



4C - IT Supported Training and Coaching for Cross-Cultural Competences: Overview of the First Phase of Research

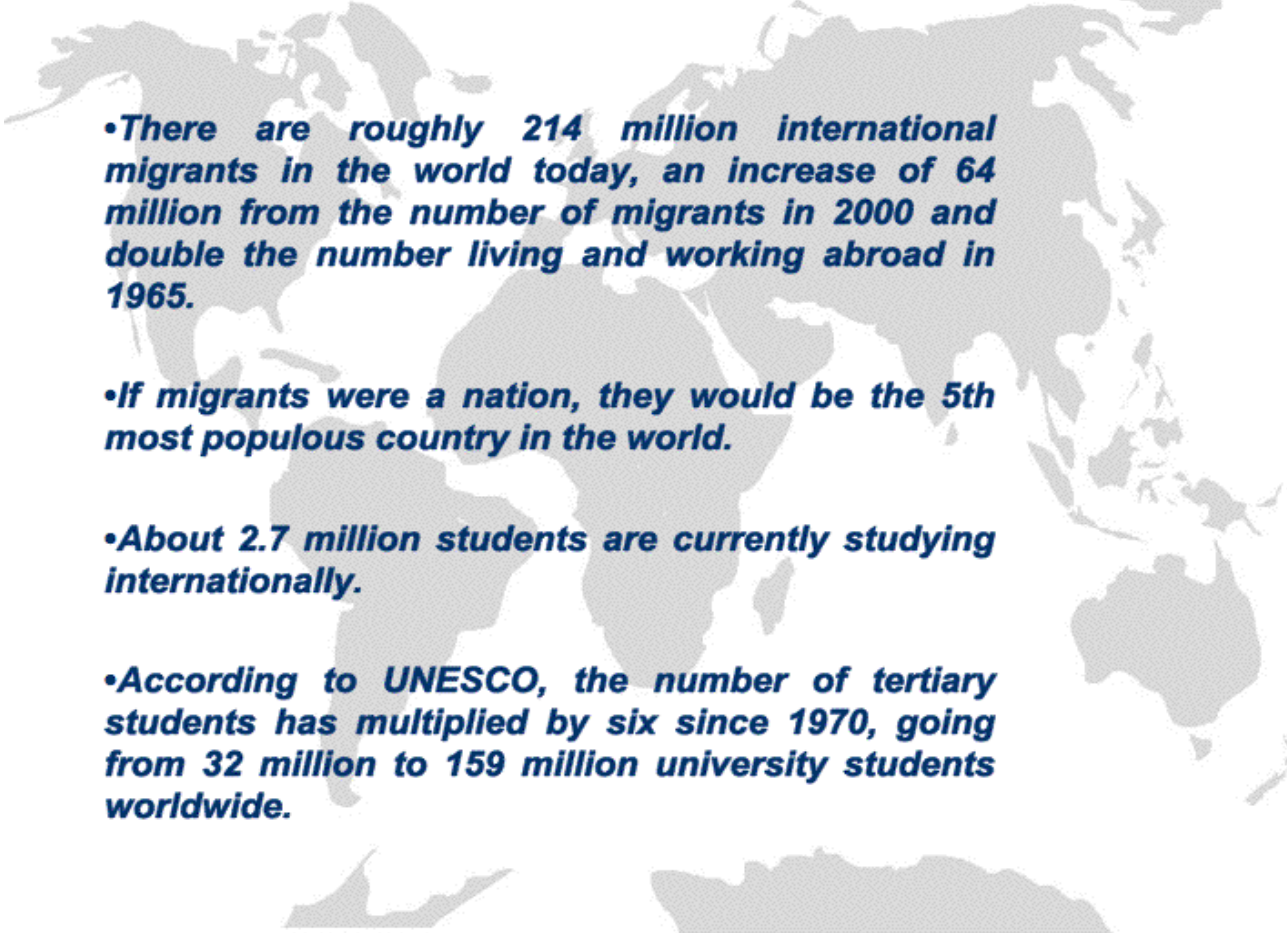


This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This communication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Introduction: Project Description

4C is a 3-year international project that started in December 2010. The project's objective is to provide adult learners in situations of intercultural mobility with new tools and methods that will help them to better cope with the difficulties inherent in the border-crossing experience. Such competences are key in today's increasingly mobile world. Consider the following facts¹:



•There are roughly 214 million international migrants in the world today, an increase of 64 million from the number of migrants in 2000 and double the number living and working abroad in 1965.

•If migrants were a nation, they would be the 5th most populous country in the world.

•About 2.7 million students are currently studying internationally.

