

Expatriation in the Light of Post-Conventional Ego-Development: Working with Expatriate Clients in a Developmental Context

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Abstract

This heuristic research study places the phenomenon of expatriation into a developmental context and explores how cultural relocation may contribute towards individuals' post-conventional ego-development. The expansion of the phenomenon due to the accelerated process of globalisation has resulted in an increasing need for a better understanding of cross-cultural transitions. The research initiated a qualitative observation of six expatriates' transition and developmental experiences, enabling a perhaps more refined and accurate comprehension of the process of growth than the quantitative methods. The study, however, goes beyond the cultural perspectives and proposes a holistic developmental approach to coaching expatriates, including characteristic developmental themes identified in the research participants' stories.

Keywords: expatriation; Brussels; ego-development; culture; coaching

Introduction

Globalisation, international career, cross-cultural communication, expatriation – just a few of those frequently heard expressions that characterise the trends in today's global labour markets and societies. Indeed, expatriation has become an important phenomenon, motivating researchers, philosophers and practitioners to understand better the conditions of successful expatriation as well as expatriates' transition and integration processes. Due to its particular relevance to the corporate sector, companies also recognised the need to adapt their corporate culture, communication processes as well as coaching practices to a high degree of cultural diversity and assist their employees in tackling challenging adjustment processes.

Based on the literature review I completed as part of my MA in Coaching Practice, it appears that the focus of studies carried out prior to my enquiry has mostly been placed on the initial phase of the transition. However, my own personal life-experience as an expatriate, those of my fellow expatriates, as well as my coaching practice with international clients have led me to believe that an excellent potential for personal growth lies in the period that follows the initial stages of cultural relocation. Throughout my own transition experiences, I have consciously observed how my perceptions, thinking and meaning-making processes changed, and when working with expatriates I discovered certain similarities in their developmental patterns and topics of concern arising at the various stages of their cross-cultural adventure.

While trying to understand the unique developmental features I have observed, I learnt about the Ego-Development Theory (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2000, 2005; Hy&Loevinger, 1996; Loevinger,

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1976) which seemed to illustrate the examined processes very accurately and which also served as the key underlying theoretical formulation of my research.

The EDT describes a sequence of how mental models evolve over time. It portrays a psychological system with three interrelated components. Each stage emerges from the synthesis of doing (coping, needs and ends, purpose), being (awareness, experience, affect) and thinking (conceptions, knowledge, interpretations) and each new level contains the previous ones as subsets. (Cook-Greuter, 2005, p.3)

Even though the EDT is just one of the several ways in which development may be approached and displayed, yet what differentiates it from those models that explore development from one particular angle is exactly the above-mentioned synthesis of components.

The operative component looks at what adults see as the purpose of life, what needs they act upon, and what ends they are moving towards. The affective component deals with emotions and the experience of being in this world. The cognitive component addresses the question of how a person thinks about him or herself and the world. (Cook-Greuter, 2005, p.3)

For this reason, I found the EDT particularly helpful in examining expatriates' transition and developmental processes and the potential changes they showed around these components as a result of their expatriation. It enabled a more comprehensive and elaborate observation of this complex phenomenon, while the detailed description of stages created by Cook-Greuter (2005) provided a framework for conducting research. Its other advantage from the perspective of my study was that compared to other models, it provided a more sophisticated insight into the more advanced stages of development. However, it is very important to emphasise that despite the stage-approach, the theory should not be viewed as a linear progression or a simple hierarchy (Cook-Greuter, 2005).

In this four-tier approach the first two represent the so-called pre-conventional and conventional stages, while the third and fourth accommodate the post-conventional realm. A fourth realm was introduced in addition to the third post-conventional one to differentiate the high-end of ego-development: the stage of ego-transcendence. The first two tiers encompass mental growth from infancy to adulthood (Cook-Greuter, 2000). It can be assumed that the individual functioning at the conventional stages has successfully developed the worldviews as well as behavioural and cognitive norms which enable him/her to use abstract reasoning to handle everyday experiences in line with the expectations and conventions of society. These norms are based on objective, rational-scientific models. The post-conventional stages demonstrate more complex ways of mental processing and sense-making. By reaching beyond the conventional realm, individuals become critical about the unconsciously held and practiced norms. However, as Cook-Greuter (2000) also points out, development beyond the conventional stages is still rare, "in part because it is not supported by society's prevailing mindset, practices and institutions" (p.229). Yet, it is possible to get there and I believe that the proportion of people reaching the post-conventional tier has increased in the past decade, since in recent years, after the "period of intense materialism in the eighties and nineties" (Gilbert, 2011), we can again observe an emerging tendency which supports and promotes Self-search.

