traditions, cultures and so on. So it's interesting to discuss about things, to realize the history,
110 what's happened in the history has many links with your origin, what you have learned in your country, and
realize how people learn differently in their countries. Of course, misunderstandings are challenges for human

112 relations and basically deep insight you don't agree with the foreigner, but still it's interesting to communicate
and change your views.

114 **Do you find any differences between the relationships you have here and those in your country?**

Not really, it's very similar. I can't be here like I'm in Finland, but people are always people after all.

116 **Did you maintain the friendships you have in your country?**

118 Yes of course, I communicate with my best friends. They sometimes come here and also when I go to Finland
for my holidays I meet them.

Did you maintain the relationships you had in France?

120 Also, ya.

Which instruments do you use?

122 E mail it's by far the easiest instrument to communicate, phone of course, but by far behind e-mails. I don't use
chat or Skype.

124 **Do they come to visit you?**

Sometimes, time by time.

126 **When you leave Brussels will you maintain your relationships?**

128 Certainly with some of them. It's always happening when moving around: you lose some contacts even if they
are best friends.

**Yesterday in another interview I was told that in Brussels you create two social networks, the work one
and the private one: who's working with you can't become a friend, as you always think to get some
benefits from him. You say a different thing, that most of your social network comes from your work
ambient. I would like to know more deeply your position at this regard.**

130 It just happens. I always meet people. In my professional environment it's always about human beings and with
134 some of them you have a good chemistry, you become very easily a friend, you can rely on them. All of us
working at the Commission, except Belgians of course, have a similar situation, coming from another country,
136 with our family left behind, and you have to create your social network, so some of them just become your
friends because you have this chemistry; there is no separation: there is no separation like that a colleague can't
138 be my friend; for me it's totally natural, I don't understand why you should separate them artificially.

Are there organizations for leisure activities inside the Commission?

140 There are also some activities but most of relationships do not develop from these activities. You become friend
with people you are working with, in the same service or directorate, and you just become friend, it happens
142 gradually mostly. It just happens so.

**I met a friend of a friend working at the Commission who said about his job: "it's not a bad job if you
don't take it seriously!". What's your comment?**

144 [Laugh] I can understand it totally. It may be frustrating if you take it too seriously. You have to take it seriously
146 in a sense that you are making what is expected from you, but you stop to philosophy a bit what we are doing
there most of our time and you become frustrated very rapidly. I mean, you have to relativize the importance of
148 things that you are doing, that's the point. It's a serious business what we are doing here, we are trying to do
something extremely important for the European citizens, the European countries and for the world also, but
150 your place in this huge machine, in this huge bureaucracy after all is a very small piece and you are submitted to
very hierarchical rules, and in this machine your human value will be minimum. When you start thinking about
152 this you become very easily frustrated, so I can agree with the person you met.

Concerning your identity how would you describe yourself?

154 It's a good question because somehow I might say I de-rooted from Finn, but at the same time I feel Finn. It
sounds contradictory but it is not that much. I grew up in Finland, I have Finnish education, Finnish traditions,
156 my mother tongue is Finnish, I remain Finn and I have my Finnish parameters for my behavior, but at the same
time I am de-rooted. Finland is a very homogeneous country and the behaviour of people is very homogeneous,
158 which means that when I'm coming out from there I'm questioning some ways of being in Finland and I'm not
behaving like this, I'm not totally like them. It's interesting: I also see here concretely that people [Finns] are not
160 that talkative, have not strong opinions or do not present them, while I'm doing it. So I'm Finn but there are
some elements that are not typically Finn. I'm European, I believe very strongly in Western values, freedom,
162 human rights, democracy, which are not only Finn but are shared in all the Europe, and I am very proud of
having these European and Western values, so I am Finn and very strongly a Western, Occidental person.

164 **What's your concept of the Western part of the world?**

As I said, freedom: we have freedom of speaking, freedom of speech, free opinions, respect of human rights.

166 **Who are we?**

Legally speaking people living in these countries.

168 **Can you qualify these countries?**

170 The EU member states, at least in principle, in theory; the US, Canada, Australia, and I think also in countries
172 where people do not have these rights but a big part of population would like to have them. Western societies
and Western states have been the first ones having these freedoms, that's why I'm calling them Western values.
For me it's more universal.

174 **So you would define yourself more Western than European?**

174 Yes, absolutely. It's also a thing which is important when you are looking at ways of living. Finn's way of living
176 is closer to America way of living than in some other EU member state for example, the rhythm of life, work and
stuff, we are a very American population. Still it doesn't mean that if in Greece they are living differently from
178 us... they are also "we" for me, they just have a different way of doing it. That's why I say that my identity is
Western rather than European.

180 **What's your understanding of the expression 'to be a citizen of the world'?**

180 Well, [laugh], we are just human beings after all. I want to tolerate all those people who want to tolerate me. It
182 could be a good direction that people tolerate each other. I don't have problems with people different from me,
as long as they don't try to make me doing the same as they do. They have the right to be what they are, they
184 have the right to have their faiths, their political views, I respect them and they have to respect me, it's
reciprocal.

186 **Have you something in common with people who had important experiences abroad?**

186 I don't know if we are so homogeneous. Basically we have in common that we have moved from our countries. I
188 don't know if we can share some values, really, it's not linked to values. Of course you have not a strong link
with your home country in the sense that you have to stay there your own life, this for sure, but I can't say about
values, I have never thought about it.

190 **When you came here you were already married?**

190 Yes.

192 **Did you experience some sort of process like the other Expats?**

194 No, I settled down. Really I didn't have any particular need to meet Expat people, I can meet them already at
work, some of them became my friends, but I'm not searching for their company in particular. I meet people,
Belgian and others, that's it, I didn't have a particular necessity to go to Place Lux or whatever. I rented a house
196 before I came and it became my home. I did some sort of process I could do anyway: I brought my home to
Brussels, my things, my music, my family, I have them around, that's why I feel home wherever I go, and it's
198 not linked to a certain territory or a certain place. I can have my home wherever almost.

200 **Some data about you. Your studies?**

200 Master level in international relationships. Now I'm involved in a Phd.

202 **What do your parents do?**

202 Both of my parents are professors.

204 **Your language ability?**

204 Finnish. French and English fluent. Swedish and Spanish more or less.

206 **Can we remain in touch for the next two years?**

206 Ok.

Interview n° 20: Finland

2

4 **How old are you?**

34.

6 **Did you have other experiences abroad?**

8 2001 in Veneto and in Pisa in 2005, one semester in Dublin. In 1994-5 I studied political science in France, in
8 Strasbourg. In 1998 I graduate in Finland and then I had a second master. In 1996 in went to Norway in an
exchange program for a semester.

10 **Did you use European programs?**

12 To France I went independently, because Finland was still out of the Erasmus programme. To go to Norway I
used a sort of Nordic Erasmus program, only for Scandinavian. To Venice I went through a program financed by
the European Union called European Master in Human Rights and Democratisation (EMA).

14 **Where do you come exactly from?**

16 I come from Helsinki, though I'm not originally from there: I grew up in the Netherland, but we moved a lot. I
studied in Finland. This was because my father was working abroad so we moved because of his position. So
maybe I also choose this kind of career because since I am a child I'm used to move a lot: I grew up in different
18 countries, so it was a sort of natural choice.

What is your father's profession?

20 He was working at the Ministry of Education. We have a Finnish idiom to say it [to describe the situation of
children like me]: we call them suitcase children, kids who grew up a little bit in a suitcase. I grew up in The
22 Netherlands, in Norway and for a while in Switzerland.

How many languages do you speak?

24 In Finland we have 2 official languages: Finn and Swedish, then at school you learn English, French, German,
Italian. Alltogether 9 languages, but I don't speak all of them, I can cope with them. I can speak English,
26 Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, French, German, Dutch a little bit and Spanish.

Are you married?

28 No.

Are you single?

30 Yes. It doesn't fit to travelling occupation, it's not the best... or maybe it does: a lot of my colleagues are
married with kids and that is a kind of challenge to the administration of this kind of work always trying to settle
32 the whole family, settle at school, etc.

What is your profession here?

34 I am the first secretary here, so I am one of the three diplomats here. We have only 3 diplomats here: the
Ambassador, the Ministry of Counsellor, and I. I am responsible of Belgian politics and press and culture
36 matters. That's why I'm interested in the research you are doing: we have a lot of communication, so I was
pleased to see what kind of research it is.

38 **When did you move to Brussels?**

40 I was posted here in 2002, in June, this is my first post, it's 5 years and I'm about to leave now and going back to
Finland: I'm living in July.

Are you happy with this?

42 I wasn't really happy, but getting into terms, we could have like other 2 years of posting, but 5 years is a long
time so they wanted us to come back. We can stay 7 years abroad, but it should be divided in two countries, and
44 not 5 and 2 years, but 3 and 4, so I exceeded the period.

Why can you only stay 7 years abroad?

46 Because after 7 years they expect people to come back, so that they familiarise themselves again with Finland,
otherwise they might forget Finland and what's going on like in current politics. You can become foreigner to
48 your own country. I think even after 5 years I feel quite distant. They have a point there, I think they have done
some study, if you stay like more than 7 years it's a kind of limit. It's like scientifically proved. Of course it's
50 also individual.

Then you can leave again?

52 Maybe after one or two years.

Would you like to leave again?

54 Ya, sure. We have an obligation to leave, too. Quite a lot of young people who have chosen this career don't
think about it any more, but it's 30 years of your life and we can have a leave of 5 years to go and do something
56 else. It's not totally like in an army but almost.

What does it mean for you to live in Brussels?

58 It has meant a lot. It's been a lot of fun. It means an international city with a lot of contacts with other cultures,
60 getting to know people from other cultures, international atmosphere, what is really concrete here. It means also
62 a lot of travelling, concretely, because it's so close to different places. It's a cliché, but it's also true: I tend to
travel quite a lot. It's easy to live here. Quite tolerant towards other cultures. Maybe I can't say about Belgium as
a whole, but just Brussels: it is tolerant.

Do you think that people here feel an obligation to travel around just because they can?

64 I think that many people get into panic like me in the last month, because I have to travel and I didn't before. I
66 don't think they feel any obligation, I haven't felt any obligation, not like a stressful one, so that you have to plan
every week end to go to Paris, London, no, I don't know anybody who feels like that. It's only easy to go, but
it's not that you feel obligated.

Did you have any expectations when you came here?

68 I maybe thought Brussels was a little more French. I studied in France and when I came here I thought it was like
70 going to France. I learned later that there are 160 nationalities, that it's really international. I didn't have a lot of
expectation because I was supposed to go to Vienna, in Austria, and one month before I was told to come here,
72 so I didn't have the time to have a lot of expectations. I came open-minded.

What about your personal life here? Did you have any expectation?

74 Not really. I was really fortunate because a lot of students I met in Venice came here to work, maybe 15 out of
100 got a work [here], so I had already a social network here. I came here with open mind and positive attitudes.
76 I also didn't have expectations because a lot of my colleagues said it is a boring city, an administrative city, it's
raining all the time and "poor you, you have to go there", so I didn't dare to have a lot of expectations.

Was it true?

78 No, I think they were so wrong, maybe because they have only seen the institutional buildings, the airport and so
80 on. I think they have missed quite a lot.

What is your schedule during the day?

82 I start at 8.30 we have fix time 17.15 We work until a quarter to 5 but I stay longer because at night we have a lot
representation of things in the evening, different openings, some receptions. I don't basically have a fix schedule
84 but I try to get out 17.40 if I can make it. Then we have 1 hour lunch break.

Do you know many people here?

86 Ya.

Would you define them acquaintances or friends?

88 I have a couple of friends but more acquaintances.

What's a friend?

90 That's a very difficult question. I think that through my job I meet a lot of people, so I have a lot of
acquaintances. A friend is someone you spend your free time with, you share common interests, then when you
92 move acquaintances stay behind, whereas a friend tends to keep in touch. I'd like to think so, otherwise it'd be
very sad to change country and to leave people behind. Because a friend is more like... for a long time.

You said you had already a social network when you came here.

94 Yes. But at this point, when I'm leaving, most of them have already left, and this is very characteristic of
96 Brussels: it's a sort of crossroads in your life for a couple of years, and then you go. All those who were here
when I came have left to different jobs abroad or returning to their home country. But then I got new friends.

How would you describe your social network?

98 I would describe it an international network, I work daily in a very Finnish environment, legally it's Finnish
100 territory here [in the Embassy, were we ran the interview], and I work with Finn people here, and our language is
Finnish. I feel like outside the work it's good to have international contacts, so I try to keep it that way:
102 multicultural.

You say that at work you stay with Finnish and outside you try to stay with people from other nationalities?

104 I stay also with Finns if it comes quite natural, but I don't feel the obligation to join a Finnish event, because I do
106 it so much for my work, so I try to keep a balance, and also because of my background I feel comfortable with
different cultures.

Do Finns stick together?

108 Pretty much so. There's a Finnish club here, with hundreds of members, it's a really active club with smaller
110 clubs, like sport clubs, and they do lots of things together. I'm not a member of the club but in the past 5 years
when I met the President I was always asked to join. We have many things in common from a professional level.

How do you manage to create this international environment?

114 I think it has always been by accident, you meet somebody through your hobbies, for example, and these people
play an important role, and then they introduce you to their friends, by confidence. I do a lot of sports, I use to go
riding horses, and when you have common interests you tend to meet people with whom you can sympathize.

116 **You said you have a couple of friends and many acquaintances, so now are you talking about
acquaintances?**

118 Ya. I think it's a fine line the one between friends and acquaintances, and maybe it has something to do with
culture, or it's a personality thing. But I think to become friend takes a longer time, I think it's a cultural thing:
120 Finnish people take a longer time.

What do you share with these people?

122 We can share a meal, or go to movie, or take a car and go somewhere.

And personally?

124 We share different experiences.

And do you trust them?

126 Yes, of course, you also trust your acquaintances.

If you are sad or have a problem will you call them?

128 Yeah, of course. People are different, it depends. You'll call a friend at 3 am but you do not necessarily do it
with an acquaintance. I think it's a cultural thing, in America for example they use the notion of friend much
130 easier than for example Finnish or in general the Europeans. We make quite a distinction between friends and
acquaintances.

132 **I was told that people here tend to use each other, because all the people who come here are alone.**

Maybe I was never like that, I think it's pretty sad to use somebody to get into some position, but I can
134 understand that when you come here and you are alone it's very human that you want to meet people. I can't put
myself in this position when you come alone and you don't know anyone, it's good to meet people, but then why
136 not to stick together for a longer time?

Where do you meet people from other countries?

138 For work I meet a lot of people, but I think that the contacts I have through my work are quite superficial, they
are very professional, very seldom they go deeper than that. Among my international colleagues maybe I have a
140 couple of persons that I have kept in touch also during the free time, but it tends to be quite superficial. Normally
I meet people through my hobbies, mainly sports.

142 **Do you think it's easy to get relationships in Brussels?**

Ya, it depends on yourself, you have to be open about people and cultures, it depends also on what you want for
144 yourself, I think that if you don't desire to meet many people, it's also very easy. If you want to have contacts
with different people from different cultures you tend to be more open, if you don't want that, it's also a choice.
146 I think people here, at least those who are friend, are international and open, easy to talk with.

Do you think that meeting people it's easier or less easy than in your country?

148 Referring to one of your previous questions, when you said that people tend to use each other in order to stick
together, I think it's because they are all foreigners in a foreign country, but when you live in your own country
150 you don't need to be so open towards foreigners, you are happy with your home friends. Maybe I am not a good
representative of Finnish in this, but I spent a lot of my life abroad and I can identify myself quite often... or I
152 can think how a foreigner who come to Finland might feel, so I also have a lot of foreign contacts there, but I
won't say it's harder there or here, it's equally hard and equally difficult or easy.

154 **Would you say the same about love relationships?**

I don't think it make any difference where you are, I don't think that the surrounding has so much influencing,
156 that's not related to a country.

**Do you think that the kind of experience abroad you are doing is restricted to a minority of European or is
spread around?**

158 I would think it's a generational question. Do you mean in Finland or in general?

160 **In general.**

I'd still say that it's related to the country. When I look at my generation in Finland, they tend to travel a lot and
162 also use the possibility of the open borders, but when I look at my parents' generation, with some exception most
stay at home for most of the time, but then again people from older member states maybe have been more abroad
164 for more generations. In that respect our culture is quite young and my generation is the first spending such a
long time abroad. Maybe more people have now the possibility to go than before.

166 **And do they take this possibility?**

168 Ya. It's more like a rule that you work abroad than an exception, among at least the people that I know. But of course there are always people, even among the young people, who just stay in the same village for all their life, so it's more like an exception.

170 **What nationalities are the people you met here?**

172 All nationalities. Belgian, American, and I have a very good Italian friend; other Scandinavian, of course Finnish, some Brazilians... a little bit of all countries. And I also noticed that there is quite a big Italian community here, because when I met one Italian girl I was introduced to a wide range of Italians, it was funny.

174 **Which difficulties and which positive aspects do you find in maintaining a relationship with a person from another country?**

176 Positive aspects are bigger than the difficulties, because they make more open and flexible towards differences, because with people from other cultures and especially in very close relationships you have to be more flexible and understanding. I think it's positive, actually it educates your own character. Cultural differences can be positive but also some things can be so... I wouldn't say different but maybe so... deep rooted. But for example, if you live together with somebody from a different culture you tend to act differently.

180 **In which sense?**

182 Because you are already flexible when you travel, but you only see half of the story, whereas I think that when you have friends from other countries you see both the good and the bad sides, and you just have to be more understanding. So I think it makes you more flexible or you learn about yourself.

184 **Tell me more about the differences you find between living in other countries and living here, in such an international context.**

186 I think for example when I lived in Italy, it was more like an Italian society, a very homogeneous country. While here it's like a melting pot, everything comes together, so compared to those experiences this is like a mosaic of cultures, whereas the other ones have been more representing singular national cultures.

188 **Do you feel there is some sort of integration among people from different countries? That there really is a community of people that come from different countries?**

190 The Expats. There is one community. Do you know the publication "The Bulletin"?

192 **Yes.**

194 When you read it, it makes you believe that there is like an international community, but I think there are many national communities. I know that I'm an expatriate, but I don't have this kind of community feeling of being an Expat. But I think that it might be a personal thing.

196 **So would you say that there are many national communities that interact?**

198 Ya, I would say something like that, I wouldn't say that all the Expats are one homogeneous group. I would say that there are many grouping.

200 **So you try to find people in different groups just to experience different cultures?**

202 I don't really try to find them. I know them just accidentally or by coincidence.

204 **Do you choose people for their culture or for their personality?**

206 Just because of personality. Even though I might be interested in a country, I would not go to these events which are special for them, for example a chilli evening. It's more a person related thing.

208 **So what can you really understand about other cultures being here? For example, what do you understand about Italians here?**

210 That's actually really nice to get to know Italians here, because I understand a little bit, having been there, how is the culture, and is like finding a little piece of Italy here, the kind bring it together here. But people change when they are abroad for a long time, so the feeling of the culture is weaker. It's a nice feeling, because you know a little a country and then you have a part of it here. But I don't know so many cultures, even though I have many friends or acquaintances from many countries, I haven't specifically lived there, so I taste my ideas on the people I meet, so I can't say, for example, that I know American culture...

212 **So what you get from Americans here? Can you generalize about their culture?**

214 No, I think that generalizations are quite dangerous in general, and I know 2 or 3 American, so I can't generalise, so it's more about their personality. I don't know if people can make generalization after having met 2 or 3 Finns. I don't think you can.

216 **Actually it's what people say: I love this international atmosphere because I can meet other cultures.**

218 That's true, it's a big point. In fact you meet only people and you get a notion of the culture but you don't really know the culture; only after having been in the country you can know the culture.

220 **What I would like to understand is at what level do you have an exchange and a comparison with these people.**

- 222 At all level it can be really superficial: exchange of customs, or you can learn very superficial things like
afternoon tea at a certain time, and in your country you don't do that.
- 224 **I have two questions: firstly, does it bring to stereotypes of other countries?**
- 226 In my case it doesn't, no, but again it's a personal thing. I already have my ideas on certain cultures so maybe the
cultures I meet here make stereotypes stronger but it doesn't really change my mind. Then again stereotypes are
understandable, but people are also different so within the same culture you can find all order of very different
228 type. Then of course there are things that are common.
- 230 **The second question is: does this level of exchange enrich you?**
- 232 Yea, I think I've learned more about myself as a person and about how react to differences in cultures, even
though the culture is not exactly a national culture but something that has developed among Expats. Because I see
234 the Expat as smaller groups, not as one big group, but I also see that there is a certain Expat culture as such,
which is different from the one they have at home, so the Finns here are different from the Finns at home. But I
think I have also learned more about my own culture.
- 236 **Considering your experience abroad, which would you say is the difference?**
- It also depends on what you do abroad.
- 238 **In every country you had this experience?**
- I think it depends on what you do there. If you work there you tend to go a little deeper, whereas if you study
then you tend to stay together with the other students and these students may be international, so...I think one of
240 our interns a couple of years ago put it very well when she wrote her report about her permanence here: she said
that the Expat culture, for example the Finnish culture we have here at the Embassy, is not the same at all as the
242 national culture, it's something in between, so I would describe it's a kind of a sub-culture: you create your own
culture, because you are in a foreign environment, but still with your national work.
- 244 **Do you manage to keep relationship with your friends in your country?**
- Ya, I do it, it's the easy part.
- 246 **And also with the people you met abroad?**
- Ya, with the friends, not with acquaintances.
- 248 **Which instrument do you use?**
- E-mail, phone calls, we also travel to each other, even though not so much.
- 250 **Do you also use Skype?**
- No. I used to have an Internet connection at home, but I closed it, because I already spend so much time in front
252 of the computer.
- 254 **Do you think that you will maintain the relationships that you have here?**
- Ya, I think that, I would really hope so with a couple of good friends. In my past experience I met really nice
256 people and I thought to keep in touch with everybody, but then the experience showed me that it's not the case.
Even though they would like to, people get on with their own life.
- 258 **So now you are conscious of the fact that you might leave them.**
- Ya, it's very sad. It's very hard for me. I have a couple of good friends back home, so it's also good to go there
and to see how life is going for them. So I don't want this thing to be dramatic, otherwise I would never leave
260 [laugh].
- 262 **How's the feeling that you have friends all around the world?**
- It's a very nice feeling. It's pretty positive. It requires you some efforts, of course, to try to keep contacts. I think
it's also a very personal question. It's a very nice feeling knowing that you have friends.
- 264 **How would you describe your identity?**
- I would describe myself as a European and as a Northern European, so as a Scandinavian, but I think I have also
266 a Scandinavian identity because of my living in Norway. And having lived abroad, identity becomes a bit
stronger. So a Scandinavian and European identity, but not very Finnish, at all actually. Sometimes I think that
268 for my work it would be better to be a little bit more Finnish. But I think it can be also an advantage.
- 270 **What do you feel you have in common with the other Europeans?**
- I think we have in common the fact of having studied abroad, I think we have a common culture, similar
272 interests, we have studied the same things, we have done the same internships experiences in different
institutions.
- 274 **So you are talking about the people who travelled like you?**
- Yes: common references, not necessarily a common language.
- 276 **I was referring to Europeans in general.**
- Ya, I'm also talking about Europeans, Europeans who had the same experience like me.
- Do you think you also have values in common with this people?**

- 278 I have a concrete example: when you speak with an American, I think [you realise] that Europeans have more
280 values, for example about the human rights issue, and when I was studying in Italy in this human rights program
282 we thought quite a lot about this issue and I think there are certain differences between the Europeans and the
Americans or any other non-European country. More philosophical values, or maybe the religion is more or less
the same, and the origins. In general Europeans are very polite people, have manners, compared for example to
Chinese.
- 284 **What's your understanding of the expression "to be a citizen of the world"?**
That you feel comfortable in different context and you are flexible, you can feel at home in different countries
and cultures and you can adapt yourself.
- 286 **Do you feel like that?**
288 I don't have a real experience outside Europe, I would like to see how I would adapt, but so far I don't know
that.
- 290 **Do you think that something like a citizen of the world exist?**
292 I think it's an interesting notion, but everybody always carries its own national identity. I think it's important to
know your roots, because otherwise even though you are a citizen of the world, you are not attached to anything,
and it could also be a quite difficult position to be.
- 294 **Which are your roots?**
I think my roots are Scandinavian.
- 296 **Can we remain in contact?**
Yes, with pleasure.

Interview n° 21: Estonia

2

4 **Where are you from?**

I'm from Estonia, from the capital, Tellin.

6 **How many inhabitants?**

400.000.

8 **Did you have other experiences abroad before this one?**

Yes, I was one year in the States 2001-2002 in Virginia to be au pair.

10 **Which kind of program?**

It was an au-pair program for 1 year, it's a European program.

12 **When did you arrive here?**

2005 in July, it's 2 years now.

14 **To do what?**

To work.

16 **Which are the reasons that pushed you to move out of your country?**

To get experience, to live abroad, to have a good work experience, to earn money, that's it.

18 **What do you mean by saying 'to get experience'?**

To spend a couple of years abroad so I think it was just a good opportunity to come here, to accept the job and get work experience as well as living experience abroad.

20 **Did they offer you a job?**

22 Yes.

Were you already working?

24 Yes, I was working in Estonia.

And the same company offered you a job?

26 No, I did a concours for the EU institutions, and now I work in the Council.

What's your profession?

28 I'm a secretary.

So you won the *concour*. What's your degree?

30 You mean educational degree? Bachelor in economic administration.

Why were you interested in living abroad?

32 To see other countries, to experience life abroad, to live a little bit time on my own, alone. I don't know. I've just decided to stay a couple of years on my own. Of course, this was a good opportunity to come here and work as well. Otherwise I'd have pondered another opportunity to go somewhere, not to Belgium, but somewhere else. But maybe I'd have found some kind of traineeship for university.

36 **If you were not here where would you like to go?**

I think I would have found an opportunity in Australia.

38 **Why?**

40 It seems an exciting country for me. Of course culture is different as well, but it's not so different maybe like in China, but I wanted to go somewhere far away. When I came back from the States, then I was already thinking to go to Australia. I don't know, maybe because of the good climate there. But I wouldn't have considered anything else right now.

What does it mean for you to live in Brussels?

44 In general? Hmm... Good question... Right now my work is here, I have made new friends here, ya, I think that... just now to stay here a couple of years is a good opportunity to have experience at the Council and to live here, but what does it mean? I cannot say in one sentence.

Ok, let's go to other questions. You mentioned that you want to stay here 2 years, you mean 2 years more?

46 Yes.

Why do you have such a time frame?

50 I think 2 years is just the time when you get used to everything, and I think another 2 years would be just the right time to work, so right now basically I'm considering to stay here 4 years altogether, but of course uncertain because my contract is endless so some days I think to stay here another 2 years and then I think maybe 4 years, so my future is not very very clear. But is basically about to get this experience, and I like right now here, and I think I'm quite young, so why not to take this opportunity to work in the institutions, and after a couple of years go back and just live in Estonia again, or maybe in another country, yea, that would be great.

56 **How do you like the city?**

- 58 Brussels? Yes, I do like it. It's not too crowded for me. I like to live in a big city. I think here they have enough
of everything to spend your time: the culture and other activities. I don't like that the city is so dirty, sometimes
60 it bothers me, but otherwise I like the city very much. Especially I like that it's small, but on the other hand it's
not so small, so you can go by foot almost everywhere, but it's not so small: a lot of people, that's why I like it.
- 62 **Which were your expectations when you came here?**
I didn't have any expectations.
- 64 **Have you a boyfriend here? Are you married?**
Not yet, my boyfriend is in Estonia.
- 66 **You said you might stay 2 years more or more. Doesn't this affect your love story?**
Until now it hasn't affected it, I cannot say what it happens in one year or in one month, but we are
considering... but maybe he has the opportunity to come here... but we haven't decided anything yet.
- 68 **How many times do you go back home?**
I'm going home every 2 months or 1 month and a half, and of course he comes here as well, so maybe every
70 month and a half we see each other.
- 72 **It's not that much...**
Yes, it's not that much.
- 74 **Because I guess you have only 2 or 3 days to spend home.**
Usually it's 4 days, or one week.
- 76 **Did you have other love affairs here?**
No.
- 78 **Do you think that this experience of yours abroad is something common to many young European people
or just to a minority?**
Many, at least in Estonia, but because of the law that coming here to work is not allowed...
- 80 **So you need a work permit.**
Yes, yes, but as far as other countries open their doors, people just go. It just happened in United Kingdom,
82 Ireland, France, Sweden and Finland as well, so a lot of people from Estonia go to Finland to work. And people
use it, at least in Estonia they use it, not everybody, but people use it.
- 84 **How many people are there in Estonia?**
1.4 million.
- 86 **Do you know many people in Brussels?**
Hmm... Yes.
- 88 **Would you define them friends or acquaintances?**
Friends.
- 90 **What's a friend for you?**
I can speak up at the phone, or in chat like one hour.
- 92 **What's an acquaintance for you?**
I need a translation: what is this?
- 94 **He's a person that you know, but not intimately.**
Yeah, ok, of course I know more acquaintances than friends, but I think I have like ten very very good friends
96 here. And the others, maybe 40 are acquaintances.
- 98 **How was it possible for you to create this broad social network?**
Many of them are my former colleagues, but we just keep in touch all the time, and we get along very well.
Some of them I knew through other people, and...and... at parties, sitting all together, chatting. In Brussels it's
100 very easy to make good friend, because there are so many foreign people who are in the same position and so
you just get in contact with people very easily.
- 102 **Do you think it's easier here or in your country to make friends?**
The point is that in Estonia I don't need to make friends any more; when I came here I looked for somebody to
104 click and to hang out, but in Estonia I don't need it anymore, because I have already my friends there, like 20
very very good friends, and I don't have the time for everybody. You know, in Estonia I have my friendships and
106 the people I meet. Of course it's always good to make new friends, but I don't feel I have to [in Estonia]. Of
course neither here I feel I have to. You come here, firstly you are alone, then automatically you start to speak
108 to people and they are in the same condition, so you just hang out and start to see each other, and soon they are very
good friends. But in Estonia I have my friends, and I have my girlfriend, so I'm not looking to make new friends.
- 110 **Tell me all the situations in which you meet people from other countries.**

112 Of course through the work because with 27 countries it's easy to meet other nationalities; then, for example, at
the beginning I met many friends at the language course, then from different parties, when you can see different
people, and by moving through different companies.

