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Relocation experts for families in geographical itinerancy: beyond the "cultural problem" [1]

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Abstract: Formerly a minority, families in geographical itinerancy have recently become more numerous and diverse. Furthermore, they are becoming the new targets of intervention over global movement. A new body of relocation experts and agencies is emerging to facilitate the life of these families. We identified a number of different service providers, which we clustered under four main categories, according to their origin: from a pre-existed organizational format (as outsourcing), from organizations themselves (insourcing), from peoples' interactions (self-organized groups), and from a self-standing expertise (private coaches and intercultural trainers). All these services include on the one hand information, guidance and support in everyday activities; on the other, a more "intercultural" oriented type of intervention. In this regard, we discuss relocation experts' use of the notion of "culture", as well as the problematic nature of interventions aiming at developing problem-solving skills to deal with "intercultural" encounters. Relocating and adjusting to new places have been defined as "problems" by mobility experts, "culture" being their main cause. In contrast, we propose a sociocultural psychological perspective to reconceptualize culture and to redefine the actual experience of families in geographical itinerancy, bringing to the fore a possible alternative to the paradox of expert intervention over mobility.

Keywords: relocation, intervention, mobile families, intercultural training, geographical itinerancy.

In a globalized world, where individuals move more and faster than ever, human mobility becomes the object of concern for researchers and for various practitioners. In particular, international companies and organizations in different professional domains try to hire the best professionals globally, regardless of their location in the world. Such pull forces, combined with people's own professional ambitions and strive for personal achievement, bring many individuals to engage in mobile lives. However, people also have also personal and family lives, and their international relocation raises a lot of everyday issues relating to, among other things, family arrangements and family local insertion and socialization. The increasing mobility of professionals has thus been accompanied by a proliferation of "experts" providing services to support international relocation. If the main function of these services is mainly to smoothen up the relocation process, so as to help people become more performant in their new

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assignement abroad, what is the meaning of such intervention, and what is the implication of this emergent expertise?

This chapter introduces the reality of relocation services providers emerging to facilitate the life of mobile families in Switzerland. Adopting a sociocultural psychological perspective, we move away from a cost-benifit reading of relocation expertise, in order to identify the ambivalent nature of these interventions, and to raise further important questions for future research on repeated mobility, concerning the way people confer sense to these frequent move. Sociocultural approaches in psychology explore migration as being a fundamentally complex and ambivalent experience of disruption within continuity, of loss in favour of discovery, change and novelty against the backdrop of everydayness. It calls attention to the fact that when moving between places, people can experience a rupture that introduces a break into a person's normal and taken-for-granted flow of being (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012; Zittoun, Duveen, Gillespie, Ivinson, & Psaltis, 2003).

Considering this approach and the ever-increasing differentiation in our globalized world, designing practices of intervention (for a frequent moving population) became a special challenge for professionals intervening over human mobility and whose work crosses international borders. These families' experiences seem to challenge the traditional division between practices of intervention "at home" and "abroad". Their dynamics engender an intervention "abroad" (from the perspective of the migrant arriving in a new country), as well as an intervention "at home" (from the perspective of the agents of intervention when they are placed in the same sociocultural environment than the just-arrived professionals), which fosters transnational practices.

In the next paragraphs, we illustrate the changing phenomenon of mobility of these families to Switzerland. Then, we present our research and the methods used, as well as a typology of Services Providers supporting families in "geographical itinerancy". Finally, we discuss relocation experts' use of the notion of "culture", as well as the problematic nature of interventions aiming at developing problem-solving skills to deal with "intercultural" encounters.

Mobile families in Switzerland

In Switzerland, like in many countries connected to international exchanges, there is a large presence of multinational companies and international organizations. Not only do companies move, but also their employees, partly as a result of transnational employment policies. Hence, a growing number of working professionals and their families become part of a more global migration flow.

Over the past decades, Switzerland, whose economy has long been reliant on foreigner workforce for manual professions or low-skilled jobs, and has hence long saved the local

working classes and women from performing this sort of work, started to develop a policy encouraging highly skilled migration. According to Pecoraro (2010), the nature of migration flows has evolved in favour of highly skilled labour consonant with the so-called 'skill bias technological change', which points to a shift in the production that privileges skilled over less skilled labour by increasing its relative demand. It was also observed an "increase of the relative total labour supply of qualified workers" (Pecoraro, 2010, p. 179) and of the perceived importance to attract this sort of foreigner workers to Switzerland, in order to foster local economy and national growth, as well as to counteract the national shortage of skilled workers (Naville, Walti, & Tischhauser, 2007). Consonantly, the country attracts this type of foreigner labour force on the point of having multiculturalism, multilingualism and diversity as fundamental constituents of the nation (D'Amato, 2010; Lhabitant, 2003; Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine, 2015).

Recent transformations in migration regimes in Switzerland are creating the grounds for increasing the number of families, who in the context of the international professional activity of at least one of the family members, move to Switzerland to live only temporarily. In particular, the growth of this type of mobility has been facilitated due to the tying of visa issuance to labour market permits (D'Amato, Jain, & Wichmann, 2015), which favours the recruitment of highly skilled professionals, the freedom of movement within the EU and the arising of shorter term employment contracts. This policy goes hand in hand with recent policies restricting access to Switzerland to other segments of less skilled foreign population.