The observations I have made over the years have led me to reckon that expatriation has a strong potential to help individuals reach beyond the 'conventional realm of ego-development' (Cook-Greuter, 2000, 2005; Miller&Cook-Greuter, 1994; Wilber, 2000, 2007). My study was dedicated to a further elaboration on this developmental potential by conducting heuristic research which placed the experience of expatriation into the context of the development of the self.

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4 tiers of development (Miller & Cook-Greuter; Wilber)	Level of mind (Alexander <i>et al.</i>)	Ego-development stages (Loevinger; Cook-Greuter)
IV. Postpostconventional Ego-Transcendent	Unity consciousness Refined cosmic consciousness Cosmic consciousness	Transcendent self
III. Postconventional or Postformal	Ego	Unitive Construct-aware
	Feelings/intuition	Autonomous/Integrated <i>Mature, connected self</i> Individualistic
II. Conventional	Intellect	Conscientious <i>Separate, individual self</i> Self-aware
	Mind	Conformist <i>Communal self</i>
I. Preconventional	Desires	Self-protective
	Behavior/Senses	Impulsive Presocial
	Physical world	<i>Undifferentiated self</i>

Table I - Four-tier model of human development, correspondence of levels of mind and ego stages in the four-tier model, Cook-Greuter, 2000, p.230

The research was conducted in Brussels, perhaps the most culturally diverse capital in Europe; the city which is often called - sometimes ironically - the 'Heart of Europe', as it hosts the EU Headquarters. The particularity of this place, however, goes beyond its highly multicultural nature, involving its unique social and linguistic features. As Belgium originally consists of three cultures, it is characterised by strong community identities rather than one single Belgian identity. Consequently, the city's character is significantly influenced by the variety of foreign nationalities that make up nearly half of its population. Deboosere, Eggerickx, Van Hecke and Wayens (2009) suggest that more than 50% of the Brussels population comes from abroad or is born to parents who migrated to Belgium. Another unique factor is the linguistic element. While we can assume that a person who moves to London or Paris - just to mention two of the most international European capitals - would speak the language of the country, the same does not necessarily apply to expatriates in Brussels. Most Europeans come here because of the EU Institutions, and not specifically for the city. In consequence, a large proportion arrives and continues to live here without knowledge of the French or Dutch languages which makes integration impossible. The study suggests that due to the particular circumstances Brussels offers, expatriates in this city form a very specific sub-group of society with unique and complex developmental trends which may be more thoroughly understood and explained through a holistic developmental approach. It proposes a framework for working with international clients in a developmental context, based on the re-occurring themes as well as similarities in participants' thought processes and transition experiences.

The first section of this article will provide a review of the core literature, as I believe that an insight into the key concepts is essential for an adequate understanding of the research context. This will be followed by an introduction into the employed methodology. The propositions and findings emerging from the data will be presented in the 'Results' section. Finally, the last section will share the main conclusions and offer recommendations for future research.

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Literature review

As an essential first step in establishing a framework for the enquiry, I attempted to gain an insight into how literature in the field of developmental psychology and philosophy views human development. In addition, I also aimed to explore what may stimulate development to the 'post-conventional tier' (Cook-Greuter, 2000, 2005; Miller&Cook-Greuter, 1994; Wilber, 2000, 2007); and finally, to provide a brief overview of the evolution of research on the implications of expatriation on self-development.

Approaches to personal development

A significant body of contemporary psychological research attempted to study the personality, as a psychological phenomenon, and formulate a comprehensive theory of its development. Various aspects of personality have been placed under a magnifying glass resulting in an examination of development in a multiplicity of 'developmental lines' (Wilber, 1999, 2000, 2007). In this light, Piaget's cognitive line (1985), Kohlberg's (1969) and Gilligan's (1982) examination of moral development, Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1970), Graves' levels of existence (1970), Fowler's stages of faith (1981), Alexander's levels of consciousness (1989), Kegan's orders of mind (2001), Wade's stages of consciousness (1996), furthermore Loevinger's (1976, 1996) and Cook-Greuter's (1999, 2000, 2005) research on ego-development might be considered the most comprehensive and well-known stage theories.