114 **Which countries are your friends from ?**

My very good friends are from Estonia. But I have a couple of very good friends from Lithuania as well. But
116 basically they are from Estonia.

Do you speak the same language with Lituans?

118 No. It's completely different.

Do you speak a common language, like Russian?

120 We speak in English.

But up to seventeen years ago you were all Russian.

122 Yes, but Lithuanian is a Latin language. I can understand Finnish.

So you speak English, French...

124 Yes, English, French that I studied 2 years ago, I can understand Finnish and Russian so and so, I'm forgetting it,
it is not fluent anymore.

Here in Brussels, have you some kind of tendency to stay with people from your country?

Ya, I must say that.

128 **How do you explain it?**

I've thought about it. I think it's like a language barrier at first, and the slang, I don't know... Maybe also
130 because at the beginning I worked in an Estonian Division and my colleagues were Estonian, and from that time
on we started to be very good friends. Maybe if I had started in some other division, with other nationalities, it
132 would be different.

Do you like your job?

134 Yes.

What do you think about European institutions?

136 I think it's a good job, for me a good opportunity to work in a big organization, I'm in a positive thinking.

Which difficulties do you find in the relationships with people from other countries?

138 It depends. You know, it depends on culture, maybe language barrier is the biggest. Hmm... it depends on
culture: Southern countries are different... but I even don't see that problem, typically it's the language barrier.

140 **Would you say that there are countries with a culture that you don't understand very well?**

Hmm... In Brussels I haven't seen it yet. The foreign countries for us are China and so on, but you really cannot
142 meet them everyday here, so basically Europe is still the same, so differences are not so huge.

Which are the positive aspects?

144 To see what kind of different views people have in different countries, and this way you open your view in the
cultures, you get outside my own country to see that there are others as well.

146 **Which differences do you find between the relationships you have here and those in your country?**

I cannot say. It depends.

148 **Do you maintain the relationships with your friends in Estonia?**

Sure. Of course.

150 **Did you meet many people in the US?**

Quite many but not so many.

152 **Are you still in touch with some of them?**

Yes, yes.

154 **Which instruments do you use to keep in touch?**

Internet: Skype, e-mail, chat. Mobile phone. No video.

156 **Do they come to visit you?**

Yes, not frequently. Except my boyfriend, of course.

158 **Do you live alone here?**

Yes.

160 **Do you think you'll maintain the relationships with the people you met here?**

Yes.

162 **And with your friends in the US?**

Yes. For example last year we met all together in Germany. We arranged all together, because two of them now
164 live in Germany...

Are they from Europe of the US?

166 From Europe. No, the ones from States, I haven't seen them since I came back.

- 168 **Concerning your identity, how would you describe yourself?**
Pretty calm person.
- 170 **I'm speaking about your national identity.**
Ah! [Laugh] Estonian are calm persons as well! [Laugh] Conservative... what else? Estonian live more in the inside than outside.
- 172 **What do you mean?**
That we keep everything inside; Italian or Spanish are like living outside, Estonian are not, you know what I mean? They remain in their own and do their own things.
- 174 **If I asked you where do you come from what would you reply?**
From Estonia.
- 176 **And if I ask you how do you feel: totally Estonian?**
Yes. [She just does not understand the question at all].
- 178 **Do you think you have something in common with the other Europeans?**
Yes. History. And with Germany, Finland and Northern country we are quite similar.
- 180 **What does it mean for you the expression "to be a citizen of the world"?**
You know, I never thought about it. I think I wouldn't like it.
- 182 **Why?**
Because we should still have nations, not a whole large big people.
- 184 **So, for you, this expression means that the world is like one nation?**
Yes.
- 186 **Do you think you have values in common with people who, like you, had or are having experiences abroad?**
Yea: the same way of thinking. You know, in Estonia there are still so many people who say "why do you go there, what do you do there, why don't you want to stay home?", and when I speak with people here, all want to spend their time abroad. Then I see that you have the same thought, like... I honestly think that it's compulsory for young people nowadays, because there are so many opportunities to go somewhere, and because Estonia is so small and you [can] see if you [someone] don't go anywhere; the solution is to go somewhere just to see a little bit the world around you and then go back with it and see things in a different way.
- 188 **Do you think you will be able to go back to Estonia after this experience?**
I don't know. When I go back I can live there one year and then I will see if I want to go again somewhere or not, so I cannot answer now. Of course not everybody is thinking like this, very few people are thinking like this.
- 190 **May I ask you what your parents do?**
On the other hand I can understand them, they are the people who don't want to stay away from their friends or their family, and of course I have to understand this as well.
- 192 **May I ask you what your parents do?**
My father is dead and my mother is a kindergarten teacher.
- 194 **Can we keep in touch for the next two years?**
Yes.
- 196
- 198
- 200
- 202

Interview n° 22: Lithuania

2

4 **Quanti anni hai e di dove sei?**

30 anni. Lituana.

6 **Di dove sei esattamente?**

Vivo in una città di 400.000 abitanti.

8 **Esperienze all'estero?**

10 A 21 anni sono partita dalla Lituania, sono andata a Roma per studiare 3 anni e mezzo, poi a ottobre 2001 sono
12 venuta qui a Bruxelles restando fino a marzo per 5 mesi per uno stage. Da marzo fino a ottobre sono tornata a
Roma per finire gli studi all'Università Gregoriana. Prima di andare a Roma avevo fatto un corso di laurea in
studi religiosi.

12 **Sei una suora laica?**

14 No.

Hai studiato teologia?

16 Non proprio. Ho studiato studi religiosi e missiologia, poi comunicazione sociale. L'anno scorso ho fatto studi
europei. 9 anni all'università.

18 **Cos'è la missiologia?**

20 È lo studio delle missioni, è come teologia, scienza delle diverse religioni (islam, buddismo, ecc.) perché coloro
che sono nelle missioni volevano saperne di più per poter insegnare fuori. Allora io ho studiato missiologia per
avere la possibilità di studiare le altre religioni perché non c'è un'altra facoltà sullo stesso tema.

22 **Quando hai cominciato i tuoi studi avevi già l'idea di andare all'estero?**

24 Forse dal terzo anno, noi abbiamo 4 anni per la laurea, volevo andare all'estero per studiare giornalismo perché
volevo diventare giornalista. A quel tempo c'era solo una facoltà per giornalisti dove era molto difficile entrare.
Inoltre il giornalismo non era molto libero: i professori erano sovietici. Io non volevo studiare in Lituania
giornalismo e pensavo a dove andare. Avevo 3 idee: Spagna, Italia o Stati Uniti.

26 **Come mai?**

28 Ho sentito dire di questi tre paesi. Poi volevo fare l'università cattolica perché ho studiato sempre presso istituti
cattolici. Ho scelto fra Pamplona e Roma-Gregoriana e un'altra negli Stati Uniti, non ricordo in quale stato degli
30 Stati Uniti. Mi piaceva perché i gesuiti sono abbastanza forti. Prima di venire alla Gregoriana ho scritto una
lettera, avevo 19-20 anni, per chiedere informazioni; dopo 6 mesi mi ha risposto il direttore del centro
32 comunicazioni, dicendo 1 che erano lieti di avermi come studente, 2 che dovevo cercare di avere una borsa di
studio, perché c'è un'organizzazione tedesca per le borse di studio per i paesi dell'est, 3 che mi sarebbe venuto a
34 prendere all'aeroporto. Mi è piaciuto questo modo di scrivere perché non era formale bensì diretto proprio a me.

36 **Come mai cercavi istituti cattolici?**

Perché ho studiato nell'università cattolica in Lituania.

Dopo Roma?

38 Sono tornata in Lituania perché ho ricevuto una borsa di studio del governo lituano che prevedeva un contratto di
lavoro per due anni. Poi nel 2004 mi sono sposata e sono venuta a Bruxelles dove mio marito, che è spagnolo,
40 lavora presso la Commissione.

Cosa significa per te vivere a Bruxelles?

42 Dopo Roma sono stata a Praga dove lavoravo alla radio Europa Libera, per un'estate, nel 2002, però Bruxelles è
una città dove è più facile vivere perché più internazionale, più che a Roma o a Praga, e poi non mi sento come
44 una di fuori. Ora per me sarebbe molto difficile vivere in Lituania perché la mentalità è molto diversa; Roma mi
piaceva ma era come una terra di passaggio. Mio marito ha dei cugini qui.

46 **Avevi delle aspettative?**

48 No. Io posso vivere in qualsiasi paese, non sono molto esigente. Prima di venire qui lavoravo in una radio
nazionale lituana e adesso lavoro come corrispondente per un'altra radio, sto facendo lo stesso lavoro da tanti
anni e vorrei cambiare, però non è facile a Bruxelles. Sto facendo ora tre lavori: corrispondente per una radio
50 privata, come quella del sole 24 Ore, poi sono insegnante di religione cattolica alla scuola europea per la sezione
lituana, e come attività libera sono responsabile di una pubblicazione di Storia dei Lituani in Belgio.

52 **Sei qui da 3 anni: consideri questa la tua casa o pensi di spostarti ancora?**

L'anno scorso abbiamo costruito una casa e quindi siamo stabili, però io ho un appartamento in Lituania e mio
54 marito una casa a Barcellona.

L'intenzione è di restare o vorresti andar via?

- 56 Si, posso stare. Non so. Essendo mio marito spagnolo e io lituana è più comodo vivere in un paese terzo. Se
vivessimo a Barcellona lui starebbe bene ma io mi sentirei straniera. Qui parliamo inglese anche a casa.
- 58 **Quali lingue conosci?**
Parlo lituano, inglese, italiano, un po' russo, un po' francese, pochissimo tedesco.
- 60 **Conosci molte persone a Bruxelles?**
Sì.
- 62 **Si tratta di conoscenze o amicizie?**
Di tutto, dato che sono giornalista.
- 64 **Ti sei fatta degli amici?**
Sì, però non belgi, pochissimi belgi.
- 66 **Come mai?**
Perché è più facile. A Bruxelles c'è più del 50% di immigranti e perché lavoro in un ambiente internazionale,
68 alle conferenze stampa vengono da tutti i paesi, anche la scuola europea è internazionale e mio marito pure.
Abbiamo i vicini belgi perché abitiamo in una zona belga, ma non sono amici.
- 70 **In quali altre occasioni oltre che sul lavoro puoi incontrare persone degli altri paesi?**
Nelle chiese, perché assisto alle messe in inglese e qui vengono da molti paesi: Irlanda, Spagna, Italia, Filippine,
72 Africa. Anche al bar, o in qualche party, però sono solo conoscenze.
- E' capitato che persone che incontri sul lavoro diventino amici?**
74 Per pochi. Non tanto. Più dalla parte di mio marito. Dalla mia non tanto.
- Consideri tuoi amici quelli di tuo marito e viceversa?**
76 Anche, io sono contenta di vederli, però mio marito è più amico.
- Cos'è un amico per te?**
78 Una persona di cui posso fidarmi, cui posso chiedere un aiuto e viceversa.
- A Bruxelles sei più portata a stare con i lituani o con gli stranieri?**
80 Un po' di tutto, perché lavoro anche in ambiente lituano, però gli amici di mio marito non sono lituani; e anche
nelle chiese. Per me è lo stesso.
- 82 **Senti il bisogno di mantenere il contatto con il tuo paese oppure potresti staccarti?**
Per il momento devo mantenere il contatto, perché devo conoscere la situazione politica ed economica per il
84 lavoro.
- E a livello personale?**
86 Avevo tanti amici in Lituania e voglio mantenere i contatti che sono lì, cerco di non perderli.
- Ci riesci?**
88 Un po' difficile, perché non torno spesso. Più o meno sì. Ogni tanto scrivo una lettera, non per posta elettronica,
proprio una lettera. I migliori amici sono quelli in Lituania. La mia migliore amica è quella con cui ho studiato a
90 Roma, perché appena arrivata ho avuto tempi molto difficili, perché avevo la borsa di studio molto piccola, non
conoscevo la lingua e già dopo 2 mesi volevo andarmene. Siamo state 3 anni nella stessa stanza e mi ha aiutato
92 molto. In Lituania abbiamo un detto: se passi attraverso il mare e il fuoco allora diventi veramente un amico. Poi
ho anche un'altra amica con cui ho frequentato le scuole in Lituania e vive a Bruxelles.
- 94 **Sei riuscita a mantenere le amicizie avute all'estero?**
Sì. Per esempio ho un'amica coreana che ho rincontrato quando sono andata in Corea per 3 settimane nel 2002.
96 Quando mi sono sposata in Lituania lei è venuta espressamente per me. Poi ho un'amica italiana che è andata
anche in Lituania e ha imparato un po' il lituano.
- 98 **Perché consideri veri amici quelli che avevi già in Lituania?**
Solo una prima di cominciare a viaggiare. Poi un'altra che ho incontrato quando ero a Roma.
- 100 **Quali strumenti usi per mantenere i contatti?**
Lettere lunghe a mano. Telefono e cellulare. Telefonate [audio] e e-mail, ma non Skype, perché il mio PC è
102 vecchio.
- Rispetto ad altri paesi, a Bruxelles è più facile creare rapporti?**
104 Sì, è più facile perché la comunità internazionale è più grande. Ci sono persone da diversi paesi, persone che
parlano diverse lingue, persone più aperte. Se vivessi in un piccolo paese del Belgio mi sentirei forse più
106 straniera che a Bruxelles. Qui è più internazionale.
- Quali sono gli aspetti negativi e positivi nell'instaurare un rapporto con uno straniero?**
108 Difficoltà è la lingua, per me parlare francese è difficile perciò ho amici che parlano italiano o spagnolo. Essendo
straniera è più facile comprendersi con gli stranieri, io non conosco molti belgi, ne conosco alcuni che hanno
110 contatti o con Lituania o con la famiglia di mio marito.
- È solo una questione casuale che hai qualcosa in comune con gli stranieri?**

- 112 Dipende dal lavoro, dalle mie attività, ho colleghi belgi.
- 114 **Riscontri differenze nei rapporti che hai qui e quelli in Lituania?**
In Lituania ho trovati tanti amici sul lavoro, nelle news rooms ho avuto tanti amici con cui ho mantenuto i contatti, anche sacerdoti. Però ho perso i contatti con gli amici delle prime scuole.
- 116 **Per quanto concerne la tua identità nazionale, come ti descrivi?**
Sono lituana, mai direi che sono europea. Quando ero negli Stati Uniti o in Corea allora dicevo ‘europea’ perché nessuno conosce la Lituania, ma in Europa dico sempre che sono lituana.
- 118 **Qualcosa in comune con gli altri europei?**
Sì. Sono abbastanza critica anche nei confronti del mio paese. Gli americani non sono così, per esempio. Ricordo che a Omaha in Nebraska c’era un americano che accompagnava noi giornalisti, tutti giovani, e lì la gente era tutta nazionalista, tu non potevi criticare. Per noi europei è normale criticare qualsiasi cosa.
- 120 **Quindi noi europei siamo più simili tra noi rispetto ad altri?**
Sì.
- 122 **Se dovessi identificare dimensioni più specifiche?**
Non lo so. Questa cosa del criticismo. Per esempio in Lituania siamo molto nazionalisti, vogliamo sempre chiamarci Lituani; non vogliamo perdere la lingua che è la più vecchia delle lingue europee.
- 124 **Ci sono differenze tra i popoli occidentali e quelli che sono stati sotto l’influenza sovietica?**
Noi siamo più diretti, forse non tanto per l’influenza sovietica ma [per il fatto di essere] del Nord. Per noi è normale chiedere quanto guadagni al mese, qui nell’Europa occidentale è una domanda troppo diretta. Non parliamo tanto, pensiamo di più. Per noi ex dell’Unione Sovietica poi è più facile adattarci, non siamo così esigenti, non abbiamo bisogno del lusso o di mantenere un certo livello.
- 126 **Cosa significa per te l’espressione “cittadino del mondo”?**
Qualcuno che viaggia tanto, come i diplomatici o i militari, qualcuno che non si sente a casa ma cambia sempre.
- 128 **E’ un concetto positivo o negativo?**
Se la persona si sente bene sono felice per lui. Per me sarebbe difficile. Voglio avere una casa, un posto dove posso ritornare, dove posso vivere.
- 130 **Senti di avere dei valori in comune con le persone che hanno avuto esperienze all’estero?**
Sono più aperti. Non hanno molti stereotipi. In tutti i paesi le persone hanno stereotipi, mentre chi ha vissuto all’estero perde questi stereotipi.
- 132 **Come definisci il tuo livello sociale di provenienza in Lituania?**
Classe media. Ho parlato tanto con mio marito di questo. Quasi tutti erano di classe media. Durante l’Unione Sovietica tutto quello che esisteva era accessibile per tutti e tutti potevano pagare: teatro, opera, balletto. Io andavo all’opera e a teatro, a vedere tutto. Per mio marito questa è una classe medio-alta però per noi è un po’ difficile definire. C’era un milieu dei capi del partito comunista a Vilnius.
- 134 **Possiamo rimanere in contatto per un paio d’anni?**
Sì, certo.

Interview n° 23: Poland

2

4 **Which town are you from?**

Warsaw.

6 **Did you have any other experiences abroad before this one?**

8 4 months in Greece, in the Athens embassy of Poland, in 2003 4 months in Luxembourg where I worked for the
European Court, and also I worked 1 month in the Polish Embassy in Berlin in a traineeship, in 2004, then 2
years ago, from September to December 2004, I went to Brussels and had a stage in the Council.

10 **Are all work experience, you didn't study abroad?**

12 I'm studying now, at the European Diplomatic Academy, I'm finishing this month, as a post graduate, it's 1 year
study after the master.

14 **Did you ever go abroad with European programs like Erasmus?**

No.

16 **Which are the reasons why you moved outside your country?**

18 To see different cultures, like in Athens: Greek are not popular [read: frequent] in Poland; to meet people and see
how their country looks like, how their life looks like, what's the mentality there. And to see how the Polish
foreign service of the Embassy in a particular country looks like.

20 **Why did you come to Brussels?**

22 Because I had been accepted to have the stage in the Council, I couldn't stay in Athens, because my stage was
finished and to work there I had to go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and then they can send me as a diplomat
[read: you need to be a diplomat], so I couldn't, I had to come back from Athens and I came to Brussels because
I had been accepted to have a stage in the Council.

24 **And now?**

Now I live here, I study here and work here.

26 **But why did you decide to remain here?**

28 Because I decided to study... It was random, because I have been accepted to this work, I had friends here, so
now I'm here.

30 **You work here and you'll remain here?**

It's not that I had the idea to stay here. I didn't know it when I accepted here but it's OK, I can be here.

32 **How long would you think that you will remain in Brussels?**

34 I don't know. Because I'm thinking to go back to Poland and then I can work for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
to be diplomat, so I have to [I should] go there in Autumn to get the diploma at the Academy in Ministry of
Foreign Affairs and then I can come back maybe, but I have to see what I want.

36 **It depends only on professional issues?**

It depends on my work.

38 **Eventually you might decide to remain here for long.**

It depends on what I will do.

40 **So it really depends on your work.**

Yes.

42 **What does it mean to you living in Brussels?**

44 To get international experience. Because you go to Athens and you have only Greeks, while here there is a very
international environment, you go to some parties and you meet international people, you go somewhere in the
institutions, it's very international.

46 **And why is it so important to you having international experience?**

Because I can get new experiences, like I can meet people from different countries, see their mentality, learn
some languages.

48 **The point is: why all that is important for you?**

To have a broad horizon, a wide horizon I would say.

50 **Which were your expectations when you moved here?**

52 I wanted to work in the institutions, I was planning a stage in the institutions and I was accepted at the Council,
that's why I came here, otherwise I wouldn't come. Because I was learning about the institutions at school and
then at the university and I wanted to see how it was like, how it works, and I applied for it.

54 **Any special expectations about the town or other issues?**

56 Expectation? About the work. What do you mean with expectation? Yes, I wanted to see Brussels because in
Poland they say Brussels is so important. But what expectation do you mean?

- 58 **So you didn't have a special idea of the town or what your experience would have been.**
No. I didn't have. I had them in Athens, because I was very much in love with the city. With Brussels I as not as enthusiastic as for Athens, which I enjoyed very much. In Brussels I came because I was accepted, it was not a "wow!".
- 60 **So how long have you been here?**
One year and half because between my stage and my work I was 7 months in Poland.
- 62 **Are you still trying to enter in some European institution? To make concours?**
Yes, there will be one for foreign service, for the DG External Relation. If I'll be accepted they will send me abroad, to some Commission's delegation outside Europe.
- 64 **So you want to travel the world.**
Yes. Brussels is not my final destination. Oh I have to live here...
- 66 **So you are planning to live outside.**
It depends if I'm accepted I might get a very good job, because I am a Diplomatic, also for the Commission.
- 68 **Do you think your experience is common or not among the young Europeans?**
It depends on... well, in Poland no, it's not so popular. Maybe Erasmus yes, but to work, it's not so popular. In Poland, when somebody go to the university, then they try to get the job in Warsaw. I don't know about other countries. My friends work in Warsaw. I worked here with my sister who came here to work with her boyfriend, and after this experience in Brussels she got a very good job in Poland, she is younger than me and she's a manager; she's younger than I am, but because of her experience in Brussels, it looks very good and they take you into consideration. In Warsaw, when you apply for a job, international experience is very important.
- 70 **Do you know many people in Brussels?**
Yes. I have just a few friends and more acquaintances.
- 72 **What's the difference?**
Close friends are those you meet often, not everyday but often, acquaintances when you go somewhere and you meet people and say "hi, how are you?".
- 74 **Where do you meet them?**
Parties, some clubs, private parties or going for dinner you meet somebody.
- 76 **In what other ambients can you meet foreigners in general?**
To parties or receptions, which are other kind of parties. When I go with my friends to pubs. You have the opportunity to know friends of friends.
- 78 **And in the everyday life?**
Well at work I know everybody! [Laugh]. During meetings I can meet people but they are not friends: it's very official.
- 80 **Here in Brussels do you normally stay with people from your country or from others countries?**
I have friends from Poland and from other countries.
- 82 **Do you have the tendency to stay with people of certain countries?**
No. It's not that I like Belgians, or Germans, it's random, it's not that I choose because I like that country. No.
- 84 **Do you find it easy to create new relationships in Brussels?**
No.
- 86 **Why not?**
Hm. Do you find it easy? [Laugh] It's easy to meet people. But to become friends it's not easy. It's easy to meet people, but not who become long term friendships.
- 88 **Is it easier or less easy than in your country?**
I think it's the same. You go out, you meet people, you get friends, here, in Poland, it's the same.
- 90 **What's a friend for you?**
[Laugh] Difficult! A person I know since a long time. I can trust this person, I know his problems, and we can talk about everything, and I know that if I have problems this person can help me.
- 92 **Why do you think it's not easy to have a long-term friend here?**
I have them but I met them years ago, because you can go out and meet and then meet again, and still just say "how are you?" and that's all, because you don't talk about your personal things with everybody.
- 94 **Are you a reserved person? Don't you like to talk of yourself?**
It depends. Certainly I don't say my things to persons I don't know.
- 96 **Generally speaking people you meet here are from which nationality?**
People I know here are Polish, one Lithuanian friend, she was working with me, and some Greeks. I had Italians, but not now.
- 98 **It is just to understand if you have preferences for Northern countries or...**

No, I don't have preferences.

114 **Because I put the same question to a Swedish guy, and he answered he had no preferences, but then it**
115 **came out that he knows Swedish, Finnish, Russian and Polish people.**

116 But maybe it's random because he never met people... For example, I have never met Russians, so it depends on
opportunities. It's not that I don't like Russians.

118 **I know Italians, Spanish, Greeks and it can't be a coincidence, I still have to understand why.**

119 Because you are from the South. I think it depends on your environment or where you work. If you work at the
120 institutions you can meet people from other countries, because all the nationalities are there. For example I don't
121 meet people from all the countries. When my sister had the stage at the Commission she knew people from
122 Brasil, Argentina, otherwise she would never meet them. It depends on the environment if you have the
possibility to meet people from other countries or not. I would like to meet Brasilians or Russians but it doesn't
124 happen. Also if you meet them you can decide if you like them, otherwise how can you say it? If you don't meet
them you can't say if you like them or not.

126 **Which are the difficulties and the positive aspects in a relationship with people from other countries?**

127 To know their culture, which is positive, their mentality, how they think, their customs, their languages. To see
128 the differences between yours and their country. I don't see any negative aspects. Maybe misunderstandings, for
example in Poland men should always let women go first through a door, while in the United States for example
130 it's not like this, so it's not polite.

132 **Do you see any difference between the kind of relations here and those you had in your country?**

133 In Poland I know only Polish people and here I know people of any nationality. In Poland it's difficult to know
people from other countries, if I walk in the city I meet only Polish people.

134 **Do you maintain contacts in Poland?**

135 With some yes, with some not. Some have different lives, for example some friends have a husband, so they are
136 concentrated on their families and so we don't have common issues: if I meet some friends from the past they
talk about their children, their families, it's different from me...

138 **What is your situation at the moment?**

139 I don't have a husband nor children. I'm living alone, I have a boyfriend. [To go on] with some friends I was
140 writing e-mails, but the distance between each e-mail become longer and longer and eventually we stopped it,
while with others I'm in touch all the time.

142 **Your boyfriend is here or in Poland?**

143 Here. I think it's impossible to have a boyfriend abroad, it would be ok for some months, but...

144 **Did you meet him here?**

145 Yes.

146 **Is he Polish as well?**

147 We have to talk about him? I don't want to.

148 **Ok. Did you maintain relationships that you created in other countries?**

149 Yes. Oh, I forgot, I have a very good friend from UK, he works in Luxembourg, he has a Thailand wife I like
150 very much, I have been knowing them for three years and they come visiting me often and I have a good relation
with them.

152 **So generally you are able to maintain some relationships from the past.**

153 Hm-hm, yes!

154 **Which instruments do you use to maintain these contacts?**

155 Telephone, sms, Internet, e-mail; I have no time to chat. Sometimes I use Skype, but only audio, no video
156 [laugh]: I have a camera but I don't use it [laugh], I don't like it, at the beginning it was funny, but now no. And
also not everybody has it. I also discovered that without a camera the quality of the audio is better.

158 **Do you see your friends? Often or occasionally?**

159 It depends. Usually they come to visit me. A friend from Poland came to visit me, but it's not so often.

160 **So now you are here and gain your money here. You have your friends in Poland. Do you think your**
161 **social level is changed in Poland consequently to your work here? Are you gaining much more than them?**

162 Difficult to say, because here I have to maintain myself, and in Poland I lived with my parents who pay for
everything. So it's different.

164 **Your friends, for example, are paying more for the ticket to come here than you to go there?**

165 No, it depends on their jobs, if somebody has a good job then it's ok, like here. For example the food in Poland is
166 cheaper. For example, the private sector is better paid than the public sector in Poland. For example, my sister
has now very good conditions, and she has better conditions there than what she had here.

168 **I know you would like to change job: would you like to remain here or go back home?**

- No difference. If I had a good offer...
- 170 **It may be linked to other personal things.**
No, It would depend on the offer, I may think to go to France or to UK or maybe I prefer a bit warmer country
- 172 [laugh]: Spain, Greece.
Will you maintain friends you met here?
- 174 If I leave? Yes.
How would you describe yourself regarding your identity?
- 176 [Laugh] What identity?
Your national identity.
- 178 It's difficult, I don't know what Polish are. Polish are friendly...
So you would describe yourself as Polish, no doubt.
- 180 But I am Polish, I don't feel Belgian, I am Polish.
The point of this question is that many people answer in a very different way from yours.
- 182 What do they say?
They immediately understand whether they feel more European or have a local identity...
- 184 I feel Polish. I don't feel at all European.
But do you think that you have something in common with the other Europeans?
- 186 It depends. For example I like the warm, so I like the Southern countries. I like to travel, but it's very personal,
because in any country you can find someone who like this or they don't like this, I think you have to compare
188 yourself personally, with a particular person, not with a country: you can't generalise.
What's your understanding of the expression 'To be a citizen of the world'?
- 190 [Laugh]. I think it's a weird expression.
Have you ever heard it before?
- 192 Yes, but I think it's weird.
What does it mean for you?
- 194 Maybe a person who knows a lot of countries, who travels a lot, who knows every culture, every continent and
then can give opinion and then can assess. But I don't know if something like this exist. I'm not. What do you
196 think? Because it's difficult to meet people who know every continents, who can assess... Many people are
forced to travel for work, and if so they have to work there, they cannot spend their time discovering the place;
198 of course they also travel for tourism, but not for long, and if they are tourist they don't know local life: they are
just there for holiday.
Do you feel you have some values in common with those having experiences abroad like you?
- 200 Hmm... Yes! [Laugh] The foreign language: it's a value.
But this is not a value.
- 202 What do you mean by value?
Something that you share, a vision of the world...
- 204 But tell me, what vision of the world? [Laugh].
I cannot answer for you.
- 206 My friends have good experiences. Some of them have preferences for a precise country. One of them was very
208 satisfied from her 6 months experience in US, was very impressed and would have stayed there, instead now she
is in Ireland but she's not satisfied. So she would like to be in America but she has a good job in Ireland though
210 she is not satisfied with this country. But I have never been there, so I cannot share it.
Which are your degrees?
- 212 Degree in administration and a master in diplomacy and tomorrow I'll get a diploma from the Academy. It was a
5 year course but I finished it in 4.
Profession of your parents?
- 214 It depends...
Hou would you describe your social level in Poland?
- 216 What do you mean?
Do you consider yourself a rich person, a middle class..
- 218 I don't know.
Which languages do you know?
- 220 Polish very well [laugh], English, and German.
Can we remain in contact for a couple of years?
- 222 [laugh] yes.