•According to UNESCO, the number of tertiary students has multiplied by six since 1970, going from 32 million to 159 million university students worldwide.

While geographic mobility is creating diverse communities worldwide, greater access to tertiary education is facilitating social mobility for first generation university students, allowing previously disenfranchised groups to have access to a variety of career fields.

In the first phase of our project, we set out to understand the relationship between three different situations of intercultural mobility and to explore the similarities in the challenges and resources of each group. Partners in four countries conducted 18 semi-structured interviews with 6 respondents representing each identified target group. Based on the results of the qualitative analysis of these interviews, we generated the first version of the questionnaire for the quantitative phase of the research.

¹ International Organization for Migration:

<http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/about-migration/facts-and-figures/lang/en>
World Education Services: International Student Mobility: Patterns and Trends
<http://www.wes.org/educators/pdf/StudentMobility.pdf>

WHOSE MOBILITY?

We were specifically concerned with three different situations of intercultural mobility:

- a. Long term adaptation to a country where one settles
- b. Short term adaptation to a new country during international mobility experiences
- c. Adaptation to new cultural environments / norms / attitudes during social mobility

We propose two arguments for considering these experiences together:

1. The three processes often involve similar populations, including students, immigrants, and other mobile groups.
2. Even when social mobility does not always take place in an international context, it shares many of the same difficulties, strategies, and resources as geographic mobility.

UNDERSTANDING CROSS-CULTURAL MOBILITY: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Social Mobility

- **1927:** Pitirim Sorokin lays the groundwork for a structural approach to social mobility with his book, *Social and Cultural Mobility*. Focusing on social mobility from a societal rather than individual perspective, he outlines the basic theories and terms that would eventually define the field.
- **1950s:** Large-scale mobility studies that began to appear after World War II continue this society level focus and mostly rely on the use of surveys and mathematical models.
- **1960s:** Achievement motivation theory, particularly the work of psychologists John W. Atkinson and David McClelland gives insight into how individual motivations affect social mobility. The development of Blau and Duncan's mobility model shifts focus from description to explanation of social mobility.
- **1980s:** New Structuralism," which is marked by an emphasis on the structural causes of social inequality such as labor markets, economic sectors, and segmented occupations, takes root.

Geographic Mobility

- 1954:** Oberg proposes the concept of culture shock.
- 1960s:** International mobility studies turn to efforts to identify predictors for successful cross-cultural adaptation. This is also the period of sequential typologies detailing different phases of the adaptation process: Lysgaard's U curve and then W curve are conceptualized.
- 1970s:** The focus is on cross-cultural training and using "cultural assimilators" to prepare travelers for cultural clashes or misunderstandings.
- 1990s:** Integrated theories appear on the different challenges of the adaptation procedure. The distinction of psychological adjustment and sociocultural adaptation becomes widely accepted (Ward).
- The quest for the identification of intercultural competences results in theories with practical applicability to assessment and training such as anxiety and uncertainty management, intercultural development inventory, identity management theory.

Intelligence

- In social mobility, raw intelligence cannot be measured without consideration for the roles of education and social environment and without motivation to achieve, Thus, the impact of intelligence on social mobility is mitigated.
- Using the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, Matsumoto and colleagues have determined that general intelligence does not predict better adaptation in international situations (Matsumoto et al. 2007).
- Thus, instead of focusing on IQ, looking at non-traditional forms of intelligence such as “cultural intelligence” and “nomadic intelligence” can give more insight into the process of intercultural mobility.

Personality

- While psychological adaptation is associated with extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, sociocultural adaptation is linked to extraversion.
- On the other hand, openness has not been found to influence expatriate performance (Mol et al 2005). With her 24-item Attitudinal and Behavioral Openness Scale, Paula Caligiuri (et. al 2000) developed four dimensions for measuring openness: participation in cultural activities, foreign experiences, openness attitudes, and comfort with difference.
- In social mobility studies, personality is typically considered from the perspective of personality orientation. Those who see themselves as the locus of control over what happens to them rather than their social surrounding tend to be more successful, while those who feel that what happens is outside their control tend to practice self-defeating behavior.

Family

- Factors such as home and family environment can also affect intercultural mobility.
- When it comes to social mobility, family size, and the socioeconomic attainment of parents greatly influence a child’s aspirations and achievement.

Gender

- As more women entered the workforce, studies comparing male and female social mobility have produced mixed results, with some arguing

for gendered differences in social mobility and others affirming similar results across genders.

- Results on the importance of gender in international cultural adjustment have been similarly mixed. While some studies report that women, particularly those from traditional cultures, experience more adjustment difficulty than their male counterparts, others argue that it is in fact women who experience fewer intercultural adaptation issues.