It is important to highlight that despite the several theoretical formulations, only the post-Piagetian constructivist developmental approaches have formulated rarely attained stages of advanced growth (Pfaffenberger, 2005). The constructivist view of development suggests that mental growth follows a predictable order. However, as also emphasised by Wilber (1999, 2000, 2007), given that human development can be approached through a variety of developmental lines which develop relatively independently in a person, the individual's development can significantly differ from one line to another. Therefore, Wilber (1999) describes overall development as a "massively complex, overlapping, non-linear affair" (pp.291-292). At the same time, he is also of the opinion that "each developmental line tends to unfold in a sequential holarchical fashion" (2000, p.28) and believes that all the theories that focus on a specific developmental line are right in their own way; it simply depends on what aspect we actually wish to follow up (2007). Despite this, I have identified that researchers and philosophers - including Wilber himself - still tend to show a preference towards the cognitive line and approach human development through the development of the self.

Theorising on the self has not been a recent trend, but already inspired philosophers and psychologists in the 19th century. James (1890) proposed the concept of self as knower (I) and the self as known (Me), distinguishing between the "active processor of experience" (Hermans, 2001, p.244) which is responsible for the organisation and continuity of the self, and everything that belongs to the self, that it possesses in its extended environment. Further developing this line, Kegan's (2001) concept differentiating between 'I' (Subject) and 'me' (Object) suggests that "during psychological development, the 'I' of one stage becomes a 'me' at the next" (Wilber, 2000, p.34). In this sense, each higher stage simultaneously "transcends and integrates the content of the lower into a more complex mental model of reality" (Cook-Greuter, 2000, p.228). This process continues until the individual "reaches the spectrum of consciousness" and the separate I, the inner subject, becomes the object of the ultimate I, "one's own true Self" (Wilber, 2000, p.34). This stage is called ego-transcendence in which the 'Subject' and the 'Object' (Kegan, 2001), the 'Knower' and the 'Known' (Alexander, 1989) merge. Even though the overall self - that consists of Wilber's (2007) 'proximate self' which can be equated to Loevinger's (1976) 'ego', and of our ever constant Self - does not follow a sequential trajectory, research evidence and practitioners' experiences suggest that the ego's development,

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however, proceeds through identifiable developmental stages. Loevinger's (1976, 1996) theory of the stages of self-identity line - further developed by Cook-Greuter (1999, 2000, 2005) - is commonly recognised as the most significant contribution to research on ego-development, moreover, also as a valuable approach to overall growth, since it attempted to "capture personality as a whole, integrating emotional, cognitive and interpersonal aspects of functioning" (Pfaffenberger, 2005, p.281). Additionally, Wade's (1996) model for overall consciousness as well as Beck's and Cowan's (1996) Spiral Dynamics are equally valuable attempts at formulating an integrated framework for human development. The most complete synthesis to date, however, is represented by Wilber's AQAL (2000, 2007). This framework demonstrates an integrated holistic approach to human development incorporating the large variety of multiple intelligences, including spiritual development.

Despite the wide-ranging efforts at theory-building towards a more and more consistent and comprehensive illustration of the dynamics of human growth, the area in terms of empirical studies and evidence can be considered significantly under-researched, especially regarding experiences and factors that stimulate self-development. Several attempts have been made to explore the relationship between the development of the ego and other dimensions of personality, but they do not provide a clear picture of how people actually develop and why some reach higher development than others. This can primarily be explained by the complexity of the phenomenon and the challenges around being able to measure it.

The state of contemporary research on ego-development

My review of the existing literature has led me to conclude that literature shows a preference for explaining development through the transformation of individuals' mental processing, more precisely, how they make meaning of their experiences throughout their life-course. Both Alexander (1982) and Loevinger (1976) propose influential self-theories which conceptualize stages of sense-making towards more complex, integrated and global views over the life-span (Cook-Greuter, 2000). Adams (2006), Bridges (2004) and Sugarman (2001) also share the position that life-transitions serve as a nourishing ground for personal development, as challenging life-events often require an adaptation from the individual, for which he or she needs to draw on and integrate new resources. This argument is supported by Bauer and Bonanno (2001) who propose that identity development requires the differentiation of novel perspectives on self as well as on others; moreover, it also demands the integration of these into a new comprehension of the self, enabling the person to act with larger capacities in an ever-widening variety of contexts. Bauer and McAdams (2004) analysed personal growth in the life-transition stories of adults in connection with social-cognitive and social-emotional factors. They recognised that those individuals displayed higher levels of social-cognitive maturity whose transition stories emphasised acquiring new knowledge. King (2001) evidenced that facing challenging life-events itself does not stimulate self-development, but it is the individual's attitude in terms of being consciously mentally occupied with the event and accepting that it challenges one's worldview that does so. He concludes that individuals' wish for harmony and well-being motivates them to give challenging events a positive meaning. Similarly, Manners and Durkin (2001) suggest that a developmental shift can occur when the individual is emotionally engaged with the event which is of an interpersonal, destabilizing nature. Loevinger (1976) assumes that individuals advance on the ladder of self-development when they are exposed to a more complex interpersonal environment than they are themselves. Kegan (1994) proposes that if the environment requires the person to function at a lower or at a higher stage than where he/she is developmentally at that moment, it creates a significant sense of discomfort encouraging the person to change or avoid the situation. Alexander describes development to higher stages as "a movement beyond representational thinking" (Nidich, S. I., Nidich, R. J. and Alexander, C. N., 2000, p.217). In Loevinger's (1976) view, the development of adult ego mirrors an emerging sense of self-awareness, in which one becomes aware of discrepancies between conventions and one's own behaviour; while Cook-Greuter explains it through "an increasing awareness of the language habit and the growing ability of non-