Mobile families in Switzerland are, accordingly, notably defined by their job-related migratory trajectories. Formerly a minority, these families have recently become more numerous and diverse, with regard to education, professional sectors of activity, gender, ethnicity, nationality and migration history. They no longer include only diplomats and their families, who typify traditional forms of repeated mobility and the "expatriates[2]", whose labour is usually structured by their employers, but also alternative forms of international mobility (Bonache, Brewster, Suutari, & De Saá, 2010). A wide array of professional activities, such as different sorts of specialists, managers, international organization workers, academics, doctors, artists, among others, are now demanding frequent relocation. As a consequence of this diversification, as well as of the high cost of life in Switzerland, highly mobile and skilled migration has experienced a profound change in its demographic profile. Previously limited to a group of people with higher financial capacity than the average population, often beneficiating from facilitated settling measures (such as "transfert des cadres" – senior managers transfer (Pellanda, 2012) or diplomatic personnel transfer), mobile families' lifestyle tend to become closer to those of local middle or upper middle class families. This could

[2]Research on expatriation has used the term "expatriate" to refer to employees sent abroad for a limited period of time by an international company from their headquarters to foreigner subsidiaries. (Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine, 2015).

paradoxically be designated as "democratization" or at least, de-elitization of highly skilled migration.

Moreover, literature on expatriation has also pointed to the increasing number of self-initiated expatriates, that is those people who migrate to work in another country on their own initiative and who cannot rely on any corporate support (Andresen, Ariss, & Walther, 2012; Ravasi et al., 2015). This reveals a trend in global geographical movement to more self-initiated, middle management, expert and female-led mobility (Brookfield, 2015; Salamin & Davoine, 2015; Xavier Salamin & Doris Hanappi, 2014). This, in turn, creates new difficulties for people and families that were often not socialized in such transnational lifestyles.

Our study contributes to previous research on global mobility of professionals and their families across the social sciences (e.g., Adams, 2014; Gyger Gaspoz, 2013; Meier, 2014; Smith & Favell, 2006). For the sake of clarity and in order to account for these changes, we are here examining families in "geographical itinerancy", a term borrowed from Gyger Gaspoz (2013) to refer to those families frequently moving because of the professional expertise of at least one family member. We will use interchangeably the locution "mobile families" and "families in geographical itinerancy". This terminological choice seems to be appropriate in view of current debates around categories such as "highly skilled migrants", "highly qualified migrants" or "expats" (Dahinden, 2016; Kuotonin, 2015). The use of the term "geographical itinerants", in particular, allows us to refer to the various family members simultaneously (e.g., professionals, accompanying partners, children, or members of the extended family or household), as well as to shift our attention from a class-based connotation characterizing the term "expats", to other aspects[3].

The above-mentioned changes in the mobility of professionals are transforming the nature of the experience of mobile families as well as the difficulties they are confronted with. In turn, it is transforming the ways by which these families can be supported, and thus, the way interventions over global movement are conceived by the agents of the global labour market. In what follows, we give an overview of supporting measures that we identified approaching the life of geographical itinerant families in Switzerland. We first present our methodological approach, and then a tentative typology of these supporting providers.

[3] It could be objected that the term does not include the work dimension (it can easily be associated with travellers or tourists). However, we choose to maintain it for two main reasons. First, it solves some of the possible lexical issues of terms such as "expatriates", "highly skilled migrants" (Lan, 2011), "skilled international migrants" (Findlay, Li, Jowett, & Skeldon, 1996), "skilled migrants" (Scott, 2006), "highlyskilled globetrotters" (Mahroum, 2000), and "migrant professionals" (Meier, 2014); or also "transnational elite" (Beaverstock, 2002), "transnational capitalist class" (Sklair, 2000), or "transnational professionals" (Nowicka, 2006). These terms tend to define this population mostly on the basis of educational levels, and of its delocalized and transnational practices. Second, its connotation is here interesting, as the term "geographical itinerancy" suggests an idea of constant and repeated movement, an image of moving from place to place, regardless of the presence of a final destination, and it hence does not imply a chosen or assigned nature of migration. Such idea thus highlights some of those aspects that have psychological and developmental implications, and that we are currently investigating for our NCCR project.

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Methodology

In order to gain leverage on our research context and to easier the access to our target population, we first approached organizations and professionals working directly and indirectly with frequent moving families. This allowed us to connect with key people structuring the mobility of families in Switzerland and elsewhere, as well as to contact several associations and locally based networks of global organizations gathering professionals and families in geographical itinerancy.

We drew on our preliminary contacts, rather than starting with the local administrations, in order to address directly those providers that have frequent mobility as one top priority[4]. Our account does not aim to be an exhaustive review of all existing service providers. Meetings and discussions with these key informants allowed us to confirm the reliability of the strategy employed to study mobile populations, and to document what currently is being done to facilitate the life of families in geographical itinerancy. We also joined several mobile families online community platforms, and participated in a number of gathering events so as to connect with these individuals, relying on fieldwork-based 'hints' to grasp the characteristics, spheres of experiences (Zittoun, 2012), social networks, dynamics and circulation of this population. Accordingly, in order to address a wide range of professional sectors, we opted to circulate a research call through these community platforms, social networks, international organizations and associations, and multinational companies. Snowballing through previous participants and trusted community organizations also contributed to map these services.

Our sample has thus emerged from this first exploratory phase in the field. Here, we draw on preliminary research fieldwork, in particular qualitative empirical data collected through:

1. Semi-structured interviews with global mobility specialists[5] supporting the mobility and relocation of individuals, couples and families.