Identity

- For French social psychologist Cohen-Emerique, all intercultural encounters are potential identity threats (2002). Identity threats occur when we are unable to satisfy basic needs or principles related to identity (Breakwell 1988).
- *Identity strategies* are efforts to answer such tensions, in order to integrate different facets of a multiple identity, overcome incoherence, regain self-esteem and re-establish desired social relations.
- Identity strategies can comprise a wide range of conscious and non-conscious actions: how we present ourselves in interaction (including body appearance), how we explain ourselves and with whom we chose to spend time, and what activities we perform.

Social Relations

- In social mobility, strivers may face a lack of preparation for their new environment or find themselves stuck between two cultures.
- In geographic mobility, migrants and sojourners must confront not only practical difficulties related to language and administrative processes, but must also be able to handle cultural differences in communication styles and worldviews as well as identity threats.
- Through social positioning, socially mobile actors establish networks that facilitate social mobility. The social flow framework, developed by Dominguez includes four components of social positioning:

Cognitive Coping Strategies

- Stress management is considered to be central to successful intercultural mobility and is included as a component in Matsumoto's Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale (ICAPS) and Gudykunst, Furnham and Bochner's Uncertainty Management Theory.

- Avoidance is a strategy that is only effective in the short term while active coping and planning have been tied to successful adaptation and problem resolution (Billings & Moos, 1981).

THREE PROFILES OF INTERCULTURAL MOBILITY

As the below examples illustrate, no two cross-cultural mobility experiences are alike. These profiles give some insight into the types of difficulties our respondents faced and the strategies and resources that served them in their efforts to adapt to new cultural environments.

Stéphane: A Sojourner in Jujuy, Argentina

When Stéphane, a young Frenchman, arrived in Argentina for an internship, it was his first time traveling outside Europe. He spent four months in Jujuy, a poor community nestled in the mountains that is twenty-two hours from the cosmopolitan capital of Buenos Aires. He found himself with no television, no indoor toilet, and limited Internet access. This slower pace proved to be life-changing for Stéphane. Now back in France, he looks back on his short stay in Jujuy as the most beautiful experience of his life and is planning for a definitive return to Jujuy.

Keiko: A Migrant in Paris, France

Paris was not at all like Keiko had expected. Instead of the romantic boulevards and stylish Parisians she had imagined while studying French in school, Keiko was confronted with the noise, dirt, and bustle of city life. She struggled to understand not only the language of the French, but also their culture. Despite her initial culture shock, Keiko's open-minded personality and curious nature made her eager to expose herself to new experiences in France. Unlike some of her colleagues and friends at the Japanese clothing firm where she works, Keiko refuses to retreat into an insular Japanese community. She now sees things from a different perspective, drawing on both French and Japanese culture to inform her decisions. Today, Keiko speaks highly of her migration experience and says she feels completely at home in Paris.

Kati: A Striver in Budapest Hungary

Kati has big plans for the future. As a member of her country's privileged cultural elite, she feels it is her responsibility to help improve the Hungarian education structure, and hopes to contribute to future institutional initiatives and social policies. Kati has not always had a position of privilege, however. She grew up the daughter of working class parents who did not attend college, but instilled in their children the importance of doing so. Kati was accepted to one of the most elite universities in Hungary. Despite struggles including feelings of isolation and conflicts with her parents and friends from home, Kati has managed to flourish. After finishing her studies in Budapest, she will soon enter a doctoral program at Oxford. After completing her doctorate, Kati plans to return to Hungary to be a professor.

While these three profiles tell individual stories of intercultural mobility, in applying a coding system to the analysis of our interviews, we have been able to quantify our results. Ultimately, our research reveals certain similarities in the experiences of our respondents. A number of recurring themes from the intercultural mobility literature also appear in our exploration of the different stages of intercultural mobility.

Before the Mobility Experience: Overview of Our Results

- While mobility experiences are motivated by a variety of different factors, it seems that people who tend to evaluate their experience positively had more pull motivations (factors that draw them to a new culture) and fewer push motivations (factors that drive them away from their home culture).
- Economic motivations are also much higher among those respondents with the most negative retrospective evaluations of their experience.
- We have found that negative preconceptions do not necessarily create self-fulfilling prophecies. To the contrary: those who evaluated their experience positively had more negative preconceptions than those who gave the worst evaluations of their experiences.
- We made the same observation concerning the expectations for a difficult experience. This implies that some level of negative expectations may be a sign of “anticipated adaptation” which actually prepares for adaptation.

Preconceptions: *“I didn’t have a detailed image of how they would behave to me. I was only afraid of the unknown...”*
Resp. from Hungary, social mobility.