evaluative witnessing" (2000, p.228). According to this theory, beyond a certain developmental stage individuals become more and more interested in the process of meaning-making and they realize how the use of language can influence the perception of reality. They also discover the functioning of their ego. Due to the increasing awareness of their language habit and ability of witnessing – which can be explained as the external observation of one's own ego (Wilber, as cited on Integralworld, n.d.) – they also open up to new, alternative ways of knowing. This approach resonates with Wilber (2009) who proposes that ego-development can be seen as a strengthening witnessing capacity - "turning inward and observing one's mental processes until the personal self-sense disappears" (Cook-Greuter, 2000, p.235). The concept of turning inward has a particular relevance to my research, since expatriates are often forced by the circumstances to enter into this process.

An extensive number of quantitative inquiries have been dedicated to measuring ego-development. The most comprehensive and widely tested method is Loevinger's (1976, 1996) Sentence Completion Test (SCT). In addition, several attempts have been made to examine the correlation between the ego's development and various aspects of personality, including the contributions by Fowler (2001), King (2001), Manners and Durkin (2001) and Vaillant and McCullough (1987). However, these do not demonstrate accurately what would generate development in the post-conventional realm. Loevinger (1996) herself pointed out that she found it challenging to come up with a precise description of the higher stages due to the very limited number of people in her sample scoring at those levels. On the other hand, as Pfaffenberger (2005) concludes, it also has to be recognised that the post-conventional realm possesses qualitatively significantly different features than the preceding tier which are difficult to capture through the quantitative methods that have been applied to date. Pfaffenberger (2005) also proposes that due to the "cognitive and affective changes of a unique nature" (p.297) which can be observed in the transition from the conventional to the post-conventional tier, "it would not be valid to assume that growth-enhancing factors show a linear effect across the entire spectrum of developmental stages, as most correlational studies imply" (p.297). The work of Alexander (1982, 1989) and Cook-Greuter (1999, 2000, 2005) on the examination of post-conventional development has been widely acknowledged. However, despite the comprehensive analysis and description of the higher developmental stages offered by their studies, it has not yet been clearly evidenced what fosters post-conventional development. Consequently, Pfaffenberger (2005) suggests that the question requires a switch from the quantitative to a qualitative approach giving individuals the opportunity to express via a deeply personal exploration what issues they are occupied with and how they could describe their own development – which is exactly what my research initiated.

Expatriation and self-development

Over the past decades, the notion of culture has inspired an increasing number of researchers, philosophers and practitioners. Placing the various dimensions of culture into the focus of analysis in the field of psychology, sociology, communication and other sciences, the popularity of cultural psychology (Hermans, 2001) has significantly expanded. A number of studies and attempts at theory-building have concentrated on the understanding and comparison of cultures and cultural differences in a variety of factors (e.g. Hofstede, 1980; Rosinski, 2003). Due to the expansion of expatriation, the need for cultural sensitivity has also been acknowledged in coaching and corporate communication (Abbott, 2010; Passmore, 2009; Rosinski, 2003). Although it seems to be generally accepted that counsellors and coaches should ideally develop a set of core multicultural competences (Nelson-Jones, 2006), even cross-cultural coaches underline that clients' situations are influenced by various determining factors among which the role of culture differs to a great extent case by case. Consequently, it may be counter-productive to treat culture as a separate variable in the coaching process (Abbott, 2010). In recent years we can observe a shift in focus from the observation of the functioning of individuals in a cultural setting to the role of culture in individuals' self-identity (e.g. Hermans, 2001; König, 2009; Miller and Prentice, 1994). Hermans and Kempen (1998) highlight that

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contemporary psychology faces a new challenge due to the increasing interconnections between cultures. They propose that acculturation – which is significantly related to the phenomenon of expatriation – takes place on the contact zone between one's home and host culture, therefore this zone merits special attention. Padilla and Perez (2003) also support this argument and in their study they place acculturation, social cognition and self-identity into new perspectives by proposing a model that "incorporates contemporary work in social and cognitive psychology" (p.1). They suggest that...