2. Exploratory interviews with staff working at a Welcome Centre of a large public institution and at the International People Operations of a multinational company[6].

[4] This decision is also a consequence of the mobile character of our population, which could not be easily accessed through public and cantonal institutions and which is usually not target of integration policies or of traditional assistance for migrants, such as Migration Centres.

[5] In particular with one "Intercultural Trainer" and "Career Development Coach", one "Relocation Consultant", the directors of a relocation agency and one "Account Manager"

[6] The first one deals with the relocation of families, as well as with the professional integration of accompanying partners through a specific project for "Dual Career Couples", while the latter leads a team focused on bringing and managing international employees to the Swiss office.

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3. Ethnographic fieldwork, in particular participant observation conducted at the office of a multinational technology company, during some workshops promoted by private relocation agencies and intercultural trainers' associations, as well as at one International Women's club and other gathering events.

4. Desk research: as data sources, we also use information shared through online invitations and posts of associations, online platforms of relocation agencies, and a number of social networks we were part of.

Data collection forming the corpora of the present analysis took place between October 2014 and October 2015. All information collected was anonymously and confidentially treated. Participants were made aware of the aims of the study prior to their participation and agreeing to be questioned, interviewed or observed.

The semi-structured and exploratory interviews with key people responsible for the relocation of mobile families offered a distinguished and fine-textured material to explore and unfold multiple meanings underlying power positions often salient in expert interviews. Further, triangulation of data sources was used as efforts to provide validity (Flick, 1992) and to account for the multifaceted reality under study.

The analysis was based on a data-driven, bottom-up approach resembling the basic thematic analysis proposed by Attride-Stirling (2001) with regard to managing the overall data into basic, organizing and global themes, as well as to finding the "principal metaphor" (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 388) across the data set, in order to reflect upon the super-ordinate unfolding issues. We first manually identified the themes, prioritizing for the analysis the most recurrent ones across the whole data set, despite the differences between various service providers.The subsequent path to generalization followed the abductive way as proposed by (Valsiner, 2014), particularly in its observation that "the primarily theoretical work requires empirical verification—but only once in a while, at specific theoretical bifurcation points. Yet—at those points, and only there—that input of empirical work acquires absolute relevance" (p. 15). Thus the findings that will be here analysed were product of the adoption of this combined movement to generalization, being themselves subject to post-factum scrutiny. In what follows, we present an overall emerging description based on this analysis.

New Mobilities – New Services

International mobility of highly skilled professionals is by no means new, and there is a long tradition of supporting moving families through different settling measures. Standard expatriation arrangements, for instance, worked with a sort of corporate-style compensation packages, which included salary supplements, professional and cultural trainings and all the expenses of family relocation abroad. Over the last years, companies especially multinationals (MNCs), who used to offer several relocation support facilities to their employees, have reduced their budget to expatriation packages and international assignments costs in response to economic pressures (Brookfield, 2015).

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Under the bid of reducing costs, companies are moving to other employment terms and conditions, such as shorter fixed-term assignments and, in Switzerland, even the localization of contracts (Ravasi et al., 2015). The discourses that sustain such employment policy shift use, ironically, as argument the "desire of employees for flexibility" (Hindman, 2013, p. 21) and self-initiated expatriation to reduce former privileges hold by these migrants and to delegate the encumbrance of relocation to the employee. Caution needs thus to be taken when using studies on mobility highlighting current changes in global migratory patterns, that is, move from long-term and permanent settlement towards more temporary and fluid mobility (Cresswell, 2006; D'Amato et al., 2015) so as not to reiterate the same old tolkens.

Considering that the time expectancy of the stay in the destination has been shortened overall, as mentioned by some of the interviewees, and that the scale of international employment and conditions for transnationalisation have expanded, many companies and governments seem to rely more often on outside agencies to manage their employees' relocation process (Hindman, 2013). We found that services offering support to highly mobile families have been progressively redistributed, and they are currently deriving out of various and different providers. As a consequence of the logic of outsourcing, a new body of relocation specialists is emerging. In Switzerland, in particular, the number of relocation agencies and experts supporting mobile families has increased considerably. Here, this new body of specialized experts and services respond, to a certain degree, to the kind of support that was formerly provided by some local organizations, companies and public institutions.

This scenario poses concrete restrictions in how support practices are framed and offered, pointing to the diversification of services provided to mobile families. In order to describe the present situation, we group the different service providers according to their origin that is, whether they originated from a pre-existed organizational format (as outsourcing), from organizations themselves (insourcing), from peoples' interactions (self-organized groups) or from a self-standing expertise (private coaches and intercultural trainers).

A Typology of Services Providers for Families in Geographical Itinerancy

1) Relocation Management Companies

We found many relocation companies offering support for mobile families during the moving process from one country to another. We identified two main types of organizations emerging from the outsourcing of international assignment programmes: Relocation Companies with Global Reach (RCGR), and Relocation Agencies. The former sort offers 'Global Mobility Services', which are advertised in different webpages as "a complete cross-border relocation solution" designed to assist corporate clients' and their employees anywhere in the world, and promising to make the relocation "a rewarding experience" both for the professionals, their accompanying partners and family, as well as for the employer.