Interview n° 24: Poland

2

4 **Where do you come from?**

Come from Poland, from Lomza. It's a medium town, it has 40.000 inhabitants.

6 **Did you have other experiences abroad?**

8 Yes, very short compared to this one. I was in the US in a work and travel program designed for students, to
10 work in attraction parks and restaurants, with the opportunity to travel around in the US. I worked in an
12 amusement park on the Connecticut-Massachusetts border, for 2 months, in 2001. I came just before September
14 11, the towers event, so it was quite an experience. So, just working and travelling; I've been 2 months in UK
16 working as a research assistant at the university of Edimbourg in 2003.

12 **Did you have these experiences with European programs?**

14 The first wasn't, the second one was an international program by an international organisation called AIESEC,
16 for students in economics; it's not European, it's worldwide; it's funded by students coming from Europe in
18 1947 so before the foundation of EU. These students coming from Belgium, France etc. gathered together and
20 wanted to avoid II world war in the future so they thought that there wasn't a sufficient understanding of cultures
22 and that one remedy could be gathering young people, people who have some influence on the world because
24 they are studying, so it was students from the very beginning, and people from different countries to find out
26 more about different cultures; and then they established 2 years later the exchange program between students and
28 countries, so students are basically exchanging between the countries their culture and experience as well. This is
30 why I went to UK. Now each country has its flexibility about establishing of programs. Regarding Belgium, I
32 used this program as well, looking for new challenges. I was working in Poland for a year and a half and almost
34 finishing my studies, I was also in a local executive board and had the privilege to use the program. I applied for
36 an intership and trainingship that looked nice and promising; it was for 1 year. They chose me, no surprise and I
38 just came here, to Brussels, in April 2005. Also I was trying to improve my career, because in Poland I worked
40 in a very small company as product coordinator, it was very interesting but I was lacking the specific knowledge
42 on something, because in a small company you have to do everything, so I was responsible for accounting,
44 marketing, coordinating, everything at same time, which is a little bit a typical coordination product-management
46 job, but still it was too much into the details. Well, on one hand I need to do everything but on the other hand I
48 didn't know all the details, so I was a little bit tired by that. I also started a new project that wasn't so interesting
50 and it was stuck by my boss at approval level, so it wasn't sure they wanted to do it. Basically I was tired. So I
52 wanted to do something more about project management, but from a more scientific level, because I was reading
54 a lot about project management and there is a European publishing, something called ticket, well it's an
organization for young people developing the skills like management, and they have a magazine called Coyote
and publishing series Coyote is for young people with also serious things but not like poverty and so on. It was
interesting, basically, and I have a gift for organizing, so I'm naturally quite a good manager project, at least for
the hard skills. I'm not very good for the soft skills, like communication, although I'm trying, but I'm naturally
an organizer, I would say. So I said "why I don't help other people to organize", so I started to work in a project
office in Belgium, that was the position I was looking for. I did one training year, then due to some internal
approvals I got another contract year.

40 **So you have been here for 2 years?**

42 Yes.

42 **Which are the reasons that pushed you to move from your country?**

44 One is the economic reason, because of the salary. It's not so bad in Belgium, but transferred in Polish currency
46 it's better. Secondly I'm kind of a nomad person, I don't mind travelling, I'm not extra interested in other
48 countries but if I stay in the same place too long, I feel something is missing, so once a time I need a challenge,
50 like going somewhere and living in different environments. Getting to know the other country is also very
52 interesting. Especially when I arrived in Belgium I was visiting all their cultural events and talking to people a
54 lot. Now it's more stable, now I feel a bit like moving on, looking for something else, especially now my job is
stable, but I have still to learn until September, because I'm doing a budget in a project for the European
Coordination Center, so I have the opportunity to talk with people from different countries. I was supporting the
budget process last year, but this year I'm responsible for this, so it's kind of more to learn, but later on it's going
back to the routine, project office, program office, supporting the same people, who do not return the same
reports, so it won't be interesting anymore.

54 **So you might...**

56 Move on, yes. Another reason why I'm thinking of moving on, apart from finishing that topic to learn, it's also
58 my family: they are always asking "why don't you stay in Poland, why don't you come back, it's such a nice
60 country". Many people moved to the West, many specialists left Poland, so now it's a normal market situation:
prices went up and also salaries went up, especially for specialists with experience from abroad and I might find
a better job than one or two years ago.

Do you think that the experience you make here would be appreciated in Poland?

62 For sure, because it's a unique experience in terms of language skills and being in Belgium itself, and on the
other hand I can easily transport the project office experience into any company.

So you think of moving back home, not to another country?

64 Nothing decided. I'm tented also by Singapore. Because they have another head quarter of DHL [where she
66 works], because the European regional headquarter so is here, but the Asian headquarter is in Singapore, but I
think I'm not brave enough to move to China or somewhere else, but Singapore maybe.

Don't you think that other factors like personal factors could influence your decision?

68 Well, for sure. Well, no boyfriend, so this is one factor that is out of the picture, but for sure my parents might
70 become ill and I could go back to Poland just to support them. Also my sister is dating an Italian guy who was
staying in Warsaw but he found, unfortunately or fortunately, a great job in Rome, so he moved back and now
72 they are commuting but if she decides to go to Rome, then it will be a more factor convincing me like "ok, come
back, at least one of us in Poland". I think it will be very difficult for my parents to have both of us far away.

Would you stay in your parent's house?

74 No. I used to stay in Warsaw, which is 150 Km from my parents, so 1 hour and half drive, not too close.

Did you choose to come to Brussels or was it a chance?

76 I wasn't specifically looking for Brussels, I was looking for experience in an international company that could
78 give me the opportunity to go back to Poland after finishing the traineeship, and my preferred location was
Europe, but just because it's close to home, it was a good experience and I didn't need a work permit like, for
80 example, for the US.

What does it mean for you to live in Brussels?

82 Very interesting question! A help question? [Laugh] If I think of myself in the future I see I'll move out from
Brussels sooner or later, I don't know if it is going to be in one or five years, probably not that long, one or three
84 years overall, so in between one and two years. This is how I feel now, I'm not going to commit, even though
maybe we meet in three years from now here [laugh]. Well, I think Brussels is an international city, because of
86 all the Expats and European citizens representing their country coming here; living in Brussels itself, it is a
nightmare from the shops point of view, I will always remember the shopping on Saturday, it's crowded and
88 with a not very polite service, although it changed from last year, I can see a difference, I must say. Living in
Brussels is also lots of international people, although most of them connected with AIESEC: I still have contact
90 with people, I have friends who came here for a traineeship and many of them have decided that it's a nice place
to live and stayed here, although they are always ready to leave, it's not forever. For me it's a very lively
92 environment, like in terms of people and of the city as well: the city is growing in my eyes. For example there's
a building next to the parliament, I saw how it was built. So it's quite an amazing experience.

Do you feel more an Expat or an immigrant?

94 More an Expat, because I think an immigrant is somebody who doesn't really have the choice to come back and
96 I know I have the choice. To me an immigrant is someone going from Poland to US, for example, because of
political reasons, or from Poland to Belgium, They are obliged to leave or looking for better life, for more
98 money, but in the sense that they didn't have much choice in their country.

Did you have any expectations when you moved here?

100 Not much. I moved very quickly, because I had the interview and in a month I had to run for the work permit to
come here and had enough to find out, like that they not only speak French but also Dutch, and all different
102 kind of things. Basically to buy the guide book and look through this. I didn't have much expectations
livingwise. I started to live likewise a student which is not so much different from Polish student life: I shared an
104 apartment that was not very high standard but had a lot of fun, yes, this is something I expected. There were
some surprises for sure, like things that are not written in a guide book. Well expectations is that you realize you
106 had expectations when you are surprised. I expected Belgians to be more open, for sure. AIESEC asked me if I
preferred to stay with a Belgian family and I said I would love a lot to find out more about the culture and how is
108 to live in Belgium, because I had a great experience in the UK where I learnt a lot about the culture, but the
response from AIESEC was that it was not possible because the Belgians do not share that much about
110 themselves, so I was surprised. I wasn't surprised in terms of living conditions because it's not so different from

112 Poland or UK, it's more similar to Poland because at least they have the same cold/hot water system, not like in the UK!

114 **Did you confirm the impression AIESEC gave you about the people?**

114 It depends a lot. Of course people are different. They have different problems and different approaches. I know few Belgians from AIESEC, Belgian students, but of course they have a different approach, a different cultural approach, a European approach. Also the other Belgians I meet are those from my work, but they also live in kind of international environment, they all know English.

118 **Are they cold or not?**

120 It varies from person to person. I was quite surprised they are quite antagonist against Flemish and you can really see this, even in one company, for example there is a guy who never speaks French, even though he understands it, because he thinks the Vallonians are not worth mentioning in Belgium. That was quite surprising. In general they don't party a lot, at least it's my impression, I have the impression that they do not need home after work hours and that they do not care about foreigners, I would say it like this. I mean: if you become a friend, it's like that you get presents for birthday, they are really nice people, but on the street if you are robbed or something I don't think any Belgian would react. For example, I got lost a couple of times in Brussels, and not a single Belgian would stop and help me. Maybe they would but never happened to me.

126 **Do you think that your professional experience is common to many young Europeans or it affects a minority of them?**

128 It's in a way a minority, although the opportunity is there. When I look at ex students with my profile, first of all... I have a master degree, so it's kind of... not discrimination, but selection, already; speaking languages is another way of selecting people from the mass of students. I was also lucky to be in AIESEC, though I know there are other programs that allow, and not also programs but also agencies that provide kind of experience to young people. In Poland you get quite a good level of education; to have people working in a bank with the same knowledge of UK students and pay the person maybe half of a UK student is more profitable for the institutions [read: abroad institution may pay Polish graduate less than native graduate, with a obvious benefit].

136 **You mean that for Polish it's easy to work abroad?**

136 Yes, in some countries, those who opened from the very beginning to the new European countries.

138 **What about the other countries in Europe? Do many young people go abroad?**

140 Yes, especially from the Eastern European countries, because they want to go for economic reasons as well, like earning more money, but then it's also... I don't know, maybe because of my sister's boyfriend and of the fact that I meet many Italians, I have the impression that Italians are more curious about the Europe, so there are a lot of them around. I don't see that many from France or from the Nordic countries. But I think it's not a lack of opportunities, they are just not so interested.

144 **Do you know many people here in Brussels?**

144 Yes.

146 **Are they more friends or acquaintances?**

146 More acquaintances, definitely.

148 **What is a friend for you?**

150 Ah-ha. I don't have a definition, really. A friend is somebody I can trust, somebody who can understand me and who always want the best for me. And the other way around as well.

152 **Do you have friends here?**

152 Not really. More acquaintances. Maybe one friend in Brussels. I had two, but she left to UK. That's the sad [side] in Brussels: that people tend to come and go. At a quite high speed. They stay 2 years in Brussels and then go somewhere else.

154 **Which are the ambients where you can meet people from other countries in Brussels?**

156 First of all the AIESEC: they organize a lot of events, they inform about the events through Internet list, so everybody who wants to join just come and join it; and I know many people from the past in AIESEC, from when I came, so we go and meet the newcomers. At the second place is my work at the European Coordination Centre: lots of Europeans, and as we also share with emerging market coordination center, there are people from different countries like Columbia, Costarica, Turkey. If I didn't have enough for instance at the beginning I used to take also salsa lessons where you could meet people from different countries; of course French lessons at Alliance Française it's another opportunity, but these people I may go for one beer, but I don't really socialize, we don't exchange the phone numbers, say, we don't go out together. With people from AIESEC and from work we do, that's the difference.

164 **Why this division?**

166 As I said before, I have many acquaintances, I really know a lot of students and people in general, so I think at
168 some point I just became tired to meet new people and getting more involved. I started to have the feeling that if
I'm a bit interested in everybody is like that I'm not interested in anybody.

Why did you choose the people from the AIESEC?

170 Many reasons. With those of AIESEC it was easier because I had already made the effort to know them. It's
easier to keep all the acquaintances going.

Normally here in Brussels do you tend to stay with Polish or with people from other countries?

172 I stay more with people from other countries. Why? I don't know. Sometimes I feel like I miss Polish, so for
174 example one month ago I organized a Polish dinner, a barbecue with a Polish meat and people who understand
Polish or at least pretend to understand Polish, like boyfriends and girlfriends, or my housemate (because I share
176 an apartment with an Indonesian and a Hungarian) and they all know the basic words. But I go out with different
groups.

Why?

178 Why? I never thought about it. I know them, I know what kind of music they like, what kind of movies, at
180 different events we are going together to, it is usually very international, so why not? I also think I don't need to
choose. Almost all my friends speak good English, like Polish friends, so I can go out with them and I'm not
182 restricted inviting other people; when I say international I mean exactly that: people from different countries,
including Poland, it's not that there are no Polish.

Living in a cosmopolitan ambient has an influence on you?

184 Maybe it will have influence in the future, it had it in the beginning, but not being cosmopolitan, but being
186 bilingual. It was very confusing for me. If I'd have only Dutch or only French [read: if there had been only one
language] it would have been easier to get used to the country. I remember that on trains or on the metro or in the
188 streets for the announcements it was hard. When I first came to Brussels I didn't really see how cosmopolitan it
is. I think Brussels changes a lot for the better. There are red districts, they are ugly, with old buildings, old
190 houses, with no care of the streets, especially near Gare du Nord, St. George, Skaerbek, so I didn't have such a
great cosmopolitan impression. From work for sure, if I was in Poland I think I would miss the international
192 environment, but it's not about Brussels, it's more about the work environment.

Is it easy to establish new relationships here?

194 I think it's more and more difficult. I have many opportunities but it's not like that I'm using a lot of them. At
the beginning I was ready to know people much better, but after one year I was meeting so many people that I
196 couldn't keep up, getting to know them better. So I have a group that I know, but the knowledge is very
superficial.

So now you have a stable group of friends, and with all the other people just a superficial knowledge?

198 Yes. But if it comes to new relationships, it's more difficult. Why should I make the effort as I'll move or the
200 person will move? In general, both for working and not working purposes, I'm quite OK, so if you ask from a
very general point of view if I can meet people and talk to them about their work, or where they live and all the
202 bla bla, I'm ok. Going deeper in a relationship, I think it's kind of closed. I'm not distinguishing the people... If I
need to choose between spending time with new people that I have the opportunity to meet at an AIESEC event,
204 let's say a completely new group of people who just came to Belgium one month ago, or meeting people that I
already know, I'd rather choose the second possibility, spending more time with the people I already know. So in
206 this sense it's closed.

"You" are closed. Why do you say "it's" closed?

208 [Laugh]. Looking at my group of old friends, it is not accepting new persons, because we have known each other
for 2 years or at least one year, we've been together to Turkey, we went to different events together, so it's not
210 like going on a bus and say hallo and going back in the evening, it's something more in terms of common
experience, so in the sense that the group is more closed and stable. But let's say that there is a common trip, for
212 example to Germany, if somebody new wants to join us, why not? We have nothing against the people, it's just
difficult, because the newcomers tend to stick together, because they have the same experiences, like looking for
214 a flat. Of course that they can ask people here for advice, but it's not the same kind of relationship: [there is a
difference] like living the thing and observing the thing. I can help a newcomer to find a flat but it's not the
216 same experience like for another newcomer who also looks for the flat, I would not share it at the same level. So
the newcomers tend to stick more to the newcomers, and the people who have been staying for long tend to stick
218 together as well. That's my impression. But then, if there is for example a couple, and the boyfriend is from the
old group and the girlfriend is new, there is no problem, she would be accepted. But why should I go to the
220 newcomers? The old group would understand me better.

Establishing relationships in Brussels is more or less difficult than in your country?

222 Hmm... [Pause] I think it's more or less at the same level. At the beginning it was a little bit more difficult for
224 the language. For example, when I wanted to make my circle of friends a little bit bigger in Poland I tried the
226 salsa lessons, here it didn't really work out, ok, I was going for 1 or 2 months, but everybody was French
228 speaking, so I was making an effort to speak English and they were as well, but especially the French speakers
230 are not that great in speaking English. In Poland, well, at least in the AIESEC in Poland, when we have a
232 stranger in a group of Polish people, everyone would speak English, as it's just polite, I don't know if it is just
234 our culture, but more people would behave like that, and some foreigners find it surprising, but we find it polite.
In my salsa class environment it wasn't so obvious, my French was not good and had problems, and everybody
was speaking in French and making an effort to say one or two sentences in English, so that was the barrier.
Otherwise I think it's a similar way. People socialize after work, is more or less the same style. I don't have
family relationships here, but it's the only type of relationship I think I would miss here. In Belgium it's easier to
make relationships in the international environment. After work I don't see many Belgians going out, probably
Belgians go out to different places, other than those of international Expats.

What about the UK or the US?

236 I missed Scotland. If I needed to make a rank I'd place US as the easiest country to make relationships, ok, US,
238 UK, Poland and Belgium. But it would be difficult to say why and for which criteria: the openness of people, but
how can you measure that?

So you see a sort of division between Belgian and expats?

240 I think so. Not only between Belgians, but within Belgians. When you see for example the Turkish, they are all
242 located in the same place near St. George and Botanique, they stick together, and Flemish stick together, so I
244 wouldn't say Belgians are particularly separated: most of the nations are so. So it is strange, because more or less
people who don't have connections with Belgians stick together, and people who have connections with
Belgians are separated.

What nationality are your friends?

246 My flat mates Indonesian and Hungarian. I changed the flat once and when I first came I was staying with a
Russian girl, one from Poland and one from Singapore.

Did you choose them or you went with them by chance?

248 I firstly met the Polish one and she already stayed with the other girls. Eventually the Singapore girl left and we
250 consulted about whom we wanted to have and we chose an Icelandic girl to stay with us, then the Polish girl was
living, so the Indonesian came in, then the Icelandic left and...

But how did you choose them, by nationality?

252 No. By personality.

Was it a chance that no one of them was Belgian?

254 Ya, it was a chance that no one was Belgian, because they were not coming by.

Where are the other people from?

256 They are German, Irish, some from Poland, Colombia, Bolivia, quite exotic places. I know some Belgian people
258 I go out with, which means going out for dinner, not having a crazy party next to La Bourse.

Do you consider them inside the small group of friends you go out with?

260 Ya.

So it's not so small, this group.

262 It's not so small, that's why at a certain point I needed to say stop.

Which are the difficulties and the positive aspects that you find in a relationship with someone from another country?

264 In the living environment, like flat sharing, difficulties are related to daily things, like for example how to make
266 laundry or which things to store in the fridge and which to leave outside, so they are things that you don't really
268 think about when you are at home, and then you find out that some persons need to store everything in the fridge
and for me it's ridiculous.

Do you think that this concerns the national cultures or more just different personal habits?

270 Regarding the fridge example I think it depends from the nationality. For example I know a couple: the guy is
272 from India and the girl from Sweden, and obviously they have totally different climates and so totally different
274 habits coming from the places where they lived, so the guy would always store everything in the fridge and the
girl wants just to keep the things on the shelf.

Can these silly things cause contrasts?

276 Sometimes. It depends on each personality. So this are a kind of difficulty.

Can you think of other difficulties?

278 Ya. Actually I must say I'm quite trained now, but it was very difficult for me at the beginning to live with a
280 person from Singapore, because it's difficult for her to say something straight, like 'I don't like it', so I was
282 staying with a person and I was caring [wondering?] what she thinks, but I'm more an open person, if I don't like
284 somebody I just say it, but that girl would never do that; of course you can see if someone is not happy with a
286 solution, so I was asking why her: "why don't you say it upfront?". I'm having the same problem with my flat
288 mate from Indonesia. I need to be very careful with the things she's not telling me. It's a very cultural thing: they
290 are trained not to say 'no' directly, it would be very impolite in their culture.

284 **The positive aspects?**

286 I think the positive aspect is the creative part, like having the opportunity to know other people, if you use the
288 opportunity and open your eyes. Let's take the Asian culture example. I've learnt from other people that I don't
290 need to tell always what I think in a straight way, and this has changed me maybe in a positive way. In general I
292 think learning from each other is a positive thing. From the practical point of view, the person from Singapore is
294 native English speaking, so I can learn the language better and this is positive for me, while she learnt a basic
296 Polish that is now maybe useful to her in her job in Shanghai. You never know!

292 **Do you find any difference in the relations you have here and those in your country?**

294 Yes. On the level of things Polish care about, yes. I can talk about national politics only with Polish people, so
296 that's a kind of unique. With Polish I shared the same experiences and maybe a similar way of thinking. But I
298 cannot classify the differences. I have a group of people in Poland that I would call my real close friends. They
300 are coming from AIESEC as well, so we passed through many things together.

296 **Did you maintain your relationships with the people remained in your country?**

298 Yes. With some of them is really challenging. Most of them are in Poland, so we write e-mail and whenever I go
300 to Poland I visit them. But one of my friends is in China, and it's difficult to see each other as our visits to
302 Poland rarely match. And now another friend went to UK. In this case it's not so difficult, it's even easier than
304 when she was in Poland, because you can take the Eurostar.

302 **So is it important for you to meet them to maintain the relationships?**

304 Ya. It's very difficult for me to maintain a relationship by e-mail. I like talking to them, chatting on Skype, so
306 whenever I find a friend on-line I always chat. But I don't use the video, only sometimes the audio: it depends on
308 the type of connection. No telephone, as it's too expensive. Once a week I call my parents, but usually I call
310 through Skype.

306 **Have you maintained the relationships created in your previous experiences abroad?**

308 No. Not in the sense that I continue to meet people. I still exchange e-mails with three people, but it's only on
310 special occasions like birthdays. Nothing really serious. Though I must say that if I needed to go to Serbia – one
312 of these friends is from Serbia – and stay over, I might ask for hospitality.

310 **So they are not close friends but you can rely for favours on them.**

312 Yes.

312 **Do you think you'll maintain the relationships with the friends you have met here?**

314 With some of them yes. Probably more than what happened with those I met in the UK. Everytime I meet the
316 people, I have the feeling that I'm winning so much more than just talking to them and I can find out what they
318 do and their plans. For example, my ex-flat mate from Singapore, she moved out to Shanghai, then she was
320 visiting Belgium for one week and we spent one day together, which after half a year gave us much more than, I
322 don't know, 50 e-mails: it's just a different type of relationship for me.

318 **How would you describe your identity?**

320 From the European point of view?

320 **Well, I don't know what you mean.**

322 I noticed that I tend to define myself Polish. Ya, Polish.

322 **Do you have a local identity too?**

324 Not that much.

324 **What about the European level?**

326 I must disappoint you, but... well, if I went to the US, I would probably say I'm from Europe, the other side of
328 the ocean, and then I would explain I'm from Poland, and that we are in the NATO [laugh].

328 **Why do you think you disappoint me?**

330 Because you are doing a study about globalisation and Europeanization and interaction between people...

330 **Do you feel to have something in common with the other Europeans?**

332 Yes, a common continent, to begin with, and then common enemies, which, as someone said, I don't remember
334 who now, are the best way to stick together. I don't know about the enemies, but the competition between

332 Europe and US is something that make the Europeans stick together. Maybe the Russian threat as well, the
334 Russian power. And a common history for the left part of Europe.

334 **Do you mean the West?**

336 Yes, the West part of Europe. We do not define East and West, not any more, not after Bulgaria and Romania
336 came into, now it's called old and new Europe. For me it's just Europe, old and new makes it too complicated.

336 **Have you ever used the expression 'to be a citizen of the world'?**

338 Not related to myself. I think of a famous Polish composer, Chopin. He's said to be the heart of Poland. With
340 'citizen of the world' I think of someone able to join the world nations and be understood in the same way all
342 over; in regard to Chopin, for example, his music is understood in the same way all over the world. This
342 expression suggests me Al Gore, who's crusading against global warming. I think this is a person who really
342 care about the entire world, not just about a piece of it.

342 **Can you try to give me a definition?**

344 A definition brings me back to rules, so somebody having a passport valid for any part of the world, speaking a
344 lot of languages, or maybe English is enough nowadays. I don't think there is a tendency to create some people
346 like this; I think that there is much more stress on the European citizenship, so on the European level. So
346 somebody who cares about the world in total and who can in a way prove it to the world. Jurisdiction, world
348 authority, but I don't know who can be. If you want to get a citizenship from a country, you need to pass an
348 amount of tests, so you need to know the language, the history, you need to prove that you pay taxes and support
350 initiatives of the country, so if you transfer all this to the world that would be something.

350 **Do you think that you have values in common with people having professional experiences abroad?**

352 It depends on what kind of experience, if it is an Expat experience or an immigrant experience. It depends on
352 which part of the world, because people from India or who are working in India have a different approach than
354 myself, so valueswise it's difficult to say: probably not.

354 **Your studies?**

356 Master of Economics, 5 years.

356 **What's your profession here?**

358 Working as a product portfolio expert at DHL.

358 **What do your parents do?**

360 My mother is an accountant and my father a quality specialist.

360 **How would you collocate your social status?**

362 I would say middle, but there isn't a middle class in Poland.

362 **You said you are single.**

364 Single.

364 **In which languages can you maintain an informal conversation?**

366 In Polish and English. I can try in French and German, I understand.

366 **Can we remain in contact for a couple of years?**

368 Yes.

Interview n° 25: Czech Republic

2

4 [She starts to speak before I make the first question; as soon as possible I turn on the recorder].
I think here in Brussels you can meet lots of very interesting people, because they all come from different
6 countries and it's up to you which kind of environment you make like by your friend; if you prefer the Spanish-
Italian one you can follow the Spanish people who live here, you can follow the Brussel lifestyle, which is not
8 very different from mine, I think.

How old are you?

10 25, but I will be 26 in two weeks.

¿En qué lengua hacemos la entrevista? En la con qué te encuentras mejor [she had told me a moment before she speaks fluently in Spanish].

12 Pues yo creo que a lo mejor ahora la mejor es el español [se ríe]. Hace mucho que no hablo inglés, por que estoy
14 siempre con la gente española, o con los italianos. Pero italiano no hablo.

¿De donde vienes exactamente?

16 He nacido en Melnik, que es una ciudad a 40 km de Praga, pero mi familia y todos son de un pueblo que está a
20 km de esta ciudad.

¿Y tú has vivido ahí?

18 No, cuando tuve un año nos movemos a Praga, entonces he vivido en Praga. Luego es distinto, por que la gente
20 que ha nacido en Praga y ha vivido toda su vida en Praga, o sea, ellos son praguenses, yo no me considero
praguense [se ríe].

¿Y qué te consideras tú?

22 Pues, que vivo en Praga, que toda mi familia viene de un pueblo, que todos nos identificamos con ese pueblo,
24 pero tampoco me gustaría vivir allí: me encanta Praga, me gustaría vivir en Praga.

¿Qué significa que te identificas mucho con ese pueblo?

26 Por que he pasado toda mi infancia, bueno, a parte del período de la escuela, que son cinco días, pero todas mis
vacaciones, con todos mis primos y mis primas, que están allá. En Praga tengo amigos de ahora, de la
28 Universidad, también de la escuela, pero es como la mitad de la vida que vives en un pueblo. Praga no es donde
he nacido, aunque he crecido ahí.

¿Tuviste otras experiencias al extranjero antes de ésta y por cuánto tiempo?

30 Sí, he vivido en Estados Unidos, a los 19 años, por... me he mudado un poco en América del Norte y Canadá, en
32 todo 14 meses.

¿Haciendo qué?

34 En principio trabajando, después viajando, y después trabajando, trabajando como camarera.

¿Viajando en plan de vacación?

36 No, por que después de la Universidad he decidido irme a Canadá, en donde tenía a un amigo, y trabajé ahí unos
tres meses, pues no me gustaba mucho, así decidimos viajar, ahí por Canadá y por Oeste de Estados Unidos, pues
38 crucé en Florida, de nuevo a Este, y en Florida me he quedado ocho meses, trabajando. Después he vivido en
América Latina, donde me quedé tres meses en Ecuador, tres meses en Perú y tres meses en Bolivia, después me
40 quedé un año en Argentina, o nueve meses, pues dos semestres, que he hecho un intercambio ahí, y después en
Brasil, otros nueve meses.

¿Y todo eso cómo lo has hecho?

42 Pues, después del primer año de la universidad he hecho los Estados Unidos, he vuelto y he hecho el segundo
44 año de mi carrera, me fui a Ecuador y tal, estuve viajando en América Latina, hice el tercer año de la carrera en
América Latina, es que me lo reconocieron por que había un convenio y después me fui a festejar el año nuevo a
46 Brasil, pues me ha gustado muchísimo, decidí quedarme y busqué trabajo y entonces trabajé como profesora en
la universidad. Es que era muy bien trabajo, por que me fui en el Noreste, y allá el nivel de educación es muy
48 bajo; pues yo aunque no terminase la carrera ya daba clases en la Universidad, de inglés y de español. Es que eso
también dice mucho de Brasil. Y después he vuelto para terminar mi carrera en Praga. Me fui a visitar mi amiga
50 italiana, que es de Sicilia, mi mejor amiga a Madrid, y en Madrid pues he decidido que me quedo por que me
gustaba mucho, y me apunté a un master, pues he hecho un año de master ahí, en la Unión Europea y en
52 Relaciones Internacionales, sobre la cuestión de los recursos comunitarios.