...acculturation is more complicated and not merely the outcome of two cultural groups being in contact with each other as earlier models hold. In fact, many social and environmental conditions or constraints exist that can largely determine the strategies available to individuals or groups in the process of accommodating to newcomers. (Padilla&Perez, 2003, p.5)

However, even in their study acculturation has been primarily explained and observed in the context of one or more newcomer groups and one majority group. In my view, this approach is not valid in a city like Brussels, where there is basically no one single host culture. Even though in Brussels one can see examples for all 'acculturation strategies' (Berry, 1997), as "beyond group findings of acculturation, individuals may also seek different levels of attachment to and involvement in their host cultures or heritage culture" (Padilla&Perez, 2003, p.6), the understanding of strategies may also require a revisiting in this unique context.

Taking a closer look at the processes of cultural relocation reflects the complexity of the phenomenon and shows that even what on a surface-level may seem to be merely practical and logistic aspects, such as familiarising oneself with the new country's social security system, at a deeper level may make the individual face the loss of his/her comfort zone which surrounded him/her before in the home country and culture. Cook-Greuter's (2000) position on the importance of language habit is very relevant in this respect. It highlights that those people who are part of a language community do not see consciously how they prefer certain aspects of experience just by belonging to that community. On this basis, it may be concluded that expatriation, since it takes individuals out of their comfort zone and exposes them to a new language community and social system, can stimulate development beyond the conventional stages. A similar argumentation is proposed by Hermans' (1998, 2001) concept of the dialogical self, which builds on the idea of personalised internal cultural dialogues that aim to maintain personal continuity during times of acculturation, but, at the same time, also to integrate into the new cultural environment (König, 2009). Hermans (2001) conceives culture and self as "a multiplicity of positions amongst which dialogical relationships can be established" (p.243). His theory suggests that cultures as collective voices are involved in a constant dialogue with other voices; however, these conversations are always subject to differences in power (2001), as a result of which some positions may become more dominant or influential than others, or eventually from the conversation between the different voices new positions may emerge. As König (2009) very insightfully explains, "living in different cultures creates a multiplicity of occasionally incompatible cultural selves or personal positions" (p.98). She also acknowledges that "the constant internal dialogue of positioning and repositioning between then and there and the here and now" (2009, p.99), moreover, the entire transition of trying to function between two different cultures "may cause a certain amount of temporary stress, uncertainty and confusion in the individual" (2009, pp.101-102). An important indicator of development according to the theory of the dialogical self is when the person develops and strengthens his/her capacity of witnessing his/her highly personalised dialogue from a so-called bird-eye view (König, 2009). Hermans (2001) proposes a variety of directions for future research including an examination of how people's cultural perception changes via immigration – which my study partly also aimed to address. Birgit den Outer (2009), who explored cross-cultural transitions in the lives of international students, created a

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typology of stages in the development of cultural relocators. Although she does not examine the post-conventional realm in detail and her observations are based on the changes that expatriates demonstrate in their attitudes to their home culture and the culture of the host country, her research offers interesting propositions on how individuals' experiences on the cross-cultural journey may contribute to their self-development. She describes the phenomenon of reaching the post-conventional tier through the example of the Dweller, who no longer thinks in cultural dichotomies. Cross-cultural adventure has turned into personal transformation and the individual creates a new culture for self based on multiple perspectives – in fact develops a culturally fluid identity (2009). In this light, the role of language habit (Cook-Greuter, 2000) suggests that by developing a fluid cultural identity one loses the importance of belonging to a particular language community and this actually turns one's attention towards the search for the Self.

Even though it appears that prior to my study no qualitative research has been conducted on expatriation from the perspective of its potential contribution towards post-conventional ego-development, Commons, Galaz-Fontes and Morse (2006, as cited in den Outer, 2009) demonstrated through a *quantitative* enquiry that "cross-cultural exposure leads to higher stages of development" (p.61).