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The full range of services typically includes apartment and house searches or coordination of temporary accommodation in case, tenancy management (e.g., assistance with lease negotiations, subscriptions and other property related services), packing and transporting furniture or what currently is being called "furniture rental solutions", work and residence permits or other necessary immigration services, registration with local authorities, coordination of tax law consultation, social insurance and bank services, school search for the children, general accompanying partner support, local orientation programmes and pre-visit area tour, language courses, intercultural training and continuous support to practical day-to-day matters.

The emergence of globally operating companies providing relocation solution correlates with a demand for support over those hands-on and operational issues. One of our interviewees reports that the company he currently works for was created precisely when the company pinpointed this demand coming from their own employees; as soon as they identified a shortage of services assisting people with the practicalities of the relocation process, they launched an international relocation company.

While RCGRs, to a large extent, seek to ensure efficiency in the transfer of international employees between headquarters and subsidiaries dispersed around the globe by mostly focusing on the practical relocation into a new home and settlement into a new environment, relocation agencies are more focused on various aspects of families' adjustment into the host-country. Although RCGRs have at their disposal a number of consultants giving continued support to these families in facing the challenges of settling into a new environment, their understanding of these challenges seems to be very strict, being these limited to practical problems raised by the move such as finding a new house, dealing with immigration authorities, or at most, avoiding what they call "cultural misunderstanding". On the contrary, relocation agencies have more resources in the host country to operate in different aspects of families' adjustments in the new countryenvironment, if compared to the RCGRs, which have to deal themselves with the challenge of managing large number of families from distance (one interviewed consultant was thus following up to eighty families in different countries around the world).

A pronounced effort in the relocation process is directed to pre-departure preparation, which commonly includes need assessments, "cross-cultural training" (Forster, 2000), information on important practical issues, and exercises on how to deal with an unfamiliar and unknown environment. Anticipation of how life will be at the destination country is also attempted through organized and funded trips, as well as by helping people to formulate realistic expectations about the new destination (MacDonald & Arthur, 2005).

2) Internal Services

Another type of offer for these families are the well-established services commonly managed by the Human Resources (HR) of international companies moving their employees

and their families, and the Welcome Services of large institutions at the destination country. This category encompasses all the HR practitioners and the different internal staff of a great number of industries, which either deal with their employees' international relocation, or are in charge of helping recently arrived professionals and their families settle in, and adjust to, the new country.

One remarkable transformation observed with regard to this traditional source of support is that the greater are the basic conditions and benefits provided by the organization, the more room there is for self-organized practices of support. One of the investigated companies widely recognized as a pivot of HR innovative practices brought a different approach to the support of mobile families. Instead of restricting support to a function of the HR, the company focuses primarily and intensively to make work overall better: from disposing restaurant quality-food and building quirk offices to increasing maternity leaves. When it comes to families' relocation they do not offer a specific program to mobile families, instead, the company is actively and strongly supporting employees' self-organized initiatives, like different meet-ups organized by and for accompanying spouses where several communities are then built out of spouses networking. Like this, they move away from traditional HR paternalistic approach.

In any manner, under this category, support services are circumscribed to the organization and to the employer. If an in-source core structure of support is found, responsibility over facilitating global movement is totally assumed as part of organizational support, and sustained employees' community-building practices arise equally as effect of organizational settings.

3) Self-organized Groups

Several informal groups and associations of families in geographical itinerancy were created in order to offer a space that allows family members to meet, connect and share experiences with their peers, as well as exchange information and knowledge about the life in the new country. The best-known example is the self-organized groups of accompanying spouses of international professionals. Very often these groups are constituted within the context of non-profit associations formed through the collaboration of companies, international organizations and academic institutions, and aimed at facilitating the job search for mobile employees' partners (like in the case of the International Dual Career Network). These groups then can develop to more informal networks within the context of a single company and evolve to grassroots initiaties organizing meetings, activities and projects in accordance with specific needs[7]. They can also be totally independent from the companies, as it is in the case of International Women's Clubs, different training centres, or online platforms dedicated to share

[7] Like in the case of the "pivot of HR innovative practices" company mentioned in the previous section, and of any informal meetings of accompanying partners of employees at the same company, or of parents of children at the same international school (e.g., different language conversations, coffee meetings).

support and ideas on the social and professional integration of accompanying partners. The majority of self-organized groups takes shape as online community platforms, under the format of forums or blogs especially designed for globally mobile individuals, families, and those working with them. The emergence of self-organized groups has been facilitated through online social networking services that simply encouraged conversation and interaction between families experiencing relocation.

4) Private Coaching & Intercultural Trainers

Lastly, private coaches and intercultural trainers propose another type of service to mobile families. Those are professionals offering guidance and coaching to individuals, parents, children, families and small groups. Commonly a one-to-one service, coaching is designed to assist people, in their own terms, to "achieve and fulfil their potential", be it professional or personal. These private services are advertised mainly to mobile professionals to help them go through the changes, remove roadblocks and "thrive" in their stay in the new country. They offer support whether in face-to-face meetings or via Skype anywhere is the world. Such professionals consider that people will search for support if they need it. A subset of coaches specializes specifically in intercultural relations, offering culture-specific orientations through the development of specific techniques and packed trainings programmes to mobile families and to organizations.

Beyond Practicalities: "Intercultural Trainings"

The description above suggests that there is thus a wide range of services proposed in order to facilitate the life of mobile families. Adopting a slightly more analytical perspective, we can distinguish two main levels of their action.