¿Compresivamente cuánto has estudiado, cuántos años?

54 Cuatro de carrera y uno de master, cinco. He estudiado economía.

¿Y los tres meses en Ecuador, Perú y Bolivia?

56 Pues los primeros tres meses en Ecuador fue para aprender español, por que lo hablaba un poquito, pero un poco
58 así, sabes, como se aprende en la escuela; me quedé con un curso de español, viviendo en una familia cristiana,
60 después por el fin de semana viajaba, y yo me emociono mucho con los viajes, yo soy el tipo que voy por un rato
62 y después me quedo, por que me parece una oportunidad magnífica, y hay mucho para conocer. Y si viajas en
64 plan barato en América Latina, y no coges los aviones y tal, pues tardas un poco, entonces me lo tomé
tranquilamente, y tranquilamente en América Latina te quedas tres meses en Perú, por que siempre te pasa algo,
tuve el problema que me robaron todo, entonces tuve que salir en dos días del país, pedir el visaje... Y Bolivia
pues también tres meses por que era muy bonito, me gustan las montañas, era muy distinto, me gustaba, había
una atmosfera bonita.

Ya veo que esta entrevista va a ser diferente: normalmente todo el mundo se queda aquí, en una base muy competitiva, mientras que tú: “bueno, me lo pasé bien...” [nos reímos].

66 Yo soy competitiva conmigo misma, pero creo que también que si uno es competitivo, pues no solamente con
68 una cosa. También si pasas un tiempo fuera recibes otras cosas, a lo mejor no haces la carrera, no haces el
trabajo, pero conoces a la gente y aprendes mucho, por que sobre todo la gente competente después se pierde un
poco, por que no sabe bajarse al nivel de la mayoría de la gente – bueno, yo no soy muy tranquila, pero... -,
comprender un poco más a la gente.

72 **¿Qué quieres decir con que no eres muy tranquila?**

74 Que no soy muy paciente, que aunque lo comprenda que la gente sea diferente, me gusta la gente rápida, me
gusta cuando la gente capte las cosas. Cuando trabajo, por ejemplo, tengo que controlarme, tengo que dar cierta
imagen, pero parece que esto viene a lo mejor de ser del Este, de un pueblo alemán o tal... Entonces también
76 estos viajes me ayudaron para comprender un poco otras mentalidades.

¿Algunas de estas experiencias las has hecho gracias a programas de la Unión Europea?

78 No. Me hubiera encantado.

¿Había el Erasmus cuando has estudiado?

80 No, por que me fui a una universidad privada y no había nada, y yo también empecé a estudiar como hace siete u
ocho años, entonces no había Erasmus, por que empezó creo uno o dos años antes de que entramos en la Unión
82 Europea, y tampoco era muy desarrollado. Hoy día sí se puede ir de Erasmus. Mis amigos ahora se van de
Erasmus. Yo cuando tenía 18 años, no sé si no tenía la información, o lo que sea, pero para mí yo vivía en la
84 realidad que es imposible salir de mi país. Entonces a mí me surgió una oportunidad, que hoy día digo que
locura, porque hoy sí veo que puedes viajar, pero primero el dinero es distinto, sólo el viaje ya te sale muy caro,
86 o sea los padres nunca te podrán pagar un año al exterior, o sí, te lo pueden pagar, pero tampoco les vas a pedir
que... que hay otras cosas para comprar. Yo me fui a trabajar en construcciones a Canadá sólo con la oportunidad
88 que salgo del país. Hoy día creo que es distinto, pero hace 8 años no era tan fácil.

¿Tuviste una beca para Canadá?

90 No, yo tuve un amigo allá, pues él ya se fue allá, y trabajaba ya de construcción y tal, pues yo sólo por conocer a
alguien, porqué para obtener el visado y cosas... hoy día creo que con lo de Erasmus es mucho más fácil que
92 hace ocho años, me parecía que no hay salida, porque trabajar no podías en ningún país, estudiar, pues los
precios de un año, aunque fuese en una escuela pública, eran en euros, o en pounds... y además no podías
94 mantenerte allá. Creo que hoy es distinto. Antes todas las chicas checas o eran enfermeras, yéndose a Austria, o
au pair, eso es lo único que te quedaba para aprender un idioma o para salir. Yo en la República Checa veo que
96 hay mucha diferencia, que está evolucionando mucho, y lo noto también cuando hablo con mis amigos de
Europa de Oeste, que viven otra realidad, completamente distinta. Ellos no trabajan durante la Universidad, o sea
98 sus padres tienen dinero y les pueden mantener; en la República Checa es lo contrario: después de la revolución,
aunque no sea el caso de mi familia, hay muchos casos en que son los hijos que mantienen a los padres. Yo
100 tengo a muchos amigos que son jefes en empresas y mantienen casi a sus padres. No digo que no sea bueno,
porque es la primera generación que empieza a ganar dinero, porque durante el comunismo no se ganaba, que tú
102 ves que haces algo y te sale algo, entonces yo creo que ahora hay la primera onda de... no sé si es capitalismo
esto, pero la mentalidad es muy distinta, estamos en la época de... por ejemplo, no hay esto de socialismo, que
104 hay en Europa de Oeste, que la gente joven es socialista, o más socialista en general que en mi ambiente...

¿Quieres decir de izquierda?

106 De izquierda, porque claro, si no te ha faltado nada en tu vida, pues es muy bonito ser izquierdista. Lo que quiero
decir es que la gente joven en el Oeste se puede preocupar de otras cosas, no se tiene que preocupar si tendrá la
108 casa o el coche, o un poco sí, pero ya no [se debe preocupar por] si la debe comprar para sus padres, o que si la
madre se pone enferma no hay dinero. Creo que maduramos en este sentido. Y también hay esto de que todos
110 están encantados de trabajar para la multinacional...

¿Todos quién? ¿En República Checa?

112 Sí. Cuando hablo con gente del Oeste, noto la preocupación que ustedes tienen por el medio ambiente, de la
114 globalización; en la República Checa la gente no se preocupa. Cuando hay un cambio... es como después de la
116 revolución en España, sociológicamente estamos unos 20-30 años atrás. En Praga ahora el PIB [producto interno
bruto] está al 200%. Entre Madrid y Praga, para mí ahora vivo mejor en Praga, y creo que mucha gente joven
118 vive mejor en Praga, porque en Madrid o en Italia, por lo que me has contado, hay lo que yo llamo
“discriminación de los jóvenes”, que hay que pasar muchos años de becario, casi pidiendo que puedas trabajar.
Bueno, no sé si empiezan a trabajar muy tarde, pero con un salario muy bajo, casi lo mismo como en Praga, o los
salarios son más altos en Praga.

120 **¿El salario medio en Praga de un joven graduado?**

De un joven graduado, pues, ya durante la facultad seguramente trabajaba, luego hay contrato inmediato, sin
122 meses de prueba, y si se encuentra un trabajo empiezas con 1000 euros, pero comparando con lo que te cuesta la
vida allá. O sea, no digo que sea fácil, yo también tengo amigos que cobran 300-400 €, sobre todo en los puestos
124 del gobierno, que el gobierno no paga bien. Tampoco tenemos esto de los funcionarios, que aquí o en España es
una maravilla: pues en República Checa nadie quiere trabajar para el gobierno, porque primero lo tenemos muy
126 conectado con el pasado, todo era nacionalista, no hay esta idea de trabajar para el bien de todos, para el bien
público, y luego porque pagan muy mal, lo único bueno es que no se trabaja y nunca te van a echar, porque nadie
128 lo quiere hacer, y tu horario es de 7 horas o algo así. No es nada prestigioso, o depende, a lo mejor en cargos más
altos en los ministerios sí, pero en general en la administración pública no es nada prestigioso, como aquí.

130 **Gracias por esta explicación. ¿Por cuales razones te has movido de República Checa?**

La primera vez creo que fue para mejorar inglés y para conocer a otras culturas. Me he ilusionado mucho en
132 aquella época con la imagen de Estados Unidos, porque después de la revolución todo lo bueno era
norteamericano, porque era lo contrario de ruso. [Yo hago una cara rara]. No, no, claro, yo también ahora me
134 río, pero es que era... todos los productos... lo mejor era trabajar para una empresa norteamericana. Pero creo
que eso siga en la mentalidad de mucha gente si no sale de la República Checa. A la gente no les gustan
136 particularmente Estados Unidos, hay bromas de los tontos norteamericanos, pero trabajar para una multinacional
es bueno. Después a América Latina porque me encantaba la cultura y tenía mucha gana de conocerla, y me
138 apasionaba, y es lo mismo que me pasa hoy día con Asia, me encantaría conocer Asia, y me encanta cuando veo
un documental sobre Asia.

140 **¿Por qué has venido aquí ahora?**

Como hacía un master en la Unión Europea, me ilusioné muchísimo con el tema de las instituciones, de los
142 proyectos; a mí me encantaría trabajar para un sector público, no me gusta mucho la empresa privada. Quería
irme de Madrid, estudiando esto tenía ganas de conocer Bruselas, tampoco tanto Bélgica, y esta fue la razón:
144 echaba currículum, pero en estas instituciones no es tan fácil entrar si estás fuera. Pues decidimos [ella y su novio]
venir aquí, y me encanta porque siento eso de Europa, y yo soy super-europea. Entonces fui yo que quería venir,
146 después de lo del master, que me ilusionó mucho con lo de trabajar para una institución o una agencia.

¿Cuáles son tus expectativas aquí?

148 Aprender francés. Quiero centrarme, o sea, quiero viajar más pero ahora no. Quiero tener un trabajo por más
tiempo, porque normalmente tengo un nuevo trabajo cada 6-7 meses, lo que no es bueno para mi currículum.
150 Ahora empiezo a trabajar para la Cámara de Comercio Ciega, y me quiero quedar unos 2-3 años por lo menos.
Quiero aprender holandés. La verdad es que espero que un día me salga un trabajo en las instituciones y que
152 pueda quedarme aquí.

¿Qué estás haciendo para conseguir este trabajo en las instituciones?

154 Estoy preparando una oposición, he pasado el primer examen, estoy esperando el segundo. E intentar cualquier
cosa que sale. Solicito las prácticas, aunque no me gusten porque no tengo una experiencia suficiente, así que
156 solicito becas como stagiaire. Pero me gustaría un trabajo no de becaria. No era mi intención trabajar con una
institución checa, prefería con una europea, pero son los únicos que me hacen más casos, y es más fácil.

158 **¿Por qué no te gustaría trabajar para una institución checa?**

Porque me gustaría más trabajar en un ambiente más internacional, más europeo, no quiero trabajar solamente
160 para las empresas checas, veo Europa más global.

¿Por qué es tan importante para ti trabajar en un ambiente internacional?

162 Porque así puedo conocer a mucha gente, aprender muchas culturas diferentes, sí, me encanta conocer otras
culturas, que hacen las cosas de manera diferente.

164 **¿Y hasta hora tus expectativas se están realizando?**

166 Sí, como empiezo a trabajar, sí. Trabajaré en el Czech Trade, para el Ministerio de la Industria y del Comercio.
Seremos sólo dos, mi jefe y yo. Normalmente tienes que pasar por un concurso en Praga, pero yo tuve mucha
suerte, y me da un poco de vergüenza, porque hay mucha gente que solicita este puesto, y a mí me salió así,

168 porque eché mi currículum y salió que justo en ese momento necesitaban a una persona, y me invitaron a una
entrevista y me ha salido.

170 **Mucha suerte para el lunes. ¿Qué significa para ti vivir en Bruselas?**

172 Pues... yo lo tengo muy conectado con el trabajo, aquí no vine para pasármelo bien o para pasear o no sé qué,
vine aquí para el trabajo. Lo único que me sorprendió un poco es que no podemos trabajar aquí, toda la gente de
174 Este, lo que me pareció un poco chocante, porque no tenemos el permiso de trabajo, y yo estuve un año
aprendiendo todas las maravillas... cómo puede ser uno de los países que más discriminan? Y para obtener el
176 permiso, es como para un mexicano: la empresa tiene que hacerte todos los papeles que vas a venir aquí, que
nadie te lo hace, y luego tienes que enviarlos al ministerio... con el trabajo he pasado por discriminaciones: en
178 España me dijeron: "con esta gente [del Este] no trabajo". Y si yo paso esta discriminación ya no me imagino
como lo pasan los de otros continentes. Porque a mí en España siempre todo bien, porque pensaban que era
inglés, y cuando te dicen que has pasado y que empezamos y cogen tu ID:

180 - Pero tú no eres inglesa!

- Es que mi currículum pone que soy checa.

182 - Ah! Pues ya, lo siento, es que nosotros no trabajamos con los no comunitarios.

- Ya, que sí, que soy comunitaria.

184 - Ya, pero estos países no trabajamos...

- Pero desde el 2006 puedo trabajar como autónoma.

186 - Ya, pero no trabajamos con estos países...

Y te pierdes el trabajo. Y eran trabajos de hostess, sabes. Y aquí en Bélgica no puedo, así que lo que tengo que
188 hacer es trabajar como si fuese en la República Checa, lo que es un poco ilegal, pero no hay otra, y pago los
impuestos en República Checa.

190 **¿O sea que eres una enviada de República Checa?**

Sí.

192 **Bueno, esto es muy legal.**

Sí, pero tú debes pagar los impuestos en donde trabajas. Y en el sector privado deberían hacer todo el papeleo
194 para cogermelo, y tampoco mi currículum es tan bueno. Entonces esto es un poco la crítica a la Unión Europea.

196 **¿Respeto a lo de vivir en Bruselas, hay algún aspecto más?**

Me gusta que sea internacional, y aunque no sea la ciudad que más me gusta en el mundo, creo que aquí puedas
198 encontrar un ambiente incluso mucho mejor que en otras ciudades. Bueno, por ahora lo pienso. Aquí estoy con
un ambiente español, italiano o griego, entonces se sale todos los días; también la cultura te la haces tú, y aquí
200 tienes que esforzarte un poco o buscarte a la gente que quieres. Aquí no conozco a ningún belga. Yo Bruselas la
encuentro super-internacional, entonces por ahora me encuentro bien.

202 **¿Crees que el tipo de experiencia que estás haciendo sea común a los joven europeos o sólo afecte a una
minoría?**

En Europa de Oeste sí, pero en Europa de Este no, porque si no puedo trabajar en otro país sino en España o
204 Inglaterra, y España me viene muy lejos y las condiciones no son mucho mejores que en República Checa. A los
checos interesan Alemania, Austria, en donde tampoco se puede trabajar, el Este no nos interesa; a Inglaterra se
206 ha ido mucha gente, pero como todavía no hay mucha confianza, es algo nuevo, si conoces a alguien o si la
empresa te manda, bien, si no es todavía una aventura para la mayoría, y no hay mucha gente que se lanza
208 porque ya piensan que van a ser discriminados. La gente de Este sigue un poco discriminada. Y también el nivel
de inglés: mucha gente piensa que lo debes tener perfecto, que por ejemplo los españoles y los italianos jóvenes
210 viajan mucho, como becarios por ejemplo, y no creo que tengan el mismo nivel de inglés de los checos.

212 **¿Por qué queréis ir sobre todo a estos países?**

Porque queremos salir de nuestro país sobre todo para el lucro económico, es la razón principal. Y en otros
214 países, Suecia, Dinamarca, o no puedes trabajar, o no aprenderías el idioma, y la gente piensa que si vas a otros
países o aprendes el idioma o como te vas a presentar, a una empresa sueca, por ejemplo, cuando hay un montón
216 de suecos que tienen un inglés perfecto. No sé si puedo realmente ofrecer algo más. Creo que nos sentimos un
poco inferior. Y la gente checa es muy de casa: la cerveza está bien, el fútbol también, las mujeres también, pues
218 ¿qué le falta? Al checo típico le cuesta mucho moverse, y si ya se muda se va a Praga, y ya le cuesta. El checo no
se va a mudar si va a ganar lo mismo.

220 **¿Te consideras aquí una inmigrante o una Expat?**

Una inmigrante no: estoy aquí porque a mí me gusta, entonces hay una diferencia. Yo no he venido aquí porque
222 en mi país no encuentro trabajo, yo en mi país estaría mejor que aquí, yo he venido para tener la experiencia, y
no creo que sea lo que piensa la mayoría de la gente, no se lo dejarían todo si están bien en la República Checa.
De hecho ninguno de mis amigos se iría, porque tienen buenos puestos, una casa, que en la República Checa

- 224 tener una casa no es una cosa tan loca como en Madrid, entonces se han tomado una hipoteca muy temprano, están bien. Creo que en Praga la vida está bien y la gente no se mueve tanto.
- 226 **¿Cuál es en tu opinión la diferencia entre inmigrante y Expat?**
- Pero si lo comprendes bien: Expat es él que vive en otro país... o es una persona excluida?
- 228 **¿Pero no conoces esta expresión?**
- No, yo me creía que era una persona excluida de un país.
- 230 **No, es algo muy típico de aquí. [Hablamos del concepto de Expat].**
- 232 ¿Pero dónde están los belgas? Yo casi no tengo oportunidad de practicar francés. En la calle escuchas todas las nacionalidades, y si escuchas francés no creo que sean belgas. No creo que aquí es que te quieres quedar en la comunidad [de Expats], sino que no es una ciudad de los belgas. No sé el porcentaje, pero... tengo la percepción que hay más extranjeros que belgas.
- 234 **En realidad no es así.**
- 236 Ya, pero ¿en el trabajo cuanto belgas tienes? A lo mejor es el ambiente en qué me muevo.
- Es esto.**
- 238 Ya. Pero cuando vas por la noche a los bares, me parece que la mayoría son extranjeros.
- ¿En cuales contextos encuentras a gente de otros países?**
- 240 En mi escuela de francés, en mi casa, porque vivimos con dos franceses. En la clase de francés me muevo mucho con los españoles, porqué con un español conoces a 20 españoles, con un italiano conoces a 20 italianos. La gente de Este no es de grupo. Los checos no somos tanto de grupo, y la gente de Checa no sé donde están ni me apetece buscarlos porque no he crecido con esta idea de grupo. Es que somos más individualistas. En los bares también, y en las charlas. En Casa América tratan de temas de América Latina, sobre todo para los belgas, pero veo de las caras que no hay muchos belgas. Te vas al Café Belga y ves españoles, italianos...
- 246 **El Café Belga es para extranjeros.**
- A lo mejor es esto, que los extranjeros te indican bares para extranjeros. Yo lo vi mucho en Praga. El primer año de la universidad vivía mucho en el ambiente norteamericano, y decía: ¡pero en Praga hay tantos norteamericanos! Mientras que cuando estoy con mi grupillo de amigos checos, jamás encuentro a otras nacionalidades, porque no voy a los bares del centro, hago todo en grupo y si veo unos italianos no me apetece acercarme, porque no les necesito, porque tengo mi grupo.
- 250 **¿Entonces aquí sólo estás con extranjeros, no estás ni con belgas ni con checos?**
- Ahora con el trabajo empezaré.
- 254 **¿Conoces a mucha gente aquí?**
- Hmm... unos 20 personas. Pero tampoco considero que conozco a todos mis colegas de clase de francés.
- 256 **¿Tienes prevalentemente amigos o conocidos?**
- Pues en dos meses... gente que conozco, y una chica española que conocí aquí.
- 258 **¿Para ti es una coincidencia que sea española?**
- No, es que me gustan mucho, y son abiertos. Conozco a un chico de Estonia, por ejemplo, que es mucho más reservado. Conozco la cultura, entonces sé que para él hace falta más tiempo para abrirse. Y la mujer nunca la lleva, mientras los italianos, por ejemplo, siempre llevan a todo el mundo. Pero también te puedo decir que a lo mejor por él somos amigos, que tal vez no sea tan expresivo como los italianos, per significa mucho para él encontrarse dos veces por semana con alguien. Entonces es más lenta la relación. Sin embargo con una española empiezas el primer día a hablar de tu vida, porque ella también te cuenta de los abuelos, y abuelas, y viene ya al segundo día a comer a la casa y te hace conocer a la pareja el tercer día, así que conoces a la persona inmediatamente. Sin embargo del tío de Estonia sólo sé que tiene una mujer desde hace muchos años, pero ni sé donde vive.
- 268 **¿Crees que sea fácil establecer nuevas relaciones aquí en Bruselas?**
- Sí, justo porque hay gente de muchos países. En la escuela de francés es muy fácil. Ahora quiero ponerme en otras actividades, pintura, baile, y allí espero que encontraré a los belgas, porque me gustaría conocer la gente local, sino es como vivir en España. Yo aquí no puedo hablar francés y no conozco nada de los costumbres, no les conozco, y me gustaría entrar en la vida cotidiana de la gente aquí.
- 270 **¿Qué dificultades y cuales aspectos positivos encuentras en relacionarte con gente que viene de países diferentes de República Checa?**
- 272 Lo positivo es que cualquier tema se puede mirar de otro punto de vista y aprendes sobre otra gente. Yo soy muy curiosa de otras culturas y los extranjeros me explican de sus países. Así no tengo que buscar en Internet cosas distintas, porque me las llevan la gente. Además por ejemplo como los españoles son muy de grupos, te dicen que bares, cines, etc. están bien, o sea, recibes mucha información. Y la charla sobre todo para mí es muy interesante: cada uno ha estudiado otra cosa, viene de otro ambiente, de otro tipo de familia; por ejemplo los

280 checos, como los polacos y tal, somos super-directos, porque no tenemos esta educación de darle muchas vueltas
282 a las cosas, o de decir las cosas suavemente, entonces yo tengo debates muy crueles con mis mejores amigos, sin
284 embrago con los españoles ya no. Los italianos son más de enfrentarse, pero los españoles ya lo ven como pelea.
286 Yo digo todo lo que pienso, porque no me doy cuenta que la gente puede ofenderse. Ahora trato de controlarlo,
288 pero ahora mismo en la clase tenemos a un polaco, y yo noto la actitud de éste como es, porque decimos la cosa
muy francamente, sin pensar en los otros, no pensamos si les hacemos daño. Y... bueno, eso de los viajes, estoy
feliz que lo he hecho, pero en el mercado laboral lo veo más con una desventaja: si yo hubiese hecho la carrera
así, en cinco añitos, y en seguida empezado a trabajar, ahora mismo tendría tres años de experiencia laboral, y
creo que me encontraría mejor en el mercado profesional.

Quedamos en el ámbito del las relaciones con otra gente.

290 Bueno, lo negativo es que a veces no comprenden completamente. Pero eso creo que te pase también en tu país.
292 Muchas veces no te puedes expresar exactamente. Y para conocer otra cultura necesitas realmente mucho, y
294 siempre hay cositas de qué no te das cuenta. Los argentinos, por ejemplo, son un poco como los italianos, dicen
296 que hacen una cosa y no la hacen, o dicen que me llamas el martes y me llamas el miércoles, pues yo no, y
298 puedes no llegar a comprender porque la gente hace cierta cosa o la importancia de las cosas cotidianas, que es
300 diferente, sobre todo entre sur y norte. La religión, por ejemplo: hay ciertas cosas que a mí en España me parecen
302 ridículas. Dicen de no ser creyentes, pero igualmente siguen con esto de bautizar a los niños: si no lo crees por
304 qué lo haces? Porque se hace. También en España hay mucha influencia de lo familia: esto en República Checa
306 no lo tenemos, porque a los 18 años te vas de casa. Y por ejemplo no tenemos asumido que con tus hermanos
308 tengas que ser amigo, mientras que en España aunque seas completamente distinto de él y lo detestes, siempre
harás todo para él, o le vas a preferenciar sobre tus amigos. Esto en la República Checa no existe y a lo mejor
quieres más a tus amigos que a tu familia. Pero ya no sé si son casos individuales... porque en Italia tampoco
creo que sea así, ¡he visto a ciertas peleas familiares! Entonces es más que lo tolero, pero no llego realmente a
comprenderlo. El humor, también: con gente checa es el mismo, y tienes los recuerdos de las películas o no sé
que, vivías la misma infancia, criticas a las mismas cosas, porque también la gente puede ser abierta, pero no
creo te guste mucho que los otros te critiquen tu cultura, tú puedes quejarte de Italia, pero si yo te digo que los
italianos son fatales a lo mejor te ofendes. En las familias pasa lo mismo, a lo mejor tú criticas a tu familia, pero
si alguien critica a tu familia, pues te pones que no es así, y les defiendes [laugh]. Defiendes una cosa con la que
te identificas y que es tuya. Esto es lo negativo.

¿Encuentras diferencias entre el tipo de relaciones que tienes aquí y él que tienes en República Checa?

310 Ahora mismo sí, pero ahora estoy aquí desde hace tres meses y no puedo tener la misma relación aquí que con la
312 gente en República Checa que conozco hace años. Sin embrago creo que si me quedo aquí en Bruselas seré
314 capaz de desarrollar una relación profunda, y puede ser incluso más... no sé si mejor, pero si vives aquí la
316 mayoría de las cosas cotidianas las vas a vivir con esta gente; en los últimos años vuelvo a Praga, estoy con mis
318 amigos, les veo de cara [cada] unos 3-4 meses, hacemos una fiesta, hablamos, nos contamos las novedades, les
320 escribo muchos e-mails, no quiero perder esas relaciones, pero de vez en cuando me pasa que estoy perdiendo
322 estas cosas [del cotidiano], ya las vías se separan mucho, no vivimos las mismas cosas, y después creo que te
324 quedan unos 4-5 amigos, que te quedan siendo amigos aunque seas completamente distinto, y aunque vuelvas
326 cada 3 meses, pero porque es una relación basada en que te interesa la gente, ya les quieres mucho, entonces te
328 interesan aunque sean distintos y hoy día no hay mucho en común. Es como tus hermanos, que a lo mejor no
tienes nada en común, pero te interesa muchísimo qué hacen, y quieres cuidarles. Creo que si me quedo a vivir
en Bruselas, y necesito a gente y creo que me relacione bien, y me gusta cuidar a mis amigos y cuidar la relación,
si me quedo aquí creo que podría cuidar nuevas relaciones. Lo malo es que la gente circula mucho. Esa chica
española: si no le renuevan el contrato a su novio, a lo mejor se van en Septiembre. A lo mejor por un año
encuentras a alguien y luego se va, a no ser que se quede a largo plazo, como una familia, que a lo mejor se
queda 20 años y sigues encontrándote, porque si vas a vivir 20 años aquí quieres encontrar a gente que también
va a vivir por largo plazo aquí. Eso aquí lo veo diferente, porque si estoy en Praga estoy con la gente checa y no
hay algún peligro que alguien se vaya, o a caso uno del grupo. Entonces, si una persona se va, te puedes quedar
amigo, pero la relación se hace diferente, porque ya no compartes la cotidianidad.

¿Consigues mantener las relaciones con los amigos que se han quedado en República Checa?

330 Sí. Vuelvo a casa cada 3 meses, ahora mismo cada dos meses, entonces me gusta Bélgica porque me resulta más
332 cerca y puedo ir con coche, y como yo soy muy de grupo, siempre les llamo antes y hacemos una fiesta, y claro
334 tengo que advertirles porque cada uno tiene su vida, pero me encanta ese grupo, es toda gente distinta pero
estábamos en la misma universidad y hacemos mucho grupo, son mis amigos, con los que encuentro muchas
cosas en común, es toda gente muy abierta, me vienen a visitar, ahora este fin de semana estaban unos. La
verdad es que cuando me imagino el futuro yo me lo imagino muchas veces en Praga. Por ejemplo la familia: la

336 familia mía me cuesta un poco imaginármela aquí en Bruselas, por ahora. Y como me imagino el futuro en Praga
me gustaría tener a mis amigos para siempre.

338 **Si tuvieras hijos, ¿en dónde te importaría que crecieran?**

340 No sé, porque ahora no me lo planteo, y no sé, si de aquí a 5 años me encuentro bien aquí, con un buen trabajo y
todo, tampoco lo veo muy irreal. Además de aquí tampoco es muy difícil viajar mucho. Y además para mí es un
342 poco difícil imaginármelo en Praga desde el punto de vista profesional, porque yo quiero trabajar para las cosas
europeas, entonces en Praga tendría que hacer algo con los proyectos, que no sé si me gustaría hacerlo toda mi
344 vida, o hacerme una compañía allá yo misma. Además no es exactamente lo que quiero hacer [lo de los
proyectos], a mí me gusta mucho el sector público, entonces me gustaría trabajar en lo europeo, y es que ahora
346 mismo me ilusiono, a lo mejor entras y no puedes hacer mucho, pero en Praga desde el punto de vista
profesional no veo nada que me gustaría por ahora. Por el gobierno veo muy difícil conseguir algo, y me gustaría
más para la Unión Europea, y puestos para la Unión Europea [en Praga] hay muy pocos.