Motivation: *“Studying was not a option. For my parents it was obvious: I was going to continue college.”*
Resp. from France, social mobility

Differences:

- Social mobility tends to be triggered by an urge for departure or a need to leave than the two other mobility types.
- In short-term mobility, professional reasons are a powerful motivator, while migrants and the socially mobile were twice as likely to refer to personal motivating factors rather than professional.

Similarities:

- Geographic mobility (both short term and long term) is often triggered by an opportunity that presents itself, such as a scholarship or an exchange program, rather than by any prior explicit intrinsic motivation.
- A non-specified curiosity for exploration or getting to know the unknown, without being particularly attached to one specific culture of destination, was a motivation factor in a small but equal portion of respondents from all three target groups.

Our findings support the literature on the importance of parental influence in social mobility. Several respondents mentioned being motivated to have a different life from their parents or having been encouraged to pursue education.

During the Mobility Experience: Overview of Our Results

- Critical difficulty areas are: identity, job and the “physical basics” such as climate, food, and physical appearance. While those who are the most satisfied with their overall mobility experience list difficulties related to isolation, the least satisfied cite identity difficulties as the most common (15 mentions versus 1 in the most satisfied group).
- Three strategies seem to be linked to the success of the mobility experience: relational and control/ planning strategies positively, while avoidant strategies link negatively to positive evaluations.
- Personal and relational resources are the two most commonly used categories by our respondents. Respondents in both the long-term and short-term groups most often rely on their own past experiences as well as those of their family to inform their actions. Sojourners and the socially mobile also take advantage of available institutional assistants such as courses and tutors. Members of the new environment are an important resource for all three groups.

All those changes, those novelties made me tired and I was fed up trying to understand the customs and habits of American people.” -Resp. from France, short term mobility

Similarities and Differences:

- Identity change is a key process in all three mobility processes. The ten respondents with the most positive evaluations of their experience mention identity change three times more often than those with the most negative evaluations.
- Long-term migrants are more likely than members of the other two groups to describe themselves in cultural terms.
- The socially mobile, on the other hand, most frequently define themselves as individuals.
- Sojourners are the most cognizant of having experienced an identity change.

“But now, I am not as Italian as before. I am an Italian with some French characteristics.”

-Resp. from France, long-term mobility

“My personal resources were already there, I was ready to face up to problems, to try to change the world, if it was possible!”

As Howard London notes in "Transformations: Cultural Challenges Faced by First-Generation Students," first generation college students may undergo a separation from their past relationships with friends or family members who may be unsupportive or even hostile towards their new lifestyle. They must then renegotiate these relationships to avoid tensions (London 1992).

After the Mobility Experience: Overview of Our Results

- After having experienced cross-cultural mobility, the majority of our respondents have found it hard to re-integrate into their former communities.
- Most display an orientation towards their new culture, or a mixed orientation in which they feel at home in both their native and new cultures.
- Respondents report having learned practical skills (language or professional task) and increased ease in communicating with those that are different from themselves.

Similarities and Differences:

- All three groups mention being able to take away general life lessons from their mobility experience that will serve them in the future, such as learning to be better communicators and becoming more open or tolerant.
- The sojourners, who are the most able to express what they have learned, mostly describe learning outcomes in practical terms, ranging from improved language ability to newly acquired professional skills.
- While strivers report more relational conflicts in their new environment than the other two groups, they also are more likely to mention experiencing tension with their parents or childhood friends.