First, almost all of these services primarily address a supposed informational gap. In effect, they provide mainly practical advice to the families: on finding somewhere to live, a school for the children, a job for the partner, on how to get around, on how things are done, on shopping, banking, "making new friends", and understanding the "local culture"[8]. Moreover, some of these associations organize various leisure activities and family initiatives, including, among other things, language courses, morning coffees, art and creative activities, outdoor excursions, mother/toddler/infant groups. In sum, these different service providers perform the role of counselling experts, spanning the new and unknown environment with existing and available knowledge, *localizing* information both in the sense of finding it and directing it to families' needs, and of accommodating to the new local circumstances, hence defining what "local" is.

[8] In this regard, the book entitled "Know It All" (www.know-it-all.ch), defined in an interview as the "the bible that all expats need" collecting all the information for relocation in Switzerland, is often provided to these people by relocation agencies.

Second, beyond advices over practicalities, the different types of services also provide "intercultural" or "cross-cultural" trainings to mobile workers and their families in order to prepare them to deal with the life abroad. This emphasis on "culture" deserves a closer look, as it reveals the implicit assumptions with which these services work.

For instance, RCGRs offer, among others, a varied range of tailor-made professional trainings and consultancy solutions in "intercultural communication" seeking to empower mobile families to become, as advertised, "interculturally competent and realise their full potential when working across cultures". Here the notion of "culture" is used to designate some supposed "obvious" differences between the "family" and the "host country". Intercultural "awareness" becomes important as the services sold by these companies rely on these differentiations. Only then, workers and their families can be trained to deal with cultural differences. Hence the first assumptions on which is based their action, is that cultural differences are inevitable in a global economy, and therefore, that "understanding and appreciating cultural differences" ultimately promotes clearer communication, breaks down barriers, strengthens relationships and yields to innovative ways of thinking.

In many approaches, it is then assumed that the individual lacks a certain skill, the one of "cultural competence" which presumably can be compensated with intercultural training. Cultural competence assessments are thus used in some cases to pre-departure selection and training, especially with the soon-to-be moving professional. Such assessments make use of psychological tests based on the idea of inherent personality traits to examine the person's ability to respond to cultural differences and to transform her work accordingly. In other words, these approaches perpetuate individualist explanations as they relegate to the subject a possible "intercultural incompetence". Cultural-competence tests themselves turn "culture" to an ahistorical list of traits (Hindman, 2013), tooling culture into an operative, applicable and even pedagogical concept for globalization.

Furthermore, trainings under this frame recurrently group the set of the supposed inherent personal traits into cultural types, constructing cultural difference through the claim of intrinsic properties of clear-cut and separated "cultures". In our fieldwork, we observe that some relocation specialists focus on forcibly finding what is typical of one culture or the other at the expenses of reiterating clear-cut and sharp distinctions between cultures based on stereotypical categories. This can be exemplified by the common use of metaphors (e.g., "coconut cultures" versus "peach cultures"[9]) or storylines that show how "different cultures" express, for instance, emotions differently. One link very popular circulating in a community platform well illustrates this point:

[9] According to these metaphors, "coconut cultures" are defined as those cultural contexts in which people seem to be hard to get to know, unfriendly and less available to engage in conversations at first, but that tend then to become close and loyal friends. "Peach cultures", on the contrary, are regarded as those contexts in which individuals are usually very friendly on the outside but more difficult to become real friends.

> for the Spanish, the concept of face is not nearly as important as it is for the Japanese. Demonstrating your emotions (…) is typical of the Spanish culture. Relationships are created and maintained with visible passion and a few sparks are inevitable. The ups and downs are nothing to be ashamed of or hidden (…) For the Japanese, losing face in public is the worst possible humiliation[10].

Here one "culture" is contrasted to another one (Spanish vs. Japanese Cultures) at the risk of reinforcing dyadic constructions, typically deriving through thinking in antinomies and polarities (Marková, 2003), and long employed to classify cultures into individualist versus collectivist, masculine versus feminine, neutral versus emotional and monochronic versus polychronic in relation to time orientation (for this type of antinomic elaboration see for instance Markus & Conner, 2014). In the example above and as proposed by some cross-cultural trainings to communicate with "the Other", there would be "cultures" in which people make a great effort to control their emotions, avoiding revealing what they feel, whereas in other "cultures" would be accepted to show emotions and people would constantly find ways to express them. Such dyadic constructions are frequently used to produce national character, as the nation-state is often the presumed unit of many forms of typologyzing culture. Within this mode, effort is reduced: one just needs to identify which dyadic pairs a culture is categorized into, and then transit between them when meeting a new sociocultural environment. Even easier it will be if one correlates directly "culture" to "nation" (Spanish vs. Japanese Cultures). It is recurrent accordingly in intercultural trainings and relocation workshops to ask nationals (the Spanish, the Japanese, etc.) to "represent" their home countries' culture by bringing some traditional food and wearing traditional clothes, or by performing national types to role-playing games (Hindman, 2013).

Like this, relocation agencies and experts treat global intercultural contact in terms of fixed and separated cultural groups, and "culture" takes a very uniform and national shape. Implicit to this work frame is a model of "culture" as "a container of a homogeneous class, in which the boundary of "culture" is assumed to be rigid and defined" and where persons are IN culture (Valsiner, 2013, p.6). "Culture" seems to stand for an entity outside the person, which is being either accepted or rejected (Kadianaki, 2009) and which exists only in relation to the host and the home "cultures".