348 **¿Has mantenido las relaciones también con los amigos que has conocido al extranjero?**

350 Los de Estados Unidos por unos años sí, pero ya se han perdido, y los de América Latina de vez en cuando les
352 hablo cuando me salen en el Messenger, pero no son gente con quién hablo corrientemente, si les encuentro
siempre me alegro y les pregunto de su vida, pero es más preguntar por el cariño que porque les considero mis
354 amigos. Por ejemplo, las alumnas de Brasil allá se convertían en mis amigas, pero vivíamos unas vidas muy
distintas, puedo compartir unas cosas con ellas pero no todo. Y la única amiga que tengo es la italiana, con quién
356 mantengo relaciones y creo que es una de esas amistades para siempre. Pero es muy fácil que se pierda, porque
en otro país vives otra realidad. También con los de América Latina sabemos que yo no vuelvo ahí, mientras que
358 por ejemplo con un amigo de Praga sabemos que nos volvemos a encontrar. Entonces te queda el cariño, el
recuerdo, pero no voy a contar mi vida a un chico de Ecuador: ya no son amigos íntimos. Pero el punto positivo
de la globalización es que hoy si te haces amigos fuera existe la posibilidad de encontrarse y de mantener la
360 relación. Sólo que en América Latina yo me encontraba con la gente local, y no tenían recursos para venir, y yo
tampoco para irme allá para visitar. Pero si encuentras a europeos que están de viaje o a norteamericanos, ya
362 puedes volver a verles. Es que ya con los europeos no es fácil. Por ejemplo conocí a un chico búlgaro, y le invité,
pero tiene que ir a Sofía, que tampoco es tan fácil, coger un avión, que el pasaje no es muy barato y claro, a lo
364 mejor cuesta 200 €, pero el no gana mucho más y es como para nosotros hacer un viaje de 2000 €, no lo haces
por un fin de semana, entonces hay que vivir la realidad de la gente. A la chica italiana le digo coge un Ryanair,
y ya sé que 50 o 100 € para ella no es dinero, o sea, sé que lo puede pagar, pero para el chico búlgaro entiendo
366 que 200 €, con el salario de allá, es mucho, y que no puede venir. Lo mismo con los checos que tienen un salario
de 300-400 €, gente de mi edad. Sin embargo por la gente de Oeste no resulta tan caro, porque ganas euros.

368 **¿Qué es un amigo para ti?**

370 Una persona que a mí me gusta comprenderla y él también me comprende; una persona a la que quiero mucho,
me preocupo mucho como está, si me pide un consejo intento darle el mejor consejo, o si puedo hacerle un favor
o ayudarle con algo, encantadísima; es gente con qué tengo mucha confianza, me gusta pasar mi tiempo libre,
372 cuido mucho la relación y me encanta verles, me preocupa su vida. Es gente a la que quieres mucho cariño, les
quieres, quieres saber como están. Aunque yo esté aquí, o sea no en su realidad, ellos me escuchan; o por
374 ejemplo yo tengo unas amigas que tienen hijos, que no es mi realidad, pero a mí me gusta escucharles y vivirlo
con ellas. Si son muy buenas amigas, son como una hermana, que piensas que la tendrás para siempre. Después
376 hay unos amigos con quién tienes a lo mejor una relación muy intensa por un año y tal, pero después se pierden.
Depende si las dos personas cuidan la relación: es como el amor, que es difícil de desarrollar, y luego se puede
378 perder por una tontería, un mal entendimiento, pero eso depende de las dos personas, porque si realmente te
importa de la persona, la relación no termina tan fácilmente, y si se termina, pues entonces me pregunto qué
380 valía nuestra amistad entonces.

382 **¿A través de cuales instrumentos mantienes las relaciones con las personas lejanas?**

384 Internet, Skype, llamando, e-mail; con el Skype hablo por teléfono, pero sin video, sólo con unos amigos.
También a veces hablo con el videoteléfono. Prefiero el teléfono, por Skype u otros operadores, porque prefiero
386 hablar que escribir. Intento mucho llamar, incluso a mi familia, porque he aprendido que cuando vuelves a tu
casa a ti te parece que no ha cambiado nada, pero sin embargo sí han cambiado, y tú has cambiado. Muchas
388 veces te encuentras que la amistad no es la misma, o que los primos se han alejado. Me ha pasado eso. Entonces
creo que es muy importante que les envíes mails, les llames, trates de ser presente, que cuando vuelves veas a
todos, que no te olvides de nadie, sino la vez siguiente ya son 4 meses que no te ves.

390 **Para todo esto hace falta tiempo, ¿no?**

Sí, y hubo épocas en qué me quedaba mucho tiempo en chat. Ahora ya no, pero a veces en vez de estudiar o algo
me pongo a chatear y ya se pasa una hora, pero al final me quedo feliz. Tras veces les digo [en chat] que estoy

392 ocupada, porque tengo cosas que hacer. Mis amigos hacen los mismos: no tienen mucho tiempo, así que a lo
394 mejor nos vemos en el Messenger, pero ni nos contactamos.

394 **¿Cómo consideras tu identidad?**

396 Primero checa, no puedo decir europea, aunque me considere muy europea, primero checa. Y cuando estoy con
398 unos europeos, la comparación sobre cualquier cosas está marcada, y todos lo sabemos y notas la diferencias
400 conociendo la otra cultura: no soy española, no soy italiana, aunque me encante el grupo: soy checa. También me
402 identifico mucho como del Este, por ejemplo en España tenía un grupo de amigas checas y búlgaras, y nos
404 identificábamos mucho como del Este, conocíamos las mismas cosas, las mismas películas... cuando estás fuera
406 de tu país te identificas con los más próximos: cuando estaba en Argentina hacía mucha diferencia entre
norteamericanos y europeos, y daba igual de donde fuese en Europa: había europeos y norteamericanos. Y
nosotros europeos nos sentíamos todos iguales. Muchas veces creo que se subestima lo de ser europeo, pero creo
que está muy presente en nosotros, que cuando salimos de Europa nos damos cuenta que somos europeos, y yo
me encuentro mucho más cerca a un francés, o entiendo mejor el cine francés, que un norteamericano, o un
asiático. Y con un español creo compartir más cosas, así, como películas, que uno de América Latina, aunque
compartan la lengua.

406 **¿Sientes tener una identidad local?**

408 Sí, porque cuando estaba en España hacía mucha referencia a Madrid, que para mí es distinto del resto de
410 España, y cuando estoy en República Checa distingo Praga de todo el resto: sé que hay muchas diferencias,
412 distingo lugares. En Bélgica creo que sería muy diferente vivir fuera de Bruselas. El lugar es muy importante,
414 porque muchas veces tu ambiente está conectado con el lugar. Yo lo veo con el Brasil: los que encuentro aquí
416 vienen de San Paulo, están instruidos, mientras que los que conocía ahí, pues yo enseñaba en una universidad,
418 pero de universidad tenía sólo el nombre, porque los que estaban allí eran gente que no sabía ni escribir ni leer, o
sea, me encantaban las playas y todo, pero después de 8 meses yo no podía más de vivir ahí. Lo que te resulta
interesante de la otra cultura puede ser también en poco tiempo insoportable. El lugar puede ser precioso, pero el
lugar también lleva a la gente. Lo mismo en República Checa: yo no me veo en una ciudad pequeña, para eso
preferiría estar en cualquier otro lugar. Sin embargo si pienso en Praga o Madrid, me gustaría Praga.

418 **¿Qué sientes de tener en común con los otros europeos?**

420 Pienso en como me sentía en Argentina. En la opinión política: aunque seas de derecha o de izquierda, no son
422 algunos extremos, por lo menos en el ambiente joven. En la gente que va de Erasmus y tal, encuentras a gente
424 parecida a ti, porque les gusta conocer, viajar; allá vi a unos norteamericanos que era la primera vez que salían
426 de Estados Unidos, y era distinto: un europeo no piensa ser el mejor del mundo, y si lo piensa no va diciendo a
428 todo el mundo que su país es el mejor del mundo. Y respeto a Estados Unidos, los europeos se encuentran más
430 sobre cosas como la opinión sobre la guerra. Y el sentido de humor, y la profundidad: la veo muy distinta en
432 Europa que en otros continentes. Nos preocupamos de cosas que a lo mejor no podemos cambiar. Cada uno
434 estudia filosofía en sus cursos generales. La educación es muy buena, es incomparable con los de Estados
436 Unidos: me encontré con gente que creo no encontraría en el último pueblo en República Checa, ni entre los
campesinos. Como vivimos en países muy pequeños, ya hemos salido de nuestros países, ya tenemos
consciencia que otros son distintos, ya conocemos otras comidas, somos como más observadores... Respeto a los
norteamericanos, no creo que somos tan arrogantes; creo que somos críticos, con nosotros mismos, con nuestro
país, con Europa, con la globalización, con todo. Cuando nos pasan una información, no siempre la aceptamos,
buscamos otras opiniones. Es que no sé como explicarlo: cuando hablas con un norteamericano, te parece muy
tonto algunas veces [laugh]. Por ejemplo el tema de la guerra: no es que los norteamericanos, sean violentos,
votan la guerra porque el gobierno dice que hay que hacerla, y ellos siguen todo lo que dice el gobierno, y son
muy nacionalistas. En Europa siempre la gente critica el gobierno, hay demostraciones.

436 **¿Por qué crees que estás haciendo una comparación justamente con los de Estados Unidos?**

438 ¡Porqué me siento muy distinta de ellos! Y porque con la gente de América Latina no me puedo comparar,
440 porque la gente no tiene la misma educación, las mismas posibilidades. Yo me siento super-europea y no veo
442 mucha diferencia entre los europeos. También he encontrado a chicas españolas que me han dicho que nunca
444 podrían estar con un alemán. Yo sé que hay diferencia, pero no les veo muy distintos, porque te toca un español
446 de norte y es mucho más cerrado que yo. Puede que sea muy individual.

442 **¿Qué significa para ti la expresión “ser ciudadano del mundo”?**

444 Sí. Pues, yo me identifico más con “ciudadano europeo” que “del mundo”. Significa que yo me preocupo por
446 Europa en general como si fuese mi estado, siento que quiero cambiar las cosas, que quiero que estén bien, que
me importa que política hay. Claramente también me importa todo el mundo, pero lo veo muy lejano, me siento
un poco perdida con “ciudadano del mundo”.

446 **¿Sientes tener valores en común con las personas que como tú han viajado?**

- 448 Sí. Todos tenemos curiosidad de otra gente. Todos hemos viajado, y cuando viajas primero te analizas a ti,
450 analizas al ambiente, entonces ya es gente que se ha puesto muchas preguntas sobre de su cultura, sobre el ser
452 más abierta, y que no está cerrada porque eres diferente. También es un estilo de vida, entonces compartes el
454 hecho de que te irías adonde sea. También normalmente esta gente habla más idiomas y comunica mejor. Y
456 puedes hablar de tus experiencias. Yo tengo una amiga en Praga que nunca ha viajado y habla sólo checo. Es mi
458 amiga y con ella hablo de otras cosas, pero no puedo hablar de cómo es la gente en otro país, de estos temas.
460 **Algunos datos. ¿Qué hacen tus padres?**
Mi madre es ingeniera y mi padre ha muerto. También era un ingeniero de industria. Mi madre tiene una
462 empresa.
Esto me sirve para entender el nivel sociocultural del qué vienes.
464 Ya, pero antes, con el comunismo, la clase que estaba mejor eran los obreros. La gente que estudiaba, si no
466 compartía la ideología comunista, pues... y como mi familia era en contra del comunismo, no militaban, pero...
[she explains some aspects of the Communist regime].
¿Convives?
462 Sí. Hace un año.
¿En qué lenguas puedes mantener una conversación?
464 Checo, inglés, español y portugués.
¿Podemos seguir en contacto por dos años para seguir el desarrollo de tu experiencia?
466 Sí, claro.

Interview n° 26: Hungary

2

4 **Where are you from?**

I'm from Hungary, I was born in a little town in the North-East part of the country. But in the last 14 years I lived in Budapest, the capital.

6 **Have you had other experiences abroad?**

8 For a couple of years in England, from 1998 to 2000 I took two years off from university and went to England as au-pair, then I went to Scotland working there. In 2001 I spent 3 months in the Netherland and last year one month in the Netherland as well in 2006.

10 **Why?**

12 The first was an Erasmus scholarship and the second was a training course.

14 **Related to your studies.**

Ya. And at that time, in 2006, I was working, so it was an opportunity to be trained. And now 3 months in Belgium as a stagiaire.

16 **So you are in Belgium since March.**

18 No, from April until the end of June. I've been to many countries, like the US, travelling around. In the States I spent 6 weeks, in other countries just a couple of weeks, you know, when you go for holiday.

20 **Where in the US?**

In Texas for 3 weeks and travelling around. Last year I was in Sicily, Napoli.

22 **Besides Erasmus, did you use other European programs?**

No, I used only the Erasmus.

24 **I want to focus on your two long experiences abroad. Which are the reasons that pushed you to move from your country?**

26 In Belgium it's clear, I was offered a stage that I didn't want to miss. Regarding the experience in United Kingdom, I was 22 years old, I had quite enough of the university [I was fed up] so I wanted to go abroad to see the world, after 1 year I should have gone back home but I decided to stay longer, that's why I stayed 2 years, I wanted to try something different.

28 **Your decision was due to your wish to stay abroad or because you found a boyfriend or to other reasons?**

30 No. I just wanted to stay. I had a good time, I enjoyed I learnt English, I liked the family I was living with. So it was my decision. No boyfriend, no anything.

32 **Why did you come just to Brussels?**

34 Because of the EU. I was working with the EU at home, because I am a veterinarian and I work with the legislation authority, regarding legislation about animals, decision making... and it was obvious to come here.

36 **So you came to Brussels because of the kind of work you were doing?**

Yes. Here you can make relationships, acquaintances, with the Commission, the Council and with the Parliament.

38 **And do you do that?**

Ya, I do.

40 **What is the nature of your job here?**

42 I have to act as veterinarian attaché, that means that I'm coordinating between the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture and the Animal Authority and between the EU institutions; I'm coordinating, speaking in the name of Hungary, that is important for us; I have to go to meetings, I have to write reports, to send home e-mails, materials, documents.

44 **Have your studies been useful to your job?**

46 Yes. As veterinarian you have to study a thousand of things, not only how to give an injection, but you have to study also policy making, food safety, epidemiology.

48 **What does it mean for you to live in Brussels?**

The best opportunity I can have for my future work, for improving.

50 **Improving what?**

52 My knowledge. You know, I can use these relationships at home. Maybe I will go deeper in EU matters when I go home, so it's really important to me to know whom to phone, to contact.

54 **So it's an instrument for you for the moment you'll be home?**

Ya. And it's also interesting the job I do at the moment, it's quite interesting to see the different stages in the decision making in the EU.

56 **Apart of your profession, what are your expectations from your stay in Brussels?**

58 To meet people I need. Outside the professional work I don't have expectations because I need to work really
60 long hours, so to be honest I haven't time to go out, to parties or pubs. I have few relationships with Hungarian
62 people here, I have friends and some more Hungarians. Sometimes I meet them. We go to events in the week-
64 end. But I don't think they will be very good friends after a few weeks. It's just that we cannot be together, and
no one wants to go alone.

62 **Up to now are you meeting with your expectations?**

64 I think so. I meet them as much as I can, whenever we have time we meet. I mean today we had lunch together,
tomorrow I'll have lunch with another person.

64 **I'm talking in general. So, professionally speaking?**

66 Up to now it was really difficult, hard, but I think it's what I expected. Actually I expected a little bit less
68 stressing, but in fact the work is quite stressful, but the relationships with other people are going well. Or maybe
I should be more open, but I'm satisfied like this.

70 **Why you say you are satisfied and at the same time you feel you should be more open?**

70 Because you can't exaggerate anything, and it's enough for me. I met a lot of people: I like them, I think they like
72 me, I might have known many more, if you smile all the time and being very friendly with everybody, but I'm
not that type of person.

74 **Do you think that your very temporary experience probably affects this?**

74 Probably. It affects everything. Actually it affects my work, as I put a lot of energy into it, and probably it affects
my relationships as well, because I don't think we will keep close relationships after I go home.

76 **Are you willing to go abroad again for a longer experience?**

78 If I had an opportunity probably I would. I wouldn't mind. But for a couple of years and not until the end of my
life. That I wouldn't want. Perhaps I'd like to come back to Brussels.

80 **Why only for a couple of years and not longer?**

80 I don't know. I like being at home [laugh], so I think for me it's enough, in the past I felt that 2 years outside was
enough, then I wanted to go back to my normal life.

82 **Do you think that your experience here is something common to the majority of young European people
or only to a minority of them?**

84 Yes, I think so. When I was in UK I met quite a lot of people from Australia, they were travelling around the
world and they were actually working in some place and travelling for one year around Europe, and working in
86 some country. This is not common in Europe, but to get a scholarship or just for a stay abroad it's common and
normal in Europe.

88 **But do you think that this happens frequently among the young Europeans?**

Yes. That's what I meant.

90 **Please tell me better about your relationships here in Brussels.**

92 Well, I arrived just one month ago. Professionally I met many people. Regarding friends, I met not many,
perhaps 6 Hungarian young people who I might meet regularly here, so they are not many. And actually I don't
know people from other countries, like, you know, as friends.

94 **Is that a tendency of yours that you stay only with Hungarians? Or is it due to the circumstances?**

96 Probably due to circumstances, if I want to have people from other countries I should go to places where I can
meet them, like night house, or to pubs, or organised meetings; but I don't really have the intention to do that.

98 **Why?**

98 Maybe I'm too old. Because after work I like to be at home studying some French instead of going out and
drinking and meeting some different people. Probably it's not a good way, but I don't feel the need for that at the
100 moment. As far as I remember, 5 years ago when I was in The Netherlands with a scholarship it was completely
different. There were a lot of people from other countries and really meet people and really make some friends,
102 had parties. But now I just don't want to do it. Now I'm 5 years older and my mind changed.

104 **For work or other activities have you the possibility to meet people from other countries?**

104 Yes, for work. I'm in close contact with some people, because I'm in a group of experts so in this group I got to
know many people, but they are not friends. I don't talk to them about serious things, just "hi, how are you?"

106 **But do you consider them just people met at work or at least acquaintances?**

108 No, just people you meet at work. [Pause] I think this is the difference, because if you are a student you have a
completely different view, but when you work other things become more important to you.

110 **Do you find difficult in Brussels to create relationships?**

112 Quite difficult. Probably it's not me, I'm not the only one who works hard and for long hours and after work you
don't have any energy to go anywhere, so it's not because of me. It's all about your job. If you are in Brussels
some people are students but most of the people work at the EU, which means that from 9 o'clock until 8 in the

114 evening you are actually working. And if you go to a bar, you will go with your colleagues, but it's not what you want to do, because you want to meet other people.

116 **Do you think that meeting people here is more or less difficult than in your country?**

It depends on what you do. If you work even in Hungary it's probably the same, but if you are a student in Hungary or in Brussels it's probably easier.

118 **What about Holland or the United Kingdom? Do you have the same impression?**

120 In The Netherlands I met a lot of acquaintances, I mean, you know, friends. In United Kingdom I didn't meet many people, but with some I'm still in contact.

122 **The ambient or the culture there made it easier or difficult to meet people?**

The situation was difficult. It was easier in Holland and more difficult in the UK.

124 **More difficult than here or than in Hungary?**

126 I can't compare with my country. In Holland I was a student and was very easy to make friends. In the UK I had to work: I had few acquaintances and few good friends. In some way every country or every culture is closed. To be a student is always a different thing even if you are in Hungary, in Belgium or in the UK. In close societies you can make superficial acquaintances but it's really hard to make real friends. My friends in the UK are one French and the other one Hungarian, so they are not English or Scottish people. I think it's the same in Hungary: it's not easy to make deep relationships.

130 **Which are the difficulties and the positive aspects you can find during a relationship with someone from another country?**

132 One difficulty could be the language, you can't express yourself as much as you would like. The different culture has never been to me a difficulty. Somebody else from a different culture for me makes it more interesting to know something more about his or her culture. If I'm abroad I think it's easier to make relationships with foreigners, because we are all in the same situation. What I really liked in the UK or other countries, when you go I like the fact that abroad no one knows who you are, so you can start from a white sheet, so you are what really are, they don't know about your past, nothing, so I think it's very good for me when I'm abroad.

138 **And do you like this?**

140 Yes, I really like it. Because at home it's always like people know many things about you, well I can't say it in English, but there are some people who can use something against you.

142 **Do you see other differences between the relationships you have in Hungary and those you have abroad?**

144 In Hungary my friends are old time friends, some last from school, some from the University. I don't have many real friends, just a couple, but it's completely different from the friends I have from abroad. It's a different relationship. I don't know how to explain. Much far more deeper. I tell them [to the one in Hungary] more things than to the friends I met abroad, because actually I don't meet them [the friends left abroad] every day, so they don't know my every day life, and then we talk or we e-mail each other, I'm not complaining to them, you know, I'm writing about good things, you know it's a different relation, different friendship. While to my friends at home, because they know what's happening in my life, I can tell anything, I can be really honest with them because actually they can understand me more because they have known me for 20 years, 30 years or 10 years; so probably I wouldn't ask things to my friends abroad and wouldn't have the same problems because I don't think they are interested in; I don't think they might help me, because I don't see them.

152 **But still you consider them friends?**

154 Ya, but you know when I talk about friendship there is different levels in friendships; you can have a lifelong friend, even if you have people that you like you might have another type of friendship.

156 **But why do you consider these people you met abroad your friends?**

158 Why? I met a lot of people but, I don't know, among them I consider really friends 2 or 3 people, because we are still keeping contact, after many years we didn't even meet each other, we are close to each other, I mean we sympathize each other, we click to each other; so there is a girl from Poland she comes to EU sometimes, so I met her this week, I met her last week, but before that we didn't meet since last October and it was as if we met constantly because we like each other, we can talk about things; when you feel yourself uncomfortable with somebody you don't feel very open; I know she is honest and with many people I met I really like, it's ok, but with her it's just a click.

162 **So the difference is between people that you like but you can't share the most intimate part of you because they don't know you enough. Is that what you are saying?**

164 That's true for most of my friends. But with one or two Hungarian friends it's different. I wouldn't tell my problems to somebody I don't know so much and I don't even want her to tell me her problems, because I can't help her, so there is no point. There are people I don't like from the beginning, and I don't care if I share

168 anything in common, but the people I like, probably it helps to have experiences together and probably it makes
170 the friendship deeper, but for me this is not the most important thing.

170 **While you are here, are you able to maintain relationships in Hungary?**

172 Really I don't have time. To be honest, I haven't the time even to call my mother. So that's my problem and I
172 really want to change, but...

172 **If you'd remain more time, would you make an effort?**

174 Ya. I think that nowadays keeping contacts is a problem in life, and this is very sad, because most important are
174 the human relationships and people just don't put an effort to maintain them and I know it's my problem as well.

176 And it's always the last thing to do because everything is more important than maintaining the relationships,
176 even if I'm in Hungary, not only here: back home I don't always go to visit, many times it's not possible.

178 **Do you think that you will maintain the relationships with the people you have met here?**

180 The professional perhaps yes, but the others no. As I said, I know about 6 Hungarians here whom I meet,
180 sometimes to have lunch together and among them, there is one who used to be my colleague and I will maintain
182 the relationship with her, because we are in good contact and I'm not sure if I would call this friendship,
182 probably it's a different friendship but surely I'll maintain the relationship with her. But with the others I won't.

182 **Concerning your national identity, how would you describe yourself?**

184 Hungarian. You mean European or Hungarian?

184 **I don't know what I mean...**

186 I'm proud to be Hungarian, that's my identity.

186 **Do you also feel you have a local identity?**

188 No, Hungarian, probably because I lived in Budapest and in a small town. I'm not really connected to my
188 birthplace.

190 **Do you also have some sort of European identity? From your face I can see it's a no.**

192 For me to be Hungarian is far more important than being European. Ok, I live in Europe, we are a member state
192 of the EU, but to me it's far more important to be Hungarian, because of our traditions and culture. There is no
194 European culture, there is no European tradition. There is a culture in each country so I think that member states
194 should not lose their identity. We can be together in the EU, but I don't like this European identity, because the
196 people will lose their national identity and start to make everybody the same face. I don't like that everybody
196 has to know English, because it's important to have our own languages, but in many countries English is wide
198 used, you can see English words, but this way slowly you lose your national identity. National identity keeps
198 the nations together. We are Hungarian because we feel the same way, we have the same tradition, the same
200 culture and we speak in the same language; but from starting speaking English we are not so Hungarian. People
200 don't know about English culture, about the dates they celebrate.

200 **Do you think you have common values with the other Europeans?**

202 Like Asian common values, American common values? They are American or Asian, we are European, it's
202 completely different. I don't know. I cannot think of any common values thinking of Norwegian, thinking of
204 Greeks. No past in Europe. Especially if Turkey will be a member of EU, so regarding the culture it's impossible
204 to find common values.

206 **So you don't feel you have something in common with the other Europeans?**

208 Probably with Centre Europeans because we are really alike: Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, we have similar
208 history which makes a big effect when we are thinking of people, but I don't feel anything in common with
210 Belgian people.

210 **And Bulgaria, Romania?**

212 No. Polish perhaps. But, you know, these countries: Czech, Slovakia, some part of Austria: in the past history we
212 lived in the same state. And perhaps in common [we have] the colour of our skin, I mean the Europeans, but if
214 you compare with the US, we can't compare Europe to US, you should compare France or Belgium, each
214 country to the US and you shouldn't compare Europe to Asia because China, Japan are completely different
216 countries. So what is in common is their skin, their eyes. That's my opinion.

216 **Do you know the expression 'citizen of the world'?**

218 I know what you mean [pause]. It means you feel at home everywhere in the world, you feel cosmopolitan. My
218 opinion is that you can feel cosmopolitan, but some people who lived in many countries during their life, they
220 don't really feel at home in any of them, so you can be cosmopolitan but you need roots in one country, where
220 you belong to your family, to your friends. It's nice to be cosmopolitan but I'm happy I'm not cosmopolitan.

220 **Do you think you have values in common with people having important experiences abroad, like you?**

222 Ya, probably. I became far more open, I accept easily new things I see, like black persons: I don't look at them
224 in a strange way like many people do in Hungary because they are not used to it; adjust easily to people or
situations. I can easily accommodate. I can easily find my place in different circumstances.

What do you mean by this?

226 I'm here and after a week I felt the first couple of days that I don't like the place where I have to live: new and
228 strange, but after a few days everything was ok, so I cannot accommodate very easily, and probably the people
who are not used to live abroad it's hard for them to accommodate. I think it's important that I'm not shocked,
I'm not surprised by different things. People who live abroad they feel the same, otherwise it would be a
230 nightmare to live abroad. I know people, I know my parents, who would not be able to live abroad, they could
not live abroad because it's impossible for them doing things in another way, they can live only in their own
232 way. When you are abroad you have just to accommodate and do things differently, at home I can go shopping at
midnight, here I can't so I have to accommodate. More things you need to change abroad and when I go home I
234 need to change back again, and that will be ok. [Laugh] Maybe it's stupid.

No, it's ok. Some data. Your studies?

236 5 years university degree.

Profession of your parents?

238 Mother teacher, father agriculture engineer.

Are you married?

240 I'm single.

You language abilities?

242 Language abilities: Hungarian and English, I can't speak French.

Can we remain in contact for a couple of years?

244 Yea.

Interview n° 27: Rumania

2

4 **Where do you come from?**

I come from Rumania, from Timisoara.

6 **How many inhabitants?**

Around 400.000. It depends, if you calculate the new suburbs then 450.000.

8 **Did you have other experiences abroad before this one?**

10 Ya, I travelled quite a lot. I used to go to an intensive French school and we had exchange trips almost every year for a couple of weeks abroad. So, ya. And also I travelled privately.

12 **But study or work for many months abroad?**

Oh yes, the Erasmus in 2004, for 7 months in Bologna.

14 **Allora parli italiano?**

Sì.

16 **Allora possiamo continuare l'intervista in italiano.**

Come vuoi.

18 **Quali sono le ragioni che ti hanno spinto a spostarti dal tuo paese?**

20 Ragioni economiche. Io sono arrivato qui nel 1999, mio padre è venuto qui in Belgio subito dopo la rivoluzione, quindi avevo già mio padre qui e avevo deciso con i miei parenti di spostarmi qui. Io e mio fratello gemello siamo venuti qui insieme. Per seguire gli studi, andare all'università, perché le prospettive erano un po' diverse 10 anni fa in Romania. Non si sapeva bene, non era chiaro come si sviluppava il turno.

22 **Cosa faceva qui tuo padre?**

Ingegnere.

24 **E tua madre è rimasta in Romania?**

26 Sì è rimasta lì. I miei genitori sono divorziati. Mia madre non ha mai voluto andar via perché ha i suoi parenti, la sua famiglia, suo fratello.

28 **Cosa significa vivere a Brussels?**

È il mio paese. Io sono belga.

30 **Hai la cittadinanza?**

Sì.

32 **Anche tuo padre?**

34 Sì. Adesso mi sento più a casa qui. Quando vado in Romania, conosco il paese, mi sento a casa anche in Romania perché sento, non so, è naturale per me. Ma qui adesso quando penso a casa torno qui. In Romania, quando sono in vacanza e vado in Romania, sento anche lì. Sono veramente un ragazzo di paese, non è che sono alienato.

36 **Quindi se dovessi parlare della tua identità, come ti descriveresti?**

Non so, belga ma di origine rumena.

38 **Quindi sei prima belga poi rumeno.**

40 Sì, è più attuale per me il fatto della cittadinanza, non la cittadinanza...vivere qui, adesso sono qui. Se torno in Romania allora cambierà. Sono più o meno allo stesso livello.

42 **Che lingue parli?**

44 Rumeno, francese, inglese, un po' d'italiano, spagnolo, un po' di tedesco anche. Il tedesco non so perché per me è stato facile; anche un po' di fiammingo. E' quasi naturale quando vivi qui, è scritto ovunque, lo senti alla TV, alla radio, sulla stampa.

46 **Quanti anni avevi quando ti sei spostato qui?**

19 anni.

48 **Avevi delle aspettative rispetto al tuo trasferimento qui?**

Non tanto. Io conoscevo già il paese. Ero già venuto qui quattro cinque volte per visitare mio padre e tutto e quindi conoscevo già un po' come va la gente, la mentalità, il paese.