Methodology

The research question, precisely how expatriation may contribute towards individuals' post-conventional ego-development, was explored through changes in the research participants' internal processes, including their meaning-making as well as their perception of culture and self-identity. Due to its focus, the research was built around the ontological orientation of constructivism (Bryman, 2008) and incorporated a heuristic enquiry (Mustakas, 1990) into an interpretivist (Bryman, 2008) epistemological framework. The heuristic research method seemed the most suitable approach, since the research aimed to understand cultural relocation from multiple perspectives, namely through comparing my own experience with those of other expatriates.

Assuming that all participants can be considered to be functioning at least in the conventional realm and none of them has reached the stage of ego-transcendence yet, the study focused its attention only on the second and third tiers of ego-development, particularly on the transition between these two realms as well as between the different post-conventional stages. This may be mentioned as one of the limitations of the research, since an accurate developmental framework needs to accommodate the whole spectrum of human development. However, the examination of the first and fourth tiers was outside the scope and possible volume of the enquiry. On the other hand, while the pre-conventional and the conventional realms have been significantly more researched, there is an essential research gap regarding the post-conventional tier and the transition between the conventional and post-conventional realms.

The study attempted to bring the characteristics of the participants' mental processing and the specific developmental themes they may be concerned about in parallel with one another. The ultimate goal was to contribute to the coaching profession by raising awareness of the specific situation of cultural relocators from a developmental point of view, and thereby to facilitate a more conscious and efficient coaching practice for this target group.

With her prior permission, I used Cook-Greuter's (2005) description of stages as a possible indicator of the participants' developmental processes. The aim was to see what themes have emerged in the expatriates' stories compared to the ones that characterise the various stages in Cook-Greuter's model – without the intention of trying to validate her model.

Sampling strategy

The research involved six expatriates aged between 25-45 who moved to Brussels on their own not more than ten, but not less than two years ago. I suggest that when considering the phenomenon of expatriation, it is useful to make a distinction between the experiences and perceptions of those people who relocate with their families or move to another country hoping for a better living standard and financial benefit, and those individuals who expatriate alone, leaving everything behind, driven by a clear purpose of professional and/or personal development. I propose that the latter group - and this especially applies to first-time relocators - due to significant changes they have to deal with on their own, and the considerable period of time spent alone, may potentially reach more advanced stages of ego-development. This may be seen as a result of the continuous self-reflection and enquiry into particular existential concerns, which for some individuals is an essential element of the transition process that accompanies expatriation, and which can lead them to engaging with a search for a higher purpose of existence. It was important, therefore, that the reason for relocating was not purely the hope for financial gain, but a clear purpose of professional and personal development. This is not intended to say that personal growth cannot occur in those relocating for different purposes, it merely suggests that different expat-groups may present different developmental patterns and trends depending on their circumstances, and from the perspective of the examination of the post-conventional realm, I found this criterion helpful. Other important criteria were that the participants did *not* experience Brussels as students before, as it would have meant a prior longer-term exposure to the city; furthermore that participants received coaching at some point during their cross-cultural adventure. The latter was helpful in gaining an insight into participants experience with coaching related to their developmental process. Despite the challenges around accessing participants that qualified from all aspects, I trust that based on the gender balance, the composition of geographical location of the participants' home countries, the balance of business sectors and the variety of coaching received, my sample served as an excellent ground for examining the topic of the research project.

Gender	Country	Years in Brussels	Type of business sector	Type of coaching received
Male	UK	5	Consulting/EU	Developmental/group
Female	Italy	3	EU public administration	Life/developmental
Male	UK	7	Freelance/financial	Career
Male	Bulgaria	5	Financial	Peer
Female	Germany	4	Sales	Life/developmental
Female	Hungary	3	EU public administration	Spiritual

Table II - Overview of research participants

Methods of data collection and data analysis

The first step of the research process consisted in a self-reflective stimulus activity which the participants were asked to complete at home prior to the interview. This useful preparatory work was based on Hudson and McLean's (2000) Life Chapters Exercise. It had its advantage in providing participants with sufficient time to elaborate on their experiences as well as in giving the researcher an overview of the participants' background and significant life-transitions. In addition, they were also requested to answer some questions about their experience with coaching. This established a solid

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ground for the semi-structured in-depth interviews of approximately one and a half hours each, which enabled a detailed elaboration on the participants' transition experiences during their expatriation as well as on their experience with coaching.