Moreover, there is an underlying idea that meeting and dealing with different cultures could be a minefield, and that shock would be consequently the state-outcome of cultural contact. The so-called "cultural shock" can lead to the pathologization (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001) of the disturbing and disorienting experience of encountering a new cultural context found in migration, and turns further "the experience of difference to a set of treatable symptoms that exist independent of the forms of contact or the location of placement" (Hindman, 2013, p.147), "symptoms" that can be supposedly managed by experts through their

10

intervention. For families, relocation practices have often relied on developing intercultural trainings to placate the "cultural shock", a "cultural shock prevention industry" in Hannerz's terms (Hannerz, 1996), trainings that mainly insist on a problematic nature of the encounter between "cultures", and that take it as central to the difficulties faced by relocated families.

Nonetheless, some service providers respond to the insufficiencies of the implied models by moving away from the clear-cut formula of cultural types in intercultural trainings. In our fieldwork, we also found relocation agencies that develop learning tools focusing on the systematic exploration of the participants' practical, everyday experiences, and proposing storytelling and games to support people "in going beyond the cliché". Through such attempts, we see service providers trying to build experience-based expertise. Furthermore, many also respond to the porousness of contemporary boundaries through the reinforcement of a "business" understanding of culture, which preserves at its core mandatory practices for the operation of global capitalisms and seems to translate "cultural encounters" into an occasion to optimize "business opportunities". Intervention on the basis of a "(trans)culture(d)" environment may appear as a good strategy to address relocation through the same mechanisms worldwide, to exclude discussions of power and history, as well as to serve to the production of global workers, workplaces and markets, and to address the question of "adjusting to what?". Many relocation organizations and experts thus try to solve this question by preparing families to an international corporate business culture that could be found everywhere. For instance, they offer "Puzzling Intercultural Stories": "Developing intercultural competence by playing and storytelling". They also have developed the "Intercultural Crazy Business Stories", a compilation of entertaining short stories based on real events and encounters experienced by the authors to help people think "out-of-the-box".

In effect, relocation services and specialists appear to prepare families for an encounter with "the Other" regardless of the context through a generalizable intercultural training, or through a transnational orientation based on the universality of business practices. Their action remains at the level of practical information and problem-solving skills to deal with 'cultural shock', and thus they appear as mere operators of a reducing-complexity strategy to approach intercultural encounters in globalized and increasing mobile world. Despite the importance of these services for the everyday life challenges faced by these families in a new environment, the practical approaches of relocation agencies may risk to leave out other possible issues people might face as they elaborate new spheres of experience and meet new neighboors, teachers or bakers in everyday life. In contrast, it may be only when the support is framed so as to enable the adjustments of these families to a life of itinerancy, that relocation practices can go beyond practicalities and exceed the instructional level, as we will now explore.

Supporting geographical itinerancy

Relocation practices clearly show their limits in view of the transformations of migration movements. Despite the increasing complexity of people's migratory trajectories,

relocation is still managed, and migration still dealt with, as if it were an unilateral movement from one country to another. Services are hardly accounting for those people who move repetitively across different countries, and engage simultaneously and systematically both in local cultural systems and transnational practices. In other words, services do not always correctly address the complexity, multiplicity and hybridity of cultural contexts, identities and belongings (Eriksen, 2007; Gillespie, 2012) characterizing contemporary global mobilities.

Moreover, services designed for international adjustment in expatriation present adjustments as linear processes over time, made of predictable phases in which learning new skills and knowledge would be enough to help families to cope with the arising difficulties, and to achieve the "adaptation stage" where new stability can be found (Ward et al., 2001). Such stage-model is implicitly based on a telos of adjustments for all migrants. However, this telos does not hold in the case of geographical itinerants, who know prior to their arrival that they will leave.

And even when relocation services are able to account for the specificities of mobile families' experience– expressly that they bring in their trajectory multiple and diverse host countries-, they end up assuming a fixed and immutable "host country culture" to which families should be adapted or adjusted to. Repeated mobility challenges any attempt to encapsulate culture to "host" and "home" countries, and to regard "culture" as a container, like in the cases analysed above. Further, where and what is "home" for highly mobile families? Is it the country where they were born, or the place where their loved ones live; is it a single place or a multitude of localities? How could services frame support for people that are presumably not rooted in national identities or even in a home place? The experience of repeated mobility draws attention to the irreversible effect of movement both on a person's sense of continuity and on peoples' perceptions of their "original home"; it can also make reflect on what "familiarity" means, if one can feel "at-home" again after the experience of migration (Gyger Gaspoz, 2013; Schuetz, 1944), or, after all, on the possibility of feeling "never at-home" (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012).

Consequently, we first propose to move away from the long-lasting ideas of adaptive responses and conformity found in adaptation and implicit in such non-dialogical readings of cultural encounters, and to understand adjustments as changes and movements working from two sides: the person experiencing the move, and the new changes of the environment. Therefore, adjustments presume mutuality in this two side's relationship, meaning that mobile families' adjustment is co-constructed in a reciprocal interaction with the host environment. Second we call attention to the fact that, by disregarding the transformations within the host countries, relocation services are still looking at, and designing practices for, a "society of settlement". Third, families in geographical itinerancy move with such intensity that attempts of "rooting" become obsolete; rather, an understanding of the dynamic nature of geographical itinerancy needs to come to the fore. But before turning to an alternative understanding of what might facilitate itinerant lives, we must first explore what might be the consequences of the

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sort of interventions proposed by the mobility experts.