50 **Hai avuto difficoltà ad ottenere la cittadinanza?**

52 Non tanto no. Mio padre era già belga e quindi è stata una naturalizzazione, non ricordo più com'è il nome della procedura, ma non è stato difficile. Amministrativamente sì perché ci sono state tante traduzioni, tante legalizzazioni, la carta d'identità, il diploma, il baccalaureato, è stato difficile certo, sono stati due anni dall'inizio, ma la parte più difficile è stata in Romania perché in Romania e questa è una cosa, non strana, ma abbastanza naturale per un paese povero perché la gente ha tante cose da fare che tu hai... qui ci sono state tante

- 56 cose da fare ma non è stato veramente difficile, la gente è stata abbastanza aperta e in Comune non sono stati
maliziosi, è solo che c'erano veramente tante cose da fare. La procedura è stata lunga.
- 58 **Tuo papà aveva già la cittadinanza o l'ha avuta quando è venuto qui attraverso il lavoro?**
Ha avuto la cittadinanza attraverso il lavoro.
- 60 **Adesso sei qui da 8 anni: come consideri la tua esperienza qui? Che cosa ti ha dato questo paese?**
Non lo so. È un paese abbastanza ok, ma non mi ha dato veramente tanto, non è che ho ricevuto tante cose, non
62 lo so. È stata questa un'opportunità per lavorare alla Commissione Europea, che è unica, non si può avere da
un'altra parte, ma se no non ho ricevuto tanto, non è che ho voluto ricevere tanto, perché penso che qualcuno
64 deve dare qualcosa. E la più grande cosa è che, come si dice, honest?
- Say it in English.**
- 66 When you try to do something you must have more possibilities to do it, you are not blocked by, I don't know,
the people who are in the position or something. If you are honest and you want to achieve something, you have
68 more possibilities to achieve it. Even here there are a lot of structures, a lot of people who are, I mean, it's also
quite rigid as in Rumania. I think that's the most important thing: if you want to do something and you have the
70 energy, you have a bigger chance of achieving the goal; the degree of the flexibility is higher [in other words:
Belgium is more meritocratic]. Otherwise you don't receive that much from Belgium, from the state. And of
72 course different accesses that the fact of being Belgina opens, compared to Rumania: people do treat you in a
different way. When I have to go to Rumania and I go to the airport, then I have to queue, everybody is on line,
74 but I can pass in the line for people from the EU with a EU passport, that was also a big advantage: procedures
for travelling are easier, there is less need of a VISA, and so forth.
- 76 **What does it mean that people treat you in a different way?**
There is a difference between being Rumanian and being Belgian. You have less rights, for example, workers'
78 rights are not the same. You may travel because your citizenship is on the level of the other member states;
Rumanian cannot go and work to another country because procedures are much more difficult.
- 80 **You need a permit.**
You need a permit, you need prove that you have a place where you work and so forth; or if you are independent,
82 a lawyer or an architect or so forth, then you may go and establish yourself, but then you have to pay the taxes
and the state only profits on you, and you don't get anything back. But as an employee and a Rumanina citizen,
84 you will not be able to go and get a position somewhere as easily as you would be if you were from an older
member state. Out of Europe, it wouldn't be so important, for example in the United States, but within Europe
86 there is a difference, at least from an administrative point of view. And even culturally people do have some sort
of prejudice, due to the past. So yes, you would get a different treatment if you are a Rumanina or a Belgian.
- 88 **Concerning your permanence here, are you planning to leave and go abroad or to remain here?**
To remain here. I would like to make it here in Brussels I mean, the quality of life in Brussels is not that bad, it's
90 actually quite good compared to other European cities, apart from Dusseldorf, Colonia or a couple of other
German cities where life is better, I think Brussels rates quite well in quality of living; I mean, you have huge
92 green areas, you have quite a low price on real estate, which is increasing but still not at the level of other bigger
cities. You have a quite good quality of life in Brussels, so I'd like to make it here, for me I hope there are some
94 opportunities. I don't like France very much, so I don't think I would like to live especially in Paris, so I don't
like to go to Paris, and my qualifications are very much to work in a small organized place, because my
96 education... the potential is found in big cities, and as far as big cities go, Brussels have a good quality of life.
- Why don't you like Paris for example?**
- 98 It's too big, it's not very clean, it's very cold, people are very cold there, very spiteful, not all of them but most
of those I met, I dislike. They have huge pretense, huge ego, that is not based on anything, the superiority
100 complex that is completely void, they are not worth than anybody else, they have the same level. So I don't like
the city, it's quite beautiful, but I'd much prefer other cities among which Brussels.
- 102 **What did you study?**
I studied journalism and Communication for 5 years.
- 104 **Do you think that many young Europeans have the possibility to work abroad or just a minority of them?**
Theoretically all young Europeans have the possibility to go and work abroad, except the new countries,
106 depending on the level of education (but I don't know exactly the relation). That's in theory. Practically
speaking, it's very restricted, working mobility in general is around 2%, which is very low; within young people
108 it is higher, not that higher, and more and more strongly it is according to the level of education, and not only the
level but also the field of education. All these people who come and go here from wherever in Europe are from
110 political science; they will move much more than other people, for example than engineers; there is also the fact
that a good engineer or engineers in general have hard studies, whereas political science is easy to get. So young

112 people have their own paper and power to go and work abroad. But how many of them do it? Not that much,
114 because it costs money to find a place, it costs money to go somewhere, just to move, then the time to find a job
116 in your field sometimes takes some time, and people are not keen to do it unless [until] they have another choice,
118 like the political science [graduated] are going to national government, national structures where most of the
120 time, let's face it, all is set up and put in place by the powers in charge, by the political environment, so either
122 you have an affiliation or you know those people. This is way [the political science graduated] want to come to
124 Brussels: because you don't need this kind of connections. They would make everything easier, but you may also
126 succeed if you don't have them. In my case, for example: I do work here [in the Parliament] and it wasn't by a
128 connection or through somebody who I might knew, or something like that. In general I don't think that young
130 people travel a lot. Now, I think the Erasmus program has done wonders for this. People who did Erasmus find it
132 more natural [to travel], because they did it before, they know before how it is and they find easier to start
134 willing and move around. Let's face it: when you do an Erasmus program you don't learn of anything: you don't
136 learn much the language, because you probably tend to hang out with people who speak the same language as
138 you and come from your nation, because it's easier, you do party all the time, you don't learn anything at
140 school, because you don't go there to study, you know how it is, and even teachers don't take you seriously. But
142 what I think is the most important thing in the Erasmus program is that people learn how exactly to move and
144 that's the most valuable experience.

Would you say that you know many people in Brussels?

130 Quite a lot.

Would you define them acquaintances or friends?

132 Acquaintances most of them. I have a few friends.

Are your friends from Rumania?

134 No. I haven't had almost any contact with Rumanian people, apart now, since I work in the Parliament for a
136 Rumanian MEP [Member of the European Parliament].

How long have you been working here?

138 6 months.

What nationality are your friends?

140 German, Belgian, Spanish.

Apart the parliament, in which other context you have the possibility to meet people from other countries?

142 Mostly when you go out: friends of friends, it's mostly what happens. But half of the time they are people from
144 the Parliament, or other people not only from the Parliament, but in this European affairs environment, where
146 you know people of mixed origins, mostly are of the same country as you are from and if they are not the rest are
148 Belgian people, even through my brother or through other Belgian people, so let's say half Belgians and half
150 from other nationalities.

Do you think it's easy to create new relationships in Brussels?

152 Ya, it depends on the level of the relationship, like everywhere. Having a relationship to go for a drink, I have at
154 least ten, it's not a problem, but with friends it's more difficult, and I think it also depends on the person. I mean,
156 in the Parliament, and in general in this environment, people tend to stick to stereotypes, which is study in
158 political science, then some master in European affairs and then they go to Brussels; this leads to very boring
160 people, most of them have never opened a book in their life apart the books they use for studies, and also if you
162 ask about a movie and maybe it was a shit with Nicole Kidman, they will say it's a great movie. I'm sorry, but
164 that's the way it is, it was a deception: unfortunately I find the most of them very boring. That's why I wouldn't
166 go to stagiaire parties, assistant parties, and stuff like that: it's always the stereotypic questions: "where are you
168 from, what are you doing here, who do you know in the Commission", and maybe one of the last question is
170 "what is your name" or something like that, and then the last question, you know, the social question is "what
172 about the weather?", or some bullshit like this; so you can actually interact with most of them in sleep, because
174 you have these five questions, you give the appropriate data and it's always the same thing: it's very superficial,
176 and it's boring, because it's not useful. So I tend to know people most because I work with them and I need them
178 or they need me, because we work together and of course some are very qualified, and apart from that of 100
180 people that I know maybe one or two of them may be interesting enough for me to visit them and have fun, and
182 out of these two or three maybe one would be a friend. I think it's a sort of normal procedure, except that I find
184 the percentage of boring people quite elevated. Once I was shocked. I went to a person's place, I was quite
186 surprised because they had books, but they were all about whatever member of parliament did or what I can
188 learn about him, or about policies of European Union. Come on, you don't have this kind of books on your
190 shelves at home, you have them in your office or take them at home because you need them to study, not near
192 your bed. What kind of person does that? It's like American Psycho in Europe! It might be depressing every now

168 and then. You go to a party to feel ok, but apart of getting drunk you have nothing to do. Also the relations with
170 the opposite sex are very very boring. Most of them [women] look nice, because they are young or whatever, and
172 you think “I would go with that one and that one”, then to go to sleep with them you have to make hours of
174 conversation which is not worthy, it’s not, because it’s boring. In Rumania during Tchaucescu there were
176 different social classes: there were the intellectual people, those who went to university, and then low workers
178 and so forth. And in my family and among the people that my family knew, there was nobody... I mean, even
180 the people with less education: you would go to their homes and find their libraries with at least 200, 300 books,
182 ok they had anything to buy with the money, because there was nothing to eat, but I mean people had those
184 books and they also read them. I had some huge bookshelves and I have read them all, not in one time, I also
186 have books here but... These people you met here have books like the relation about Rumania and Bulgaria: I
188 mean, these are interesting books for work, not the kind of books that you may say that you like because of
190 whatever. So that’s one of the biggest obstacle to get friends within this environment. It’s a bit more different
192 when you go out the European affairs community, things tend to be a bit different, improved a bit, not a lot. I
194 like to do interesting things. I don’t like reading [those books], because most of the things you find in those
196 books I already know, because they are obvious. There is no use to me to meet someone and explain the reasons
198 of socialism failure, because I know them, they are very obvious. And I find that somebody who buys these
200 books for 45 euro, or I don’t know how much they cost, and start read them and keep them near the bed to read
202 them at night, is crazy, is really American Psycho. Every now and then you may find somebody who is really
204 interesting, but you have to go with different people. I mean, this is my opinion.

How many hours do you work?

188 I tend to stay in the office around 10 hours a day from Monday to Thursday, but I don’t work for most of them,
190 for most of them I spend my time in Internet or reading the newspaper. I do work maybe 3 hours a day, and on
192 Friday at noon everybody leaves. So I can’t say that I work a lot: I spend a lot of time in the office, but I don’t
194 work a lot.

Yesterday I interviewed one of your colleagues here in the Parliament, and she said that she works at least 8 hours, but that it’s not realistic, normally she works 11, and she seemd to be very stressed just by saying that.

194 They stay here, it doesn’t mean that they work. They go to take some coffees and speak with people, and maybe
196 say “it’s very interesting what I saw today in the Commettee meeting”, but it’s not interesting what they saw in
198 the Commettee meeting, because a Committee meeting is interesting for a few people: the rapporteurs and some
200 guys who are there for lobbying. For the rest of the people is shit, and they are there just because they are
202 waiting their time to speak. But people, especially stagiaires, say it’s very interesting: it’s always a sign of
204 wealth, here in Brussels, like the badge you use to enter or the hours you spend in the office. You say: “I stay
206 long hours in the office so I’m important to my company”, you know this logic, but first of all they don’t work
208 long hours in the office, they have the impression to do it, but they don’t do anything interesting, and secondly
210 the work they do could be done in much less time. It would be impossible: if you really worked ten hours a day,
212 you would see it, and I don’t see such a huge amount of work done by anyone of those people. But it’s a sign of
214 wealth, it’s like in other places having a big car: that implies that my boss likes me, that he trusts me, that I’m
216 important for my office. It’s not true. People who are really that important don’t have the time to tell it. This is
218 also why I strongly dislike the people that you meet here... this is the kind of bullshit that you here at parties: “I
220 work so much”, but it doesn’t appeal to me, because I know exactly what they do. I strongly dislike this tendency
222 to identify you as importatn because you work much, or you wear a suit. This is why I don’t like those parties. I
mean: it’s not true! Either they lie about their work, or they are stupid, because they spend a huge amount of time
to do what a normal person would do maybe in 20 minutes. There is no other explanation, otherwise you would
see it: if somebody who is intelligent should actually do this amount of work, you would see the results, but you
actually do not. This is what happens in the Commission: people work and they are qualified, but on the other
hand they don’t spend 12 hours per day in the office, because they don’t find it useful and they know it. Despite
the rumours about the Commission, three or four administrative officer do the work that a Cabinet does in a
federal government. They do something, they are quite effective. But here, a 25 years old who sais he works I
don’t know how many hours a day, no, it’s bullshit, I never believe them. I don’t call it out, because business is
business, but I wouldn’t probably speak with him a second time, becasse I don’t need him. You find that they are
mostly the people who never read another book [laugh].

Which are the difficulties and which are the positive aspects that you find in a relationship with a person from another country?

222 The easy fact is that they are quite open, their openness. I think it mostly derives from the fact that they are people
who are not native here, so they are not in their normal context, and all the social barriers that might held them

224 from making new acquaintances or making new experiences back at home here don't exist: you don't have the
226 same social environment and the same social obligations as in your native place, where you come to do this and
228 that because of your family's name and this kind of stuff. You have social rules that everybody respects for
230 tradition or stuff like that, but being here you don't have to follow them; most of them speak English so that's
232 also easy level; most of them have the same experiences and that makes things easier, and the positive thing is
234 that, I don't know, some of them might be nice people but I don't think that it depends whether they are from a
236 special place or because they travelled a lot, I don't think that people who travelled a lot are more interesting, it
238 doesn't make difference. This is such a gathering place in Brussels that you have many people here, and out of
240 many people, even though the rate of interesting people is lower, there are so many hundreds that even in a small
242 percentage you might find somebody who is interesting and funny and whatever, which you have things in
244 common with. And the negative, I said they are all formed in a certain way by their education, by their way of
246 being. Apart of this, I don't find any drawback. I mean, it's not their fault, but they have a certain ambition, very
248 light, which I cannot identify myself with, because I was almost always much surer about what I want to do with
250 my life and about what I want to work with, and I find many things interesting, while the most of these people
252 have this ambition, maybe from the age of 12 they want to work in this, and then they follow only this ambition,
254 and of course it closes, you may become good in your field but you don't know anything else about other stuff
256 which actually can have a strong difference on your performance in your own field, especially in the field of
258 public affairs, because you have to know a lot of things besides that you may learn by newspapers or something,
260 but if you don't start doing it from an early age, you don't see the big structure behind it. You know the details
262 and you know them very well, but you don't know exactly why things go in a certain way because you don't have
264 the basic knowledge from these other fields and you don't know how they work, you know the facts but not the
266 machine behind, and this influence your way of doing something.

Did you maintain relationships with friends in Rumania?

246 Hmm, phone... no, phone is only for my family. With the other ones I don't actually maintain contacts. I think
248 it's a personal thing. I'm not very good in keeping relationships via e-mail or stuff like that. I'm quite lazy.
250 That's one thing, the other one is that trying to maintain this kind of contact you cannot do it because you grow
252 apart, you have differences, differences that you can't fill in by e-mail, or you should write very detailed e-mails,
254 very boring, nobody would read them; people have their own life, and reading for example an e-mail from
256 somebody who is far away requires a certain amount of time during which is not like having the person near and
258 having an interaction, doing together, no: you evolve apart. So I try to maintain more or less superficial contacts
260 in case of events and then when I should go there try to catch up a bit. Obviously it's not the same.

So you prefer to visit them?

256 Yes, if I have the chance. Otherwise I don't keep contact, which is strange. I know for example the new
258 communication technologies, the free ones, like Skype, messenger... Skype, for example, was because of the
260 Latin community, where the most of the people were poor, and they couldn't afford a regular and conventional
262 communication by phone, because it costs too much, so they developed it, and this is how web cam and all that
264 stuff came about. I don't keep contact. You can't do it in a proper way, only in a superficial way, so as I cannot
266 go farther than that, I prefer to meet together and catch up then.

And what about the people you met in Erasmus? Is it the same?

262 Ya. I haven't had any contacts with them ever since. With none of them. It's odd, because some of them were
264 funny, but we just had different interests. They are far away and I couldn't or I didn't have the time or the money
266 to go. And I'm not the kind of guy who goes to somebody's place and see him for a couple of weeks, I don't like
268 it, I like a certain comfort, I don't like to owe something to people.

Do you think you have something in common with the other Europeans?

268 Hmm, not that much, no. It's like with everybody else. I don't think I have more in common... I have less
270 differences with people from other parts of the world. Well, I think that in general Europeans do have something
272 in common: a social democratic idea, which is everybody having good jobs, having a meaningful life that is not
274 only for work, having the opportunity for everybody to achieve what they want. It is a possibility: people have to
276 have the possibility to achieve their potential, so you know this kind of freedom, social barriers, democracy. Yes,
278 I do think Europeans have this in common. It's a sort of freedom, liberalism with this social democrat layer on it.
This is what I have in common with most Europeans. For example it's not the case with the Americans or some
part of Asia or Africa. Otherwise I don't think we share a culture or whatever, and this is one of the reasons for
the Constitutional Treaty failure. Apart of big facts that we all came from different migrations and other stuff
like that, I don't think we have a common cultural layer. We have different origins, or developed different
leaders, different cultures. I don't see any point in staying together in one only big Europe, I think that we will
lose more than what we gain. Economically we'll have a future but culturally I don't think so, because I don't

280 feel I have this in common with other people. Economically I might have a common vision with most of them,
282 but apart of that I have much in common with other people. I don't think we have much in common in Europe:
284 everybody has his language and culture, and I think it's good to keep it this way, it's a richness, it's something
286 that makes things much more interesting than having a unified culture or whatever. I think that modern society
288 takes care of it already quite well, we don't have to push this forward more of what already happens, because
290 let's face it, with the common economy... ok, this is market, but culture and society derives from the economy,
292 so if we have mostly the same economic ideas and goals, even culturally we will. There are not so many ways to
294 achieve a certain goal in economic terms, so even culturally people will get more and more in the same shape, so
296 eventually this will happen and I don't see the point in pushing it. I think this [our differences] is a richness, it
298 makes travelling very entertaining: you go somewhere, you see the differences and you have to get used to the
300 local things, and you learn things from them and they learn things from you, it's a richness, much more
302 interesting. I'm not nationalist. I don't like one country more than the other one. I think nationalism is stupid, it
304 is very basic, and it is very easy to create. When somebody says to be nationalist most of the time is not because
306 he want to but because he's set up with things like these. Nationalism is one of the easiest feeling to create in
308 somebody, it's very easily done by political parties... many people don't know it, but are in it. I don't think
310 there's a European identity or whatever, but I think we must be united, and I believe in Europe, and not because
312 of my career, but as a general scope: I don't think in my career, but I think in the lives of hundreds of millions of
314 people. I think for them in general is better to have a united Europe, at least economically, this is a good
316 improvement. Look at countries like Spain: 25 years ago it was nothing, and now look at it. Look at Ireland, at
318 Rumania and at what it will be in 10 years. The lives of their people is much better because of this. They
320 wouldn't have had the same prosperity without Europe. People don't really realise this, especially in Eastern
322 Europe. Most of them [the new Eastern countries] are very new to this, and they don't feel they have the same
324 references. You know, when you want to go out of your country [and] you have to spend two days in a line for a
visa, then you don't really feel European, you feel very resentful. You need some years of this experience [to be
European] to actually feel that you belong to Europe and you have freedom. Otherwise you just see Europe as a
good economic basis to have a career, to make some money and to get away from where you are now. This is
underneath what they mean when they say that Europe is an opportunity for their careers: it's an opportunity to
get away fro mwhere they are. It's a paradox, because they want to improve the situation in their country,
because it's a crap, and they feel within it, but they don't like it. For most of these people there is much more
freedom now. For Eastern countries you will see in 10 years... In general their lives have much improved,
economically and socially. Women: the basic right of women have improved, because when a country wants to
enter in the club of Europe, it has to accepts the rules, the rules made by a huge elephant and you are just part of
it. But I don't see a European identity: I think it's a good club, it's part of your identity, maybe, a small part, but
you cannot say "yes, I'm European", it's a club of which you are taking the rules. It's a paradox, but easy to
explain, that people from Eastern countries are very nationalist, and at the same time most of them want to get
away and see Europe as the possibility to go work somewhere and maybe raise some money there, or to wok at
home but taking somemoney from a multinational company. It's a paradox, but it's easy to explain, because yes,
we didn't have the same chances, but once we grow out of it, it's a very superficial and silly feeling, this
nationalism, based on nothing, and the borders will just disappear and will remain the main borders [represented
by the] language, the culture, but not the nationalistic borders. Because this is the difference: the nationalist
borders are not the cultural borders or the linguistic borders, they are the borders drawn by the state lines, and
when you ask to a nationalist what is the image of his country, he will indicate the image of the country
delimited by the borders on the map, not the image of a culture. So I'm not nationalist, but I don't see any
European identity. Europe is maybe a small part of what I am, but I don't define myself European above of other
things.

What does it mean for you the expression "to be a citizen of the world"?

326 Hippie crap! [Laugh] I think it's bullshit, it's a very idealistic vision unfortunately not based on reality. When
328 you hear somebody saying he is a citizen of the world, he's either some hippie, some join smoker who never
330 actually got out of his place, or somebody who has travelled the world and feels a compassion for other people,
332 but he puts himself or herself on a superiority position: "I will help those people". So I don't think it's a good
334 approach if you ever want to do anything for developing countries, because it's not true: culturally we are very
different, politically and socially and economically, everything you want, there are so many differences... it's a
huge diversity, so being a citizen of the world is one of these things that people like to say, but they don't
actually know what it means, they don't think it's true. It's an impoverishment of the language: they want to say
something, it's already there, they use it, even if it's not exactly what they want to say. Citizen of the world is
something that you might say in very precise situations, for example in communication, in technology, as far as

- 336 Internet goes. Many people feel citizen of the world because they have Internet at home, which is very racist, very discriminant, because there is a huge continent where people don't have Internet. If you have a mobile
338 phone, you are a citizen of the world, theoretically speaking, because mobile phone technology is now quite well
340 implanted, but in practice in Africa nobody would ever call you because they don't have the money to do it. So
citizen of the world, how can I say, it's a literary, it's a political license, it's a metaphor, but a metaphor is just a
342 comparison and you should not take it literally.
Ok, some data now. Are you married or live with your girlfriend?
No.
344 **Can we keep in touch for a couple of years?**
Yes, of course.

Interview n° 28: Bulgaria

2

4 **Where do you come from?**

From Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria.

6 **Did you have other experiences abroad?**

I lived in Cuba for 2 years and then in Spain for a couple of months and now I'm here since last September.

8 **When did you go to Cuba?**

I was very young. I have started my education in Avana. My family was there in 1990. I was 8 years old.

10 **Do you speak Spanish?**

I have a good understanding but I can't speak it unfortunately.

12 **When did you go to Spain?**

1992. Directly after Cuba we went to Spain.

14 **Why did it happen?**

My parents were working there for our BTA, which is like for example in England Reuters, it's an Agency and they were working in this Agency for 2 years.

It's a press Agency.

18 Yes.

Nothing to do with the EU. Why did you move out from your country?

20 The reason is strange. My mother is working at the Embassy, I was working in Sofia and she asked me if I want to come. She came here one and a half years ago. But all the time I said "oh I don't know, I don't know, I'm not sure, I don't want to".

So she is working at the Embassy here? And asked you to come here?

24 Yes. To study French, to work something or to make an internship, something like that, just to change the environment, so I was not sure in the very beginning, there's nothing to do in Brussels but after I decided to try to see what's happening here and so on.

Why did you change your mind?

28 If I have to be honest it's because I had a very serious relationship with a girl in Sofia, we lived together for 3 years and we just split up and there was nothing to do there, I was a little bit disappointed from this situation, so I decided to change place and to look for something new, so I came here, but I think that very soon I will go back to Bulgaria.

32 **Why?**

34 People here are very down, very boring, the only thing here is the international environment and the people you can meet here. You can meet a lot of people [from] all over the world [who are] making internships or whatever, so it's interesting to meet, to speak with them, to see how they are living, what they are doing and so on and so on, but I think that one year is absolutely enough to spend here in Brussels. [Pause].

Did you have any expectations when you came here?

38 No. It was my third visit here, I spent 2 months just visiting my mother with time for holiday, travelling, but I don't know what I'm doing here, thinking to find a job or to make a master degree or something like that, I was not sure what I'm going to do here, but when I came I spent maybe 2 months doing nothing, absolutely nothing, and after that, it was strange, but I found a job and started working. The point is that in the very beginning I was coming here just to learn French, then go back to Bulgaria and start to work and continue my education in French and that's it, but after that I liked it and decided to stay one year. But, you know, in the summer there's nothing to do here. It's better for me to go to the seaside and have vacation in Bulgaria. The problem here are also the women.

46 **In which sense?**

The women are awful here, that's the problem.

48 **You mean that they are ugly?**

50 They are ugly, you know, the only beautiful girls that I know here are Italians, Russians and Bulgarians, that's it. All the other nations they are like... [expression of disgusting]. I don't want to be rude, I really don't like them. So I'm 25, not 55, so I would like to have more fun.

52 **What are you doing exactly here?**

54 I'm working in a private Belgian company, import-export, we are working with Bulgaria and Eastern Europe, we are importing goods not only for Belgium: Luxembourg, Holland, France. A lot of goods, we are working with orders, they are giving us orders and we are trying to find the best prices and the best solution for their inquire.

56 **What's your function there?**

58 I'm making the contacts for Eastern Europe. I'm trying to find the goods at the best prices and then I'm responsible for the logistic, I'm looking for a storage here.

Do you have a contract?

60 Ya. But the point is that it was very difficult in the very beginning to make a working contract, because you need the 'permis de travail', that's why [I have] the contract for an intership for one year [pause]. But it was almost the same like a working contract, because you have a minimum salary, you need a permission to stay here and so on, so it was like it took time to prepare the documents.

64 **Because you need a work permit.**

66 Ya. I thought I don't need it but after that they said that [I need it] because it's a Belgian company, not an international [one]. That's [also] why [the company] needs me and not a Belgian guy, because it has contracts with Bulgarian, Russian, Serbian and so on, so I was the perfect person because I speak all the languages he needs so we did it like this, with the internship, and my internship is going to end, at the end of August so I'm taking my vacation earlier, a little bit earlier, and that's it and after that, I want to come back here, I have to check and look for another job or something like that. And my education is not in lobbying, policy or whatever, I mean that any international companies are situated here because of the EU, so I cannot help them, so I have to look for another Euro... working, but maybe if everything is OK I'll come back here to do a master degree in the ULB [Université Libre de Bruxelles].

74 **But I don't understand: you want to remain or you want to leave? Or you want to leave and come back here?**

76 I want to leave to spend some time in Bulgaria, I don't know how much time. After that it will be good for me to come back to do the master degree and find another job because the point is that in Bulgaria the opportunities are lower than here, of course, the capital of Europe. You can find a good job in an international environment and so on, but in Bulgaria it's like you have a frame you cannot go further and further. It's like you are working but you don't know why you are working.

Why?

82 I mean the salaries. For example: the minimum salary in Bulgaria is 90 euro... 90 euro!... This is funny. Of course, everything is cheaper there.

84 **So, why do you want to brake with the work you have now for spending some months...**

86 No, no. no. Not because of the vacation or something like that. The point is that the intership contract is finishing now and, if I want to get the permis du travail, it's a little bit complicated to get the documents, so they cannot make another intership again for one year with the same person. So if I have to do all the stuff, I need to receive all the documents here and the permission to stay and it's a little complicated. It's easier to do a new intership with an international company, it's faster, it's a good experience and statistic for my CV and so on. Starting in a Belgian company with a working contract it's a little complicated. We are completely new in the EU and we are not allowed to do whatever we want.

92 **So you have to come back and then it'll be easier to find an international company than to remain here in the same company...**

94 Ya, absolutely.

OK. Taking your experience in these 9 months in the overall, aspect by aspect, how would you judge it?

96 I'm happy about this. It's a good experience in an international environment. I've never worked before in Western Europe, in Cuba it was for my education and it's completely different, so now I know what it is about. I know differences between Easter and Western Europe and [I am] improving my languages, which is quite useful, and in Bulgaria you have to work in an international company to use your foreign languages and to improve them. Here it's like you're obliged to improve your languages, while in Bulgaria you work or whatever you have to do and the level of languages is always the same. So it's completely, completely different. People in Bulgaria and people here it's completely different. For example we are wilder, people in Bulgaria are very poor compared to Belgian people or Benelux in general, but at the same time we live quite better than people here. I'm telling you, really better. We are spending every 3 minutes to have fun, enjoy our lives and here people, I don't know, they have problems, mentally. Because of the weather, because of the boring life, because of everything. You are Italian, you can catch the difference, because the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Greeks, the people from the South are completely different from the North. They are just working, working, working, running after their children and doing nothing exactly. My brother is studying here in a French School, so I can see perfectly what it is about. They are 16-17 years old and they are already out of their minds. They're going crazy, they're studying 10 hours a day, they don't have time for anything, they are not allowed to go to discoteques, to bars, to have some fun, they have just one day in a week to do what they want, this is the problem for their mentality, their psychology condition. It's not just about the money, here you can have a lot of money but if you stay in Western

114 Europe you can't do everything. What are you going to do? Do you go to the seaside and freeze there and spend
your time with people who are 60-70 years old? And if you go to Bulgaria for 2 weeks, you will not stop to have
fun, to go to discoteque, bar, having good time, spending your day in the beach with the young beautiful people.