The interviewees could freely talk about their most influential life-experiences, the issues they were occupied with and how they viewed their own development, however, the themes which run as developmental threads all across the stages in Cook-Greuter's (2000, 2005) theory provided a general framework for the conversations, expanded with relevant cultural themes. In this light, the following themes received particular attention:

- the participants' attitude to their home as well as host cultures;
- sense of self-identity;
- striving for meaning-making;
- awareness of the functioning of their minds;
- attitude to aloneness/loneliness and introspection/self-reflection;
- drive for self-realisation;
- access to and trust in their intuitions;
- observing/witnessing capacity;
- perception of religion and spirituality; and
- the Brussels-experience.

I see the advantage of the in-depth interview method compared to the SCT in that participants assumingly did not feel any sort of pressure while talking, it was perceived as a pleasant conversation – without having to stress about how they express themselves, what expression would be important to the researcher. At the same time, the data analysis is obviously more time-consuming, complex and challenging, in particular at the higher post-conventional stages.

The interviews were recorded and the participants were asked to check the accuracy of the summary points. The summary points were very helpful in facilitating an overall understanding of the participants' developmental processes. They served as a thread which helped me see the links and turning points between the developmental phases. Following the primary goal of having an accurate understanding of individuals' developmental phases and an estimate of their ego-developmental stages, the data have been compared to see whether common patterns could be identified in the participants' developmental processes. This was a truly exciting phase leading to the discovery of interesting and valuable correlations. As a final step, the themes emerging from the participants' stories have been included in a table together with the characteristics of individuals' mental processes at the various stages as identified by Cook-Greuter (2005). Unfortunately, this could not be included in the article due to its volume. However, upon request, I can provide the reader with it.

Results

The study suggests that all research participants have reached the first post-conventional tier and none appears to be in the second post-conventional, ego-transcendent realm. In the cases of two participants the data propose that their expatriation experience stimulated their transition from the conventional to the post-conventional tier, where they, at the moment of the research, seemed to reside at the Individualist stage, although their advancement at this stage could be considered different. In the other four examples, two participants displayed characteristically Autonomous features, one seemed to represent Construct-aware developmental qualities, while one the early steps into the Unitive stage. In these cases, it is not completely clear if the shift into the third tier occurred before or after arrival in Brussels; nevertheless, in view of the research objectives, the findings

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demonstrate that the research participants' expatriation experience has indeed contributed towards their post-conventional ego-development, however in varying degrees.

The participants' assumed levels of development did not show any correlation with their age. One of the youngest participants seems to have reached higher than most of her elder fellows, suggesting that individuals' maturity from an ego-developmental point of view is not determined by their age. Nevertheless, the data mirrored an important connection between one's developmental process and the individualistic versus collectivist tendencies of one's home country. It appears that those individuals coming from more individualistic societies are raised as naturally more introspective, self-reflective and independent thinkers and they seem to handle solitude better than their peers with a more collectivist or traditional cultural background. This capacity is especially important in the transition phase between the conventional and post-conventional realms where the individual starts to show awareness about the limitations of his/her cultural and personal conditioning. In this process one faces the inner drive – usually also accompanied by anxiety – for reconstructing one's self-identity based on one's self-defined values.

The data also indicated that the impact of cultural conditioning on the perception of self-identity in those individuals coming from multicultural family backgrounds is not as dominant as in those coming from a single cultural background. This may be a possible reason why, according to the data, they seem to have found this process smoother and more liberating. There also appears to be a very important relationship between one's striving for meaning-making and self-actualisation needs. This theme tends to become particularly dominant at the Autonomous stage. However, no common patterns were identified in terms of the ways research participants see the path towards self-realisation. Based on the data, this seems to be purely dependent upon one's personality. It is also clearly visible from the data that in the post-conventional tier individuals start to abandon purely rational reasoning and open up towards a more holistic worldview, including the spiritual dimension. Due to this newly discovered perspective they may also experience a natural drive for seeking external help with their developmental process in the form of coaching, psychotherapy or spiritual guidance. The research participants' examples suggest that coaching and spiritual search can well complement one another. Finally, but very importantly, the data demonstrated that the unique conditions offered by Brussels seem to have contributed towards the participants' post-conventional development in a specific way.