Expertizing mobility

In the context of the logics of free movement and transnational spaces, the international mobility of professionals and their families is itself the product and a precondition of homogenized and connected global forms of production and transnational employment policies. Families in geographical itinerancy represent not only an increasing reality in current global migration flows, but they are also becoming the new targets of intervention over global movement. Mobility has turned into a field of activity, one that can be transformed into business and materialized through the displacing bodies of these families. Emerging services providers "are creating a new epistemology of alterity which efficiently intersects" (Hindman, 2013, p. 145) with the demands of global markets and intercultural encounters.

Authority is now being given to this new industry structuring global mobility, with special emphasis for outsourcing, as it becomes specialized, functionally differentiated and apparently independent. Global mobility experts, global relocation experts, intercultural experts, intercultural competence experts and so forth, appear to translate mobility needs into services and then translate it back, adding a sophisticated technical language into practical advices for mobile professionals and their families. Through such authority and by professionalizing respective services, the expert has emerged as the "agent of intervention" over global mobility, responsible for the works of adjustments. Attempting to improve and to come between intercultural encounters, they function as mediators of the available information and knowledge pertaining to a certain context to the other, and also as an interpreter of what is particular to a context, bridging and wording the dialogically of encounters prompted by globalization and human movement across borders.

The expert, for Bauman (1993), is defined

> not so much by the qualities and possessions which characterize her, but by the function she (he, or it) is perceived as performing by the recipients of the services. It is the problems that the recipients of experts face in the course of their life-process that fully define the expert. The expert is, so to speak, a condensation of the diffuse need of trustworthy - because supra-individual- sanction of individuality (Bauman, 1993, p. 200).

Following this, before offering any service, mobility experts need first to articulate the quest of adjustments as *problems* that require solutions. For Bauman (1993), it is the privatization of ambivalence - when ambivalence move from the public to the private spheres- that has casted on individual shoulders the task and responsibility to take care of all their problems on a private and individual basis, transforming the discomforts and anxieties it normally engenders into problems calling for solutions. In his analysis, people are entitled to locate the appropriated instructions to the tasks they wish to perform and as "the assumed availability of solutions

made living with unresolved problems uncomfortable, solutions are actively sought; finding them, choosing and appropriating is perceived as an act of emancipation and an increase in the scope of personal freedom" (Bauman, 1993, p.211-2012). Here is where we found a redeployment of skills to the experts and since "the personal skills needed to deal directly with the problems are no longer available" people are asked to swallow "the right kind of expert-prepared and expert-prescribed pill in order to 'solve' – neutralize – a complex interpersonal problem" (p.211).

According to the author, growing incompleteness and insufficiency of the individual generating the need of experts creates a very complex structure of dependency. These are the effects of "expertizing mobility" and they help boost this industry. Expertise, in creating the need of itself, generates this chain of ceaseless problems. In this sense, expertise is consequently *self-reproducing* as suggested by Bauman; "and yet – as, each successive step in the endless problem-solving, while experienced as another extension of freedom, further strengthen the network of dependency seem to be the ultimate effects of the privatization of ambivalence". (Bauman, 1993, pp.211-212)

We can see this clearly through our fieldwork. First, a body of experts appeared to intervene for alleviating the discomfort and frustration associated to the move for the relocating person - in dealing with property owners, suppliers, various subscription, and so on. In some cases, when the company covers the practical expenses, packers take care of moving people's furniture and objects, employers take care of career development of the moving professional, relocation experts try to assist partners with job search and school search for children. Soon, however, complaints about the strict focus on solving only practicalities were raised. For one of our interviewees, "there is no possibility of "intervention" over families adjustments when working in a RCGR company", as every service offered operate from distance: "everything is done by e-mail, need assessment and coordination calls - I have never seen the face of those people!". The consequence of impersonal professional service aimed at personal use is here highlighted, bringing the contradictions of a growing industry "serving the consequences of the privatization of ambivalence" (Bauman, 1993, p.208).

This situation also creates conflicts of interest between relocation experts and the very structure of this industry. Many relocation experts are aware of the intrinsic problematic of discretionary power when relating to the target of intervention – mobile families - from an expert knowledge position, and wonder how much support they can provide to these families. This points thereafter not only to the insufficiencies of existing services, opening the way to propose new services to address the new just-recognized problems, but interestingly enough, it also stresses the limits of support.

Relocation experts' position of being at the frontline where distress triggered by frequent relocation is transferred to, brought about the awareness that other life transitions, including these related to family life (marriage, birth, death) - according to one interviewee -

"spills over" their work but is not necessarily visible for them.The difficulty of dissociating the mobile families working and private family life is exacerbated in geographical itinerancy. "Problems" faced by the family have contributed to define new experts and to expand the intervention to non-employee members of the family and into the domestic life. Consequently, spouses and children became "incorporated" into the experts' domains. Like this, the paradigm where problem and solution are crafted as one could be potentially creating a "burden of support" for these families, who are expected to respond and resort to the available solutions and to contribute to smoother the adjustments, strengthening the network of dependency and control. Paradoxically, social authority of expertise could also des-responsabilize the families.

A living fabric to resort: redefining culture

By attempting to facilitate the life of mobile families, experts are turning "culture" into the cause of discomfort generated by the encounter with a different sociocultural context. They have presented themselves as the only ones in the position to sort out this kind of problems. Expertizing intercultural encounters to deal with mobility thus paradoxically creates and reinforces those very problems experts initially have sought to solve.