116 **Don't you think that this impression depends on the fact that your social level here is not the same as the
one you have in Bulgaria?**

118 I don't know. I tried a couple of times to have fun with Belgian people but it's absolutely impossible. At the
same time, I have a lot of friends, from the East, and most of them are Italian or Spanish. I'm telling you, they
120 are having a very good time here. They know how to do it. I mean: you are in Belgium and you have to spend all
the time with foreigners to feel good. This is stupid. I might go to Bari or to Lecce and spend a good time and the
122 problem is of course the money, because the South Italian regions are poorer than the Northern. Maybe one day,
if I have a family and want everything to be OK, to come down, to be a normal person like going somewhere for
124 a vacation or having a rest, I might come here. But for my age it's not possible here. The standards are
completely different and at the same time the life is completely different.

126 **Do you think that your experience here is common to a minority or to many European people?**

128 A lot of people. They are coming here in Brussels, in Holland, Germany, France because the standards are
higher, the salaries are bigger, and they are trying to do something interesting, but the truth is that most of the
130 people are spending some time here working for internships, and all their jobs are for 1 or 2 years and after that
they go back to their countries to have their lives, with their families and friends and so on. People here are very
132 nice, very kind but they are not friendly. We [in Bulgaria] spend every week-end with our friends, going to the
mountain or to the countryside, to the seaside. People here I think they haven't friends, they spend their week-
ends at home and they are spending their vacation for one week to go somewhere around, which is strange.

134 **When do you say 'we' you mean...**

Bulgarians.

136 **When you say 'they' you mean Belgians?**

Ya.

138 **So here are you going out with the Bulgarian community?**

140 No, in the very beginning, for 5 months, I tried to go out only with foreigners, to speak with them, to have more
information, to see what they are doing here, what they think of the life here, but later I was fed up with all
142 foreigners and started to meet not exactly Bulgarians but Eastern European nations. [Pause].

142 **Why Eastern people?**

144 Because we share the same culture, the same living, we have our way to feel free, to have fun and so on, so it's
easier to stay with them than with Western European people.

146 **Which are the differences between Eastern and Western countries?**

148 Differences are huge, in general. I don't know. The life is extremely different. You cannot see children on the
street, this is very strange. All the parks, all the small gardens are absolutely empty. There is nobody.
150 Desappeared. But if you go for example to Bulgaria, during holiday, or late afternoon, there are a lot of young
families with their children having a walk, relaxing after the hard day, and here people are still at home, they are
going to work and there is nothing else in their mind than working. I don't want to be rude, I don't want to blame
152 them but I'm telling you they have a mental problem here. In my brother's school, maybe 10 percent has tried to
commit suicide, 16 years old! This is ridiculous. It says the way of life here. You can see every 10 minutes
154 people talking with themselves: they are crazy. I know one statistic that 56% of Belgian women are lonely. I
don't know the reason. Maybe they are ugly, maybe they are stupid, they are living a very boring life – at least I
think this is the reason – but this is the truth: 56%.

156 **Which countries do you consider being Eastern? Do you consider Poland like an Eastern country?**

158 Poland not really. Bulgaria, Romania, the whole Yugoslavia, Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, all the Russian republics,
Hungary maybe.

160 **What do you have in common with these countries that you don't have with Western people?**

162 Everything. I don't know [pause]. I can tell you the first thing I told to my friends when I went back to Bulgaria
for the New Year Event, OK they asked me: "What do you think about Western people?" and I said "They are
164 sleeping". During the day they are sleeping, they're doing nothing, they are driving and they are sleeping, they
are having fun and they are sleeping, and after 30 minutes they get drunk in the discoteque, after they go out and
166 fall on the ground. You can see lying people after 12 o'clock on Fridays and on Saturday everywhere, and this
people are dressed in a suit, in the same suit she or he was the day before at work, where they were strict, calm,
very quite, the perfect person for the job, and now you see them on the ground, with beautiful things around him
and I don't want to tell you more. This is ridiculous. They are working 5/6 days and they are waiting for one

168 night to get drunk and to forget about their lives. Why doing this? For 2000 euro a month? To live a good life?
169 Maybe it's not so good, I'm not sure.

170 **Do you think this is common to most European countries?**

171 No. The problem is not between West and East, it's more between South and North, because I've been in Spain,
172 in Greece, in Turkey a lot, a lot of times. Greece can be in Eastern Europe but at the same time it is very
173 Western, like way of living, standards, they have joined EU a long time ago, but you have normal people there
174 having fun. Another reason is the weather, I think. Here it's always raining, it's dark. Where are you going?
175 Nowhere. Staying at home. And the most interesting thing is that people here don't want to do anything. On
176 holidays they are going to Italy or to Spain or to Portugal and this every year. OK, but between Italy, Spain and
177 Portugal there isn't such a big difference: good weather, nice swimming pools, but try something new: new
178 cultures, new ways of living. I have a lot of foreign friends in Bulgaria, they are working there, a friend of mine
179 who is Austrian told me he spent last 4 years two in Palma de Maiorca and two in Ibiza and last summer he spent
180 a month in Bulgarian seaside. It's 2 times cheaper and he had a really great time. He said he won't ever go back
181 to Maiorca or Ibiza. My grandparents are going there. Here people when they are seventy they buy Porsche, the
182 stupidest thing I have ever seen. You are buying a car for a hundred thousand euro, you've been working all your
183 life for this car and at the end you jump in this car and you are driving for 50 km. Come on, this is ridiculous.
184 What for? They are starting their life when in pension at 60 years. They don't have relationships with their
185 children and their relatives, they have their houses in the countryside and they see each other only on special
186 holidays, catholic, I don't know them because I'm not catholic and I don't care really. And the funniest thing is
187 that people here do not know anything about Eastern Europe and the rest of the world, don't tell me. I met a
188 Swedish girl who told me that Bulgaria is an island; also I met two Americans, this is my favourite, when I said I
189 was Bulgarian they said "Oh sorry, we've never been to Africa". This is ridiculous, come on. Their life is so
190 good, so perfect and they don't know anything on Benelux. This is Europe. It's smaller than Russia. There are 30
191 countries in this small area and they don't know anything. Go to Bulgaria, ask a 10-year old child and he will tell
192 you all the EU countries and also where each country is. People here don't know where Bulgaria is, or Romania
193 or Ukraine. That's it. They don't care anything outside Benelux. They know Spain because they go there for
194 holidays, they know the French and Italian Alps as they go for the winter holidays to ski. And if you ask a
195 French guy where are the Alps he would say in France, if I ask you you'd reply "in Italy" and if I ask a Swiss
196 he'd say "In Switzerland". Come on, [laugh] geography is so simple. It's written everywhere. And that's it. But
197 nobody knows that you can go to Bulgaria and our ski resorts are absolutely perfect to spend your time and
198 you'll spend 40% less. Another thing is that people here have very low standard in building things and don't
199 want to spend their money. For example the bars here are ugly and old, maybe I've been in 20 bars in Belgium
200 and I can tell you that if I would do a bar like this in Bulgaria people would go crazy. We had same furniture and
201 same buildings 20 years ago at the communism time. Have you noticed how they wash the glasses in the bars?
202 They have one thing with clean water and one with dirty water, they put a little soap in the left sink, they put
203 there the glass... if you see this in Bulgaria you are fired after three minutes, this is not possible, nobody would
204 drink from that cup after seeing you, that's why I always drink and order it from the bottle. This is not possible.
205 You can see this only here. I'm working now in the export/import and I am receiving offers from factories for a
206 lot of goods; the beer that you are buying for 3 euro it costs 20 cents, as in Bulgaria, but in Bulgaria you are
207 buying it for 50 cents. Here a stupid guy who has a small café is rich because everybody knows that is normal to
208 pay 3 euro for one beer. 3 euro! This is ridiculous.

209 **Do you think that there is something like a language barrier why people do not go to Eastern countries, or
210 some sort of stereotypes or prejudices?**

211 No. For example if there is a German group visiting this part of our seaside, all of the people on this seaside they
212 speak German. Very soon – ok, this is the Belgian and French tragedy – very soon everybody will speak just in
213 English. Nobody will care about your German, your French, your Italian or whatever you want. The English
214 language is going more powerful and more powerful. So, if you go to Bulgaria, in every single hotel people there
215 speak not less than 2 languages, Bulgarian and 2 more languages: one is absolutely necessary to be English and
216 mostly the second language in Bulgaria is either Russian or German because we have a lot of tourists from these
217 countries.

218 **So that tourists can feel at ease...**

219 Any time. And that's why I like Spain in general. Because if you call to the reception you can speak only in
220 Spanish, nobody can speak other languages, but if you go outside to a restaurant and having some fun and if you
221 are in a good hotel, 4-5 stars, they will find you any language you want. Because I had a holiday 4 years ago and
222 we were with Russian friends and the Russian guy sat in a very expensive restaurant, said: "I don't care, I want a

224 Russian speaking waiter” and after 5 minutes... yes... one guy came and said “Hallo, I speak perfectly Russian. Tell me what do you want”. If I’m going to give you my money I want that.

226 **Was it in Spain?**

Yes, in Costa Brava.

228 **Ok, I have a picture of what you say. Let’s go on with the interview. Do you know many people here in Brussels?**

A lot of.

230 **Would you define them more friends or more acquaintances?**

232 Maybe more friends. The most funniest thing is that I don’t have even one Belgian friend. I don’t know even one Belgian person, or Holland or Luxembourg or French. [Pause] My friends here are either Portuguese, Spanish or Italian, either English or somewhere from the East. [Pause]

234 **What’s your definition of ‘friend’?**

236 If I have to be honest, the purpose that I want to reach, my aim is like to find friends and after that... because nobody is here for ever; the people are coming here and after a couple of months they are coming back to their countries, looking for other opportunities somewhere here, somewhere abroad. I want to save my contacts and relationships, to visit each other in our countries, to see different cultures and, for example, I reach this contact in Italy, with two girls here, they are my first friends in Brussels, two sisters from Bari. So at the end of the summer, I’m going to go to visit them in Bari and after that they will visit me in Bulgaria on the seaside. [Pause] And the other thing that I hate here is that everybody are trying to get in this stupid European Commission or Committee Regions, all these stupid European institutions. It’s like their dreams. Come on, wake up! This is the biggest mafia in the European Commission and in the European Institutions. You are going to work 50 years on one table from 9 to 5 [he beats on the table] until the end of your life. Everybody, every person is dreaming about reaching this in the European Commission and thousands of people going to their interviews, tests, work and learning about it, and for a couple of months before that [the concour] they cannot sleep. I don’t know. This is really strange for me. And after 10 years you are a robot, you are doing the same thing until the end of your life every single day. I don’t know.

248 **Generally speaking, do you find it easier or more difficult to create relationship in Brussels respect to your country?**

250 It’s easier.

252 **Why?**

254 Because... people are like... My relationships are only with foreigners so in the international environment everybody... I like the first question: Where are you coming from? It’s not: What’s your name? How do you do? What’s up? What are you doing here? Every single question. No, the first question you will hear is “Where are you from?”. That’s what I like because you never know the person in front of you where he is from, or she. And if you go to Bulgaria I would say: “Hallo, where do you live? which neighbourhood?” Not which country, or which town, but which neighbourhood. That’s why I like here: it is quite international. This is the biggest plus of Brussels, not in Belgium, in Brussels, that you can meet people from all over the world. That’s why Belgium is on the second place in Europe for foreigners living here and the first place is, surprise, Luxembourg.

260 **It’s not a surprise.**

262 Of course it’s not.

264 **Have you ever been in Luxembourg?**

Yes, 2 times. I travelled a lot since I’m here. I visited a lot of places, that’s why I’m happy of course, because I didn’t have this opportunity before. If I had to choose, I’d really prefer Belgium instead of France, Germany or Luxembourg or something like this. Central European countries, I really don’t like them.

266 **Why?**

268 I don’t know. For example, ok, I like Hungary, Czech and Slovak. It’s very strange. How West, how East, you cannot say that they are from the East, you cannot say they are from the West, not geographically, I mean that you can see on the map, their way of living, the mentality and everything else is somewhere in the middle... I don’t know.

272 **In which kind of context or environment do you meet people from other countries?**

274 During my work I meet people from everywhere. Because I told you that we import from East to West, not from Bulgaria to Belgium, just from these 2 countries, but we import from a big amount of countries in all Western Europe. So I have contacts everywhere on the East, everywhere on the West. Sometimes I’m really wondering how it is possible that an international company which is working import/export in Western Union, they don’t speak English. I can’t understand this, I’m telling you: this is not possible. You are doing international business, importing goods and if you are from Spain, they speak just Spanish. It’s strange for me, but maybe people here

280 they think this is something normal. In Bulgaria for example 100% of people working in international
environment they speak not less than 2 or 3 languages, not less, because it's not possible to speak only
Bulgarian: who would understand you? The Macedonians, the Serbians, the 5% of the Russians.

282 **Another place where you meet people?**

284 When I'm having fun. I met the first friends here in the British Council, when I attended my English course, in
Alliance Française when I studied French. After that, they told me where the parties are, where you can go to
take a beer and little by little I started meeting different people in the bars, everywhere.

286 **Which are the differences that you find between the kind of relationships you have here and the ones you
have in your country?**

288 How is the word?... People here are shy. They are not open minded and they are like... they keep distance in the
relationships. In Bulgaria everything is going very fast, you know, today we are speaking in a bar and tomorrow
290 we can go for holidays together. There is no problem. Here, it's very difficult to get closer to somebody. But this
is typical to North people. All Northern people keep distance between them. You need 3 years maybe to get
292 close to somebody. This is very strange and this is the biggest difference in the relationships.

294 **Do you think that what you describe in Bulgaria is something common to all Eastern countries?**

294 Yes. Absolutely. People who think... I'll give you an example: for the East the biggest towns are Moscow and
Istanbul, for the West they are London and Paris. If you are trying to have fun and to spend a really good time in
296 the Western capitals, London and Paris, and after you go to Moscow and Istanbul you can see that the difference
is really, really huge. In London and Paris there is nothing to do. You can see the art, the towers, the Big Ben and
298 the most popular things in these towns and after that you can go home. No problem. You don't need anything
there. You need just 3 days to visit these 2 towns and that's enough. Go to Barcelona and you'll have really a
300 good time or for example, ok I've never been to Italy, but my brother went to Rome and he said like this: it's
very beautiful and at the same time crazy people. Going to the North people wait for the Friday, to cure
302 themselves with alcohol and if they can't go home after that and wait for next Monday to start their boring life
again. And they are very happy because they are rich. Tell me about it! For example, it's a European statistic that
304 going to the North the suicides are higher, while going to the South the people are happier, and it's strange
because the standards are lower in the south and the people live better than in the North where they are rich. And
306 lot of children have mental problems and so on and so on.

308 **Do you maintain here the relationships you have in Bulgaria?**

Ya, of course. With all my friends all the time: mail, Skype, speaking on the phone, receiving news from them or
reading in Internet about politics, not only in Bulgaria but in all the world.

310 **Do you use also video Skype?**

Ya, of course.

312 **Do you visit them when you are back home?**

Ya.

314 **Or do they come here?**

Unfortunately, this is the problem, because our standards, our salaries and our life do not allow us to travel, but
316 I'm going back, ya. Everytime I can, I go back and I have such a good time.

318 **Do you think you will maintain the relationships you have here?**

Very few of them.

Why?

320 Because for me it's not a problem, but the other people, I told you, they are cold. If I like them and I get closer
with them for one month they need one year to feel the same for me. That's why the strongest relations here I
322 have with Italians, Spanish and Portuguese people. Northern people are really cold like their weather.

324 **Last part of the interview is about identity. I'd like to know how you feel about your national identity.**

324 My national identity? Ok, I'm very proud to be Bulgarian and I have a hidden mission here in Western Europe,
to make people know more about Bulgaria, to give more information. I can give you a very small example: Italy
326 is 3 times and half bigger than Bulgaria and we, in Bulgaria, we have seaside, 11 mountains and more than 40
big rivers; we have the perfect weather, good winter, good summer, good spring and good autumn. With every
328 specific thing about each season. You can feel every season perfectly, not like here. People here they don't have
winter cloths or summer cloths, they have only umbrellas. I'm really really very proud to be Bulgarian, and the
330 only problem we have is that Bulgarians do not care about the country. Everyone wants to be ok individually, but
in general what's happening nobody cares. That's why the situation in our country is a little bit difficult, ok it's
332 getting better and better now, but we don't have social policy, we don't have middle class, and this is the biggest
problem in Bulgaria and the biggest political difference between the East and the North.

334 **What's your understanding of the expression 'to be a citizen of the world'?**

336 ...This is very funny... if you are from the US you are a citizen of the world because you are from the US, if you
338 are from England you are a citizen of the world because you are from England, but if you come from Bangladesh
340 you are nobody because you are from Bangladesh, but if you are from Bangladesh and you have a lot of money
342 you can go wherever you want and everybody will love you so much and you will be a citizen of the world. We
344 are in the European Union now since 6 months, we are travelling without any problems and when you tell
somebody that you are Bulgarian, they don't know what you are talking about. I'm not even a citizen of the
Europe, citizen of the world is very funny! Come on! We are all the same persons, same individuals, a lot of
persons here in Western Union are more stupid than me or than any Russian or Tanzanian or whatever you want,
but they have Belgian passport, that's why they are very special. That's the point. It doesn't matter who you are,
it matters where you are coming from. That's the problem.

You mean that there like A series states and B series states?

346 Of course. If you are French and you go to England for example, nobody will ask you who you are, you are a
348 good person, very nice because you are French, and if you are Russian, oh come on, you are not you, you are a
very bad guy, you are just Russian; and when they look at your passport, at your nationality, full stop, it's
finished. That's it. Forget about it.

You mean, to find a job, or something like that?

352 To find a job, to meet somebody. Because if I meet a girl – that's very interesting and my friends laugh a lot
354 about it – when we are going out to a bar and meeting a lot of people and sometimes having fun with them, so
I've met a girl and she asks me where I'm from, I said I'm from Palestine and after 5 minutes she's vanished, she
disappeared. And if I said I'm Italian everything is ok. "Oh, you are Italian, oh that's cool". Ok and if I was
Palestinian what is the point? I have a suit, what's the problem that I'm Palestinian? And before that: "oh you are
Bulgarian, oh you are to join EU in two months" and I received congratulations from my friends here on the first
of January for joining EU! But I told them "ok thank you very much, but I really don't care about it". EU! I will
be 60 when something will happen in the EU. It happens so slowly, so slowly that nobody will understand it.
This is the perfect example with the girls and the people in the bar: if I said I'm Italian they like me, if I said that
I'm Bulgarian they don't like me. It doesn't matter how I look or whatever.

Last question: do you feel you have something in common with people having important experiences abroad?

362 I don't know. What do you mean?

I don't mean anything.

364 You don't mean anything. You want me to find differences between me and people from my country or my town
366 who are abroad?

No, I wish to know if you feel you have something in common with people having experiences abroad, people from any country.

368 We have nothing in common, we are completely different. The reason that we have spent 6 months here, me and
370 them, it doesn't make anything, because I spent all my life in Bulgaria, I had my education there, my life there,
way of living, way of understanding the things and because we are Bulgarian and not French or Belgian, we
372 were obliged to understand all the things about the countries which are better than us. That's why we know a lot
of things, more things about all the countries, all the nations, way of living outside our borders, than the people
374 in Western Europe, because they don't care and don't have to care about it. Because they have the job and they
are so cute and they live a life easily. They don't care about anything else. And you can see on the highway: the
376 people have problems with their car and they are calling the police or whoever for help and are paying for. In
Bulgaria, if you have problems with your car, you call a friend of yours and he would come and repair your car
378 just on the highway. Come on. I don't need your money, or most people can repair them by themselves. Here
people call and pay 200 euro for making some repairs in their home, for cleaning, for example, or to repair the
380 outdoor, to paint the walls and we are doing everything by ourselves. Everything, in any case. That's why my
boss here in my company... come on, I repair my car by myself, I'm doing by myself all the electric problems,
382 I'm cleaning my office and I'm doing everything about my work in place, and before that he was calling
somebody to do everything, a specialist in electronics to do a 5 minutes job for 200 euro, and now it's 9 months
384 he's doing nothing. This is the mentality of the people here. They can do their job, that's it. Nothing else. And
they need 2 minutes, one minute now and one minute after 3 years to make two children. Yes and that's it.
386 Finished. And they can't do anything else. In the bar, they asked me to open a bottle with a lighter because they
cannot. My sister is 12 years old and if I give her a lighter she would open a beer, I say you open it my dear, but
388 the 40 year men here they would ring to the specialist in opening the bottles. Ridiculous. And that's the truth. A
lot of people told me about it a long time ago but I was like come on, it's not possible, but now after 9 months,
390 yes, everything is possible. Here you are going to rent a flat and it's like in Baghdad, or in Beirut, everything is

awful, is down, the furniture is older than my grandmother's and you are paying 500 euro; in Bulgaria if you go to a flat like this your broker who is going to sell your apartment he will laugh at you... uh uh where are you going with this flat? And if I go to this flat I'd go out in 3 minutes. ... I don't like Polish people because they are slaves: they come here and they say "I don't care, I'll live in the basement, I will do this, this and this and at same time I'm in Belgium and I'm working for 1000 euro", can you imagine this, 1000 euro! And in Sofia I work for 300 euro and I live in a flat that nobody in the Commission would live in a flat like this. How is it possible, nobody knows

398 **You mean that in Bulgaria your quality of life is better?**

Ya. The only problem is with travelling. I don't have enough money to save. I don't have the money to buy a 50 thousand car, to go on vacation to Palma de Maiorca, but at same time I live 5 times better than people here. I can go every week to a discoteque and I can spend 100 euro, I don't care. Here 18 years old go to a discoteque and their mother give them 5 euro, and they have one beer and go out looking at the stars stupidly and they don't have 5 more euro to buy a drink to a beautiful girl and to feel a man, to feel free, good. And after that when he's 25 he's ready to die. My brother's class mates, when in Rome, 3 of them out of 40 got drunk and try to commit suicide.

406 **Belgian people?**

French, but the difference is not very big. I can tell you my 16-year old brother's philosophy about Belgium, it's very interesting. He spent 2 years in a French school in Belgium and his philosophy is that the Belgian are stupid and they know this, while in France people are stupid too but they don't understand it. This is the only difference between Belgian and French people. One nation know it and the other says 'oh that's not true'. And now because I have a lot of Norwegian friends and Swedish here and a lot of Italian and Spanish friends, all of them are very clever, but at the same time the North people are very stupid, if you can get it, if you know what I mean. That's the truth, unfortunately. Every person that has spent his vacation in Eastern Europe, Greece, Bulgaria or Turkey, he will never go back again in France, on the Nizza coast, or whatever, the greatest places in the world, never again. The point is dare you! to go there. Do it one time and after that you will go every year: you will spend the half and you have two times more fun, that's the point, but everybody are trying to get here, because people want to be secure, to live their boring life and after 10 years, after 5 years not 10 years, when it's too late you understand you can buy whatever you want, they are rich ok middle-rich, normal living person, and at the same time you are not happy and that's the truth.

420 **Ok, some data. Your studies?**

Degree in economics, 4 years.

422 **What do your parents do?**

My father works in the tourism business.

424 **Are you a single?**

Yes.

426 **Can we remain in contact for two years?**

Yes, sure.

Interview n° 29: Switzerland

- 2
- 4 **Quanti anni hai?**
24.
- 6 **Lavori con un contratto o sei una stagista?**
Sono una stagista. Al 50% faccio test o aiuto per le conferenze e al 50% mi occupo di supportare per i meeting e scrivere la nostra newsletter.
- 8 **Pensi che alla fine del tuo stage ti prenderanno, rimarrai qui?**
No, non penso di rimanere anche se mi prendono.
- 10 **Dici a Bruxelles o a [nome dell'ente presso cui lavora].**
Dico a Bruxelles.
- 12 **Quindi stai pensando di tornare in Svizzera?**
Sì.
- 14 **Quanto sei stata qui?**
Sarò stata in tutto 6 mesi. Sono qui da 1 settimana e mezza. Sono appena arrivata.
- 16 **Questo è interessante. Come mai pensi di tornare in Svizzera?**
Perché prima di venire qui ho passato 6 mesi in Francia e 6 mesi in Canada, dunque è da tanto tempo che sono andata via da casa e per quello vorrei tornare un po' a casa. E' tanto tempo che sono in giro adesso.
- 18 **Da dove vieni esattamente?**
Da un paesino vicino Ginevra che si chiama Grans.
- 20 **Quanti abitanti ha?**
2000.
- 22 **Mi dici delle tue esperienze all'estero?**
Cominciamo dall'inizio. Nel 2001 un viaggio umanitario in Africa, era una missione umanitaria in Burkina Faso per un mese. L'anno dopo la stessa cosa ma in Vietnam...
- 24 **Con quale organizzazione?**
Si chiama Nouvel Planet. Viene da Losanna. Poi sono stata un mese e mezzo a Dublino per l'inglese nel 2003 per studiare in una scuola di lingua, poi nel 2004 sono stata un mese e mezzo in Brasile come turista, poi 3 anni a Lugano, e da agosto 2006 4 mesi in Francia e 4 mesi in Quebec per fare il master in gestione internazionale: ci si occupa di commercio, tutto quello che si fa a livello internazionale, per un'impresa o per un'istituzione, però abbiamo fatto della contabilità, della statistica, della gestione interculturale.
- 26 **In totale quanti anni hai studiato?**
4.
- 28 **In tutte queste esperienze hai mai usato programmi dell'Unione Europea?**
No.
- 30 **Anche se la Svizzera non fa parte della CE, avete programmi come l'Erasmus?**
Sì ce li abbiamo, ma non viene finanziato dall'Erasmus, viene finanziato dallo Stato, però abbiamo meno vantaggi degli altri perché è lo Stato che paga e forse ci sono meno soldi, però esistono comunque. Non li ho usati.
- 32 **Questo stage fa parte del completamento del master?**
Sì, esatto.
- 34 **Perché sei venuta proprio a Bruxelles?**
Perché anche se ho fatto un master orientato verso le imprese, mi sono resa conto che il mio ambito di base è quello delle istituzioni internazionali; prima volevo fare nell'umanitario, ho puntato sull'ONU ma ho trovato tante porte chiuse, è molto difficile entrare, e poi grazie alla mia università di base, di Lugano, ho trovato questo stage. Bruxelles è il posto perfetto per le istituzioni internazionali, io conoscevo un po' l'Europa e l'Unione Europea, ma volevo vedere da dentro a cosa somigliava e cosa voleva dire lavorare in un'istituzione.
- 36 **Come mai non hai chiesto lo stage al Parlamento Europeo?**
Ho chiesto anche, però era più facile per me restare nell'ambito svizzero, perché, visto che sono fuori dall'Europa, ho pensato che sarebbe stato più difficile trovare un posto. Allora ho provato sia qua che alla missione svizzera in ambito diplomatico e mi hanno presa qua.
- 38 **In principio, quando sei partita per il master, perché hai deciso di andare all'estero?**
Allora, perché era l'ambito internazionale che mi interessava e mi sono detta che l'università di Lugano comunque è piccola, è nuova, e non ha tantissima reputazione attraverso il mondo. Io volevo andare oltre l'ambito della comunicazione, così se vedevo che la comunicazione non mi piaceva potevo orientarmi
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- 58 diversamente. Però dopo, volevo andare in Canada perché mi piaceva il paese e mi hanno parlato dell'università di Sherwood che ha una buona reputazione e lì ho fatto la mia application.
- 60 **La tua prima lingua è il francese? Quante lingue parli?**
Sì, parlo francese, italiano, inglese, tedesco e spagnolo
- 62 **Quindi sei andata in Canada perché facilitata dal francese?**
No. Veramente volevo migliorare l'inglese perché l'inglese nel mondo internazionale va benissimo, però non sono riuscita ad essere ammessa nelle università anglofona e dunque mi sono allontanata da quello scopo e mi sono indirizzata verso un'università canadese, però francese, sapendo comunque che l'inglese non ci sarebbe stato; mentre in Francia le lezioni erano in inglese, un po' un paradosso, però era così.
- 64 **Date da professori inglesi o da francesi in inglese?**
Da francesi in inglese [ridiamo].
- 66 **Gli altri studenti erano inglesi o francesi?**
Erano francesi, cioè francofoni.
- 68 **Una buffonata.**
Sì! Diciamo che i francesi non sono bravi in inglese, era la scuola che lo voleva, però non era un granché.
- 70 **Di solito chiedo cosa significa vivere a Bruxelles, ma per te è un po' presto visto che sei arrivata da una settimana e mezzo.**
Posso dire che significa la possibilità di lavorare in ambito internazionale e, al di là dell'Unione Europea, nel mondo internazionale.
- 72 **Cosa vuoi dire?**
Voglio dire che nel quartiere dove vivo, verso la stazione nord dopo il canale, c'è molta immigrazione.
- 74 **Che tipo di immigrazione?**
Africa del nord soprattutto. Il posto era economico. Ho trovato una lista di alloggi, con coabitazione e io non volevo vivere da sola.
- 76 **Con chi vivi?**
Vivo con altri studenti che stanno facendo degli stages. Uno viene dal Marocco, uno viene dall'Olanda e una è belga.
- 78 **Quali sono le tue aspettative rispetto a questo periodo?**
E' molto complicato. Dopo due settimane ancora non mi sento a mio agio con tutte le situazioni che esistono, chi fa cosa, chi è finanziato da cosa, come si interagisce tra i paesi. Tra sei mesi spero proprio di tornare al mio paese e lavorare al dipartimento degli affari esteri sapendo cosa vuol dire lavorare nell'Unione Europea e sapendo a chi rivolgermi per tale e tale problema.
- 80 **Vuoi capire meglio come funziona il meccanismo?**
Sì, esatto.
- 82 **E a livello personale?**
A livello personale è la mia prima esperienza come stage e mi aspetto di vedere come io – da persona formata dopo il master – posso interagire con il mondo del lavoro finalmente, e come posso mettere in pratica tutto quello che ho imparato. A livello personale, vorrei farmi dei contatti, anzitutto professionali per dopo. Comunque torno spesso in Svizzera, anche perché sono stata via tantissimo tempo e non ho intenzione di farmi una rete di amicizie, anche perché non ci sono occasioni visto che ormai, al di là dei miei coinquilini non conosco gente che possa farmi conoscere gente. Quindi sono qua soprattutto per una questione professionale.
- 84 **Quindi vuoi una rete sociale che ti dia dei vantaggi a livello professionale?**
Esatto. Infatti la maggioranza dei contatti internazionali che ho qua sono nell'ambito del lavoro.
- 86 **E perché ti chiudi a priori di avere una rete sociale informale?**
Non è che la chiudo nel senso che non la voglio proprio. E' solo che come potrei averne una visto che non conosco gente di base qua? Non conosco nessuno a Bruxelles e la gente che incontro, la incontro grazie al lavoro. Fuori dal lavoro sono spesso in Svizzera perché ho una nonna che vorrei ancora vedere. Però dopo se mi accade, bene, non sono chiusa. Però non era la mia primissima intenzione incontrare gente qua.
- 88 **Ogni quanto torni in Svizzera?**
Ogni due settimane.
- 90 **Anche quando eri in Francia?**
No, perché la vita sociale era più facile. Era una scuola, c'era più gente. Era più facile di quando si arriva in un ufficio così piccolo dove c'è gente che ha la sua vita qua. Ma prima non ho mai fatto così, anche quando ero a Lugano, tornavo molto poco a casa; solo che qui approfitto anche del fatto che gli aerei ora non sono molto cari. Non so se capisci, non è che sono asociale, però dopo diverse esperienze all'estero, vorrei focalizzarmi sul lavoro.
- 92

Quanti siete a lavorare?