According to the data as well as my experience with coaching expatriates, the cross-cultural knowledge of the coach can be particularly valuable in the transition from the conventional to the post-conventional realm. At the Individualist stage coaching might be helpful in assisting clients with gaining awareness of their cultural and personal conditioning and reconstructing their self-identity and value system based on their newly discovered values. Towards the Autonomous stage, as the need for meaning-making and self-actualisation receive more emphasis, the work might involve more focus on career-aspects. Most of my clients turned to me in this developmental phase. At the Construct-aware stage, as clients represent more complex and differentiated worldviews and ways of reasoning, the spiritual aspects of existence seem to dominate over purely rational reasoning. Clients at this stage may tend to feel more comfortable with a transpersonal or spiritual coach from developmental perspectives; however, coaching may also be a useful complement to regular spiritual practice, as explained above, especially regarding the practical aspects of life. The Unitive person no longer feels torn apart between the rational and transpersonal ways of existence and reasoning, and can benefit from both as the situation demands. The study also makes practical recommendations on working with clients in the various developmental phases, however, these are only partly evidenced by the research data – they in part derive from my practice-based experience.

Despite the use of a stage-model as an aid to try to identify participants' development, it is highly important to underline that the study's and the EDT's relevance to coaching does not lie in the stages themselves. The paper certainly does not suggest that one should look for progressive development and try to locate or label the client. It is intended to help coaches understand their international clients' inward and developmental processes better and serve merely as guidance. For instance, if a client presents certain topics of concern, by relating these to the study and the EDT, the coach may be able to understand better what sort of mental processing or way of meaning-making may be behind them and how well the client is 'equipped' to deal with the challenges. Thereby, it can facilitate a more conscious and informed coaching practice. At earlier stages there might be more focus on skills, while at more advanced stages existential concerns may dominate, requiring a more holistic approach. I favour an eclectic-multimodal approach to coaching; consequently, I do not suggest that the entire coaching should be built around one theory. Yet, knowledge of the EDT and the research findings may help the coach more consciously choose the appropriate intervention and approach.

Stage-theories are often criticised for the ethical concerns about labelling the client. In my personal view however, the fact that individuals do not develop in the same ways and are differently 'equipped' with emotional/social/intellectual/mental skills and capacities should not be ignored. I believe that remaining ethical lies in finding the appropriate way to integrate this knowledge and assist the client in the most professional way.

Conclusion

As a new initiative in terms of examining expatriation in the context of adult transition through development towards higher levels of cognition and consciousness, the study offers useful implications for the coaching profession, even though not focused directly on coaching as such. It may contribute to a smoother, more conscious and efficient coaching practice by helping coaches working with expatriates to understand the type of thought processing patterns and the interrelated topics of concern clients might present at the coaching session, in part by pointing out potential correlations between the above-summarised factors and the clients' cultural background. At the same time, it draws attention to the potential limitations of a purely cross-cultural approach and raises awareness of the need for a holistic approach to expatriates' development by highlighting that after a certain developmental level individuals transcend their cultural conditioning and are no longer to be seen as primarily Italians, Estonians or Brits, but instead as complex and unique human beings full of potential.

Simultaneously it also involves interdisciplinary benefits, especially in the domains of sociology, anthropology as well as international communication and management by offering useful insights into the unique situation of a group of expatriates.

The study proposes that the validity of theories on expatriation and cultural integration is determined to a large degree by the actual city's as well as the individual's characteristics – suggesting also that the recommendations emerging from the research are particularly relevant to expatriation in Brussels. In this light, as a recommendation for future research, I would propose an enquiry into how cultural relocation may contribute towards expatriates' ego-development in other multicultural cities, not necessarily limited to focusing on the post-conventional realm. It would be very interesting to see how cultural relocation may impact the development of children, adolescents as well as people relocating for different reasons than my research participants, or how one's expatriation experience has contributed towards one's ego-transcendence. I trust that this research will increase interest in expatriation and encourage further enquiry to gain a better understanding of the needs, trends,

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dynamics and functioning of cultural relocators. Furthermore, hopefully it may also inspire experts to come up with a range of creative proposals for further investigation of the topic

As the ideas that emerged from the data would merit further research I suggest that replication of the study would be useful. Even though the interview questions did not follow a well-defined sequence, but evolved with the flow of the conversation, the core themes can be well identified and can serve as the basis for replication. I include here Susanne Cook-Greuter's (2011) suggestion according to which it would be worthwhile exploring "what makes a difference between a good adjustment without actual stage change, but satisfaction with the move and transformation of meaning-making based on the move". This is a very relevant question, since obviously not all expats go through this post-conventional developmental journey. Even though the study has set some step stones in this direction, unfortunately the time-scale and scope of the research, as well as the limited resources did not allow a detailed scientific examination of this process. Another alternative for future research could be initiated by coaching practitioners, verifying whether the emerging themes similarly appear in their clients' stories.

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