A double perspective of the construction of nomadic identities: young in geographical move and businessmen

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Extended Abstract

In a globalized world, facing new cultures is a daily phenomenon. What is the impact on people identity? Who are nomadic individuals? Our aim here is to define the concept of nomadic identity through the experience of two types of population: young in geographical move having grown in different countries according to their parents’ career, and international businessmen joining firms in the multicultural environment of Luxembourg. We aim at defining the construction of nomadic identities: which elements are to be taken into account in the developmental process of nomadic identities? What is the place of international and national factors? How do these nomadic identities express themselves? Finally we will analyse whether the development of such an identity is an asset for an international business career.

We favoured a constructivist methodology enabling to understand the complexity of the development of the nomadic identity. We have conducted semi-directive interviews with thirteen teenagers in geographical move and ten international businessmen in a Big Four in Luxembourg. To get another perspective, we interviewed the international director for global mobility in this firm and used our professional experience since one of the author used to be responsible for international mobility for Luxembourg in this firm. We interpreted our data through the grounded theory analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), letting theory emerge from the empirical experience.

We intend to understand the influence of international experience on the structuring of identity, be it in the frame of expatriation (Cerdin and Dubouloy, 2004; Gerner et al., 1992; Kohonen, 2004; Peltonen, 1998) or broader experiences (Joly, 1990; Fernandez, 2002). The Developmental Model of Integration Sensitivity (Bennett, 1993) is a basis to the integration of our data in a theoretical frame.

Our data suggests that self-confidence, pleasure to develop in a multicultural environment, ability not to compare cultures and to take distance towards one’s culture is common to our population having developed a nomadic identity. Beside they seem to integrate and to perform very well in the multicultural organisational environment analysed in Luxembourg, which is consistent with the research of Lam and Selmer (2004). This construction is to be understood in the interaction with social and cultural environment (from the host and passport countries). It is whereas important to take into account different variables when studying the development of nomadic identity.

Our research focus only on two types of population, young in geographical move and business expatriates, this analyse should be enlarged to other kinds of population to generalise its results, it could be interesting to check whether people growing and working in a multicultural environment in their country (like Luxembourg) may develop a nomadic identity.

We analyse the development of a nomadic identity at two moments in the life of the individual, at the child stage and then as an expatriate in the specifically multicultural context of Luxembourg. We found common traits defining nomadic identities and showed that nomadic individual perform well in a multicultural organisation. That suggests selection criteria to recruiters.

Key words: Nomadic identities, expatriates, Luxembourg, young in geographical move, mobility

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