114 Siamo in 4. Due sono arrivati all'inizio dell'anno gli altri sono qui da molto e poi è anche l'età... hanno famiglia.

L'esperienza di andare all'estero per un periodo pensi sia comune alla maggioranza dei giovani europei?

116 Trovo che per me sia molto difficile rispondere perché, venendo dall'università di Lugano e facendo un master
118 in economia internazionale la gente che frequento lo fa, è spinta verso l'internazionale, si muove tanto. Mi rendo
120 conto che i giovani oggi si muovono tantissimo grazie ai programmi tipo Erasmus. Trovo che sia un'opportunità
bellissima, che i nostri genitori non avevano prima, che va sempre aumentando. I giovani si muovono tantissimo.

In che tipo di contesti entri in contatto con persone di altri paesi?

122 Sul lavoro abbiamo molti meetings con uffici omologhi al nostro. Dunque già in due settimane mi è capitato di
trovarmi in riunioni dove ogni paese è rappresentato e poi, come ho detto, al di là dell'ambito europeo Bruxelles
è molto internazionale.

Essendo tu svizzera, ti senti un'outsider rispetto ai paesi membri?

124 E' molto strano. Me l'aspettavo di essere trattata un po' a parte o di non essere considerata dato che non sono
126 nell'UE; in effetti adesso mi chiedo come mai non ci siamo perché non fa alcuna differenza, almeno nell'ambito
della ricerca, penso che sia un ambito un po' particolare perché la ricerca è abbastanza sviluppata nel nostro
128 paese e siamo spinti verso l'Europa. Per quello mi sento che in confronto alla Spagna, alla Germania o all'Italia
non c'è nessuna differenza. Siamo invitati agli stessi meeting, abbiamo gli stessi rapporti con la Commissione
130 dell'UE. Dunque, assolutamente no, non mi sento fuori dell'UE.

A livello personale... avevi bisogno del passaporto o ti bastava la carta d'identità?

132 Adesso ci sono gli accordi bilaterali tra Svizzera e UE, dal 2004 se non sbaglio, dunque no, si può circolare
liberamente.

Per quanto riguarda studio e lavoro, hai bisogno di un permesso?

134 Niente. Però in Francia ero per studio e non avevo bisogno di niente, appunto, mentre questo comunque è un
136 ufficio svizzero, amministrativamente svizzero, comunque non ho avuto bisogno di niente, almeno per il periodo
di sei mesi.

Quindi non c'è alcuna differenza fra te e una cittadina di uno stato membro?

138 E per quello mi chiedo come mai non ci siamo, solo in teoria non siamo nell'UE, perché praticamente, almeno
140 nell'ambito della ricerca e dell'innovazione, ci siamo.

E i programmi europei, come Leonardo, li avete anche voi?

142 Sì, io sono venuta qua grazie a Leonardo. Mi sembra che non possiamo avere le borse dall'associazione
'Leonardo', solo che le borse vengono pagate dallo stato svizzero.

Quindi accedete allo stesso programma, solo che la fonte di finanziamento è diversa.

144 Esatto.

Vorrei sapere: cos'è per te un amico?

146 Un amico è qualcuno con cui ho condiviso un'esperienza di vita e mi è risultata positiva. Ci sono diversi tipi di
148 amici, gli amici con cui si può avere un buonissimo contatto ma sono a tempo determinato solo perché la vita
vuole così, penso fra l'altro ai buonissimi amici che mi sono fatta in Canada e in Francia, so che sarà difficile
150 rimanere in contatto con tutti, e poi gli amici d'infanzia che avrò per tutta la vita.

Per ora, le persone che hai conosciuto qui le consideri amiche o conoscenti?

152 Per il momento è un po' presto dirlo. Immagino che tra un paio di mesi possono diventare amici. Nel senso che
con un amico si può parlare liberamente, senza problemi.

Pensi che a Bruxelles cercherai di stare con persone di altri paesi?

154 Non tengo conto di questo parametro quando incontro qualcuno. La nazionalità non è un criterio di amicizia.

Facendo riferimento alle esperienze passate, quali aspetti positivi e quali negativi trovi nelle relazioni con persone di altri paesi?

158 Intendi nella barriera culturale?

Non so, dimmi tu quello che pensi.

160 Forse è la percezione dell'amicizia. Può essere a volte una barriera nel senso che... ho in mente per esempio il
162 marocchino, adesso: per lui, dal momento che si divide qualcosa con una persona è già amicizia, per me ci vuole
più tempo per considerarlo, per fidarmi di lui. Non accade subito perché vivo con qualcuno oppure perché lavoro
164 con qualcuno che lo considero un amico. Un po' di tempo ci vuole. Per conoscere un paese, so che il migliore
modo è conoscere la gente del paese, ovvero se fossi stata in Canada per un viaggio turistico conoscerei meno di
166 forse due o tre cene con dei canadesi [leggi: avrei forse avuto solo un paio di cene con dei canadesi], loro mi
permettono di integrarmi meglio con il paese. Potrei parlare per ore sugli esempi sulla lingua, sulle barriere
168 linguistiche. Sono stata in Francia e in Canada dove parlano un francese diverso dal mio, mi sono divertita
tantissimo perché abbiamo differenze nelle nostre similitudini. Pensiamo di essere vicini geograficamente o

170 grazie alla lingua, ma grazie a queste differenze si crea già molto contatto. Solo il fatto di interagire, di
171 scambiare opinioni, elementi culturali così, per me mi avvicina molto ad una persona ed è molto piacevole a
172 livello internazionale. Fa parte delle mie migliori esperienze e mi aiuta anche a rendermi conto di come funziona
173 il mio proprio paese, perché all'estero ti rendi conto di come è percepito dagli altri, come ne parlano e questo è
174 un soggetto di interazione con le altre persone, e per me è molto positivo.

174 **Sei all'estero già da un anno. Riesci a mantenere le amicizie che hai nel tuo paese?**

175 Già avevo due vite: quella di vent'anni a Ginevra e poi quella più recente a Lugano di 4 anni, italiana. Dunque
176 già in Svizzera avevo due vite in relazione. La primissima esperienza a quel livello è quella di Lugano dove già
177 mi sono resa conto con chi si vuole tenere contatto e con chi si può, perché ovviamente la gente va e viene e fa la
178 sua vita senza di te; dopo quando torni... per esempio quando torno e incontro i miei amici, mi fa molto piacere,
179 però ogni volta viviamo nel passato, ci ricordiamo tutto quello che abbiamo fatto prima e non faccio più parte
180 della loro vita attuale, il che è normale quando si sta lontani per tanto tempo, provo al massimo a mantenere
181 questi contatti almeno con chi voglio e con chi lo vuole anche.

182 **Da cosa pensi che dipenda?**

183 Penso che dipende già dalla relazione di base, cioè da quello che si aveva prima di partire, se erano amici stretti
184 oppure così, oppure che derivi dal carattere di una persona. Più o meno ho in mente due tipi di rapporti con la
185 gente che ho lasciato al paese: la gente con cui non si ha contatto mentre si è in posti diversi e quando ci vediamo
186 è come se non fossi mai partita e lì c'è una sicurezza, nel senso che anche se sto fuori due anni quando tornerò
187 sarà sempre così. Il secondo tipo di amicizia è quello che si deve fare uno sforzo, cercare di mantenere sempre il
188 contatto per essere sicuri che quando si torna c'è ancora. Voilà.

189 **Stai cercando di mantenere anche le amicizie fatte in Canada?**

190 Quello è fresco fresco, perché li ho lasciati due mesi fa. Per noi tutti il primo mese non abbiamo potuto
191 mantenere contatto perché ognuno doveva iniziare il suo stage o la sua vita, tornare nel suo paese, però adesso,
192 da una settimana, ci sono mail che girano, delle notizie e poi si ha voglia di sapere come sta questa gente e
193 comunque abbiamo provato a creare una rete via internet dove possiamo mantenere contatto, penso a questi
194 nuovi siti. Eravamo un piccolo gruppo, una trentina, metà che venivano dalla Francia, metà dal Canada, dunque
195 come si farà, anche quella è stata un'esperienza... Perché era la stessa gente sia in Francia che in Canada: prima
196 i francesi son venuti in Canada e poi i canadesi in Francia. Per quello a livello interpersonale l'ho trovato molto
197 interessante, di stare in due paesi diversi con due esperienze diverse, perché ti rendi conto di come è la gente
198 quando è a casa sua e quando è all'estero, ed è molto diverso. Adesso, è chiaro che in un gruppo di 30 persone si
199 formano contatti con certi più che con gli altri. Con gli amici più stretti che ho avuto penso di tenere al massimo
200 il contatto e con gli altri tutto quello che potrò. Purtroppo ho imparato che non è molto semplice sempre.

201 **Che tipo di strumenti usi per mantenere il contatto?**

202 Soprattutto via Internet, però da un anno con le mie amiche di infanzia abbiamo deciso di creare una rete via
203 lettera, perché è più bello, più personale. Se no Skype, Face book, che è un tipo di messenger più evoluto, si
204 danno i dati, si crea una rete con tutti gli iscritti e poi da ciascuna persona si può vedere tutta la lista di amici
205 come se potessi entrare nella mail box di qualcuno e vedere tutti i contatti. Così grazie a quello ho riscoperto
206 degli amici che non avevo più visto da 10 anni. E' un tipo di megarete attraverso tutto il mondo.

207 **Avete pensato anche di visitarvi a vicenda?**

208 Sì. Ci sono a Dubai, negli Stati Uniti, in India, a Parigi. Io andrei a visitarli tutti, se potessi, solo che siamo
209 comunque studenti, anche se sotto stage, non abbiamo moltissimi soldi, la prima barriera è quella finanziaria. È
210 chiaro che andrei a Dubai dalla mia amica o a San Francisco anche per scoprire il paese; trovo che il migliore
211 modo di visitare un paese è attraverso una persona del posto che conosci. Penso che andrò a Parigi parecchie
212 volte, se no essendo qui 6 mesi e loro stando pure all'estero purtroppo non potrò farlo come vorrei, ma lo farei se
213 avessi tempo. Perché i legami con la persona che vai a trovare diventano più stretti: dimostri alla persona che un
214 passo al di là di dove eravamo adesso c'è.

215 **Hai detto che vuoi tornare a casa ogni 15 giorni per rivedere la tua famiglia. Quanto conta in questa
216 decisione rivedere i tuoi amici?**

217 Prima di venire qua, sono stata un mese a casa e mi sono accorta che sono stata un po' troppo via, cioè hanno
218 fatto un passo in là nella loro vita che ho perso, penso soprattutto ai miei fratelli. Mi sono accorta che la mia
219 nonna non ci sarà più per un casino di tempo [?], può sembrarti paradossale che voglio tornare ogni 15 giorni nel
220 senso che se si va all'estero non si torna, se si vuole fare un'esperienza di base – lo penso anch'io – però mi sono
221 accorta che volevo riprendere queste relazioni che avevo prima, primo perché mi mancano e secondariamente
222 perché quando sei all'estero ti rendi conto con quali persone vorresti stare di più. Adesso sono nel *mood* che mi
223 sento molto legata alla mia famiglia, di quanto lo fossi prima che volevo andare via da casa. Ormai vorrei
224 tornarci, anche con gli amici che hanno vissuto 4 o 5 anni, durante i quali si fanno tante cose, e io non c'ero;

226 vorrei tornare un po' alla fonte, diciamo. Non mi sarei accorta di quanto tutto questo è importante per me, se non
fossi andata via. Dunque non è che non mi piaccia la vita qui, ma vorrei riprendere le mie relazioni di fonte.

Sei un po' commossa?

228 Un po'. [Ha le lacrime agli occhi].

Hai anche un fidanzato a casa?

230 Sì, anche. A Lugano.

Per quanto riguarda la tua identità, come ti descriveresti?

232 In confronto alla nazionalità, molto più svizzera di prima, nel senso che, prima di partire non avevo un
234 grandissimo rapporto col mio paese, però stando all'estero, mi accorgo che per poter interagire con altre culture,
altri paesi bisogna conoscere il proprio. E bisogna fare lo sforzo di imparare, siccome non ho l'accento svizzero,
236 parlo francese e basta, tantissima gente mi chiedeva come si parla il francese in Svizzera e io ero incapace di
farlo, oppure mi chiedono cose sulla cultura, per esempio come si fa una fondue... io ho dovuto andar via per
238 conoscere meglio il mio paese e quindi l'identità è diventata molto più forte nel senso che mi sento più svizzera
di prima. Trovo che l'internazionale ha un vantaggio enorme in confronto all'identità, andare fuori per
conoscersi meglio trovo che sia verissimo, io l'ho vissuto. Voilà.

Cosa pensi di avere in comune con gli altri europei?

240 Una voglia di interagire. Io sono europeista, credo nell'Europa, ai vantaggi che può avere per un Paese, non è il
242 caso degli Svizzeri perché tantissimi sono contro l'idea dell'Europa, secondo me hanno un po' paura. Io mi sento
un po' francese, un po' tedesca, che ha dei vantaggi enormi a interagire con altri paesi. Soprattutto in Svizzera
244 secondo me a livello di identità mi sento più francese che svizzera, perché parlo la lingua del loro paese, non
parlo svizzero, neanche svizzero-tedesco, studio letteratura francese, guardo i filmati francesi, seguo la politica
246 francese e quando ero nella parte italoфона era lo stesso per l'Italia. Per essere latini, c'è meno coinvolgimento
nella loro identità culturale [leggi: i latini sono meno nazionalisti, o più aperti verso le altre culture?] e per quello
248 sono più pronti ad interagire col resto dell'Europa, perché hanno comunque una lingua con la quale si può
comunicare. Quelli che parlano svizzero tedesco sono bravissimi nelle altre lingue, ma col loro tedesco non si
250 rapportano con nessuno. Secondo me, potersi capire è la base, ma gli altri europei hanno dei vantaggi che
potremmo avere anche noi se fossimo nell'Unione.

Perché in Svizzera sono contrari all'Unione?

252 Perché la Svizzera non è mai stata coinvolta in niente. Parlo dell'unificazione e dell'identificazione europea,
254 ovvero penso alle due guerre mondiali, nell'identità europea di base, cioè storicamente non c'entra niente. Poi
vuole preservare assolutamente la sua neutralità, perché il suo primo criterio è che non vuole avere rapporto in
256 nessun conflitto. A dire il vero sono divisi a metà, chi è per e chi è contro l'Europa. Le votazioni hanno detto due
volte di no e diranno ancora di no, perché vedono tutto quello che non va bene in Europa, tipo l'euro, l'aumento
258 dei prezzi, avrebbero paura che può avere un impatto negativo sul paese. Per quello penso che bisognerà
aspettare ancora un po' prima di unirsi all'UE. Però fanno degli accordi bilaterali, fanno tantissime cose per
260 interagire con loro, quindi a parte che non abbiamo la stessa moneta e non siamo coinvolti in certe cose, per la
maggioranza delle altre, come la ricerca, ci siamo.

Cosa significa per te l'espressione "essere cittadini del mondo"?

262 Per me è una grandissima espressione che vuol dire poco. È una definizione dell'essere umano oggi, nel
264 senso che è una parola fashion per giustificare tantissime cose. Però per me non ha un gran significato in sé: nei
paesi dove sono stata e in quelli in cui non sono stata non conosco niente, quell'espressione è utilizzata da gente
266 del nord, nel senso che se si chiede a qualcuno dei paesi abbandonati nel mondo direi che questa cosa è ridicola;
è indicata per certi tipi di paesi, certi tipi di relazioni in un certo ambito.

Senti di avere valori in comune con le persone che come te hanno avuto esperienze all'estero significative?

268 Sì, l'apertura di spirito, la voglia di scoprire novità, la voglia di scambiare le esperienze [pausa], la tolleranza e
270 l'adattarsi alle situazioni e l'essere molto flessibili nella vita in generale.

Cosa fanno i tuoi genitori?

272 Mia madre fa l'infermiera e mio padre l'operaio.

Possiamo rimanere in contatto per un paio d'anni?

274 Sì, certo.

Interview n° 30: Moldova

- 2
- 4 **How old are you?**
25.
- 6 **You represent a different case for me because I normally interview people from the member states and you are not, but I'm glad to make interviews also to people from Eastern countries. To begin with, I'd like to know your identity perception being outside the EU but at the same time working in the EU.**
8 I think it's a big different. Everything is different here compared to Moldova and it was a shock for me to come.
10 But in general I can't say, if you ask me questions, it will be easier for me.
- 12 **Where do you come from?**
From the capital: Chisinau.
- 14 **How big is it?**
Around seven hundred thousands.
- 16 **Did you have other experiences abroad?**
No, it's the first time.
- 18 **Did you travel abroad, for tourism?**
Not so much.
- 20 **So it's really your first time abroad.**
Yes.
- 22 **Which reason pushed you...**
[She interrupts me] Nothing pushed me. I didn't even want to come. My parents insisted and everybody told it was a good chance for me to make experience, so I came.
- 24 **Was it a job opportunity?**
Before this job I worked in a private company and there I heard there was a vacancy to come here for this job, that's how it happened: I just changed my work and my work is to travel.
- 26 **What do you mean that your work is to travel?**
28 That's my work to be here. [I am here because of my work]
- 30 **Why didn't you want to come?**
It's not that I didn't want to come, I didn't plan to. The conditions were that I had to leave Moldova and to come to Belgium in one month and I didn't plan it. I mean, I never thought going somewhere, living somewhere for three years, working in a state company, you see?
- 32 **Why in Brussels?**
34 You know where I work? It's the Diplomatic Mission of Moldova in the European Community.
- 36 **Now that you are here what does it mean to you to live here?**
It means a lot. I met a lot of people; a huge amount of people. I speak two languages I didn't speak before (I spoke English but I didn't use it everyday). And now I study French... it's like that all my life has changed. I changed my work, I changed the country I live, I changed the language I speak, I changed my friends.
- 38 **With what consequences?**
40 It is a great experience for me, I feel like I am more... (pause) I'm more developed, more open now, much more than I was before.
- 42 **Did you have expectations before you came here?**
No.
- 44 **How long have you been here?**
One year and a half.
- 46 **Do you consider this experience a temporary one or something that can develop?**
Something that I can develop.
- 48 **In a long term base?**
Yes, for sure.
- 50 **How long would you remain here?**
Normally, I should not remain here, but I can.
- 52 **Would you like to?**
It depends. I'm still thinking of it. There are plus and minus, but is the same in Moldova.
- 54 **May I ask you which are these plus and minus?**

- 56 Yes, you can. So plus is the level of life, I really like it; minus: it's not my country, it's not my language and all
my family is in Moldova... and I don't really like the job... In Moldova I had a very interesting job, I still miss
it. Can you believe it? It's about one year and a half that I'm here and I'm still thinking to my previous job.
- 58 **I was never so excited for a job!**
Yes, I really mean it, now you understand how much I really liked it.
- 60 **Could you remain here for the rest of your life?**
It depends on my personal life.
- 62 **What do you mean?**
I would not like to talk about my personal life.
- 64 **But could you marry someone here?**
I don't know... (pause) About staying here I can add something. I feel like now I still have 1 year and a half to
stay here, so I think in 1 year and a half it would be difficult for me to leave everything again, after I built my life
here for 3 years, and then I have to come back to Moldova, you see what I mean? It will be difficult like it was
difficult to leave Moldova when I was coming here. That's the place where I'm living for 3 years and I'm pretty
happy.
- 70 **That depends on your personal relationships?**
In general.
- 72 **You told me you know many people here: are they more acquaintances or friends?**
They are friends. I was lucky when I came here, because a friend of mine she came here to make a stage at Coca-
Cola, she had a lot of friends here, then really a big company.
- 74 **So everything began through your friend from Moldova?**
Yes. She came earlier than I. She made her studies in Paris and then came here for her stage.
- 76 **So you entered her group of friends and you still go out with the same people?**
Yes.
- 78 **Of which nationality are they?**
Mostly they are Belgian, no, all of them. Flemish.
- 80 **Don't you feel the need to go out with someone of your country?**
Yes, I need it, but not someone from Belgium, I need someone from my country, that's why I'm spending
hundreds of euro to call them by phone.
- 84 **So you are here normally to have Belgian friends, but you miss a lot home and you spend a lot. But there
is Skype!**
There is Skype, yes, but I don't have Internet at home, only at work but I don't like talking at work.
- 86 **Maybe it would be a good investment.**
But that's why I do not put it at home.
- 88 **Why?**
Because I do not want to spend more money.
- 90 **But with Skype you could call for free.**
Yes, but I have Internet like eight hours per day at my work, and I wouldn't like coming at home and sitting at
my computer again.
- 94 **So you maintain the relationships you have in your country?**
Yes, I keep them going.
- 96 **You basically speak with them?**
Yes.
- 98 **How many times do you go back home?**
Until now 3 times.
- 100 **And did you have the chance to visit your friends in Moldova?**
Yes. I cannot go home more often because of my work. I only have the chance to go once a year. It's quite
difficult to take a vacation plus.
- 102 **Didn't you try to go out with people you work with who are from Moldova?**
I have a good friend of mine who is a colleague and we often go out to have a drink.
- 104 **So you are happy with your Belgian friends.**
Yes.
- 106 **In which kind of context do you meet foreign people here?**
In my French class. Some of my friends are from my previous French school.
- 108 **Do you think it is easy to establish new relationships in Brussels?**

- 110 It was easy at the beginning, but now I feel like it's enough. It's becoming more difficult for me, I don't know, it's too much information, I don't know why. With every person you just stop to communicate with, you have to... I don't know, I have to know a good person to feel good with him.
- 112 **But why did you say too much information?**
- 114 Because every person is a demand of information, you know, his habits, his character... I don't know, you get tired of getting to know new people.
- 116 **Did you feel the same also in your country?**
- No
- 118 **Did you meet so many people in your country?**
- No.
- 120 **Let's say that in your country you start a job that permits you to meet a lot of people: do you think that you would feel the same?**
- 122 I don't know. It depends on the kind of people I meet. Maybe not, it wouldn't be that difficult.
- Do you think that it depends on the fact that people you meet here are from different countries?**
- 124 Yes.
- What kind of difficulties do you find...**
- 126 It's not a fact of difficulties, it's quite different [pause].
- And this implies a bigger effort for you?**
- 128 It's becoming major. In one year it didn't happen to me to meet a real person and now I start to notice...
- Which are the difficulties and the positive aspects that you find in a relationship with people from other countries?**
- 130 It's difficult because we have different... Moldova was part of Soviet Union and we were all educated according to the Russian culture, the Russian movies, and people from here, of course they know nothing about it. And that's all my colleagues say also. I talked with one colleague here and she's attending a French course too, and they discuss about moving, but no one... and she knows about two hundreds Russian actors, that's why... that's why we don't like Soviet Union, it was like very cold.
- 132
- 134
- 136 **And the plus?**
- I feel impressed that they don't care at all, they take it easy, everything.
- 138 **What do you mean?**
- Everything: their work, the relationship with their parents, their work mainly.
- 140 **Do you mean your Belgian friends?**
- 142 Yea, they don't care about their work, they do not work, I sometimes work 14 hours per day 'cause I have a lot to work and I cannot go home until I have finished something, and nobody else is doing something like this.
- Do you think it's something related to you personal character or to national culture?**
- 144 I don't know. Maybe it's personal, I don't know. No, but all my friends are like this also, so.
- Like you?**
- 146 Yes, like me.
- So you have a different sense of responsibility?**
- 148 Ya.
- Do you think that this fact of taking easy is a better way of living?**
- 150 Yes, maybe it's a better way.
- Which are the differences you find in the relationships you have here and those you have in your country?**
- 152 [Pause] There is one difference. To be really close to a person in my country for example it takes a lot of time, and here I met those people and in one month I feel very close to them, as I feel close to my friends in Moldova.
- 154 **How do you explain this?**
- I don't know. Maybe they are more kind or something.
- 156 **Have you ever thought about it?**
- No.
- 158 **Now you will start to.**
- Yes [Laugh].
- 160 **Would you agree that very often friendships depends not on people' character but on what they share?**
- On the situation they are living in. Yes, I would agree. Maybe I'm a good example of this.
- 162 **Do you think that you will maintain the relationships created here when you are back home?**
- It will be more difficult, for sure.
- 164 **Why?**

- 166 I don't know why. Because as I told you in Moldova it takes much more time to make a real friendship. With all my friends we have been friends like for ten years.
- 168 **But with your friends here will you be able to continue?**
- 170 Yes, for sure.
- 172 **Let's talk about your identity. How would you describe your identity?**
- 174 I'm a good girl! [Laugh]
- 176 **I mean your national identity.**
- 178 What do you mean?
- 180 **What would you say you are?**
- 182 I don't understand.
- 184 **I can say I feel Italian or whatever else. Many people have different perceptions of their identity.**
- 186 Ah! I feel 100 per cent Russian. My parents are Russian, and we're just living in Moldova and they had to study Moldovan language.
- 188 **Do you have a different language?**
- 190 Ya. My native language is Russian. Under the Soviet Union they spoke Russian, then after the crash they became separated. In Moldova there was a Moldovan language but under the Soviet Union nobody spoke it, after the separation they started to develop it and to speak only Moldovan.
- 192 **Now what language do people speak?**
- 194 Now it's a problem. Like me, for example. I knew Russian and had to study the Moldovan language, and so my parents, that's why I hate Moldovan language, but we have to speak it, because we are living there, that's how they say. Even though I would prefer Russian.
- 196 **So how old were you when you started to study Moldovan?**
- 198 10 years old.
- 200 **So it's a second language for you?**
- 202 Yes.
- 204 **And everyone speaks Moldovan? In the street what do you hear?**
- 206 Both. It's becoming more Moldavian. Now those who are little children do not speak Russian, because they have real Moldovan families and it was not like this before, every family spoke Russian.
- 208 **Do you think you have something in common with the Europeans?**
- 210 Ya.
- 212 **Would you describe yourself as European?**
- 214 I think yes. In the sense that I can communicate very easily with people from Europe. I have no problems at all.
- 216 **Would you say that you could communicate as easily as with Americans for example?**
- 218 Yeah, one of my friends is American.
- 220 **Or with Asian?**
- 222 I cannot say it about Asians, but American for sure.
- 224 **So it's not a matter of feeling European but only that they are not so different?**
- 226 Hmm...
- 228 **If you are in America or in Asia and they ask you where are you from?**
- 230 Form Moldova.
- 232 **Ok, from Moldova, and what if they don't know this state, what would you say?**
- 234 It's a little country, a part of former Soviet Union.
- 236 **And if they asked you what your culture is?**
- 238 My culture is Russian.
- 240 **Have you ever heard the expression "to be a citizen of the world"?**
- 242 Yes.
- 244 **What's your understanding of it?**
- 246 Feeling like you are at home in every country you are, and when people consider you like their own, like that you do not come from a different culture.
- 248 **Do you think is a realistic concept or totally ideal?**
- 250 Totally idealistic.
- 252 **A positive or negative one?**
- 254 A positive.
- 256 **Would you like to be like that?**
- 258 No.
- 260 **Why?**

- It's like that you don't have your...I don't know, your own country, your own culture.
- 222 **But you said it is positive.**
Positive because it's good that people don't have any problem in another country.
- 224 **Ok. Just some data more. Your degree?**
University degree in accountancy for 5 years.
- 226 **Your profession now?**
Accountant.
- 228 **Profession of your parents?**
Father, doctor, mother, *informaticienne*.
- 230 **You are not married.**
No.
- 232 **Are you living with your boyfriend?**
No.
- 234 **Would you like to?**
Yes.
- 236 **Are you planning...**
Not for the moment.
- 238 **How many languages do you speak currently?**
Russian, Moldovan [which is like Romanian], French.
- 240 **Can we remain in contact for the next two years?**
Yes.

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