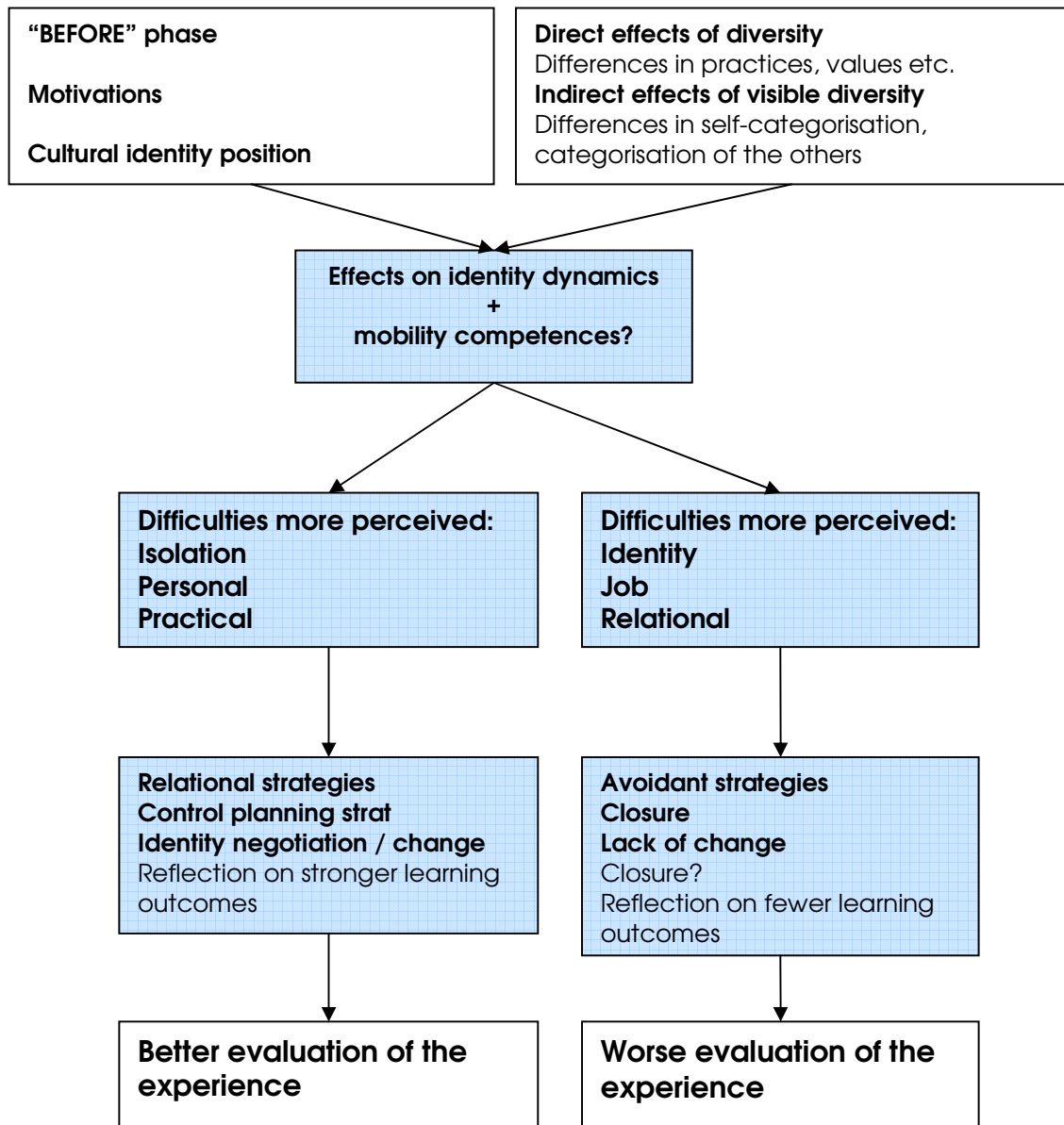
The variety in stages described by our respondents reinforces the idea that cross-cultural mobility is not a linear process. Still, while their experiences may not correspond directly with the order of the stages described in past models, stages such as culture shock, adjustment, integration proved relevant to our respondents.

"It became more important to be informed about things from different viewpoints. Not to readily accept every piece of information, to observe things from different aspects."

-Resp. from Hungary, social mobility)

A MODEL OF THE INTERCULTURAL MOBILITY PROCESS

Our respondents showed a tendency to evaluate their mobility experience as negative or positive based on a variety of factors. A first draft model of the cross-cultural mobility is shown below. The model will be tested in the quantitative phase.



ROOM FOR INTERVENTION: HOW INTERCULTURAL MOBILITY CAN BE HELPED

If cross-cultural mobility is replete with challenges, the main concern of trainers, counselors, and coaches is whether this process can be helped, how and in what stages of the experience. Our findings shed light on such room for intervention in each stage of the mobility experience.

Before the Mobility Experience

→ Pre-departure work on motivations, such as trying to find pull factors beyond the standard push factors, may facilitate the success of the transition.

During the Mobility Experience

→ Experiencing difficulties related to identity tend to trigger negative evaluations of the mobility experience. Spending time on these difficulties gives a chance to avoid these negative evaluations by working through difficulties together.

→ Connecting to new people and being able to engage in meaningful interactions with them is a key element of intercultural adaptation according to several models of intercultural competences. The development of such relational/networking skills may be a key to a successful mobility and is worth exploring.

→ Dominant strategies can be explored and new strategies can be learned, developed to better answer the challenges of mobility.

After the Mobility Experience

→ The accompaniment of mobility can continue even after short-term mobility projects have ended. Indeed, gaining awareness of potential learning outcomes and making efforts to integrate them into one's professional and personal life can contribute to giving sense to the mobility experience.