In contrast, a sociocultural developmental perspective invites to understand culture as a unique organizer of person-environment relations. We can for instance agree with Shweder (2001) according to which,

> 'culture' refers to community specific ideas about what is true, good, beautiful, and efficient. To be 'cultural' those ideas about truth, goodness, beauty, and efficiency must be socially inherited and customary. To be 'cultural' those socially inherited and customary ideas must be embodied and/or enacted meanings; they must actually be constitutive of (and thereby revealed in) a way of life (Shweder, 2001, p. 3153).

Culture can be seen as a whole – as the sum of all human material, social and symbolic production – the semiosphere (Lotman, 2001; Valsiner, 2007, 2014), which is organized in temporary local, yet evolving, subsystems. This approach prevents us from talking about cultureS, and allows to redefine mobile families' experience as an extreme case of living in changing sociocultural environments.

If culture is borderless - transcending the stereotypes resting at the surface of nationalities and recurrent in some studies on migration and intervention practices - it can function as a living fabric upon which mobile people could draw, and that could offer direction for those navigating between multiple and constant changing sociocultural environments, instead of being the cause of problems. There seems to be a need of interventions facilitating processes of elaboration related to the construction of meaning. This is imperative to deal with

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frequent relocation and with the existential displacement of people and families, wherever they find themselves at the moment.

From this perspective, a sociocultural approach invites then to reframe the questions concerning the experience of frequent move in, for example, how to maintain a sense of self-continuity beyond repeated changes and potential experiences of ruptures. The person needs to establish a stable and defensible difference, between her own and the wider outside sociocultural world. In the case of mobility, when people lose the common ground - the taken-for-granted - by changing sociocultural worlds, they have to re-create sense (Zittoun, 2006; Zittoun et al., 2003). In effect, we carry the power of sewing our experiences while moving between different contexts and conceivably turning them into meaningful experience through the process of sense-making (Salvatore & Zittoun, 2011). Sense-making is itself made possible because people draw on available cultural "stuff" that they can use as semiotic and symbolic resources (Dahinden & Zittoun, 2013; Kadianaki & Zittoun, 2014; Zittoun, 2006). As consequence, "culture" can be seen as naturally providing people with the cultural elements that could be used as resources for dealing with relocation.

The paradox of expert intervention – a possible alternative

International forms of mobility contributed to the emergence of "families in geographical itinerancy". These families face new problems, as they not only experience migration, but as frequently mobile people, they face host countries that have a longer experience of hosting long-time residents. However, our exploratory work allowed us to highlight the emergence of a new body of specialist – international mobility experts. These experts design their interventions at two levels: helping with practicalities, and dealing with mobility – this being done through intercultural education. Our analysis suggests that this creates a double problem: first, it reduces the specific and new problems faced by these families to a problem of "culture", which can be solved by adequate training; and second, it individualizes people, who have that problem, and that, in a skill-deficit approach, need to be taken care of by "experts" with intercultural expertise. We believe that the whole situation can only be changed if we, as researchers, reconceptualise culture, differences, and movement, and we redefine the actual experiences of these families in geographical itinerancy. Our first proposal is to adopt a sociocultural psychological perspective, which, consonantly with other social sciences, sees culture as a whole, within which people reposition themselves. In such terms, culture is not "the problem"; it is the means that people use as resources to deal with new situations.

Second, it follows that we need to emphasize the dynamic nature and diversity not only of the family's trajectories, but also of the "host countries". These, as much as the family, are changing and transforming, moving from policies designed for long-term "immigrants" (from the schooling system to the loan conditions), to conditions more likely to facilitate the life of frequently moving families.

Third, instead of considering international professionals as isolated individuals, relying on experts to solve their problems, we see these persons as members of families and networks, who can be active in exploring and using various resources. This reminds first, that "families in geographic itinerancy" are not merely passive recipients of the expert intervention of service providers and of intercultural trainers. They can actively participate in adopting, negotiating or re-making sense of the different resources necessary when relocating to a new environment. In this regard, an important direction of study would be to explore the very meanings that these individuals construct themselves when confronted with "cultural differences" in their "mobile lives", when and under which circumstances this difference can actually matters, or when it does not. Most importantly, this has led us to observe various self-organized groups and associations of frequent mobile people, groups and associations that have more potential to meet mobile families' different and arising needs, especially because their structure is more malleable and less rooted in previous non-functionig models of culture.

The underlying structure allowing the emergence of the different service providers, that is to say, if it is originating from, for example, from peoples' interactions or from a self-contained agent as the expert, as described in our typology, seems to change the potential to develop relocation support practices, which go beyond rooting. The more fluid and shared is their organization, the more possibility there is to account for movement and temporality in intervention. Nonetheless, we also found also much replication within foreign self-organized groups of constructions of culture as essence and cultural stereotypes.

Fourth, we are aware that the reduction of geographical itinerancy to a practical problem and to an issue of intercultural contact has actually made vanish the question of the actual psychological experience of frequently moving, as member of a family. This, in itself, is not a new human experience. Suffices to turn back to nomadic trajectories, or those of the "cosmopolite" upper classes from past centuries, to know that geographic itinerancy is not a problem per se. Yet the conditions of these frequent movements need to be understood in the current sociocultural context. This is the aim of our starting project and we hope to be able to bring new knowledge about this. Only such new understanding can allow to reconceptualise family geographical itinerancy in a globalized world, and on this basis, can allow defining new tools for intervention.

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